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How to Cite: Jackson, K 2020 The Problem with Steel: Garth Evans' Placement with the British Steel Corporation (1968–71). *Open Library of Humanities*, 6(2): 30, pp. 1–34. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16995/olh.454>

Published: 21 December 2020

Peer Review:

This article has been peer reviewed through the double-blind process of *Open Library of Humanities*, which is a journal published by the Open Library of Humanities.

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THE WORKING-CLASS AVANT-GARDE

The Problem with Steel: Garth Evans' Placement with the British Steel Corporation (1968–71)

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From 1968–1971, sculptor Garth Evans participated in an artist placement with the British Steel Corporation. Evans' placement was associated with the Artist Placement Group, a coalition of artists that negotiated placements in government and industry throughout the UK and Western Europe during the 1970s. This essay utilizes archival photographs, feasibility studies and reports, to consider Evans' placement and his sculpture *Breakdown* (1971) within the context of British industrial politics of the late 1960s and 1970s, a time when many artists did not have experience in industry themselves, yet their identities were strongly tied to working class heritage. From Saint Martins' Sculpture Department to the British Steel Corporation's factory floor, this paper contextualizes and questions the shifting relationship between material, labour and class within Evans' placement, and subsequently, the contextual conditions for an artist making work within the framework of the corporation.

The artist is someone who has been unable to accept or come to terms with existing realities. He is engaged in proposing and making a reality of his own.

—Artist Placement Group Proposal, 1970.¹

In 1970, London based sculptor Garth Evans paced back and forth through bits of steel strewn on the floor of his studio. Daily, he arranged and re-arranged the pieces of steel, yet he was unhappy with his compositions. More than a year of Evans' artist placement with the British Steel Corporation had passed and he still had not made a sculpture.² Evans' situation as an artist within the British Steel Corporation was one of the first set up by the Artist Placement Group (APG), founded in 1965 by Barbara Steveni, John Latham, Barry Flanagan, David Hall, Anna Ridley and Jeffrey Shaw. The APG was a coalition of artists that sought to directly enter industry, and later government bodies, by negotiating over nineteen artist placements in the UK and Western Europe during the 1970s. Evans' placement with British Steel was his first direct exposure to factory life, and his first time working with steel as a sculptural material.

The opportunity to work with British Steel was therefore an influential period in Evans' professional life, but one that he encountered with apprehension as he found both the atmosphere of the factory floor in flux and the material intimidating. At the time of Evans' placement, the British Steel Corporation was restructuring, and labour conditions on the factory floor were changing. Evans' apprehension about these changes was further compounded by a competitive modern art scene saturated with the steel sculptures of Antony Caro and his New Generation of sculptors out of Saint Martin's School of Art's Sculpture Department, based in London. These contextual pressures combined with the self-imposed pressure to make a work during his placement, produced much anxiety. Evans' anxiety during his placement became so crippling that he did not produce a sculpture in steel until a year after his placement. He titled the sculpture *Breakdown* (1971).

¹ Barbara Steveni and the Artist Placement Group (1970), "Artist Placement Group Proposal for Milton Keynes." Barbara Steveni Archive, London, UK.

² Garth Evans (1970), "Work in the Studio." Notes by the Artist. Tate Archive, Tate, London, UK.

The following paper considers Evans' placement with the British Steel Corporation and his creation of *Breakdown* as a point of transition in his practice: a transition that was formed by the specific pressures of Evans' placement, but also reflective of a larger transition for many artists in the late 1960s, who existed in the gaps between conceptual art, minimalism and modern sculpture. It is from this in-between state that this paper extracts the formal concerns of sculptors working in steel at this time in order to situate *Breakdown* within the context of postwar economic and social destabilization in Britain. Through my contextualization of Evans' work, this paper asks the following questions: what is the relationship between concerns of material, form, and class experience? And how does this relationship inform the conditions of composition of an artist working within the context of the corporation?

The Appeal of Steel

In 1967, APG's Barbara Stevani approached Lord Melchett, Chairman of the British Steel Corporation (BSC) and Director of Publicity, Chris Patey, to discuss the terms of BSC's existing fellowship, which they had recently advertised.³ Reflecting the APG's mission, Stevani proposed revising BSC's existing fellowship to align with the APG's principles for artist placements. This conversation would help lay the groundwork for what would later be dubbed by the APG as an "Open Brief," an open-ended contract used in future placements to negotiate terms between artists and organizations. In contrast to traditional fellowships like BSC's, the APG advocated for a non-determined outcome, and insisted that the placement should prioritize the importance of an artist's perspective within industry rather than perpetuating the traditional relationship of patronage.⁴ Garth Evans, a sculptor and teacher at Saint Martin's School of Art, was given an application for the BSC Fellowship by the head of Saint Martin's Sculpture Department, Frank Martin, and was ultimately chosen by BSC. In 1968, Evans accepted, initiating one of the APG's first industrial placements.⁵

³ Author's interview with Barbara Stevani, November 2018.

⁴ Barbara Stevani and the Artist Placement Group (1969), "Sculpture Fellowship British Steel Corporation Statement." 26 June, Tate Archive, Tate, London, UK.

⁵ David Hulks (2013) "Breakdown: Analysis of a Crisis in the Work of Garth Evans," in *Garth Evans Sculpture Beneath the Skin*, ed. Ann Compton, London: Philip Wilson Publishers, pp. 60; and, Barbara

The fellowship that evolved into an APG placement committed BSC to pay for materials but also, through Steveni's negotiation, simultaneously guaranteed that there was no pre-determined expectation of a given outcome on the part of the artist.⁶ In fact, there could be no outcome at all. While the APG would sharpen contract negotiations as the placement progressed, these initial conversations with Lord Melchett and Chris Patey established the priority of securing the artists' time rather than a work of art. However, the APG did not outline how artists' time should be spent. The immaterial labour was, therefore, importantly undefined, rendering the traditional definition of a contract in Britain null and void.⁷

In addition to what can be identified as strategies of negation, the pairing of Evans and BSC was also strategic. Steveni recounts: 'Evans was not primarily nominated for his material portfolio but for his line of questioning.'⁸ In correspondence from the period, Evans argued that the artist's independence in the context of BSC was not a 'personal anxiety' but a necessity to the success of the proposal.⁹ The APG and Evans' concerns over artistic autonomy were seemingly met with a mutual understanding by BSC. An excerpt from an article written the following year (1969) in the *British Steel Journal*, titled 'Sculpture in Steel,' states: 'It seems reasonable to suggest that (APG placement) may offer one of the most fruitful ways for industry to supplement state patronage and bring about a closer understanding of the arts and artists as they

Steveni and the Artist Placement Group, "Sculpture Fellowship British Steel Corporation Statement." The proposal would in some variations be supported collaboratively by E.A.T. Although this joint effort seems to have soured only a year later, with APG arguing E.A.T. did not accurately reflect APG's principals namely their concept of the "open brief," as a result E.A.T. would not work collaboratively on placements.

⁶ My interviews with Barbara Steveni (November 2016–2019) and a later undated document titled "Sculpture Fellowship British Steel Corporation Statement" indicate that a new APG contract was negotiated and recorded with BSC. This new contract included that BSC pay for the cost of exhibiting the work at the later Hayward Gallery APG exhibition, publicity and a 10% commission to the APG. However, it is unclear when exactly during Evans' placement this document was negotiated and printed.

⁷ Removes the third criterion of "contract" under British Common Law, which is "consideration". See <http://www.a4id.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/A4ID-english-contract-law-at-a-glance.pdf> [last accessed 1 December 2020].

⁸ Author's interview with Barbara Steveni, November 2018.

⁹ Garth Evans (1968), "Notes by the Artist." Tate Archive, Tate, London, UK.

are and not as industry might wish them to be.¹⁰ The *British Steel Journal's* statement can be read as an invitation, but it should be recognized as an invitation to enlist artists' perspectives into the corporate apparatus. To enter BSC's context was to enter a precarious grey zone whose conditions were defined by the steel industry.

During the 1960s and 70s, the steel industry not only represented the health of the UK's industrial economy but was globally symbolic of an older industry facing post-war decline. A Mark Abrams poll in 1968 showed that the majority of the public thought 'almost anything was more modern than steel,' a lackluster public opinion that BSC hoped they could change for their own survival. The same year as the start of Evans' placement, the BSC launched an advertisement campaign titled 'Steel Appeal' to re-imagine steel's image. The campaign took on a variety of forms, from the comical advertisement of a woman modelling a dress made out of steel to the more functional proposals for furniture design. If steel was perceived as innovative, it was good for business.¹¹

The potential for Evans' placement to contribute to this campaign is further reflected in the placement proposal (1969). BSC states:

Sculptors working in steel have so far confined their attentions mainly to simple shapes and structures and little work has so far been done in this country on exploring the possibilities of using steel in advanced techniques, fully exploiting its potential in the field of creative art. The interaction between the artist and the industry will, it is felt, be of benefit to both. As a part of its effort to promote widespread awareness of the merits of steel as a material, the corporation has recently embarked on a large national advertising campaign. The sculpture fellowship represents another way in which the corporation wishes to draw attention to the versatility and variety of the material it produces.¹²

¹⁰ British Steel Corporation (1968b), "Sculpture in Steel." *British Steel Journal*, April, p. 34.

¹¹ Lord Melchett (1968), "Introduction to the British Steel Journal." *The British Steel Journal*, April, p. 2.

¹² Barbara Steveni and the Artist Placement Group and the British Steel Corporation (1969), "Sculpture Fellowship British Steel Corporation Proposal." 26 June, Tate Archive, London, UK.

To understand artists as they are, to 'be of benefit to both,' created the potential for the aging steel corporation to salvage its reputation. Technological innovation could increase sales, but perhaps more importantly, it was the potential for an innovative re-branding that could be extracted from the imagination of the artist.

While Evans was not economically invested in the advertisement of steel, he was interested in the innovative potential of the material. In Evans' own words from the first year of the placement, '[t]he focus of my activity has been the material product of the industry.'¹³ Prior to the placement, Evans primarily made sculptures using fiber glass, participating in many prominent shows at the Rowan Gallery throughout the late 1960s. He had made a career teaching at Saint Martin's Sculpture Department, developing a sculptural process Evans described as formulating problems and solving them. In correspondence from the late 1960s, Evans considers what the placement could mean for his own art practice, stating that '... accepting the placement presented a new series of problems.'¹⁴ Evans had never used steel. In fact, he had actively avoided it.

When BSC launched its 'Steel Appeal' campaign, steel was one of the more popular materials being used by contemporary sculptors in Britain and specifically at Saint Martin's School of Art. Various authors have discussed the influence of the Saint Martin's art scene on Evans preceding his placement.¹⁵ Most notably, David Hulks' 'Breakdown: An analysis of Crisis in the Work of Garth Evans' (2013) gives a useful overview of Evans' relationship to Saint Martin's Sculpture Department and specifically comments on Evans' apprenticeship with sculptor Robert Adams and friendship with sculptor William Tucker, as well as Evans' shows before the placement at the Rowan Gallery. Through these relationships, Hulks signals a merger of Constructivist and Minimalist tendencies in Evans' work during the 1960s that would influence his practice during his placement.¹⁶ However, within Hulks' discussion, there is little analysis of Evans' transition to steel and

¹³ Garth Evans (1969), "Garth Evans—Report." Tate Archive, Tate, London, UK.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Hulks (2013), "Breakdown." pp. 53–54.

¹⁶ Ibid.

the popularity of the material at the time. This line of enquiry deserves greater consideration.

In the early 1960s, Saint Martin's Sculpture Department and instructors such as Antony Caro popularized the use of steel as a material and became a dominant force within the sculptural production of the school and the larger art market. The popularity of steel within Caro's work and, subsequently, the Saint Martin's Sculpture Department was largely inspired by the American David Smith's scrapyard sculpture being made and shown at the time.¹⁷ As Hulks states, 'Caro was attempting to inject a new sense of optimism into sculpture, part of a conscious attempt to depart from 'the geometry of fear' to seek instead inspiration from the general economic upturn of the 1960s much of which derived from America.'¹⁸ However, and significantly, this inspiration materially manifested in the choice of steel for these two artists.

While Smith's use of steel as a material would greatly influence a generation of British sculptors, his *Voltri* series in 1962 is of particular relevance to Evans. The series was made during Smith's trip to Voltri, Italy, for the project *Sculptures in the City* and is recognized for the unprecedented scale of Smith's production: the legendary twenty-seven sculptures in thirty days.¹⁹ However, significantly, the sculptures were made from discarded industrial material gathered from abandoned factories that had recently closed, signaling, much like Evans, the choice of steel at a moment of the industry's economic decline.²⁰ Smith's influence can therefore be viewed formally, as I will now discuss in the work of Caro, but equally as contextually site-specific, motivating a multifaceted interest in steel that played out within British art schools, and specifically at Saint Martin's.

¹⁷ Antony Caro (1960), *24 hours*, painted steel sculpture, Tate Britain collection.

¹⁸ Hulks (2013), "Breakdown." pp. 53–54.

¹⁹ Exhibition Catalogue, Cambridge, Ma., Fogg Art Museum (1966), *David Smith 1906–1965: A Retrospective Exhibition*. USA: Harvard University. p. 80.

²⁰ *Ibid.* This interest in industrial materials reflected his work with Studebaker cars in 1925 and later his studio at the Iron Works terminal in Brooklyn in 1933.

Influenced by Smith's use of industrial materials, Caro fused steel configurations on the ground and often painted them. Paul Moorehouse's text, *Antony Caro* (2005), describes Caro's process as working in extremely close proximity to his materials. However, to Moorehouse, Caro's process was significantly more aligned with American abstract painters such as Jackson Pollock rather than other sculptors at the time. Moorehouse states: '... the small scale of the studio prevented Caro from envisioning each part to the whole instead, it is possible to see an unpremeditated relationship with the evolving work from within, ... parallels with Jackson Pollock's assertion that while working he was "in the painting."²¹ In discussing the problems of sculpture, Evans would similarly assert in a much later interview with Jon Wood (2013a), 'The problem was to make it so that it didn't invite the viewer to see some hierarchy or pattern within it, and find some way of making sense of it. In a sense it was like an all-over painting and that's where it connected with American painting, in some way which interested me.'²²

Caro's concept of building a 'sculptural experience' was like American Abstract Expressionism, largely defined by Clement Greenberg's assertion that sculpture existed separately from life. This was an autonomous experience that for Caro simulated a musical score, envisioning steel as multiple units working together to create a cohesive sculpture.²³ Caro's *24 hours* (1960) and other early sculptures made from steel show the physicality of this score, they are heavy and mechanized, their gravity amplified by black and earthy hues. Reminiscent of Jean Tinguely's kinetic sculptural machines, *24 hours* is made from large circular shapes that appear frozen in rotation. The composition is simultaneously mechanical and monumental.²⁴ However, only two years later works such as *Early One Morning* (1962) show Caro's mechanical monumentality had shifted from heavy machinery to airy and bright colored collections of steel structures.²⁵ The shapes and relationships of Caro's formal

²¹ Paul Moorehouse (2005), *Antony Caro*. London: Tate. p. 21.

²² Jon Wood (2013a), "Jon Wood in Conversation with the Artist." In *Garth Evans Sculpture Beneath the Skin*, ed. Ann Compton. London: Philip Wilson Publishers. p. 29.

²³ Moorehouse (2005), *Antony Caro*. pp. 21–22.

²⁴ See Laurence Sillars (2009), *Joyous Machines: Michael Landy and Jean Tinguely*. London: Tate Liverpool.

²⁵ Antony Caro (1962), *Early One Morning*. Painted steel sculpture, copyright Tate Britain.

compositions are arguably more akin to abstract painting rather than traditional sculpture.

From the early 1960s onward, Caro dictated to his students a formal agenda of raw industrial materials and a painterly philosophy of autonomy formed by the influence of Greenberg and later Michael Fried. Sam Cornish, in his text *Stockwell Depot* (2015), constructs the history of this 'New Generation' of sculptors. Of particular interest is his discussion of prominent students of Caro's such as Phillip King, David Annesley and William Tucker who, like Caro, chose steel as their material. Making and showing their sculptures on the floor of industrial warehouses, Cornish identifies their formal agenda as industrial horizontality: what sculptor Elizabeth Baker called a 'persistent physicality,' which attempted to combine abstract painterly composition with raw industry.²⁶ Yet the rawness in their work is ultimately tamed and contained, resembling brightly painted pieces composed by the sculptor.

While teaching at Saint Martin's, Evans wanted to distinguish himself from Caro and the New Generation sculptors.²⁷ However, at the time of Evans' teaching, a shift was occurring within Saint Martin's Sculpture Department that is described by Cornish as occupying an awkward position between the subsumption of artistic practice into concept and the preservation of the sculptural experience.²⁸ In 1971, just after Evans' placement, Saint Martin's Sculpture Department responded to these two modes of sculptural experimentation by dividing their sculpture course into the experimental and highly conceptual A course, conceived and instructed by Garth Evans, Peter Kardia (né Atkins), Gareth Jones and Peter Harvey, and the more traditional material-based B course taught by William Tucker.²⁹ Nonetheless, it is important to note that within Saint Martin's, and in Britain's broader sculptural scene, experimental art production and more traditional material-based sculpture were not mutually exclusive: artists and themes continued to straddle both trajectories.

²⁶ Sam Cornish (2015), *Stockwell Depot 1967–1979*. London: Ridinghouse. p. 17.

²⁷ Wood (2013a), "Jon Wood in Conversation with the Artist." p. 28.

²⁸ Cornish (2015), *Stockwell Depot*. p. 16.

²⁹ A.J. Sleeman (2007a), *The Sculpture of William Tucker: British Sculptors and Sculpture*. London: Lund Humphries and the Henry Moore Foundation; and Cornish (2015), *Stockwell Depot*.

William Tucker, part of the New Generation of sculptors, modeled his B course on many of Caro's philosophies and considered the agenda of the course to be a direct negation of the A course's more conceptual agenda. A.J. Sleeman, in her text *The Sculpture of William Tucker* (2007), comments that like Caro, Tucker regarded sculpture as units composed to create an autonomous experience, which Tucker identified as 'sculptural intelligence.'³⁰ However, Sleeman argues, one difference between Tucker and Caro was Tucker's concern for the phenomenology of the body. Inspired by the philosopher Hannah Arendt, Sleeman argues that Tucker re-investigated the body through the material of steel.³¹ Tucker's 1971 works, *Cat's Cradle 3* and *Beulah i* showcases this shift; the horizontal steel sculptures of Caro become elongated, gestural, and bodily.³² In a period that favored abstraction over figuration, Tucker would arguably surpass Caro. Steel became the material to recover the body.

In contrast, the A Course was in many ways designed as an experimental and critical response to Saint Martin's own sculptural legacy, and can be considered a uniquely self-reflexive moment for an art school.³³ As Malcom Le Grice, in *Radical Art and the Academy* (2010), has usefully noted, the main initiative of the A course was to deprogram students to combat what they perceived as their completely alienated condition under capitalism.³⁴ This psychological deprogramming was further combined with strict material instructions. Evans' student, Richard Deacon, in an essay titled 'Localized Changes of Conditions,' describes the role of materials in his A course experience: '... the students were given no teaching instructions. But their studio times and materials, were strictly monitored. For example, each student

³⁰ Sleeman (2007b), *The Sculpture of William Tucker*. p. 12.

³¹ Ibid.

³² William Tucker (1971), *Cats Cradle 3*, raw steel, and *Beulah i*, raw steel. Tate Britain collection.

³³ Many scholars have emphasized the A course's lean towards conceptual art practice to the detriment of leaving out the course's concept, the material concerns and process-driven instruction. See John Walker's *Left Shift* (2001) and Lynda Morris' *Genuine Conceptualism* (2014).

³⁴ Malcom Le Grice (2010), "Radical Art and the Academy." In *From Floor to Sky: The Experience of the Art School Studio*. London: A & C Black, p. 155. Also discussed by Hulks (2013), "Breakdown." p. 58.

was only given polystyrene wrapped in brown paper, craft paper, string, plaster and water, and a stopwatch.³⁵

From Deacon's account, the A course can be considered as much psychologically as it was materially engaged, striving to first awaken students to their alienated condition under capitalism and then to encourage them to de-program themselves to ultimately achieve more freedom in their practice. From Deacon's description, Evans' specific approach to the A course can be described as restrictive and largely structured around specific materials. Evans' teaching approach, like his own practice, bypassed divisions between material and concept by framing his inquiries around questions and restrictions. The students were encouraged to pursue an artistic process within these parameters that was not actively judged or critiqued by their instructors.

Significantly, the *British Steel Journal* (1968) similarly describes Evans' process from the beginning of the placement, stating that 'Evans explores the relationship between certain shapes ... imposes on himself an extreme set of rules ... and has a very clear concept of what he can and cannot do with them.'³⁶ Following this approach, Evans wanted to know the limitations of his material. He wanted to know the shapes, quality and finish produced by the steel mills and collected samples, filling the floor of his studio with bits of steel.³⁷ Daily, Evans moved the pieces around the floor, positioning them in different configurations. Like Caro's 'working inside the sculpture,' Evans, too, physically worked inside his composition, testing different relationships.³⁸ Evans states: 'The collection of a rich variety of forms appeared to be ready made sculpture ... my arranging and spacing activity is seen as an endeavor to find a suitable presentation for the existent sculpture.'³⁹

Evans perceived steel as already existing in a finished state. However, unlike Duchamp's readymade satire, Evans found increased difficulty and was unable to

³⁵ Richard Deacon (2013) "Localized Changes of Conditions." In *Garth Evans Sculpture Beneath the Skin*, ed. Ann Compton. London: Philip Wilson Publishers. pp. 36.

³⁶ British Steel Corporation (1968), "Sculpture in Steel." p. 34.

³⁷ Evans (1970), "Work in the Studio."

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

negotiate steel's increasingly complex connotations. Furthermore, Evans had trouble separating himself from the material. He described his process as a never-ending dance with the pieces of steel.⁴⁰ No matter how many times he rearranged them he was unable to commit to a composition. If formulating a problem was the first step to his sculptural process, his problem here would be: what to do with steel?

The Steel Problem

A year of Evans' placement passed, and he had still not made a sculpture. Evans' frustration with his studio practice led to more time spent touring and photographing the corporation's processing factories. Thirty-six of these photographs were published by the BSC in 1971, in a small book titled *Some Steel*. The photographs in *Some Steel* are gray toned and small in scale. They feature stacked and scattered groups of a variety of steel shapes, close-ups of single joints and simple constructions of one or two elements.

On one of these tours of Redpath Dorman Long Depot in East Greenwich, Evans saw something unusual: a haphazardly stacked pile of steel shapes and simple constructions on the floor of the stockyard. BSC management explained to Evans that these were remnants left over from their Apprentice Program. During tutorials, apprentices learned techniques such as making joints, and after class, their creations were stacked in the stockyard. The objects appealed to Evans, and he later photographed them. While the photographed steel objects are formally similar, they are not identical. Evans described the material subjects of his photographs as 'having been made freely within a given formula or set of rules ...'.⁴¹ Evan's description of the making of these objects echoes his teaching methodology during the A course and his own practice; the objects are created with material restrictions and under a set of established rules. However, unlike Evans' self-imposed rules, the apprentice objects were made by rules imposed by the Corporation.

⁴⁰ See Adina Kamien-Kazhdan (2018), *Remaking the Readymade: Duchamp, Man Ray, and the Conundrum of the Replica*. USA: Routledge.

⁴¹ Garth Evans (1970), "Garth Evans—Report for Training Officer BSC Redpath Dorman Long Depot." Tate Archive, London, UK.



Figure 1: 1.1, 1.2, 1.3 and 1.4 Garth Evans (1971), Contact Sheets, Henry Moore Foundation Archive. Reproduced with permission from Garth Evans, David Cotton and courtesy the artist/Leeds Museums & Galleries (Henry Moore Institute Archive of Sculptors Papers).

Evans' photographic framing isolates these objects from human and mechanical activity.⁴² Significantly, he chooses not to capture the act of learning or more accurately training within the corporation but, instead, captures its aftermath, its debris. Evans' choice of composition presents a ghostly portraiture that draws many parallels with Carl Andre's photographs of found sculptures from 1960/61. However,

⁴² Garth Evans (1971), Contact sheet, Henry Moore Foundation.

Evans photographs, taken in the context of the BSC stockyard, arguably portray a subject and atmosphere more similar to early surrealist photography, notably French photographer Eugène Atget's photographs of Paris taken at the turn of the 20th century. Walter Benjamin famously described these same photographs as 'remarkable for their emptiness.'⁴³ 'The city in these pictures,' Benjamin continues, 'is empty in the manner of a flat that has not yet found a new occupant.'



Figure 2: Eugene Atget (1910), *Petit étalage de poissons, Coin de la rue Daubenton et de la rue Mouffetard*, Paris. International Center of Photography (no longer under copyright).

⁴³ Walter Benjamin (2015), "A Short History of Photography." In *On Photography*, ed. Esther Leslie. London: Reaktion Books Ltd.

While Benjamin's description of 'emptiness' is now mired in art historical tropes, he importantly signals a composition that is defined not by negative space but by a missing subject. A striking example is Atget's *Petit étalage de poissons, Coin de la rue Daubenton et de la rue Mouffetard* (1910), which captures a small vitrine littered with fish skeletons on a Parisian street corner.⁴⁴ In many ways *Petit étalage de poissons* is a portrait of the aftermath of consumption. However, during Atget's time, the relationship between commodity, provider and consumer occupied a changing Parisian landscape, a cityscape that was being redefined by Haussmann's mid nineteenth century renovations.⁴⁵ Through what Atget chooses to leave out of frame, *Petit étalage de poissons* poignantly conveys not only what is lost in individual acts of consumption, but ultimately what Paris may be losing in its continued redistribution of people and spaces.

Considering *Petit étalage de poissons* in relation to Evans' photographs, both compositions are strikingly defined by what is absent, but also more importantly both establish a pre-occupation with what is considered not of use or use-less at times of social and economic change. While Atget's fish skeletons' fleshy detritus exists as social remnants of the past in Paris' renovated streets, Evans' objects are misshapen cogs in what was globally considered an archaic line of steel production. Referring to the apprentice objects photographed, Evans states that:

... they have an absence of any practical or obvious use which enables us quite easily to consider them aesthetically ... they encapsulate the technique as an end to itself ... it is this end in itself that they exactly parallel works of art and it is this which is the focus of my interest in them.⁴⁶

The objects, in Evans' view, had aesthetic value because they were no longer of use or value to the corporation, yet still occupied space in the stockyard. They were

⁴⁴ Eugene Atget (1910), *Petit étalage de poissons, Coin de la rue Daubenton et de la rue Mouffetard*. Paris. Copyright International Center of Photography.

⁴⁵ Peter Sramek (2013), *Piercing Time: Paris After Marville and Atget, 1865–2012*. UK: Intellect Ltd.

⁴⁶ Evans (1970), "Garth Evans—Report for Training Officer."

essentially surplus; in Evans words, '... the only profit of these objects can be evaluated solely in the experience gained in their making.'⁴⁷ If Atget's empty Paris was a flat awaiting its new tenant, Evans' objects awaited their new function, their new use-value. Existing on a tightrope between function, commodity and non-use, they were objects in transition, much like the conditions of the BSC factory floor itself.

According to newspapers at the time, BSC's interest in renovating steel's image was not merely for innovation but was politically strategic. *The Times* argued that, for BSC, the more spectacularized steel became the more it could distract from internal changes occurring in the corporation. *The Times*, in 1970, states that 'the ostentatious BSC publicity ... has really been a desperate attempt to keep up appearances in public while behind the scenes the moles worked out a new product organisation.'⁴⁸

The 'new product organisation' that *The Times* refers to was a byproduct of the Nationalisation Act of 1967. The Act advocated a grandiose vision for re-nationalizing the steel industry and a full scale reorganization, a restructuring that would take place throughout Evans' placement.⁴⁹ As referred to by *The Times*, the company had historically been organized geographically, resulting in strong regional ties between site, employees and management. However, in 1969 two reports were produced (BSC Second and Third Reports on Organization) by Dr. H M Finiston, Deputy Chairman of British Steel, and his committee, advocating for a shift from regional grouping to product grouping. The reports indicated that product grouping would more easily accommodate the increasing new technology being adopted by the corporation, most significantly the electric arc furnace. This mentality was also fueled by a broader corporate assumption: 'if we could get the structure down everything else would follow suit.'⁵⁰

However, the implementations of this plan had many ominous side effects. Eliminating regional organization weakened employees' sense of community, and

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Andrew Lumsden (15 July 1970), "Why Steel is Appealing." *The Times*: 23.

⁴⁹ G.F. Dudley and J.J. Richardson (1990), *Politics and Steel in Britain 1967–88: The Life and Times of the British Steel Corporation*. USA: Dartmouth Publishing Company. p. 29.

⁵⁰ Dudley and Richardson (1990), *Politics and Steel in Britain*, p. 29.

technological modernization meant that many plants would close, leaving many workers unemployed. Even more unpleasant was the fact that closures would not take effect until the mid-1970s, leaving the employees at these plants in limbo. They knew their plants would close and their tasks, up until that point, would become increasingly mundane.⁵¹ At the time, BSC's atmosphere was considered so fragile that in 1974 the Secretary of State of Industry, Tony Benn, created a manifesto calling for a review of all proposed steelworks closures.⁵²

However, according to Dudley and Richardson's *Politics and Steel in Britain 1967–88: The Life and Times of the British Steel Corporation* (1990), despite knowledge of these structural repercussions, there was a prevailing corporate optimism at BSC that they could be handled painlessly.⁵³ This sentiment is expressed by the corporation itself in the *British Steel Journals 1968–1969*, in which BSC prides itself on a history of surviving 'adversary politics,' and claims that more than any other industry, steel's nationalization or denationalization depended on the party in power.⁵⁴ The corporation and Dudley and Richardson, among other scholars, further argue that this political manipulation of the steel industry could be viewed as a litmus test, not just of the financial state of steel, but symbolic of the greater health of British industry. Therefore, the steel industry in British industrial history takes on a special status. If the perception of steel could be modernized, BSC and the Labour government hoped that this new image could symbolize a rebirth of British industrial prosperity.⁵⁵

The Steel Crisis

Part of BSC's strategy of corporate optimism was a pre-emptive measure to assuage the negative impact the structural changes were having on their employees. Whether they were fearful of worker unrest or simply wanted to create better working relations as part of rebranding their identity, along with restructuring came a corporate and government mandate to seek out consultation to better express the concerns of

⁵¹ John Valiey Weidenfeld (1994), *The History of British Steel*. UK: Wilmer Brother Limited.

⁵² Dudley and Richardson (1990), *Politics and Steel in Britain*, p. 59.

⁵³ Dudley and Richardson (1990), *Politics and Steel in Britain*, p. 34.

⁵⁴ Lord Melchett (1968), "Introduction to the British Steel Journal." p. 2.

⁵⁵ Dudley and Richardson (1990), *Politics and Steel in Britain*, p. 1.

their employees.⁵⁶ This mandate no doubt aided in creating an atmosphere open to the very presence of Evans in the corporation. Further, as Evans' interest in labour practices at the corporation grew, program initiatives under this mandate shared many similarities to the conditions of his placement.

One BSC consulting initiative of particular relevance was the Employee Director Scheme. The scheme began at the same time as Evans' placement and ran until the late 1980s. The scheme involved a union worker, dubbed Worker Director, joining BSC management's committee meetings. The corporation hoped this initiative would generate greater worker inclusivity in the corporate decision-making process.⁵⁷ Here, it is important to identify the specific relationship between trade unions and BSC during Evans's placement.

While British steel workers had a less confrontational history than other labour groups such as the coal miners, they also struggled to self-organize, thereby crippling any attempt at a united response to BSC's re-structuring of the company. According to steel unions at the time, the changing working conditions eroded workers' sense of identity and resulted in a weakened sense of community.⁵⁸ The weakening state of steel unions is reflected in the outcome of the Employee Director Scheme. While optimistic in theory, the scheme was highly problematic in practice and was ultimately cancelled in 1983. Dudley and Richards (1990) quote Brennan, who describes the problems inherent in the scheme,

Worker directors of necessity enter worlds already established in both of formal roles and processes of custom and practice, of values and language. The social dynamics of those worlds strongly favor the encapsulation of worker directors within the pre-existing boardroom ethos and organization and within though in a limited way, the pre-existing organizational categories of information and analysis.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Dudley and Richardson (1990), *Politics and Steel in Britain*, p. 46.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Dudley and Richardson (1990), *Politics and Steel in Britain*, p. 47.

⁵⁹ Dudley and Richardson (1990), *Politics and Steel in Britain*, pp. 136, 46.

From Brennan's account, one of the key problems of the Worker Directors was that they 'felt mistrusted by their own union officials and colleagues at work'.⁶⁰ In an article from a 1968 edition of *British Steel Journal* titled 'The Employee Director Idea,' the BSC, an unusually reflective company, predicted this very problem: 'Industrial democracy, in the sense of workers' participation in management, is one of those concepts which are widely applauded until the time comes to work out what they really mean ... How can workers participate in management without becoming identified with us?'⁶¹

The plight of the Employee Director Scheme is significant because it shares many similarities with the difficulties of the APG placement and, most importantly, brings the issue of class to the forefront. Like the Worker Director, the structure of the APG placement actively sought to put Evans in a position that was both accessible to workers and management. Evans was attuned to the precariousness of this position and particularly concerned with management interference. In correspondence from 1968, Evans states that 'interpretations of his actions should not be open to the idea that they are in accordance with (management) given instructions.'⁶² However, despite Evans' awareness of potential problems, his free mobility inevitably created a question of personal class alliance. The question asked of the Worker Director may appropriately be re-phrased: how can 'artists' participate in management without becoming identified as part of management?

A Question of Class

Prior to the placement with BSC, Evans' connection to the working class was crafted by his childhood spent in and around South Wales, listening to his grandfather's and uncles' stories of working in the coal mines. In interviews, Evans elaborates, describing the influence of his family's stories about 'life underground,' tragedies and strikes. Evans (2015) states:

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ British Steel Corporation (April 1968a), "The Employee Director Idea." *British Steel Journal*: 17.

⁶² Evans (1968), "Notes by the Artist."

My mother grew up in the small mining village of Pencoed and my grandfather and my mother's brothers were coal miners in the region. As a child, I spent summers in South Wales and I vividly remember listening to my uncles and other men talk of their lives underground, in the dark. I wanted to make something that I felt had a connection to the coal mining and steel making industries of South Wales ... I found something grittily majestic in that world, particularly in the bonds forged between individuals. It was clear that a powerful sense of community existed between these men and their families, a sense of unity built through a long history of shared hardship.⁶³

Evans' commitment to the working class and the role of sculpture in public art would come to greater fruition after his placement with British Steel. In 1972, Evans constructed a large public sculpture, *Untitled*, in The Hayes, Cardiff city center. The sculpture was one of sixteen public art sculptures within the Peter Stuyvesant City Sculpture Project and was displayed for six months. During the sculpture's display, Evans initiated, and recorded conversations held around the sculpture. The collection of recordings was transcribed and formed *The Cardiff Tapes Project*.⁶⁴

From Evans' description and his later public sculpture in Cardiff, we can arguably discern a loyalty but often romanticized relationship to the working class, an appreciation of hard labour and a sense of community that initially deterred him from committing to work professionally as an artist. It was not until Evans was stationed in Hong Kong as part of the British Military that he was convinced to commit to art production and teaching.⁶⁵ Evans' description of his military service and education includes him in a post-World War II generation of artists from working class backgrounds who were enabled by these experiences to pursue careers in the arts. However, as these individuals entered art school, and later became teachers, they increasingly expressed a loyalty to, or a desire to conceptually and aesthetically reconnect with, their working-class heritage.

⁶³ Garth Evans (2015), *The Cardiff Tapes 1972*. Chicago: Soberscove Press. p. 7.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

Such a cultural trend has been theorized by American Fredric Jameson as a phenomenon of working-class guilt. As Jameson (1991) states, this individual 'is forever suspended between classes, yet unable to disengage from class realities and functions, and from class guilt.'⁶⁶ In American sculpture, this trend has been the subject of art historian Julia Bryan-Wilson's *Art Workers* (2009) and Alex Potts' *The Sculptural Imagination: Figurative, Modernist, Minimalist* (2000), which discuss the work of sculptor Carl Andre who was active during the same time period as Evans.

Bryan-Wilson (2009) draws attention to the inherent hypocrisy of an artist in an 'elite' position posing as a blue-collar worker; in contrast, Potts (2000) argues Andre's self-professed working-class identity was a product of nostalgia at a time of industrial change.⁶⁷ Potts states:

In hindsight, the world of industrial processes evoked by Andre's work has more to do with the aging rust belt than with the new world of consumer commodities and high technology industry. The materiality of his work with its evocations of industrial grittiness might now even have a slightly nostalgic patina. The arrangement of the metal pieces too, suggests the need for the care and precision not of a machine but of a craftsman.⁶⁸

Pott's argument importantly draws attention to the relationship between industrial change and subsequent shifts in artists' choices in form and process.⁶⁹ However, the complexity of class identity within these larger industrial shifts in the UK is not easily read through Jameson's guilt, Wilson's hypocrisy, or Potts' nostalgia, and the broader

⁶⁶ Fredric Jameson (1991), *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. USA: Duke University Press. p. 38.

⁶⁷ Alex Potts (2000), *The Sculptural Imagination: Figurative, Modernist, Minimalist*. USA: Yale University Press. p. 231. See also Bryan-Wilson (2009), *Art Workers*. p. 69.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ This is an ideological parallel reminiscent of Benjamin's famous assertion in *Arcades Project* that at a moment of technological obsolescence and transition, the retraction of technology's functionality creates opportunities for changes in cultural production. See Walter Benjamin (2002), *The Arcades Project*. USA: Harvard University Press.

question remains as to the changes to intellectual and public perceptions of the working class.

Unlike Andre, Evans' work does not directly align with working class identity or mimic industrial processes. While still feeling the kindred connection to his working-class roots, Evans was negotiating his past from a position once removed. In Evans' own description from a recent interview, he references a 1962 film, *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*, in which the main character purposefully loses the race to show his solidarity with his mates, an act that Evans suggests showcases a particular refusal of the intricacies of the class system in Britain.⁷⁰ In other words, the film expresses a desire for, and an almost romanticized view of, solidarity that is predicated on acts of refusal and detachment. And it is perhaps this arm's length relationship to industry and the embedded class structure that the photographs in *Some Steel* convey. Evans is not a 'worker,' but an observer within the context of industry. Reiterating Evans' quote above, he found the coal miners' lives 'grittily majestic' and further described the materials photographed in *Some Steel* as having a 'mysterious symbolic quality ...'.⁷¹ The people and material of the industrial world were perceived by Evans as both familiar and simultaneously other, muddled like the blurry backgrounds of the photographs.

Evans' dialectic relationship to his class position is reflective of the larger re-composition of the public's perception of class in post-World War II Britain. Britain's post-war politics were defined by an aggressive upward social mobility plan, an optimism that was contingent on the promises of the UK's Welfare State to take care of its citizens. This promise was epitomized in the 1942 Beveridge Report's slogan, 'from the cradle to the grave we will look out for you,' a utopic vision that comprised policies of full employment and an increased standard of living through what was perceived as the material benefits of mass production.⁷²

⁷⁰ Carmen Morsch (2019), *Incidentally in Context*. Kopaed: Verlag Munchen. p. 129.

⁷¹ Evans (1970), "Garth Evans- Report for Training Officer."

⁷² William Beveridge (2007), *The Beveridge Report*. See discussion by John Kirk (2007), *Class, Culture and Social Change: On the Trail of the Working Class*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. p. 1.

Along with the increased accessibility of consumer goods, a parallel initiative occurred in the mass production of secondary school education, known as the comprehensive revolution, which not only made education more accessible, but it also introduced students to a greater variety of subjects, including art.⁷³ Consequently, as consumer goods made their way into more households, so did greater options in education, creating opportunities for members of the working class to 'move up'. Evans' exposure to art and his ability to attend art school were direct results of these reforms.

The belief in the ability of these policies to create upward social mobility at the time was so extreme that it would fundamentally change approaches to and perceptions of working class character. British historian John Kirk's *Class, Culture and Social Change: On the Trail of the Working Class* observes that it was largely assumed by the intelligentsia that the post-war working class was on the brink of disappearance—a myth, Kirk argues, that motivated E.P. Thompson and others to obsessively document working class culture in the 1950s and 60s.⁷⁴

However, as Kirk recounts, the working class did not disappear, but instead changed shape in the public's perception. In his seminal text, *A Phenomenology of the Working Class Experience* (1999), Simon Charlesworth describes this shift during the 1960s and 70s as 'a deep existential gulf between those reared in an industrial past and those for whom this culture now stands as some sort of folk-lore, a folklore that stands contrary to their existence in the present.'⁷⁵ He further states, 'mutual respect and recognition structures of feeling produced through the processes and self-discipline of meaningful work are now replaced by individualistic performance and the display of commodity desire.'⁷⁶

If, according to Theodor Adorno and Guy Debord, post-World War II European high culture fell victim to mass culture, in Britain, cultural historians similarly

⁷³ Roy Lowe (2012), *Education in the Post-War Years: A Social History*. UK: Routledge.

⁷⁴ Kirk (2007), *Class, Culture and Social Change*. pp. 14, 103.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ A. Charlesworth (1999), *Phenomenology*. p. 283.

lamented working class communities as victims of mass consumer individualism.⁷⁷ The image of working class culture that Evans had constructed from his childhood had become corroded by consumption and individualism, and was largely thought to have disappeared in Britain's social imagination. Evans was faced with the problem of rectifying his nostalgic narrative of his pre-war working-class heritage with these changing post-war conditions and perceptions of his contemporary working class. These conflicting identities inevitably pressured Evans to negotiate his own class position and allegiances while at BSC.

Despite the publication of *Some Steel*, Evans kept returning to his studio determined to make a sculpture. The photographs that compose the publication and the many others, such as the apprentice object photographs, were ultimately unable to embody the scale of his experience at BSC. This motivated Evans to reflect on his practice and cultivate a perspective that cultural theorists such as Bertolt Brecht shared decades earlier when they argued that direct representations of factory life, such as photography, were inadequate. For example in Brecht's essays, *On Film and Radio* (1919–1956), he states that human socio-economic experience was now reified in its relationship to capitalism. As a result, the individual's experience was no longer readily available to capture. It was now fragmented and needed to be reconstructed.⁷⁸ Brecht's suspicion of photography was reiterated by Carl Andre in 1968 (during the early stages of Evans's placement) when he exclaimed, 'The photograph is a lie ... this is anti-art because art is a direct experience with something in the world, and photography is just a rumor ...'.⁷⁹

If Andre, had forsaken the photograph in favor of fetishized craftsmanship, In Evans' case, the photograph represented a point of transition, a transition that

⁷⁷ See Guy Debord (2012), *The Society of the Spectacle*. USA: Bread and Circuses Publishing; and Adorno and Horkheimer (2002), *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. USA: Stanford University Press.

⁷⁸ For an expansion on this theme see Steve Giles (2015), "Photography and Representation in Kracauer, Brecht and Benjamin." In *Verswisch die Spuren!: Bertolt Brecht's Work and Legacy*. Amsterdamer Beiträge zur neueren Germanistik, Volume 66, pp. 115–125. Also see Brecht (1930), "Durch Fotografie Keine Einsicht." In Brecht, Werke, Schriften 1, pp. 443–44; and Brecht (2000), *Brecht on Film and Radio*, p. 144.

⁷⁹ Liza Bear and Willoughby Sharp (1970), "Interview with Carl Andre." *Avalanche* 1.

allowed him to learn the hierarchy of material, to navigate levels of labour and, ultimately, introduced him to the problem of his placement: how to convey the material and subsequently the labour conditions of an individual working within capitalist modes of production.

In addition to taking photographs of the apprentice's objects, Evans proposed a project to work collaboratively with the apprentices. This proposal, like all of his proposals to collaborate or work on the factory floor, was ultimately denied by BSC on the grounds of it being too dangerous for the artist.⁸⁰ However through his attempts to collaborate, Evans did learn that the apprentice program was largely in decline; working as an apprentice no longer secured a job.⁸¹ From the archival material, it is unclear in how much detail Evans knew about the relationship between the lack of job security of the apprentices and the larger restructuring of BSC. However, in letters to Kenneth Robinson, Director of Social Policy at BSC in 1971, Evans does express his concern over the negative implications of the corporation's changing social policy, specifically listing: boredom in the workplace, the effect of mundane tasks on the worker's psyche, and the methods of education used within the factory. Evans states that, '[industry] needs to be concerned with and allocate resources in a deliberate attempt to engage the interest of their participants ... an industrial undertaking requires for its own efficiency to include in that description of its function, the idea that it exists to provide a meaningful experience of work.'⁸²

Evans concludes that the success and efficiency of industry rests on the quality of the work experience and the creative engagement of its employees. If industries fail to do this, Evans states, 'I believe that the industrial enterprise, taken as a whole will become increasingly unworkable, in that it has to give impossible financial substitutes for its failure to provide a meaningful experience of work, and to cope

⁸⁰ There is some disputed evidence in the archive and interviews with Evans and other APG artists that suggest Evans may have gotten the apprentices to at least fill out surveys about their status and experience at the British Steel Corporation. However, in a recent interview with Carmen Morsch, Evans states he never spoke to them directly; see Morsch (2019), *Incidentally in Context*. p. 139.

⁸¹ Garth Evans (1970), "Garth Evans—British Steel Report." Tate Archive, Tate Museum, London.

⁸² Garth Evans (1971), "Letter to Kenneth Robinson, Director of Social Policy at British Steel." Tate Archive, Tate Museum, London, UK.

with ever more serious irrational and negative assertions of their importance by individual groups.⁸³ In many ways, Evans' correspondence revisits a very British argument towards industry dating back to the 19th century—notably, in John Ruskin's "Stones of Venice" (1851), and William Morris' later Arts and Crafts movement—a mixture of romanticism and Marxism valuing the creation of a more meaningful work experience, and the simultaneous threat of the consequences if industries do not comply.⁸⁴

Dr. H. M. Finiston, Deputy Chairman of British Steel and responsible for the reports dictating the structural changes of the corporation, responded to Evans's concerns. Finiston argued that what Evans suggested was not new, and further, that BSC was already making strides to combat boredom in the workplace. Finiston (1971) states:

I would like to take time off to debate the major issue of job satisfaction in industry and particularly in industry, which is of a routine productive nature. The problem you pose is not unrecognized... What is more difficult is suggesting one (or more) solutions. ... I do believe that advancement in technology increases the proportion of tedious work but reduces the number who have to undertake such tedious work.

My main concern is that, however the artist may work, (whether intuitively or otherwise) unless the method by which you hope to raise the level of interest for the worker within the industry is propounded in terms which they (the workers-management and men) feel they have an understanding of what you are after, your mission will fail. It is in this respect that I found both your memos deficient. The intent is good, the mode of attack on the problem less satisfying.⁸⁵

⁸³ Garth Evans (1971), "Letter to Dr. H M Finiston Deputy Chairman of British Steel." Tate Archive, Tate Museum, London, UK.

⁸⁴ See E.P. Thompson (1976), *William Morris Romantic to Revolutionary*. New York: Pantheon Books.

⁸⁵ H.M. Finiston (1971), "Letter from Dr. H. M. Finiston Deputy Chairman of British Steel to Garth Evans." Tate Archive, Tate Museum, London, UK.

Finiston's response echoes Bryan-Wilson's critique of Andre, suggesting that the artist's elite status or way of communicating makes any critique of worker's conditions problematic and, further, hypocritical. Evans himself conceded these criticisms, claiming that he too felt some lack of conviction in his proposition.

In response, however, Evans chose to focus his criticism on a smaller scale. He specifically advised adjustments to the work and safety films. Evans was shown a total of nine films from the corporation film library as part of his introduction to BSC.⁸⁶ One of primary interest was a trainee film on electric arc furnaces (as mentioned earlier, electric arc furnaces were one of the main technological developments that caused small factories at BSC to close). Evans' primary concern with the film was its production. He argued that BSC's production style disconnected the processes of hearing and seeing.

In recent interviews, Evans more specifically equates his experience with the BSC films with his time in the military. He states they both brought on a similar feeling of inefficient manipulation; that is, as Evans states, 'being manipulated in the sense of being put in a position where you are supposed to be drawn in and enlightened and made part of something but actually at the same time being separated from it.'⁸⁷ As a result, according to Evans, not only was BSC's message lost on trainees, but instead of creating a sense of shared interests, the film felt isolating. Evans's focus on the trainee films therefore served to channel his criticality of BSC labour practices to a specific focus on communications. Evans states: 'In my visits to steel works I have been fascinated by the means of obtaining and communicating information ... The noise of the machinery makes oral communications.'⁸⁸

The role of communications in the factory later inspired Evans' proposal for the APG's exhibition that documented its placements (Hayward Gallery, 1972). For the exhibition, Evans proposed that the communicative energy of the steel floor be transmitted to the floor of the gallery and invited BSC management to a screening

⁸⁶ Garth Evans (1971), "Notes on Trainee Films." Tate Archive, Tate Museum, London, UK.

⁸⁷ Morsch (2019), *Incidentally in Context*, p. 96.

⁸⁸ Evans (1970), "Notes on Trainee Films."

of the BSC training films. Evans requested closed circuit televisions, telephone links, cables to loudspeakers and computers with print outs to be placed throughout the gallery space.⁸⁹ While the invited BSC representatives left early and his request to channel live sound from the BSC factory floor would be denied due to BSC's concerns over workers' language, what the plan and eventual form of installation shows us is the use of communication to draw a connection between material and labour. The 'noise of the machine' was its own form of communication amongst a background of workers and management voices. Caro's musical score of composing steel sculpture is thus redefined as a cacophony of material, mechanical and human voices that make up a factory floor.

Evans' intuitive concern with communications at BSC can be considered symptomatic of the waning optimism and subsequent erosion of productive communication within the corporation. The repercussions of BSC's restructuring were amplified by the UK's impending entry into the European Economic Community (1973), and by the mid-70s BSC's share of the domestic market significantly fell from 75% to 54%.⁹⁰ Optimism turned to pessimism with the departure of the Publicity Director and head of 'Steel Appeal,' Chris Patey. Patey left BSC to start working for the American oil company Mobile, a move that was especially symbolic, for at this time, Mobile was involved extensively in drilling for oil in Scotland's North Sea.⁹¹ Like Patey, the focus of Britain's economy had migrated from the steel industry to off-shore oil. No longer Britain's vessel for economic optimism, steel became a thorn in the government's side. The steel problem became the steel crisis. The growing offshore oil industry would dictate politics while the steel industry remained dictated by politics, with its denationalization in 1979 by the new Conservative Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher.

⁸⁹ Garth Evans (1971), "Proposal for Hayward Gallery." Tate Archive, Tate Museum, London, UK.

⁹⁰ G.F. Dudley and J.J. Richardson (1983), *Steel Policy in the UK The Politics of Industrial decline*. Glasgow: Glasgow Department of Politics, University of Strathclyde. p. 50.

⁹¹ Chris Patey (2016), interview by the author. This can also be found on the Oil Depletion Analysis Centre About, an organizational web page, available at <https://www.resilience.org/stories/content-partner/oil-depletion-analysis-centre-odac/#> [last accessed 1 December 2020].

Breakdown

In 1971, shortly after Evans completed his placement with BSC, he welded and rewelded together the sets of steel that he had rearranged throughout his placement. He made a sculpture. The large composition consisted of short linear units sprawled across the floor of his studio. Like a web, the raw pieces intersect, creating abstract shapes with excess steel protruding into the air like metal tentacles. He titled the sculpture *Breakdown*.⁹² Like the work of Antony Caro and some members of the New Generation, such as William Tucker, *Breakdown* is large in scale and composed of unit to unit relationships that horizontally rest on the floor. However, the musical score of Caro is staccato and broken into jagged pieces; the sculptural body of Tucker is dismembered and flattened. *Breakdown* makes an aesthetic crime scene out of Caro and Tucker's sculptural legacy at Saint Martins.

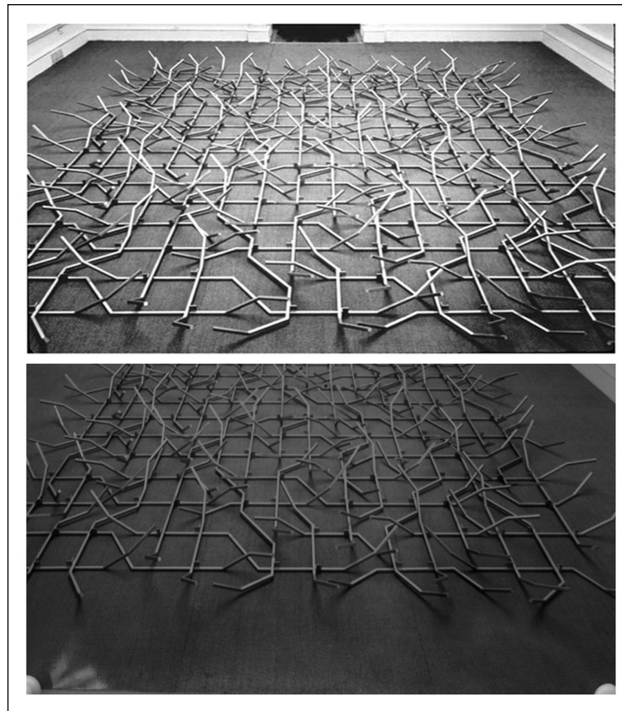


Figure 3: 3.1 and 3.2 Garth Evans (1971), *Breakdown*, Hayward Gallery, London. Reproduced with permission from Garth Evans.

⁹² Garth Evans (1971), *Breakdown*. Raw steel, Hayward Gallery, London. Copyright Garth Evans.

Significantly, Tucker also participated in a fellowship at Leeds University at roughly the same time as Evans' placement with BSC, a coincidence that Hulks credits to more artists turning to fellowships as academic positions became scarcer. The prominent art publication at the time, *Studio International*, published a letter exchange between Tucker and Evans discussing the different approaches to their fellowships. Within his letter Evans points to an important distinction between his work and Tucker's, as Hulks (2013) summarizes:

... Tucker's mistake according to Evans was in thinking that a new kind of sculpture solely by virtue of its internal properties could force itself on the world in a new way. Evans thought this naive insisting instead what happens to sculpture is determined largely by factors outside of itself. Furthermore, the sculptor tricked into believing too strongly in artistic autonomy ... he has not yet except privately for himself gained any freedom to participate in the creation of new concepts of reality.⁹³

Hulks largely credits the difference between Tucker and Evans' perception of a new reality for art making and, subsequently, the crisis culminating in *Breakdown*, to the personal pressure that Evans felt to be more socially engaged with his practice. However, the factors of Evans' placement arguably crafted a new reality that was significantly different from his expectations. If, according to Hulks, Evans felt pressure to be more socially engaged, how did this new social role transpire and how did it affect composition?

During his placement, Evans encountered a context riddled with contradictions: materials that did not fit into the modes of production; a community that did not fit his image of the working class; and a shifting corporate policy that deemed these materials and people obsolete in a Welfare State that had promised full employment. I argue that he began to grapple with this reality in his photographs of the apprentice objects and brings this to some conclusion in *Breakdown*.

⁹³ Hulks (2013), *Breakdown*. p. 58.

In interviews, Evans states that the title, *Breakdown*, referenced his inability to create a sculpture during his placement and reflected a general trepidation he felt about being a sculptor at that time. Evans' anxiety was so great that he recalls he sought psychological counselling at the time of his placement.⁹⁴ Evans' conflicted state is metaphorically akin to what prominent Scottish psychiatrist and APG collaborator R.D. Laing described as the 'divided self.' In his text, *Divided Self* (1960), Laing describes the feeling of this fractured mental state: 'To an individual the totality of whole experience is split in two main ways; in the first place, there is a rent in his relation with his world and in the second, there is a disruption of his relation with himself.'⁹⁵ According to Evans, the 'disruption' of his relationship with himself came quite literally to occupy the materials of *Breakdown*. As he put it, '*Breakdown* didn't offer itself as an object. This was because I couldn't objectify it, I couldn't get out of it, I was in it literally.'⁹⁶

Fredric Jameson describes the radicality of the cultural object as drawing 'the real into its own texture and ... its paradoxes.'⁹⁷ The subject of *Breakdown* is similarly formed by drawing the outside in. Evans' (1968) words echo this sentiment when he describes the artist's ideal role during a placement: 'I have in mind someone who is not primarily concerned with producing things that are easily identifiable (as art) but one whose concern includes the conventions by which we classify experience, the social and conceptual framework through which our experience is received.'⁹⁸

To reiterate Evans' description, '[w]hat happens to sculpture is largely determined by factors outside of itself.' However, this is not solely credited to a greater social responsibility. When he refers to the naiveté of Tucker's autonomy, Evans is not abandoning autonomy, but instead is redefining the problem of composition from painterly abstraction to terms of mediation. Therefore, a more socially engaged artist

⁹⁴ Wood (2013a), "Jon Wood in Conversation with the Artist." p. 29.

⁹⁵ R.D. Laing (1964), *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness Volume I*. UK: Tavistock Publications. p. 15.

⁹⁶ Wood (2013a), "Jon Wood in Conversation with the Artist." p. 29.

⁹⁷ Frederic Jameson (2002), *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. London: Routledge. p. 66.

⁹⁸ Garth Evans (1968), "BSC fellowship Re: Film." Tate Archive, Tate Museum, London, UK.

can be described as one who maneuvers through the contradictory strands of Evans' placement experience; or, perhaps more accurately, one who comes to terms with the failure of mediating these conditions and who assess the way this failure ultimately materializes, as in the broken totality of *Breakdown's* frayed steel grid. Unable to separate himself from the object, *Breakdown* ultimately embodies the struggle that Evans experienced while navigating between the material of steel and aesthetic form, between the changing structure of BSC and the individual worker, and between his own conflicting relationships to class. *Breakdown* draws in the real so much that it is ultimately the breakdown of the artists' ability to negotiate between himself and the varying scales of capitalism. In a letter to curator Jasia Reichardt written in 1980, Evans reflects, 'I wished to stop making objects, but I did not wish to stop being a sculptor ...'.⁹⁹

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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How to cite this article: Jackson, K 2020 The Problem with Steel: Garth Evans' Placement with the British Steel Corporation (1968–71). *Open Library of Humanities*, 6(2): 30, pp.1–34. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16995/olh.454>

Published: 21 December 2020

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