

Luna Park
Heather & Ivan Morison



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Luna Park was conceived by artists Heather & Ivan Morison and realised in Portsmouth in August 2010. It was a life size model of the *Ultrasaurus*, a fictitious dinosaur 'discovered' by American palaeontologist Jim Jensen in 1979. The Morison's sculpture met an untimely end when it burnt down after eight weeks on Southsea Common on 1 October. It was due to be installed in Colchester's Castle Park from October 2010 to January 2011, followed by a final presentation in Cardiff.

Chapter in Cardiff commissioned the project and worked in collaboration with firstsite in Colchester and aspex in Portsmouth to tour the work. Staff at Chapter and firstsite commissioned texts from writers who they felt would unearth the multi-layered nature of the project, putting it into the context of the Morison's broader artistic practice.

When news came through that the sculpture had been destroyed, these texts were in the final stages of editing. Both writers have adjusted their pieces to allow for the fire, the demise of the sculpture and its subsequent non-appearance in Colchester and Cardiff. The decision was taken to produce the two essays side by side for this small publication, with the aim of providing a critical reflection on the aftermath of the destroyed sculpture as well as the impact of the strange turn of events.

The story of *Luna Park* will no doubt develop; this publication and *An Unreachable Country. A Long Way To Go* – the Morison's film about the making of *Luna Park* – offer a route through to a potential future narrative.

November 2010

Nomen Nudum: The naked name of Luna Park

Roger Luckhurst

On New Year's Eve, 1853, the sculptor Benjamin Waterhouse Hawkins held a celebratory meal inside a life-sized model of an Iguanodon. The dinosaur had been commissioned by the Crystal Palace Company for its new entertainment wonderland on the hills of Sydenham, south of London, and Hawkins was celebrating the completion of this great educational project. There were fifteen models of these 'antediluvian monsters' in the parkland of Crystal Palace, the first life-sized recreations of extinct animals whose ordinal name, *dinosauria* (from *deinos*, terrible/powerful/wonderful + *sauros*, lizard) was only about ten years old.

Advances in palaeontology – a bad-tempered and competitive discipline in Victorian science, full of vicious professional rivalries – soon outstripped the Crystal Palace models. The sculptures contained inaccurate leaps and guesses from fossil records. Notoriously, the thumb spike of the iguanodon was misread on the model as a nose horn, and it was a bipedal animal, not the quadruped depicted. The cultural historian WJT Mitchell has remarked that: "It is one of the most remarkable features in the evolution of the dinosaur image that its public life begins not with a skeletal reconstruction, but with an artificial restoration, indeed, *a total fabrication*, of the living appearance."¹ Soon enough, these models became less of an attraction, were left disregarded, and began to fall apart. They were lost in the undergrowth. These were dinosaur dinosaurs.

The figure who coined the word dinosaur and designed these models for Crystal Palace was the eminent man of science, Sir Richard Owen. 'Old Bones' Owen catalogued and categorised the materials that poured into the British Museum, publishing multiple volumes of *The History of British Fossil Reptiles* and developing ways of taxonomising these vanished species. But Owen, too, was rapidly forgotten. He hated Darwin and Huxley – his religious faith insulted by their evolutionary materialism and its revolutionary social and political implications. Darwinians have written Owen out of history. Huxley unforgivingly claimed that Owen "lied for God and for malice".² In 2009, London's Natural History

Museum quietly removed its founder Owen's statue from the main hall and replaced it with one of Darwin. Memory is in the custody of the victors.

Yet there are ironies. In 1936 the Crystal Palace burnt down. It had survived fires before, but this time the company decided to abandon the site, the life of the pleasure palace having run its course. All that is left on the hill at Sydenham are the outlines of a vanished building and the stone sphinxes that once guarded the entrance. But the dinosaurs in the park survived. They gained listed building status in 1973, were rescued from their precarious rot near the overgrown pond and underwent full restoration in 2002. The Crystal Palace, that wonder of the world, has left little trace, but the dinosaurs, with all their wrongness, live on.

But not all dinosaurs – not even the fabricated ones – survive the flames. Heather & Ivan Morison's *Luna Park* reminds us that fantasy is never far away from our relationship to dinosaurs, and indeed is thoroughly interwoven into the very fabric of the science. The Morisons built the model of a dinosaur that never existed, a chimera produced by misreading a jumble of bones from a brachiosaurus and a supersaurus to invent the largest dinosaur that never roamed the planet. The 'Ultrasaurus' was declared to be a new type of dinosaur by the flamboyant fossil hunter and 'rock hound' Jim Jensen in 1979. Jensen started out as a mechanic and engineer in the Second World War, working on nuclear reactors for the Manhattan Project, before trying his hand as an artist and sculptor. He was hired to prepare dinosaur skeletons for museum display, and eventually came up with a way of putting supports inside the bones, meaning that the skeletons could be displayed free-standing rather than on clumsy frames. You know, just how that T Rex looks before it leaps to life and starts chasing Ben Stiller around in *Night at the Museum* (2006). There's no chance of the bones falling off the frame, something Katherine Hepburn manages to do to Cary Grant's dinosaur in *Bringing up Baby* (1938). Jensen never trained in the science of palaeontology, but he bounded into field work in the 1960s, digging up a vast collection of bones mainly from the

Dry Mesa quarry in Colorado (several tons of his finds are still uncatalogued and lie stored under the football pitch of Brigham Young University). The Ultrasaurus was one of these 'finds' in Jensen's brief but stellar media career. It was an accidental creation and his name for this fabricated dinosaur has remained a *nomen nudum*, a 'naked name', a term used in the biological sciences for something that has not yet had an adequate scientific description within the zoological code. Jensen's chutzpah reminds me of John Hammond, the wealthy creator of Jurassic Park played by Richard Attenborough in Spielberg's CGI extravaganza, but Jensen will probably be forgotten sooner than Spielberg's oedipal dinosaur shenanigans. Fossils shake off their finders and anonymous bones get shuffled and re-aligned inside the latest taxonomies.

The Morisons specialise in a form of fieldwork, fabricating narratives from their findings. They undertook a 'global survey', travelling around the world, sending back cryptic postcards, cataloguing the extraordinary beauty of Mongolian wild flowers and the varieties of Chinese trees, and writing a pastiche science fiction novel in the cabin of a container ship crawling between China and New Zealand. These adventures were collected in *Foundation and Empire* (2004), a catalogue hidden inside the facsimile of the cover of Isaac Asimov's science fiction novel. In 2005, they acquired woodland in Wales and have set about creating an arboretum. In the grounds, a strange structure called *Fantasy Island* (2007) – built from felled wood – snakes through the trees and has become a site for gatherings, storytelling and other less specific situations. Recent projects have been bound together in the gnomic narrative of *Falling Into Place* (2009), a book which is neither catalogue nor fiction, but a strange hybrid in-between. Of late, their practice has converged with the dystopian imagination of post-war science fiction, their titles often borrowed from classic genre texts. Ominous meteorites hang in the sky in the *Dark Star* series (2009). Their temporary pavilion in Victoria Park in Bristol was called *The Black Cloud* (2009), after Fred Hoyle's classic novel, and was used to host events on surviving a post-apocalyptic world.

The fabrication of *Luna Park* is part of this sequence. The dinosaur is a monument to the reality of mass species extinction, and many date the latest wave of our 'dinomania' to a new awareness of potential ecological catastrophe and our ongoing wave of extinctions. On this model even the Astronomer Royal, Martin Rees, has published a commentary on the plentiful ways humanity will likely end in *Our Final Century* (2003). When we imagine the disaster, we reach for an available iconography of monstrosity. Nuclear testing unleashes *Godzilla* (1954) on Tokyo, or the vast kraken that attacks the Golden Gate Bridge in *It Came from Beneath the Sea* (1955). What is the shape of that thing we glimpse in the edges of the frame in *Cloverfield* (2008) but *Godzilla* re-imagined for post-9/11 New York? Things buried in prehistoric times are best left undisturbed: this is the message of *The Thing* (1982) with that alien creature found buried under the ice, or *Quatermass and the Pit* (1958), as the force unleashed from engineering works in the London Underground finally materialises over the skies of the city like a spectral Tyrannosaurus Rex.

In its first incarnation in Portsmouth, the beast was planted incongruously behind Southsea Beach. There, the magical appearance of the Morison's dinosaur was not just about imagining catastrophe or obsolescence. It was also testament to the enduring ability of fantasy and narrative to stave off destruction, creating new meaning amidst rubble and ruins. The modern ecological dystopia is rarely a purely nihilistic imagination of disaster – that's left to the special effects departments of Hollywood studios, delightedly liquefying the White House with alien laserbeams. Instead, the critical dystopia avoids closure by being provisional, open-ended, playful and even comical – for the spirit of comedy is an essential attribute for adaptability and survival. Nowadays, the utopian impulse is not sketched out in rigid visions or re-ordered societies (all those crushingly boring texts by William Morris or HG Wells), but is something cloaked, peripheral, hinted. The utopian horizon, theorist Tom Moylan suggests, *shivers* at the edges of texts, contained in fugitive possibilities and acts of resistance.³ In Heather & Ivan Morison's work, it is in the making of

meaning, its communality and its effort, where this critical spirit lies.

The Morisons illustrate what Nicolas Bourriaud has called 'relational aesthetics' – that is, art that constructs spaces of sociability and possible interactions between diverse elements, "ways of living and models of action within the existing real, whatever scale chosen by the artist".⁴ This form of contemporary practice involves "temporary and nomadic constructions, whereby the artist models and disseminates disconcerting situations". In its first incarnation, *Luna Park* saw the dinosaur installed in a public space, whilst aspx ran the accompanying film, *An Unreachable Country. A Long Way To Go* – a lyrical and elliptical document of the fabrication of the dinosaur model in a Serbian village, using technologies from an old car factory rendered ancient or extinct in a rapacious globalised economy.

Each time, and in each specific place, *Luna Park* was intended to network together different elements to produce a different set of relations and thus a different reading of the work. In Portsmouth, the Ultrasaurus loomed behind the seafront. You walked through the ruins of Portsmouth's naval heritage – the monuments to lost ranks and ratings, to battles in Tsing-Tao, Suez, Jedda, to the deaths of forty-eight officers from yellow fever on the HMS Aboukir in Jamaica, 1873 – to aspx in the revamped docks. You had to traverse streets of 17th century town houses to get to the nearby Clarence Pier theme park, a piece of the English seaside preserved in amber like dinosaur DNA. On the side of a rickety stall you could pick out the ghost sign of an ancient entertainment, JURASSIC 3001, and begin to think about connections and relations, the resonances intended and unintended by this surreal insertion of a dinosaur into the British seaside landscape.

On 1 October a fire completely destroyed the model of the Ultrasaurus. The fiery impact of a comet extinguished the dinosaurs all those millions of years ago – and now, it seemed, even their fictive offspring must suffer the same apocalyptic end. The fire seemed to end any chance of fulfilling the plan to take this project on a short tour to other places.

The planned public interventions into the urban terrains of Colchester and Cardiff would necessarily have to be very different, but perhaps it is entirely possible to mutate the project according to circumstance. Although thousands of people have been denied the surprising intrusion of this fictional beast into their everyday lives, the logic of relational aesthetics demands that the piece will take on a whole new set of significances, even after the sculpture was destroyed. It is not possible to negate the art of situations. That negation will always be incorporated into the meaning and thus ensure the survival of the work.

This is because even a total destruction by fire leaves a trace. The philosopher Jacques Derrida was always obsessed by cinders as remains that persisted after a total burning away. "A cinder", Ned Lukacher has explained, "is a very fragile entity that falls to dust, that crumbles and disperses. But cinder also names the resilience and intractability of what is most delicate and vulnerable".⁵ In an odd way this fire – which is suspected to have been an arson attack – only helps to underscore the double logic of dystopia and utopia, negation and affirmation, tragedy and comedy, explored in the work of the Morisons. But the resonances of this creative destruction by fire can get even stronger than this.

The title, *Luna Park*, reminds us that utopias, dystopias and fantasias often take place in strictly demarcated spaces: on unmapped islands, in isolated territories or hollow earths, in the suspended rules of carnivals and circuses, or in futures reached through mesmeric sleep. These are just the kind of impossible niches where dinosaurs live on, out of time – in *The Lost World* (1925), *King Kong* (1933 / 2005), *The Land that Time Forgot* (1975 / 2009). More significantly, the title of this piece echoes the amazing entertainment complex of Luna Park that was built in Coney Island on the edge of metropolitan New York in 1903. Luna Park had over a thousand towers, spires and minarets and was lit up by over a million electric lightbulbs. The conceit for entering Luna Park was that visitors were leaving behind the desperate poverty of New York for the surface of another planet, a world of wild entertainment and luxurious excess.

For architect Rem Koolhaas, Luna Park was the incubator for Manhattan itself, a model of the future, a shiny post-natural world of pure alienated distraction. Luna Park was “foetal Manhattanism”: lunatic excess; gigantism; hollow pleasure.⁶ Like Crystal Palace, Luna Park also burnt down, in a conflagration that lit up the sky for miles around in 1914. There is undoubtedly something mournful about pleasure parks, their crumbling lath and plaster exoticism. They always seem to contain the seeds of their own destruction. Fire sweeps through them because they are only ephemeral visitations, the illusion of solidity built on a shoestring, the propped plasterboard fascias hiding empty volumes. The fire that destroyed the Ultrasauros reinforces the history evoked in the name of *Luna Park*. And the new relational associations introduced by fire don’t stop here. Now it means that we watch the fire built by the Serbian workers to roast a hog in the film *An Unreachable Country. A Long Way To Go* with a different quality of attention. Whilst the flames lick around the beast, these images might evoke the punitive use of fire in the Balkans just half a generation ago in the wars that wrenched Yugoslavia apart. This was the conflict depicted in that extraordinary film by Srđan Dragojević *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame* (1996).

These contrary associations merely confirm what Gaston Bachelard observed about fire, that it always falls “within a zone that is only partially objective, a zone in which personal intuitions and scientific experiments are intermingled”.⁷ Contradictory, over determined, relational: this is also the experience of engaging with the temporary zones created by the Morisons. Their installations may be provisional and passing, but they also sustain a fugitive utopianism, the sense that the order of things could be (or is compelled to be) always on the point of being re-shuffled. This ambivalence, it seems to me, is the essence of the practice of Heather & Ivan Morison.

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1. *The Last Dinosaur Book: The Life and Times of a Cultural Icon*, WJT Mitchell, University of Chicago Press, 1998

2. *Richard Owen: Biology without Darwin*, Nicolaas A Rupke, University of Chicago Press, 2009

3. *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia*, Tom Moylan, Westview, 2000

4. *Relational Aesthetics*, Nicolas Bourriaud, (trans. S Pleasance and F Woods), les presses du reel, 2002

5. *Cinders*, Jacques Derrida, edited, translated and introduced by Ned Lukacher, University of Nebraska Press, 1987

6. *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan*, Rem Koolhaas, Monacelli Press, 1994

7. *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*, Gaston Bachelard, (trans. A Ross), Quartet, 1987

A Strong Dark Presence

Eric Fredericksen

I stand for language. I speak for truth.
I shout for history. I am a cesspool
For all the shit to run down in.

*Do You Want New Wave or
Do You Want the Truth?*
Mike Watt, *The Minutemen*

Early on 1 October 2010, the work under consideration in this writing burned in a spectacular fire on Southsea Common, Portsmouth. As it was consumed by flames, Ivan Morison was in Vancouver, British Columbia, where it was still evening, giving a lecture about a work he and Heather had made there in charred timber. In the talk, he spoke of the transformative effect the Morisons hope to achieve through their work: “The modern city needs to be reordered and reconfigured. Only through individual violent and subversive acts and larger societal shifts alongside cataclysmic events will its residents find true happiness.” That weekend, also, I was finishing edits on this essay. We thought it best to preserve various ironies or coincidences by leaving the writing as it was at the time of the work’s destruction, inserting notes as necessary where events overtook the facts presented or underscored the themes discussed.

Heather & Ivan Morison are generally in motion. Their practice is a form of travel that leads them to spots not covered in Rough Guides; where no package tour would ever be organised. Their travels across the earth are not atypical of the contemporary artist today, ever moving from site to site: asked to arrive, take in the scenery, prepare a response to local context, and move on. But the work they produce through these travels is far afield from that sort of site-specificity. Their work instead carries sites along with it, displacing a scene found in one location to another, drawing connections between radically different situations. They currently live in Brighton and north Wales, but recently they’ve been in Serbia, working on the project that occasions this piece of writing. Working in collaboration with twenty former employees of a Yugo car factory in Kragujevac, the Morisons have built a full-scale sculpture of a massive dinosaur, titled *Luna Park*.

This year and next, the massive form – a steel frame covered in a hard polyester shell – manifests itself in sites across Britain: first on Southsea Common, then in Colchester’s Castle Park, then on a derelict site in Cardiff Bay. Black and looming, it will draw your attention first to itself, then to its setting, and finally, should you be curious, to the story of its creation. Your attention will thus be drawn to a series of failures, stories of decline and dissolution.

The real destruction of Luna Park, oddly, reminded me that the Morisons have approached their works in a spirit of optimism. This is most obviously visible in the incredible energy they bring to their ambitious undertakings, and in the coming together of various people – hired help, skilled labour, armies of volunteers – required to realise the projects. The works, too, evoke catastrophe as an opportunity to come together, to build anew. There is more than a hint in the Morisons of Walter Benjamin’s troubling ‘Destructive Character’, the ‘cheerful’ figure “whose deepest emotion is an insuperable mistrust of the course of things and a readiness at all times to recognise that everything can go wrong”.¹

This text is being written in Seattle, where the Morisons were recently in residence, working on a project called *Frost King* (2010). I must imagine the site where this new work was made, the places to which it refers, and the places it will visit. Through remapping, the sites will become analogs to places closer to hand.

Ducks and Decorated Sheds

The sculpture *Luna Park* represents an Ultrasauros, a dinosaur with a tangled history, and a questionable claim to existence that was discovered in Colorado by palaeontologist Jim Jensen. Initially thought to be the largest dinosaur to have walked the earth, the Ultrasauros is now considered a chimera, a muddle of specimens of multiple, previously identified genera.

The Morison’s Ultrasauros is, in response, less a figure from a museum diorama than it is a roadside attraction in the style of the American traffic stopper: designed to make motorists take notice, and pull over to eat,

fill their tanks, or buy trinkets. *Luna Park* lights up at night, illuminating a space beneath the beast's belly; a small gesture suggesting shelter, a place to gather.

The lights were ultimately blamed for the beast's destruction. Arson was initially suspected, but the local police determined that rain had leaked into the structure and caused an electrical fault. Evidence remains inconclusive. Either version has its resonances. If it was an electrical fire, the gesture toward gathering-place led to the destruction of that place. And whatever the cause, it's easy to see a connection between the structure and its fate. The Morisons are quoted below discussing Luna Park as "a strong dark presence", an attractor of negativity. You could see it as a magnet drawing its doom inevitably towards itself.

In their film *An Unreachable Country. A Long Way To Go*, the Morisons show the Serbian workers in the countryside, building *Luna Park's* steel frame and polyester shell. These scenes mix work and play. We see the thistle-strewn meadow around the workshop, the frame components cut and assembled, men with brushes daubing resin onto the skin, working the shell into shape. Day turns to night as the workers slaughter a pig and roast it over a fire, drinking beer and sitting in the dirt. This engaging muddle of life and work is far away from the modern style – an office worker updating his Facebook status from his cubicle, say. These scenes will be familiar to anyone who has worked with the Morisons – a barn-raising spirit presides, with many hands at work, skilled and otherwise, to realise a project.

Interspersed between the documentary scenes is a fictional dialogue, heard over a black screen. Taken from their 2009 novel *Falling Into Place*, the dialogue sets the sculpture in a deserted landscape, in a world scarred by an unspecified apocalyptic event. A woman pulls off the road, attracted by the figure of the *Ultrasaurus*, and is offered tea by a man running a café inside the beast. A commonplace transaction takes place in the monster's shade, in the uncanny atmosphere created by the beast and the sense that these people may be among the last survivors of a catastrophe.

These subtly post-apocalyptic scenes connect the operations of the Serbian workshop to a long history of handiwork. In the workshop, an expensive plasma-cutter is used on the steel, which is then assembled using only simple machines and muscle. Missing is any sense of Fordist production: the scenes mix modern equipment with unmerchandised workshop labour. We're clearly in the present, but also after something; specifically, the closure of the plant that employed these men. This present, with the disappearance of the macroeconomic structures that gave these men paid work, can then rhyme with the Morison's post-catastrophic themes. This specific present implies a more general future.

This form, the roadside 'traffic stopper' is of the type dubbed a 'duck' by the architects Robert Venturi, Denise Scott-Brown, and Steven Izenour in their book *Learning from Las Vegas*². The name is derived from a duck-shaped drive-in illustrated in *God's Own Junkyard*³, Peter Blake's influential critique of the degraded American landscape. Such figures persist on American roadsides – driving from Los Angeles to the desert resort communities of Palm Springs, travellers on the Redlands Freeway encounter a massive T Rex and Brontosaurus in Cabazon – like a gateway to the hot, dry paradise beyond. They loom behind a diner, perfectly named the Wheel Inn, and a dusty gift shop of no distinction. These dinosaurs can be entered and occupied, but the gate in the Bronto's massive tail was locked when I visited, probably its typical state. Though custom-built, they are hardly unique – similar creatures are scattered throughout the networks of the American highway system. But there's no mould; no factory produced these in bulk. They're appreciated by the kind of people who like folk art, the obsessive rock grottos found in small-town back yards, corn mazes, and stunning sites like the Watts Towers. They testify to immense labour devoted to the construction of novelties, a kind of optimism of purpose which mingles pathos and deep commitment to wonder.

Learning from Las Vegas contrasts two typical modern architectural forms: the duck and the decorated shed. The authors' sympathies lie with the latter – a structure built in the ordinary

manner, with applied ornament signalling any necessary distinction of the structure, rather than giving over the entire form to symbolic purposes. Illustrating the architectural distinction with reference to vernacular structures, they set next to their picture of the Long Island Duckling another picture from Blake, of a typical roadside dominated by a huge sign reading 'Esso'.

A few pages later, they supply a proposal for a monument in the mode of the decorated shed: a bland, square building surmounted by a huge sign reading 'This is a monument'. In architecture, they have lost the argument: Frank Gehry's ducks are in much greater demand. But on the roadside, it's all gigantic Esso signs, while the ducks' shotcrete skins crack and degrade. In Cabazon, a sparkling new Burger King was built on an adjacent lot, its generic sign as high as the T Rex's head, drawing custom from the roadway and ensuring the further decline of the Wheel Inn. These repetitive fast food and gas station signs, logos on tall posts, calling out from every cloverleaf on every interstate, represent the offerings of each exit, which is to say, exactly the same thing everywhere.

The Morison's *Luna Park* is modelled on ducks; sculptures as signs. It refers to all these forgotten corners, these nowheres-in-between-somewheres off highway exits, but it connects without flattening. It calls for a direct response to the local situation, not a confirmation of the interchangeability of every place. The places it connects remain strange and specific, and so do we.

Luna Park

The title for the Morison's piece derives from a particular *Luna Park*: a rundown amusement park just outside of Novosibirsk, Siberia, which they visited in 2005: "It's where people wait, spit, swat mosquitoes and slowly die from hard work, drink, and sadness", the Morisons wrote in a recent email. "It's so distant to us now in our memories that it's as if it only ever were a fiction."

As poets from Coleridge to Ferlinghetti have shown, little can match the pathos of a pleasure ground in ruins. Henry Home, writing in 1762⁴, compared the various effects of

gothic and classical ruins, the former representing "the triumph of time over strength, a melancholy but not discouraging thought", while the latter showed "the triumph of barbarity over taste: a gloomy and discouraging thought". What then would the decline of a theme park represent? These structures were never built for eternity. The triumph of taste over barbarity? It seems rather that a pleasure ground in decay reminds us of our lost childhood, and as childhood's habits and ways of mind are extended through adulthood in this era, to the point of our second childhood in senescence, there's something of the transience of life itself visible in a place like this, a profane and childish *memento mori*.

Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West*⁵ paraphrases Home's thoughts in a footnote to a page containing a passage that seems relevant here: "... it is not the Classical statue, but the Classical torso that we really love. It has had a destiny: something suggestive of the past as past envelops it, and our imagination delights to fill the empty space of missing limbs with the pulse and swing of invisible lines".

The images sent to me from Portsmouth, of twisted metal surrounded by shreds of the polyester shell, evoke both the destiny and the spur to imagination discussed by Spengler. You see a ruin, and strain to connect its abstract form to a representation. Further, you see the structure of the beast – invisible when the sculpture was completed – and its strange parallels to the skeletal frameworks supporting the tracks of a roller coaster. In its ruin, the connection between its referents – roadside attraction, skeletal fossil and amusement park – is made absolutely clear. Spengler's ruin is a spur to imagination, a connection to Benjamin's 'Destructive Character', who "sees nothing permanent. But for this very reason he sees ways everywhere... But because he sees a way everywhere, he has to clear things from it everywhere... What exists he reduces to rubble – not for the sake of rubble, but for that of the way leading through it". This is the active agent to Spengler's passive viewer, a link between destructive and imaginative impulses.

The Siberian park's namesake was built on Coney Island, Brooklyn, in the spring of 1903. Its designer, Fred Thompson, set amusements like A Trip to the Moon and 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea, across twenty-two acres of sand. It was a sensation, and by 1905 there were similar attractions right across America: Thompson's biographer lists "four Dreamlands, five Luna Parks, two Manhattan Beaches, four White Cities, seventeen Electric Parks, five Sans Souci parks, four Wonderlands, and one Fairyland".⁶ Thompson – a brilliant publicist, fun guy, heavy drinker, and lousy fiscal manager – lasted eleven summers at Coney before losing the park, which went into slow decline before being wiped out in a series of fires in the 1940s. But the name has kept its currency: Wikipedia lists Luna Parks on every inhabited continent, from Beirut to Baku, Cairo to Cameroon. A new Luna Park opened at Coney, not far from the original, this summer.

Here's to failure

What kind of monument, then, is *Luna Park*? It seems a monument to failure, to inevitable decline, but its very presence, and the obvious effort given to its creation, presents an equally inevitable optimism, a looking forward. This is too strong a form to contain mere melancholy, the weak sensation of nostalgia and loss. It is a new creation, not a neglected or abandoned vestige. As they work on this project, the Morisons have come to see it as "this strong dark presence, something that has the capacity to soak up all the shit, the bad feelings, the negativeness, the insecurities and prejudices from the cities it visits, to absorb them and to move on taking them with it. A void to project all negativeness towards". But it also attracts you, offers you somewhere to sit, creates a place within an empty site, and protects you from the brooding threat that its form itself suggests.

The twisted fragments suggest something other than protection. They do suggest possibilities. The balance between an object and a proposal (or invitation, event, action), so frequently held in tension in the Morison's work, is here tilted strongly toward the latter by the fire. Community attempts to organise a rebuilding of Luna Park have been proposed, but beyond its specific fate, we're left with the indelible marks of activity,

of an arduous making and an abrupt unmaking. Spengler's odd phrase, "It has had a destiny", suggests itself as a conclusion. Past and future collide here in some form of a perfect tense.

Objects rarely have destinies, they just are. The verb 'to make' or 'to do' is replaced by 'to be'. They are things to be preserved or left to decay – until something goes wrong. The destruction of Luna Park retrospectively confirms a future for the work, though that future was the work's ruin. What persists here is not the finished object, or its skeletal ruin, but the energies that animated it in its creation, in its time on Southsea Common, and in its persistence in memory. More significantly, the possibility of the work is what remains. That cheerful spirit which animated its being, seeing everywhere a way, is what moves forward.

Eric Fredericksen is a curator and writer, and director of Western Bridge, Seattle. He recently curated the Morison's project Frost King for Open Satellite, Bellevue, Washington, USA.

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2. *Learning From Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism Of Architectural Form*, R Venturi, S Izenour and D Scott Brown, MIT Press, 1977 (Revised Edition)
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5. *The Decline of the West: An Abridged Edition*, Oswald Spengler. Oxford University Press 1991
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All photographs courtesy of Heather & Ivan Morison

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