## Interview between Gair Dunlop and Carmen Beckenbach in the context of the group exhibition „Das große Reinemachen“ [The great Clean Up], shown in Kunsthaus Nuremberg KunstKulturQuartier from February 27th until May 4th 2014.

*CB: I always wondered about the situation in which you had access to Dounreay Nuclear Power Development Establishment. How did you get the permission to film there?*

GD: It took a long time to gain trust from the gatekeepers at the site; one key factor was the way in which I approached them. I had previously done some work on Cold War structures (Orford Ness and RAF Coltishall) and so I had a little experience of negotiating with secure site access. I had to visit the office facilities without getting any further on three occasions; it's a long way to travel!
They were interested in the possibilities of making a work about the site, and once they had agreed in principle it was simply a case of arranging the schedule. I had very limited time inside each of the decommissioned reactors, so every shot had to be pre-arranged. There were a few things I was asked not to film or photograph: door numbers, positions of certain security features, and movements of active waste around the site.
Instead of laying out a proposal in detail, with the intended treatment laid out, I brought archive fragments of various processes and facilities on an iPod, then asked what had happened to them. It was easy to grasp as a structure, it showed that I had done my homework and was genuinely interested in their stories and experiences. The film doesn't stick rigidly to the parallel time model, but it provides a framework.

*CB: Dounreay Nuclear Power Development Establishment is a quite huge complex. What is there today?*

GD: Slow decommissioning and removal of structures is intended to enable site closure between 2022–2025. However, the time schedule keeps slipping as more tasks are defined in order to reach that state. It is intended that the last of the "exotics" – highly active fuel elements and residues – leave the site by the end of this year.
A significant quantity of waste and residue will need to be guarded continually for a long period after the official site closure. "Decommissioning is complete when all redundant facilities have been demolished and wastes made safe for long-term storage or disposal".[1]
Last week, there was an announcement that the intended reductions in staff numbers, which was intended in about 5 years time, will not take place as planned.[2]
So there are still as many people working on site as there were during its period as an active centre. Radioactive gases, solids and liquids are by definition slow and careful. All of the liquid coolant metals have been removed from the reactors, and treated with resins to remove caesium contaminants. Pits for waste are ready.
Dismantling of facilities continues.

*CB: Right now in Germany we have quite a critical mass when it comes to nuclear energy. How is it now in Scotland and Dounreay, after the “gold rush” (quote from your video) in the 1950s?*

GD: In Scotland, there is no appetite for more nuclear experimentation or production. The Scottish Government has a position of moving to as much sustainable/renewable energy as possible. The public seem to support this; of course the issue of wind farming is also tied up with the issue of concentrated land ownership in Scotland. So people are not always happy when big estates apply for massive wind farms. There are quite a few community owned wind facilities, though.
The UK government are firmly pro-nuclear, and have announced a programme of development of some of the country's existing sites. The investment for these comes from large multinational corporations- and in many cases elements of these consortiums are nationalised power production companies from other countries. The Government, for ideological reasons, do not want

[1] http://www.dounreay.com/UserFiles/File/Project%20profiles/Site%20Closure%20Programme.pdf [27.01.2014]
[2] http://www.scotsman.comnews/environment/dounreay-rundown-delayed-by-a-number-of-years-1-3278517 [27.01.2014]

UK publicly owned utilities, so have offered long term attractive guarantees of future energy prices to these companies. One of Britain's largest power generation companies is EDF: this actually stands for "Electricité de France".
Designs for these new stations in England are based on existing plans; any new design of nuclear facilities could theoretically use fast reactor technology to burn up plutonium and other long-lasting remnants of the military nuclear programme. This seems unlikely to gain acceptance, however.

*CB: "Atom Town: Life after Technology" is a two channel projection in a corner. Why did you choose this presentation?*

GD: I wanted a sense of architectural scale and positioning for the viewer, to make the metaphor of being between past and present real. When it is shown at sufficient scale, the viewer catches similarities and differences between the two eras in ways, which gives them space to reflect on their own concepts of what high technology meant, and what it means today.

*CB: You combine found footage material and archive fragments. How did you get them?*

GD: I have developed a good relationship with Scottish Screen Archive over the years, starting with "The Tomorrows Project"[3] in 2004. For that project, Dan Norton and myself looked through the entire collection looking for ideas of how the future was portrayed in propaganda, public information, documentary and advertising films. I later went back and discovered more specific nuclear material there. I went to the independent television archive, and also the nuclear archives at Harwell. That had official films, which are very useful.

*CB: Part of "Atom Town: Life after Technology" is confronting the people who witnessed that period with the archive material. How was it to conduct these interviews?*

GD: I liked this part of the work very much; there were other sessions where groups of people responded to the film material, but only the voices are used. Three participants-appeared in the film.
Alan Clasper, who watches himself as an awkward teenager in the science lab, had intended to become a physicist but instead became the chemistry teacher of Thurso High School; so in fact contributed to the flow of intelligent young Caithness residents to the facility over the years. For a while in the sixties, there was a greater density of PhDs in Caithness than anywhere in Britain outside Oxford and Cambridge.
Barbara Downie watches the film – and recognises a sequence with her cousin, who was lost at sea. I wanted to leave that in as it showed the contingent nature of memory – and that not all memory was completely configurable. After all, there were other industries and lives in the area.
John Walford, the scientist whose remarks punctuate and close the film – was a great interviewee, and still passionately convinced of the rightness and future utility of the work they did. I wanted to work more directly with him, so did not do the same treatment.

*CB: What do you mean by more directly?*

GD: He was part of Dounreay for its whole extent. He worked on the first criticality experiments there through to being the scientist who brought the last reactor up beyond its expected power output. So I conducted long interviews with him, which I have sent to the science museum as historical records in themselves. His insights were crucial to my understanding, but I always had to bear in mind that he is a "True Believer" in nuclear technology, and to contextualise that.

*CB: Let's talk about the sound in the video. It is a combination of original comments, interviewee statements and electronic music. Were the electronic parts especially composed for the video?*

[3] www.tompro.co.uk

GD: The soundtrack is a mixture of original music – such as the introductory theme – and specially composed sound elements by Mark Vernon. Mark is a sound artist with feet in radio production, live music, and collage work. The sound of nuclear safety detectors pops up throughout the soundtrack; these were recorded on site.
The introductory theme, which for me is a tremendous theatrical confection of John Barry and Shostakovich – probably originates in the Chappell film music library; there is a vast amount of anonymous work in the film industry of the time, which is simply tremendous. I am very grateful to Mark for his great work, and also to Zoe Irvine for the overall sound design.[4]

*CB: What are you doing right now?*

GD: Now… I seem to be doing a lot of writing at the moment! I am also working on a film about the remnants of the Colossus project at Bletchley Park, the ur-site of computing and cryptanalysis. The area, which interests me is the strange limbo area between the edge of the 'heritage compound' and the developers new build area, which encroaches on the original site with some typical medium density Home Counties new build. The area left in between the heritage and the building site are the remains of the great leap forward in computer technology, which at the end of Second World War were hidden and incorporated into the Cold war secret state instead of forming the nucleus of a post-war modernity. Indeed, computing in the UK had to be discovered twice. This strange sliver of land carries some similar resonances to Gordon Matta-Clark's "Reality Properties Fake Estates" project.



[4] More Information about “Atom Town: Life after Technology” under http://www.atomtown.org.uk/media/atomtown_catalogue.pdf [27.01.2014]