



ON THE THRESHOLD  
PAUL SCOTT, NEW AMERICAN SCENERY.

*Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial.*<sup>1</sup>

*In liminality people 'play' with the elements of the familiar and defamiliarize them.*<sup>2</sup>

When he began to experiment with printing on ceramics Paul Scott soon found himself in liminal territory: his creative practice was becoming unclassifiable. 'In those days', he has said, 'there was no-one around me who was doing anything remotely similar, but that's a double-edged sword: it launches you into a no-man's-land, because you're not a painter or a fine art printmaker and you're not a potter or a craftsperson ... In a way I enjoyed it immensely because I was doing things that people hadn't seen before.'<sup>3</sup>

That was back in the 1970s. Nowadays Paul Scott is a leading international figure in the field of ceramics and print. He is known for his subversive manipulation of transfer-printed designs on factory-made tableware such as the *Willow Pattern* and Spode's *Italian*. Take for example an early edition of plates: *The Scott Collection, BNFL in Cumbrian Blue(s)* (1996) (Fig. 1). The design is a refashioned version of Spode's *Italian*; it would be indistinguishable from the mass-produced original, except that warning signs for radioactivity are incorporated into the border and the stylised central landscape has been replaced with a view of the Sellafield nuclear reprocessing plant, less than forty miles from his home in Cumbria, England. Over the years his repertoire has expanded and with the advent of digitality his techniques have diversified, but his work still challenges conceptual boundaries and this continues to be his signature approach: Paul Scott uses domestic ceramics to comment on our life and times.

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<sup>1</sup> Victor Turner *The Ritual Process*, Cornell University Press, New York, 1991 (1<sup>st</sup> pub 1969) p.95

<sup>2</sup> Victor Turner *Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbolology*, Rice Institute Pamphlet, Rice University Studies, 60, no. 3 (1974). <https://hdl.handle.net/1911/63159>.

<sup>3</sup> Dialogue between Paul Scott and Jo Dahn, 5<sup>th</sup> August 2014.



Fig.1 *The Scott Collection, BNFL in Cumbrian Blue(s)*, in glaze decal print on bone china plate, 25cm dia, Paul Scott 1996.

His strategies involve a unique blend of archival research and studio practice. From 2004 to 2009 he undertook doctoral studies in order to recuperate a lost history of British and European transferwares.<sup>4</sup> Designs had migrated across borders to be produced by factories in more than one country: some architectural and landscape motifs were re-used to show a different place with each iteration. Transferwares can thus be described as ‘remediated’ and ‘confectured’. ‘Remediated’ because motifs produced in one medium – print engraving – are represented via another, the ceramic surface; ‘confectured’ because their imagery might be culled from more than one source. Paul Scott submits them to further, equivalent processes and in so doing opens up new territory: liminal territory where established understanding is unsettled and fresh meaning allowed to emerge.

Originally used by anthropologists to denote the symbolic separation, transition and re-incorporation associated with rites of passage, notions of liminal space and the condition, or state of liminality have broadened in recent years.

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<sup>4</sup> Paul Scott *Ceramics and Landscape, Remediation and Confection – a Theory of Surface*, PhD thesis, Manchester Metropolitan University (2009).  
Online: <http://www.cumbrianblues.com/pdfs/CLRC.pdf>

‘The concept of liminality incorporates a spectrum of ‘betweenness’: interstitial spaces, intersectional identities, temporal margins, geographical borders, cultural boundaries, dialogical practices and dialectical perspectives.’<sup>5</sup>

Through this lens, the studio can be seen as liminal territory: an exploratory ‘betwixt and between’ purposefully separate from the quotidian.

Describing his practice, Paul Scott maps a liminal position: ‘within and on the edge of studio ceramics – and completely outside it.’<sup>6</sup> The present essay sets out from an equivalent place; it offers an appreciation and contextualisation of his latest work - *New American Scenery* – much of which was still in progress as he prepared for a series of exhibitions in the USA. I have written about Scott’s ceramics before, in connection with co-curated exhibitions in 2002 and 2014.<sup>7</sup> In both cases I was discussing already existent artefacts. This is different: stepping now into the flow of his creative and intellectual process is akin to stepping into what the anthropologist and leading exponent of liminality Victor Turner called ‘...a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise.’<sup>8</sup>

#### AMERICAN TRANSFER-PRINTED EARTHENWARES

*New American Scenery* is permeated with Paul Scott’s response to American transfer-printed earthenwares. A multi-year grant from the Alturas Foundation enabled him to travel and conduct research in the USA, where he sought out historical transferwares in museum collections and visited many of the sites that are illustrated on their surfaces.<sup>9</sup> Further research in the archives at Wedgwood, Spode and the Victoria and Albert Museum, London was supported by Arts Council England.

Although they are called ‘American’, these transfer-printed earthenwares were not made in the United States: they represent the efforts of British firms to supply the growing American market in times of great change following the struggle for independence. Scott’s activities recall

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<sup>5</sup> Teresa O’Rourke *The poetics and politics of liminality: new transcendentalism in contemporary American women’s writing*, PhD Thesis, Loughborough University 2017, p.49.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Scott cited in Amy Gogarty *Confected Landscapes and Contemporary Vignettes*, Ceramics, Art and Perception No.75, 2009.

<sup>7</sup> Jo Dahn, *Remember Me When This You See: Ceramics by Paul Scott...* University of Wales, Aberystwyth, 2002; *Confected, Borrowed and Blue*, Holburne Museum of Art, Bath, England, 2014.

<sup>8</sup> Turner, Victor, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, Cornell University Press, New York, 1967.

<sup>9</sup> [http://alturasfoundation.org/artist\\_residence/paul-scott/](http://alturasfoundation.org/artist_residence/paul-scott/)

what happened in the early nineteenth century, when factory owners from Staffordshire, England, or their agents, travelled to the new Republic. In 1822 for example, pottery owner John Ridgway toured the North Eastern States. He met with merchants and took orders for the ceramics he would produce on his return to Britain. Ridgway hired local artists to accompany him and sketch suitable subjects which, as engravings, would subsequently be used to decorate a dinner service titled 'Beauties of America.'<sup>10</sup> (Fig.2) It comprises twenty two views, depicting public edifices such as hospitals, churches and libraries. Like several other Staffordshire pottery owners, Ridgway was a reformer with a strong sense of social responsibility and his beliefs influenced his choice of imagery.<sup>11</sup>



Fig.2 John and William Ridgway, 'Beauties of America' Philadelphia Library, transferware plate, 1829-1830, (RISD Museum).

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<sup>10</sup> In Boston, the artist was probably Abel Bowen (1790-1850). Ruth Ann Penka has researched Ridgway's journal. See: <https://www.americanantiquarian.org/Exhibitions/Ridgway/enter.htm>

<sup>11</sup> John Ridgway was a founder of the Pottery Philosophical Society and a prominent member of the Methodist New Connexion Church. He rejected the offer of a Knighthood because 'I could accept no honour that would sever me from my Brethren in Christ.' James Stacey, *A Prince in Israel: or, Sketches of the life of John Ridgway*, Hamilton Adams & Co. London, MDCCCLXII (1862) p.263

Transfer-printed ceramics like the 'Beauties of America' fostered pride in the new Republic. They showed civilisation where there had been wilderness and harnessed a burgeoning sense of national identity, acting as a focus (perhaps a catalyst) for meaning construction. In the first part of the nineteenth century they may have provided the only images of change that many people who lived in the farthest-flung territories would ever see.

By the end of the century 'Old Blue', as it was often called, was energetically targeted by collectors. Examples from between c1820 and c1830 were especially prized for the intensity of their deep blue colour. According to the records of the firms that produced them, the blue was 'far deeper and richer than the ordinary blue used for the English market.'<sup>12</sup> It fetched a higher price too; trade with America was lucrative, when it was halted following Jefferson's Embargo Act of 1807 restricting imports the Staffordshire Potteries suffered considerable economic hardship. Some firms estimated that a third of their production was affected.<sup>13</sup>

#### CHINA HUNTING; THE DISCOURSES OF COLLECTING

Despite the fact that they were not produced in America, American transfer-printed earthenwares were imagined as true relics of a nation grown from humble beginnings. They constituted a kind of retrospective evidence. Freedom, equality, progress, enterprise, social cohesion: their illustrations seemed to capture the spirit of a moment when there was everything to play for and they inspired lively discourse amongst the collecting community. 'Many bore mottoes, inscriptions, likenesses and views relating to America and the celebrated Americans of the time and thus form interesting mementos of the wars of the Revolution and of 1812.'<sup>14</sup> (Fig.3) So wrote Alice Morse Earle, whose influential book on *China Collecting in America* (1892) was widely cited. She was one of the so-called china hunters who published glorified collector's manuals that interwove technical information such as factory marks with personal anecdote.<sup>15</sup>

'I'm in such a hurry to show it to you! It's a tall blue teapot — or maybe it's a coffee-pot, I don't know — but what do you think it's got on it— a picture of the Hartford State-house!

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<sup>12</sup> Frank Falkner *The Wood Family of Burslem*, Chapman & Hall, London, 1912 p.85

<sup>13</sup> The embargo was lifted following the Treaty of Ghent in December 1814.

<sup>14</sup> Alice Morse Earle *China Collecting in America*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1892 p.135.

<sup>15</sup> Their activities have been described as a kind of sport. 'Americans were enthralled by the chase...' Anne Anderson, *The Romance of Old Blue: collecting and displaying Old Blue Staffordshire China in the American Home c1870-1938*, in *Interpreting Ceramics* 2013, issue 15. <http://www.interpretingceramics.com/issue015/articles/03.htm>

Don't you remember when I went to Hartford with papa, and I told you how we went to the State-house, and saw the Legislature? Well this is the very same building...<sup>16</sup>



Fig.3 Ralph Stevenson & Williams, *Jefferson and Lafayette*, transferware plate, c.1835, (RISD Museum).

Such accounts often have a breathless tone and read like adventure stories, as raiders from the city scour the New England countryside and descend on humble cottagers in their mission to rescue old china from dusty attics.<sup>17</sup> Annie Trumbull Slosson described 'entering an ancient farm-house, forcing one's way into pantry or garret, coaxing, threatening, wheedling, dazing the inmates into disposing of quaint old crockeries...'<sup>18</sup> Slosson thought china hunting was 'a good service to art and education.'<sup>19</sup> This was collecting for the nation. Indeed, today the results of the china hunters' efforts can be found in many American museums.

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<sup>16</sup> Annie Trumbull Slosson *The China Hunters Club* by *The Youngest Member*, Harper & Brothers, New York, 1878, p.235.

<sup>17</sup> Many of the raiders were women. See: J. Samaine Lockwood, *Shopping for the Nation: Women's China Collecting in Late-Nineteenth-Century New England* in *The New England Quarterly*, Vol. 81, No. 1 Mar. 2008, pp. 63-90

<sup>18</sup> Slosson *China Hunters Club* p.214

<sup>19</sup> Slosson *China Hunters Club* p.231.

You had to seek them in museum stores for much of the twentieth century, however. Transferware had fallen out of favour by the 1940s and despite its popularity in the nineteenth century, it became a neglected genre. Following the demise of the ceramics industry in the West, and the onset of post-industrialism, creative practitioners have begun to turn their attention to factory products and production methods. Paul Scott's practice and research have been highly influential in opening up the field.

He describes the development of *New American Scenery* as a series of discoveries, many of which have come about through archival exploration. Two plates titled 'Extinct' and bearing the legend 'Forget Me Not' for instance, commemorate American species of birds, fish and a butterfly that have died out in the twentieth century due to loss of habitat. The print motifs have a nostalgic feel. In a process that Scott calls 'harvesting', they were culled from a forgotten archive of 8600 tissues for transfer printing that he discovered in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



Fig. 4 *Highlands Hudson River*, transferware platter, Enoch Wood & Sons (1819-46), (Smithsonian Collection).

#### SCENIC WONDERS: THOMAS COLE

The roots of *New American Scenery* go back at least as far as 1999, when Paul Scott handled a transfer-printed platter from the Ohio State University collection, titled *Highlands Hudson*

River. (Fig.4) This is an object that punches above its weight. The vivid deep blue glaze engulfs the ceramic body, and the imagery derives from the Hudson River School of romantic landscape painting. He was captivated:

‘... it was quite unlike anything I had seen before. That was the first time I had seen one of the dark blue wares ... I was aware of their existence, but the experience of seeing the transferware platter for real, and handling it was very important.’<sup>20</sup>

*Highlands Hudson River* belongs to a group of transferwares with romantic views of landscape after the paintings of Thomas Cole and the Hudson River School. They seem to outstrip the genre: it is easy to forget that one is looking at an item of tableware. Nancy Siegel argues that their illustrations signified ‘America’s bounty, scenic wonders, and the success of democracy in the New World’ and that ‘a rise in nationalism coincided with a rise of interest in American landscape imagery by the 1830s.’ Most people could not have afforded to buy a painting by Thomas Cole, ‘possessing engravings and ceramics with imagery based upon Cole’s artistry was the next best thing.’<sup>21</sup>

One of Cole’s most glorious landscapes, *View from Mount Holyoke, Northampton, Massachusetts, after a Thunderstorm* (1836), is nicknamed ‘The Oxbow’ because it looks down on a bend in the Connecticut River, where it meanders through Pioneer Valley.<sup>22</sup> The painting has been interpreted in relation to Western expansion and the Louisiana Purchase of 1804, a land deal with France that resulted in America acquiring some 827,000 square miles of territory west of the Mississippi.

‘...many believed that it was a divinely ordained obligation of Americans to settle this westward territory. In *The Oxbow* Cole visually shows the benefits of this process. The land to the east is ordered, productive, and useful. In contrast, the land to the west remains unbridled. Further westward expansion—a change that is destined to happen—is shown to positively alter the land.’<sup>23</sup>

In his *Essay on American Scenery* (1836) Cole expressed ambivalence about this ‘divinely ordained obligation’, known as the doctrine of Manifest Destiny. While he accepted that the wilderness

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<sup>20</sup>Personal communication 29/4/2019

<sup>21</sup> Nancy Siegel *Along the Juniata: Thomas Cole and the Dissemination of American Landscape Imagery*, exhibition catalogue essay, Juniata College Museum of Art, 2003.

<sup>22</sup> Pioneers settled there in the 1650’s ‘making this region America’s first West and giving it the name that it bears today - the Pioneer Valley.’ Norman Kotker *On a Clear Day You Could See New Haven*, *New York Times*, Aug. 9, 1987. The painting is in the Metropolitan Museum, New York: <https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/08.228/>

<sup>23</sup> Dr. Bryan Zygmunt, *Thomas Cole, The Oxbow*, <https://smarthistory.org/cole-the-oxbow/>

would inevitably be tamed - 'where the wolf roams, the plough shall glisten' - he mourned its passing. There is a prophetic tone (perhaps a proto-environmental awareness) in his final paragraphs:

'I cannot but express my sorrow that the beauty of such landscapes are quickly passing away - the ravages of the axe are daily increasing - the most noble scenes are made desolate, and oftentimes with a wantonness and barbarism scarcely credible in a civilized nation. ... another generation will behold spots, now rife with beauty, desecrated by what is called improvement.'

What has become of the iconic *Oxbow* landscape? Paul Scott visited in April 2019. Printed straight across an antique pearl-ware platter, his dour *Near the Oxbow* shows the riverbank area as it is today, complete with litter and no trespass signs. (Fig.5)<sup>25</sup>



Fig.5 Scott's *Cumbrian Blue(s)*, *New American Scenery, Near the Oxbow (After Thomas Cole)*. Inglaze decal collage on shell edged pearlware platter c.1850, 34cm x 42.5cm. Paul Scott 2019.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas Cole, *Essay on American Scenery*, in *American Monthly Magazine* 1, (Jan. 1836) 1-12.

<sup>25</sup> Pearl-ware describes ceramics made from a white earthenware clay, with a small amount of cobalt in the glaze which gives it a bluish cast.

## RECLAIMING TRANSFERWARE FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

In 1820, at a banquet in Plymouth, Massachusetts to celebrate the bicentennial of the Mayflower landing, statesman Daniel Webster delivered a famous oration. 'We feel that we are on the spot,' he declared, '... where Christianity, and civilization, and letters made their first lodgment, in a vast extent of country, covered with a wilderness, and peopled by roving barbarians.'<sup>26</sup>

According to Ada Walker Camehl, "The banquet was served upon one of the souvenir dinner-sets, the guests, as they listened to the speaker's eloquent periods, looking down upon the pictured scene which was the theme of his inspiration."<sup>27</sup>

Although her statement is difficult to substantiate, it is a clear indication of how she perceived not only the imagery of American transfer-printed earthenwares, but its social function. Hers is one of numerous period accounts where didactic factors come to the fore. Whole historical events may be described in detail – every piece a lesson - echoing and extending the knowledge/s that informed the viewing experience.<sup>28</sup>

'It may well stir our patriotism to look on the plain buildings our ancestors were content to view as "Beauties"; to note the primitive methods of transportation both on land and sea; to revise our knowledge of such famous victories as McDonough's, or Bunker Hill, and to study the rugged features of those who worked and died to make our country what she is. All this and more may be found within the limits of a collection of *Old Blue*.'<sup>29</sup>

The sense that something can be learned is important. American transferwares maintain the common format of a central motif framed within an ornamental border. Each firm employed characteristic border designs that, aside from their decorative qualities, can be used to identify its wares. The framing has another, more subtle function: it selects, promotes and makes special a particular scene: the view has been cropped as one might crop a photograph. So too has history been cropped; transferwares communicate socio-political-cultural allegiances both by what they do and what they do not show. Inconvenient subjects (perhaps entire historical episodes) that were not 'on message' were simply ignored. The wilderness that had supposedly been supplanted

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<sup>26</sup> Daniel Webster *Discourse Delivered at Plymouth December 22 1820...* Wells and Lilly, Boston, 1821, p.11.

<sup>27</sup> Ada Walker Camehl, *The Blue-China Book Early American Scenes and History Pictured in the Pottery of the Time* New York, EP Dutton, 1916, p.116. Camehl's assertion that the 'souvenir dinner-set' was made by the firm of Enoch Wood may be fanciful, it is certainly unsubstantiated.

<sup>28</sup>When you have some piece with a view unmarked, the next point of interest is to settle what it is. You ... look over all the old histories of this country you can find ... in hopes of verifying your china.' N Hudson Moore *The Old China Book*, p.236.

<sup>29</sup> N Hudson Moore, *The Old China Book*, Frederick A Stokes, New York, 1903, preface.

by civilisation was not uninhabited and it was fiercely contested during the American Indian Wars; in a process of mythologizing heritage was edited and truth gave way to what Edward Said has called 'sanctioned narratives; over time these acquire an almost theological status, with founding heroes, cherished ideas and values.'<sup>30</sup>

Historical transferwares may well look parochial to the contemporary eye. As Paul Scott observes, 'Depictions of American Indians are of the 'noble savage' and Hollywood variety, whilst African Americans are almost entirely absent, except notably as slaves being loaded onto a ship (flying a US flag) on Enoch Wood's *Cape Coast Castle* ... Representations of other ethnic groups (Chinese Americans etc) are nonexistent.'<sup>31</sup>



Fig.6 Scott's Cumbrian Blue(s), *New American Scenery, Across the Borderline (Trumpian Campaign) No.2*. In-glaze screen print (decal) collage on shell edged pearlware platter, c.1820, 30cm x 40.5cm. Paul Scott 2019. Alturas Foundation Collection.

He speaks of his urge to redress 'subject matters and perceptions' and reclaim transferware for the twenty-first century. An enormous barred fence will be 'pasted across souvenir plates of California, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas', while a shell edged pearl-ware platter will show

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<sup>30</sup> Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*. Chatto & Windus, London, 1993, p.380. Said cites 'The West as America: Reinterpreting Images of the Frontier, 1820-1920' a 1991 exhibition at the Smithsonian Institute. 'According to the exhibit, the conquest of the West ... had been transformed into a heroic meliorist narrative that disguised, romanticized, or simply eliminated the many sided truth about the actual process of conquest, as well as the destruction of both native Americans and the environment.'

<sup>31</sup> Paul Scott, informal account of work in progress, May 2019

figures dwarfed by the same fence.<sup>32</sup> (Fig.6) They are on the wrong side of the national border. These ceramics will reference President Trump's anti-immigration policies. They will be back-stamped *Trumpian Campaigne*, in imitation of the 'Texian Campaigne' transferwares of the 1830s-40s that depict conflict between Texas and Mexico.



Fig.7 Detail, the back of Scott's *Cumbrian Blue(s), New American Scenery, Across the Borderline (Trumpian Campaigne) No:2*. In-glaze screen print (decal) collage on shell edged pearlware platter, c.1820, 30cm x 40.5cm. Paul Scott 2019.

The crowd at the centre of Scott's *Souvenir of Selma* plate (Fig.8) are re-enacting the Selma Bridge Crossing of 1965, when Martin Luther-King led African American activists across the Edmund Pettus Bridge out of Selma on a march to the state capital of Montgomery in order to register as voters.<sup>33</sup> In 2018 Paul Scott was amongst them.

<sup>32</sup> Personal communication 25/6/2019

<sup>33</sup> Previous attempts to exercise their voting rights had been met with extreme violence from State Troopers.



Fig.8 Scott's Cumbrian Blue(s), *New American Scenery, Souvenir of Selma, AL*. In-glaze screen print (decal) on salvaged Syracuse China with pearlware glaze, 30cm dia. Paul Scott 2019.

DEPARTURE... TRANSIT... ARRIVAL... a heightened awareness of change; travel is readily characterised in terms of liminality.<sup>34</sup> More than four years of travel have informed the development of *New American Scenery*. This extended period has allowed Scott to roam across the country, taking in New York, Philadelphia, Buffalo, Pittsburgh, Washington, Boston, Dallas, Fort Worth, San Antonio, El Paso, Tombstone, Phoenix, Chicago, Detroit, Columbus, Santa Fe, Arizona, Birmingham Alabama, Selma, Montgomery...

John Ridgway visited some of the same places in 1822 and sought out features that met with his approval; his 'Beauties of America' were the public institutions he believed essential for the proper advancement of an embryonic nation. Whatever reservations he had, he confined to his diary: in Boston he noted 'the great laxity of religious opinion which prevails & especially amongst respectable society'; in Philadelphia he found the '... market exceedingly bad, even while

<sup>34</sup> '...a journey into the unknown, allowing yourself to be open to whatever experiences may come your way.' Beckstead, *Liminality in Acculturation and Pilgrimage: When Movement Becomes Meaningful*, Culture & Psychology, 2010, 16(3), p. 387.

I form a connexion I am not pleased with it [...] I am well nigh weary.' He thought 'the people here are too much alive to getting money.'<sup>35</sup>

Like Ridgway, Paul Scott's gaze has followed his interests. His travels in America have been, in his words, 'driven by issues and institutions as much as a desire to experience particular landscapes.'<sup>36</sup> Unlike Ridgway there is no requirement for him to flatter potential buyers and he has always made it his business to pursue socio-political themes. Here is the New Jersey Turnpike, famous for its deadly pile-ups; the brutal geometry of Chicago rail, the magnificent desert landscape that belies the horror of uranium mining in the Navajo Nation, the Indian Point nuclear power plant still leaking radioactivity, as it has done for more than thirty years; here is the scandal of the contaminated Flint Waterworks, the fenced-off toxic disaster that is the Niagara Falls 'Love Canal' district (you will not find it in the holiday brochures) here on *New American Scenery* souvenir wares are the run-down 'Ghost Gardens' of Detroit and the Californian wildfires.

In 2009 after 138 years in business, Libbey Inc. of Toledo, Ohio closed the Syracuse China factory in New York State and all production moved from North America. Crates full of bisque-fired unglazed table-ware were abandoned. Paul Scott visited the site in 2016 and in 2019 he commissioned Hollie Lyko, a Masters Graduate from Syracuse University, to collect and reclaim a quantity of the plates. They have been used to host themed *New American Scenery* work, often in the format of traditional souvenir wares. These pieces unequivocally address issues head-on; though politically at variance from the didacticism of the original American transferware, they are its direct descendants.

With a central image bordered by smaller cartouches, *Ghost Gardens of Detroit No:2*, for example, shows the derelict city suburbs, where abandoned homes (some 78,000 buildings) and overgrown gardens have become wasteland. (Fig9) Detroit filed for municipal bankruptcy in July 2013 with estimated debts of \$18-20 billion.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Extracts from Ridgway's diary. See: <http://www.americanhistoricalstaffordshire.com/history/john-ridgways-visit-america>

<sup>36</sup> Paul Scott informal account of work in progress May 2019

<sup>37</sup> '... almost a third of Detroit – covering a swath of land the size of San Francisco – has been abandoned.' Paul Harris *How Detroit, the Motor City, turned into a ghost town*, in the Guardian newspaper, 1/11/2009. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/nov/01/detroit-michigan-economy-recession-unemployment>



Fig.9 Scott's Cumbrian Blue(s), New American Scenery, Ghost Gardens of Detroit No:2. In-glaze screen print (decal) on salvaged Syracuse China with pearlware glaze, 30cm dia. Paul Scott 2019.



Fig.10 The back of Scott's Cumbrian Blue(s), New American Scenery, Ghost Gardens of Detroit No:2.



Fig.11 Scott's Cumbrian Blue(s), *New American Scenery, Pipelines & Peltier*. In-glaze screen print (decal) on salvaged Syracuse China with pearlware glaze, 28cm dia. Paul Scott 2019. Birmingham Art Museum, AL. collection.

On the reverse of all Paul Scott's ceramics are found his maker's mark, information about the printed edition to which it belongs, and his signature. These back-stamps have proliferated on *New American Scenery* works. There are eleven on the reverse of the *Ghost Gardens of Detroit* plate, including a set of trade-marks reminiscent of historical transferwares.

Some plates are tantamount to documents. A portrait of incarcerated American Indian activist Leonard Peltier presides above a photograph of a Texas pipeline, in reference to the disputed site in Dakota. (Figs.11/12) Texts on the reverse give a summary of his unjust conviction for the murder of two FBI agents in 1975. The 'Angola 3': Herman Wallace, Albert Woodfox and Robert Hillary King, who spent decades in solitary confinement at Louisiana State Penitentiary, are accorded similar treatment.

Three pieces address the issue of uranium mining in the Navajo Nation. Paul Scott visited the area in 2018, having read *Yellow Dirt*, Judy Pasternak's moving account.<sup>38</sup> Beginning in the late 1940s when high-grade uranium was discovered on their lands, thousands of American Indians

<sup>38</sup> Judy Pasternak *Yellow Dirt; An American Story of a Poisoned Land and a People Betrayed*, Free Press, New York, 2010.



Fig.12 The back of Scott's *Cumbrian Blue(s)*, *New American Scenery*, *Pipelines & Peltier*. In-glaze screen print (decal) on salvaged Syracuse China with pearlware glaze, 28cm dia. Paul Scott 2019.

worked in the mines without protection from exposure to radiation and ignorant of the risks.<sup>39</sup> Exceptionally high incidences of cancer and congenital birth defects are amongst the continuing effects.

Scott met with ex-miner and activist in the struggle for compensation Timothy Benally in Shiprock New Mexico, where nuclear waste from more than twenty two uranium mines was dumped and where the ground water is still contaminated.<sup>40</sup> A cartouche on a *Souvenir of Shiprock* plate (Fig.13) features Benally at the office of the Navajo Uranium Workers, while a pearl-ware

<sup>39</sup> 'Of the 150 Navajo who worked at the uranium mines in Shiprock, 133 had died of lung cancer or various forms of fibrosis by 1980.' <http://www.nuclear-risks.org/en/hibakusha-worldwide/shiprocktse-bit-ai.html>

<sup>40</sup> 'In the mid 2000s, studies showed that more than 1.8 million liters of groundwater were contaminated with uranium, selenium, radium, cadmium, sulfate and nitrate. Parts of the San Juan River showed uranium concentrations that were between 47 to 97 times above official safety levels.' <http://www.nuclear-risks.org/en/hibakusha-worldwide/shiprocktse-bit-ai.html>



Fig.14 Scott's Cumbrian Blue(s), *New American Scenery, Uranium Series No:2, Farmstead, Cove AZ*. Inglaze decal collage on shell edged pearlware platter c.1840, with uranium glass, 28.5cm x 37cm. Paul Scott 2019.

platter shows him walking along the Mesa No:1 mine road in Cove, Northern Arizona. Pieces of uranium glass have been fired onto another pearl-ware platter, back-stamped *Farmstead Cove Az* (Fig.14). Between the 1940s and the 1980s, more than seven million tons of uranium were extracted from this landscape.<sup>41</sup>

#### MATERIALITY; A POETICS OF TRANSFERWARE

A goods lorry passes Independence Hall in Philadelphia on its way across an altered souvenir plate, shifting the illustration into today's world (Fig. 15). Our familiarity with the style of the original sets up a kind of oscillation between past and present that opens space for reflection. In one of a series titled *Residual Waste* another lorry drives past the oil refinery at Corpus Christi in Houston, Texas (Fig. 16). Unromantic – though not unlovely - views on antique pearl-ware platters titled 'Cities Series' present Chicago, New York, Albany, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh and

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.epa.gov/navajo-nation-uranium-cleanup/cove-arizona-mines-cleanup>



Fig.15 Scott's Cumbrian Blue(s), American Scenery, Souvenir of Philadelphia. Inglaze decal collage, gold lustre on souvenir plate, England unknown manufacture c.1900, 22cm dia. Paul Scott, Clay Studio Philidelphia 2013. Alturas Foundation Collection.

Houston. Such images are observations: witness statements, in some sense. They may depict urban sprawl and by implication the pollution that accompanies it, or worse: environmental disaster - Figure 17 shows Houston partially submerged following Hurricane Harvey - but they do not deny the geometric beauty of the city and are also seductive, elegant objects that mobilise the vocabularies of transferwares.

'His engagement is with the surface rather than the substance of the clay' I wrote in 2002, but since then Scott's fascination with the material qualities of transferware has become more and more pronounced.<sup>42</sup> Cracks and breakages – the bane of the collector – are welcomed and put to significant symbolic use, as in his ongoing series of over-printed antique platters titled *Fracked* - each boasting a prominent gold-filled crack – that were begun during a 2013 residency at the Clay Studio in Philadelphia (Fig.18). His approach has further diversified to include work where the ceramics themselves have been cut and collaged, heightening awareness of their materiality. Figure 19 shows the front and back of *Fukushima no. 8*: a 1960s Japanese Willow Pattern platter has been physically invaded by Hokusai's iconic Great Wave, and joined using the traditional Japanese method of kintsugi, employing a mixture of resin and gold leaf that celebrates the breakage, rather than attempting to disguise it.

<sup>42</sup> Jo Dahn, *Remember Me When This You See*, (2002).



Fig.16 Scott's Cumbrian Blue(s), *New American Scenery, Residual Waste No: 3*. In-glaze decal collage on shell-edge, pearlware platter c.1820, 40.5cm x 33cm. Paul Scott, 2017. Alturas Foundation Collection



Fig.17 Scott's Cumbrian Blue(s), *New American Scenery, The Cities Series, Houston No: 3*. In-glaze decal collage on pearlware shell edge platter c.1820, Paul Scott 2017. Alturas Foundation Collection.



Fig.18 Scott's *Cumbrian Blue(s)*, *New American Scenery, Fracked, No:10*. In-glaze screen print (decal) collage, on repaired, cracked shell-edged pearlware platter c.1820, kintsugi and gold leaf, 30cm x 40.5cm. Paul Scott 2019.



Fig.19 Scott's *Cumbrian Blue(s)*, *Fukushima No:4*, in-glaze decal collage on broken and reassembled Willow pattern platter, marked Japan (c.1965) with Kintsugi. Wave insert from erased Willow platter (c.1840), 6cm x 35cm, Paul Scott 2014, Private Collection.

The golden seams take on a life of their own in installations such as *Bridges, Boats and Blossoms*, gliding across cut-and-joined historical pieces in what amounts to a poetics of transferware.



Fig..20 Scott's Cumbrian Blue(s) *Bridges, Boats and Blossoms*, Installation of 5 collaged 19th century transferware plates and platters with Kintsugi, 175cm x 125cm, Paul Scott 2017

(Fig.20). Similarly lyrical play distils a visual essence from fragments in *Battery Park Triptych*: three antique pearl-ware platters from the Leeds Pottery, each embedded with a gilt-edged slice – like a glimpse - from a deep blue antique platter titled *Castle Park Battery, New York* by Enoch Wood & Sons (c1830) (Fig.21).



Fig.21 Plate 2 of *Scott's Cumbrian Blue(s), New York Battery Park Triptych*. Fragments of Enoch Wood & Sons New York Battery Park platter c.1825, collaged (with kintsugi) into three Leeds Pottery shell edged pearlware platters c. 1840, 40cm x 32cm. Paul Scott 2015.

## DIGITAL PRODUCTION, COMMISSIONING AND COMMUNITAS

'It does not merge identities; the gifts of each and every person are alive to the fullest. [...] It comes unexpectedly like the wind and it warms people towards their fellow human beings.'<sup>43</sup>

'People find *communitas* in the comradeship and fellowship of work.'<sup>44</sup>

Paul Scott has long used digital applications such as Adobe Photoshop to compose surface designs in-screen. *New American Scenery* has seen his methods evolve further as he explores the possibilities of digital process in the production of form. A cup plate showing the Indian Point nuclear reactor within a border of oak leaves, for example, began as a 3D digital scan, the first that he has ever commissioned.<sup>45</sup> (Fig.22) This is one of several pieces that have entailed contributions from fellow practitioners in Britain, Norway and America. Scott's respect for the

<sup>43</sup> Edith Turner, *Communitas: The Anthropology of Collective Joy*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2014 (introduction).

<sup>44</sup> Edith Turner, *Communitas: The Anthropology of Collective Joy*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2014 (Chapter 4)

<sup>45</sup> Measuring 3-4 inches across, a cup plate was slightly smaller than the saucer from which hot tea was drunk in the first part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was used as a coaster for the tea cup, to prevent marking furniture.

skills of others and his expressed pleasure as the prototype passed through tests, from person to person, hand to hand, evoke notions of ‘communitas’: the existential sense of fellowship associated with liminality, when ‘the gifts of each and every person are alive to the fullest.’

An antique cup plate was scanned at the Oslo National Academy for the Arts and a new form was created from the scan by Ed Bentley, in a studio that was once part of the China Hall at the famous Spode factory in Stoke on Trent, England.<sup>46</sup> New slip cast cup plates were produced in Longton, Staffordshire<sup>47</sup> and a pearl-ware glaze was developed by Scott, in discussion with the late Larry Bush.<sup>48</sup> The copper-plate engraving was executed by Paul Holdway, the last Head Engraver at Spode, which closed amidst considerable dismay in 2008. His brief was to replicate as far as possible the qualities found in historical transferwares. Given freedom to interpret Scott’s design, Holdway sourced and adapted the oak leaf and acorn border (which Scott has also used for other pieces.)<sup>49</sup>



Fig.22 Scott's *Cumbrian Blue(s)*, *New American Scenery*, *Indian Point on the Hudson*. Transferware cup plate with a pearlware glaze, tissue print from an engraving by Paul Holdway (former head engraver at the Spode Works), 10cm dia. Paul Scott 2020.

The result is a composite object of mixed pedigree and a kind of homage: a contemporary cup plate whose dense imagery is characteristic of the originals, with which it is effectively in dialogue. There is a strong sense of continuity and change, as Holdway’s traditional engraving skills are showcased while other aspects of the work are digitally generated. Holdway’s

<sup>46</sup> <https://www.edbentley.co.uk/section192471.html>

<sup>47</sup> <http://www.ceramicsbydesign.co.uk/>

<sup>48</sup> Larry Bush was Professor of Ceramics at Rhode Island School of Design 1984-2019

<sup>49</sup> For discussion of how factory based engravers interpreted designs, see Halliday, Richard, *The transferware engraver: Training, practice and scope at the Spode Works*, PhD thesis, Manchester School of Art, 2018.

contribution is acknowledged via a back-stamp on several New American Scenery pieces (as are the contributions of other practitioners whenever they have been involved). Here Paul Scott redresses more than a hundred years of imbalance: historical transferwares were not as a rule the focus of in-depth aesthetic analyses. Features such as the sharpness of the engraving were only mentioned in passing by collectors, in order to identify pieces by particular firms; they were rarely discussed for their own sake and little consideration was given to the identity of the engravers whose skills were crucial to the quality of the ceramics.

#### CURATORIAL PRACTICE: THE INTERVENTION

The *New American Scenery* exhibition tour will begin in the Lucy Aldrich Gallery at The Rhode Island School of Design Museum (RISD) under the aegis of the *Raid the Icebox Now* project, which commemorates the fiftieth anniversary of Andy Warhol's ground-breaking and controversial *Raid the Icebox* intervention.<sup>50</sup> Paul Scott will select and install artefacts from the RISD collection alongside his own work. He will re-curate the exhibition for each subsequent venue.

Interventions have become an established way for museums to promote mindfulness in the viewing experience and embrace critique. They involve creative juxtapositioning and often require new research. Supposedly run of the mill curatorial activities that may otherwise go unremarked are spotlighted; there is thus a significant element of performance in the intervention process, and a promise of transformation (the practitioners involved in *Raid the Icebox Now* will 'create new bodies of work or create a unique curatorial project ... question dominant narratives.'<sup>51</sup>)

RISD Museum houses a substantial collection of American transfer-printed earthenwares, including 250 pieces that were given in 1938 by Edward B. Aldrich (1871-1957) in memory of his wife, Lora E. Aldrich (1874-1931 née Lawson).<sup>52</sup> The year before, one of Edward's sisters – Lucy Truman Aldrich – had donated a significant collection of eighteenth century porcelain figures,

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<sup>50</sup><https://www.risd.edu/news/stories/raid-the-icebox-now/>

<sup>51</sup> RISD website <https://risdmuseum.org/exhibitions-events/exhibitions/raid-icebox-now>

<sup>52</sup> It is likely that Lora Aldrich, rather than her husband, collected them. Brown/RISD Community Art Project, "Calendar of Events February 1941". [https://digitalcommons.risd.edu/brownrisd\\_communityartproject\\_calendarevents/37](https://digitalcommons.risd.edu/brownrisd_communityartproject_calendarevents/37) The Aldrichs were a wealthy Republican family. Edward's father was Senator Nelson Aldrich (1841-1915) a man with enormous political influence. Edward himself was President and a Director of the Times Publishing Company; amongst his other professional interests were several African connections: he was President of the American Congo Company and Vice-President of the International Rubber Company.

which are normally displayed in the Lucy Aldrich Gallery, a period English wood-panelled room that was imported for the purpose.<sup>53</sup> A pamphlet from 1941 describes the figures glowingly as:

‘choice examples of the products of nearly every European factory of consequence. It was in the making of figures that the most skilful workmen were employed, the most lavish pains expended, the most ambitious hopes placed. [...] Rhode Islanders would have to travel very far indeed to find a collection comparable to the Aldrich Collection.’<sup>54</sup>

In terms of cultural status Lora E Aldrich’s transfer-printed earthenware pales into insignificance beside her sister-in-law’s exquisite porcelain. In the same pamphlet it is described as ‘...a ware which in the early years of the last century was well within the reach of the most modest pocketbook. Quantities of it were manufactured especially for the American market.’<sup>55</sup> That, of course, was the point and Paul Scott has expressed a rather gleeful pleasure at the prospect of replacing the porcelain with lowly transferwares. Costly porcelain figures speak of other times and other people; their narrative range is limited compared with the stories told in the theatre of Old Blue.

One of the most striking items in the Aldrich transferware collection and a major focus for Paul Scott in his curatorial/interventionist role is a large platter by Enoch Wood & Sons titled *Cape Coast Castle on the Gold Coast Africa*. (Fig.20). Its qualities are comparable to the *Highlands Hudson River* platter by the same firm, discussed earlier, but this view has a troubling history: from 1664-1807 Cape Coast Castle was the principal British centre for the transatlantic Slave Trade. The platter shows a picturesque seascape with a sailing ship flying two American flags. Across the water is the white castle building with a large Union Jack on a flagpole. In the immediate foreground a shallop is carrying six seated black figures towards the sailing ship. Could they be slaves?

In the company of transferwares such as Ridgway’s *Beauties of America*, the *Cape Coast Castle* platter seems an anomaly. Yet many American views owe their existence to the Slave Trade: huge expanses of America scenery were formed when forests were cleared and - through slave labour - the land became ‘an agro-capitalist landscape.’<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Deborah Del Gais, *Two Remarkable Women/Sisters*, Rockefeller Archive Center Research Reports Online, 2009, <https://www.issuelab.org/resource/two-remarkable-womensisters.html>

<sup>54</sup> Brown/RISD Community Art Project, "Calendar of Events February 1941"

<sup>55</sup> Brown/RISD Community Art Project, "Calendar of Events February 1941"

<sup>56</sup> Colleen Walsh, *The Landscape of Slavery* in *The Harvard Gazette* 17/12/2010 <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2010/12/the-landscape-of-slavery/>



Fig.23 *Cape Coast Castle*, transferware platter by Enoch Wood & Sons, c. 1830. Paul Scott Collection.

The platter attracted relatively little comment amongst the collecting community and none that makes reference to the Slave Trade.<sup>57</sup> Alice Morse Earle describes it as one of a group of 'very richly colored, clearly printed, and beautifully drawn pieces decorated with spirited marine views and clear and graceful shell borders. These were evidently made for the American market, for on all of them appears prominently a full-rigged ship bearing the American flag; yet they cannot be classed as "American views."<sup>58</sup>

The American flags puzzled collectors and an article that appeared in the 1902 periodical 'Old China' offered a pragmatic reason for their inclusion: 'altogether too much importance has been attached ... to the meaning of the American flag found on so many ships on dark blue Staffordshire.' The flag is there merely '...to make it as attractive to the American public and as

<sup>57</sup> 'E. Wood & Sons produced many views of scenery characteristic of other countries, India, Africa, Italy, etc. among them being such *well-known places* as Calcutta and Cape Coast Castle on the Gold Coast, Africa.' N Hudson Moore *The Old China Book* p.26 (My emphasis). Edwin Barber included the platter without comment in a list of eight 'Miscellaneous Foreign Views, dark blue.' *Anglo-American Pottery; Old English China With American Views, A Manual For Collectors*, Press of The Clay-Worker, Indianapolis, 1899 p.160.

<sup>58</sup> Alice Morse Earle, *China Collecting in America* p. 325-326. Morse Earle notes an 'Anti-Slavery Plate ... printed in a purplish and rather light blue' and mentions that when Abolitionist ceramics bearing the inscription 'Lovejoy the first Martyr to American Liberty; Alton, Nov. 7<sup>th</sup> 1837' were sold at auction, the proceeds were donated to the Society of Abolitionists. 'If this account is true', she comments, 'these plates are certainly most interesting relics of those interesting days.' She does not appear to have recognised the similarly 'interesting' aspects of the scene on the Cape Coast Castle platter. *China Collecting in America* p.332.

saleable as possible.’<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless, today the *Cape Coast Castle* image irresistibly evokes the trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and such comments appear disingenuous. One wonders why Enoch Wood, a supporter of the Abolition Movement, chose it; who were his customers? How might they have understood the image?

The Slave Trade Act of 1807 abolished slavery in Britain, but slavery was not comprehensively banned throughout the British Empire until the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833 and in the interim the struggle to end it continued. In 1808 the West Africa Squadron of the British Navy was formed to patrol the West African coast. In 1819 the Squadron was joined by United States Navy warships known as the African Slave Trade Patrol. The print source for the Cape Coast Castle platter illustration was a coloured aquatint published in 1806; it does not show any flags – American or otherwise - on the ship.<sup>60</sup> Enoch Wood was a known Abolitionist. Perhaps he added them as a mark of approval.

Cape Coast Castle has become a site of pilgrimage. Visiting in 2009 President Obama stated that it ‘reminds us of the capacity of human beings to commit great evil.’<sup>61</sup> The *Cape Coast Castle* platter has probably been in the RISD store for over eighty years.<sup>62</sup> Whether or not it was intended to applaud the joining of American and British forces in the Abolitionist cause, in Paul Scott’s words, ‘it shines a light on a very dark part of the American story and it is still a potent piece.’<sup>63</sup> Rhode Island was the point of entry for more than half the African slaves who were trafficked to America and Scott’s intervention will raise questions about the legacy of the Slave Trade.<sup>64</sup> He plans to install the platter as part of a group that will include an original *Souvenir of Providence*, a Rowland Marsellus plate overprinted with (one might say haunted by) the *Cape Coast*

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<sup>59</sup>Not only is [the flag] found on many views of ships in foreign ports ... but on views in which the presence of an American ship seems impossible... ‘A Puzzling Series of Dark Blue’ in *Old China* Vol. 1 No: 6, S.Robineau Editor 1902, p.85-87.

<sup>60</sup> *Cape Coast Castle a British Settlement on the Gold Coast Africa* 1806 engraved by J.Hill from a painting by G.Webster <http://george3.splrarebooks.com/collection/view/cape-coast-castle-a-british-settlement-on-the-gold-coast-africa.-to-his-roy> Webster’s original painting shows a large British flag on the sailing ship and blue uniform-clad sailors on deck. Further research may establish why the Union Jack was omitted from the print.

<sup>61</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/jul/12/barack-obama>

<sup>62</sup>There are no records that suggest otherwise. I am grateful to Emily Banas, Assistant Curator, Decorative Arts and Design, RISD for information on this point.

<sup>63</sup> Paul Scott personal communication, May 2019.

<sup>64</sup> ‘The American slave trade from 1727 to 1807 might better be called the Rhode Island slave trade...’ Stanley Lemons *Rhode Island and the Slave Trade* in *Rhode Island History* Vol. 60, No.4, Rhode Island Historical Society. Paradoxically, in 1787 Rhode Island was the first state to ban participation in the slave trade; the law proved unenforceable however and slavery was not effectively prohibited by Congress until 1808.



Fig.24 Scott's Cumbrian Blue(s), *New American Scenery, Souvenir of Providence, Cape Coast Castle*. In-glaze screen print (decal) on *Souvenir of Providence* by The Rowland & Marsellus Co., 1894, 25cm dia. Paul Scott 2019, Alturas Foundation Collection.

Castle imagery (Fig.24) and Andy Warhol's *Race Riot* (1964) from the RISD collection.<sup>65</sup> He has collaborated with New England ceramist Mara Superior and she has made a high-relief, cast and modelled porcelain platter based on the original that he will hand-paint with a version of *Race Riot* (after Warhol), who in 1969 baffled RISD curators by rejecting canonical works in favour of copies.<sup>66</sup> (Fig. 25).

<sup>65</sup> In the event, Warhol's *Race Riot* was displayed elsewhere in the museum.

<sup>66</sup> For further discussion, see Natalia Musteata, *Defrosting the Icebox: A Contextual Analysis of Andy Warhol's Raid the Icebox 1*, *Journal of Curatorial Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 2, 2016,



Fig.25 Scott's *Cumbrian Blue(s)*, *New American Scenery*, After Wood & Warhol. Hand made porcelain platter by Mara Superior, with painted underglaze. Paul Scott, Mara Superior 2019.

#### AMERICAN SCENERY ON THE THRESHOLD (AUGUST 2019)

This essay has tracked the development of *New American Scenery*; in so doing it has mapped the terrain of Paul Scott's response to American transfer-printed earthenwares. I have witnessed (at a distance) his 'scavenging' - archival and otherwise - and his 'harvesting' of the results, followed his extensive preparations in studio and noted the significant broadening of his creative reach through digital process and commissioning. The project has given rise to a wide range of work with complex layers of reference; in his words: "The scope of my research over the past five years or so, and the issues that it has touched are vast."<sup>67</sup>

Research and practice went hand in hand in the Staffordshire potteries. Writing in 1829, Simeon Shaw thought that "The very extensive Manufactory of Enoch Wood and Sons ... presents all the appearance of a most extensive Laboratory, and the Machinery of an Experimentalist. Here also is a Museum, altogether unique, containing Specimens of the Progress

<sup>67</sup> Paul Scott informal account of works in progress May 2019

of this Art.’<sup>68</sup> The ceramic genre that manufacturers such as Enoch Wood and John Ridgway established has proved to have great flexibility and endurance. That Scott’s work strikes a deep chord is due in part to our recognition of its roots.

Reclaiming, responding, updating, truth-telling.. ‘Prophets and artists tend to be liminal and marginal people’ wrote Victor Turner, himself a prophet of liminality, ‘who strive with a passionate sincerity .... to enter into vital relations with other men in fact or imagination.’<sup>69</sup> Considered as a project, the durational nature of *New American Scenery* – with at its core a ritual quality and sense of performance in Scott’s passage(s) through the American landscape - lends itself to a discourse of liminality, which ‘encompasses both essence and process: it addresses and values the physical space that is a borderline or threshold between things, as well as the passage or movement across whatever that threshold space or borderline demarcates...’<sup>70</sup>

Now at just such a threshold, the ground is shifting. As the first *New American Scenery* exhibition draws closer there is a mounting sense of anticipation, of events gathering speed. Regular posts on social media function as a visual diary, opening Scott’s practice to a wider audience. A recent online image shows sheet after sheet of print decals pegged up to dry in studio. The caption reads: ‘A mammoth printing session yesterday... but all now done in readiness for my upcoming residency.’<sup>71</sup> He will complete many pieces during his residency at Project Art in Cummington Massachusetts – and he left more than a fortnight ago. There can be no closure, no neat academic conclusion: events have overtaken this account.

We are on the telephone. I am in Wales, Paul Scott is in Massachusetts. I have asked how he thinks *New American Scenery* has changed him and he is describing two large sampler jugs that he has just completed. (Fig.23) They were slip cast in Staffordshire using a mould that was developed from his drawings and photographs.<sup>72</sup> He tells the story of the jugs: of the historical transferwares that inspired them; of how he was seduced by the ‘beautiful fat-bellied’ forms. ‘I couldn’t have dreamt of doing something like this before’ he says. Yet in studio they intimidated

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<sup>68</sup> Simeon Shaw, *History of the Staffordshire Potteries*, Scott, Greenwood & Co; London, 1900 (1<sup>st</sup> published 1829) p.30.

<sup>69</sup> Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process*, Cornell University Press, New York, 1991 (1<sup>st</sup> pub 1969), p.128.

<sup>70</sup> Joan Wry, *The Art of the Threshold: A Poetics of Liminality*, in Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman, PhD Thesis, McGill University, Montreal 2010, P5.

<sup>71</sup> 3/8/2019: <https://www.instagram.com/p/BosiVwWgTVF/> [https://www.instagram.com/p/BolikEmA\\_MA/](https://www.instagram.com/p/BolikEmA_MA/)

<sup>72</sup> The form and mould were produced by Ed Bentley in Stoke on Trent; the jugs were slip cast at Ceramics by Design in Longton, Staffordshire.

him and he left decorating them until the very end. 'There they were' he says, with a shrug in his voice, 'sitting blankly'.

He need not have worried....

'The jugs are spectacular by the way' he writes in a follow-up e mail, 'I am so pleased with them.'

©Jo Dahn September 2019



Fig. 26 Scott's Cumbrian Blue(s), New American Scenery, Sampler Jugs Nos: 1 & 2, Stay Nasty, Big Bend & Hot Dogs. Earthenware jugs with pearlware glaze... designed by Paul Scott and Ed Bentley, 37cm x 40cm x 28cm. Model made by Ed Bentley, jugs fabricated by "Ceramics by Design", Longton, Stoke on Trent, England.

