

# The archaeological world of Paul Noble

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This is a text for the catalogue that accompanied the exhibition of Paul Noble's work at Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, in 2014.

Paul has created an extraordinary world, Nobson Newtown, that appears in his pencil drawings. We began a conversation in late 2013 that led me to compile this list of things you might encounter on a visit to Nobson. We also published some of our conversation as a hypertext that we called "In Parenthesis" - [<http://web.stanford.edu/group/archaeolog/InParenthesis/>]

For me, Paul is working in the archaeological imagination, as well as many other things!

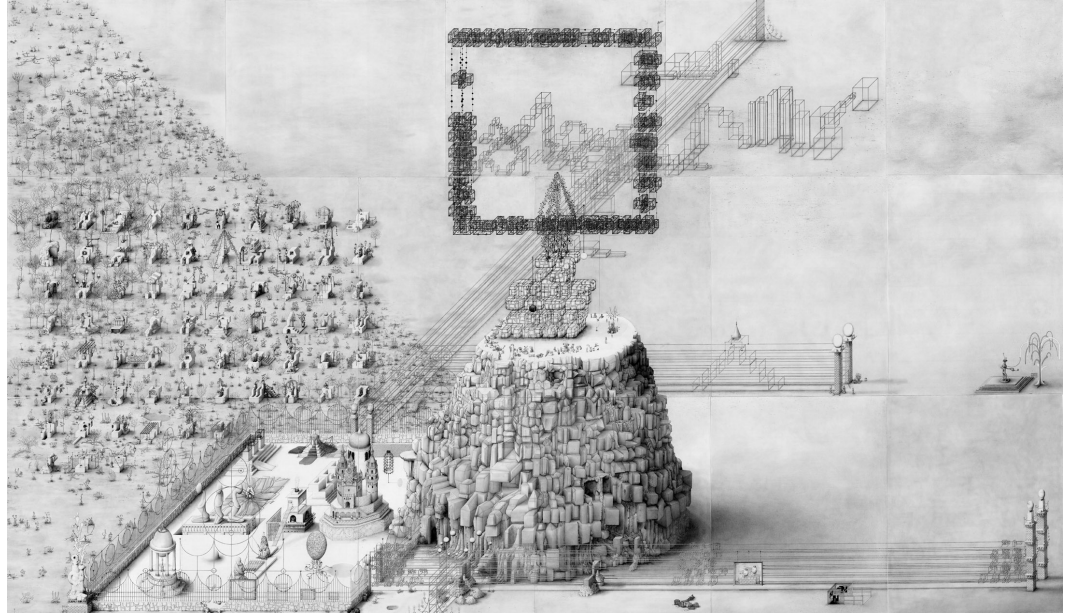
Here is how Paul is described by Gagosian, the gallery that represents him:

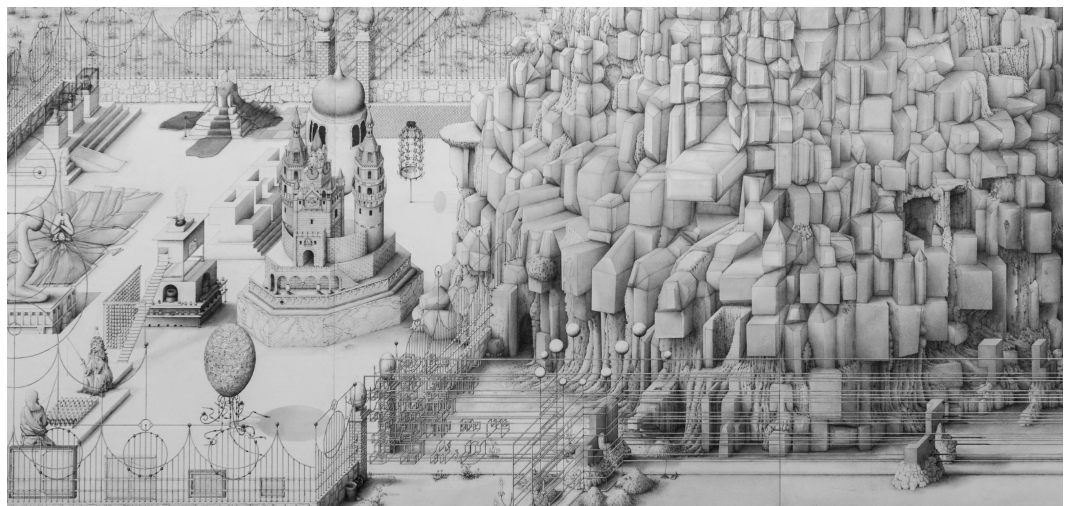
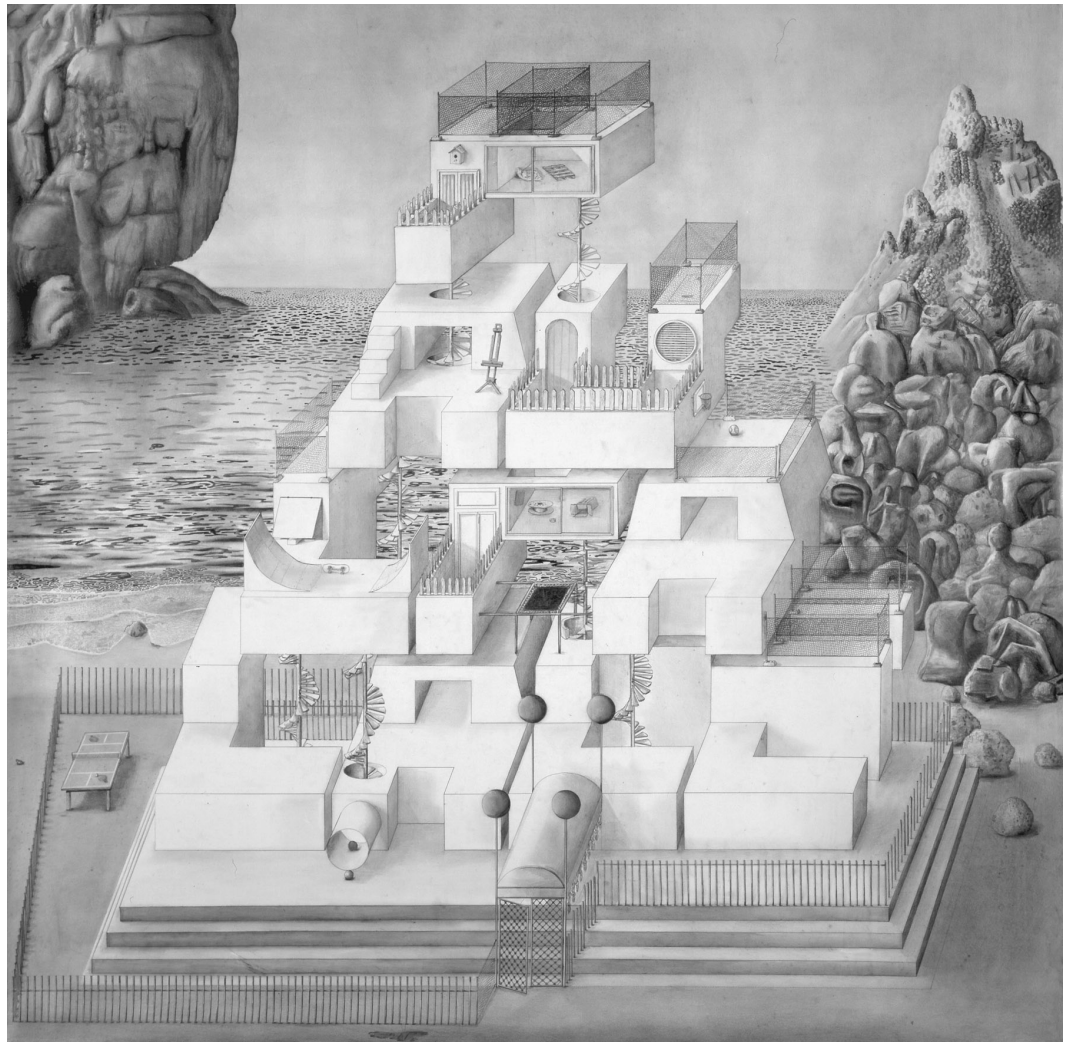
"Forging a unique and maverick path in the ebullient British art scene, Paul Noble received widespread international recognition for his vast and monumental drawing project, Nobson Newtown. Drawing image after image, story after story—at once architect and town planner, archaeologist and cartographer, social historian and activist, creator and destroyer—over the course of a decade Noble invented and described a melancholy urban vision somewhere between Le Doux's revolutionary utopias, Sim City, and the post-holocaust wastelands pictured in the daily media. Nobson Newtown was Noble's own fantasist master plan of a symbolic city, isometrically rendered and replete with all manner of nightmares, perversions, scatological and libidinous excesses. A blocky, geometric font (also invented by the artist) structured many of the buildings themselves, providing yet another layer of meaning in this fascinating parody of contemporary society and the dreams of social engineers.

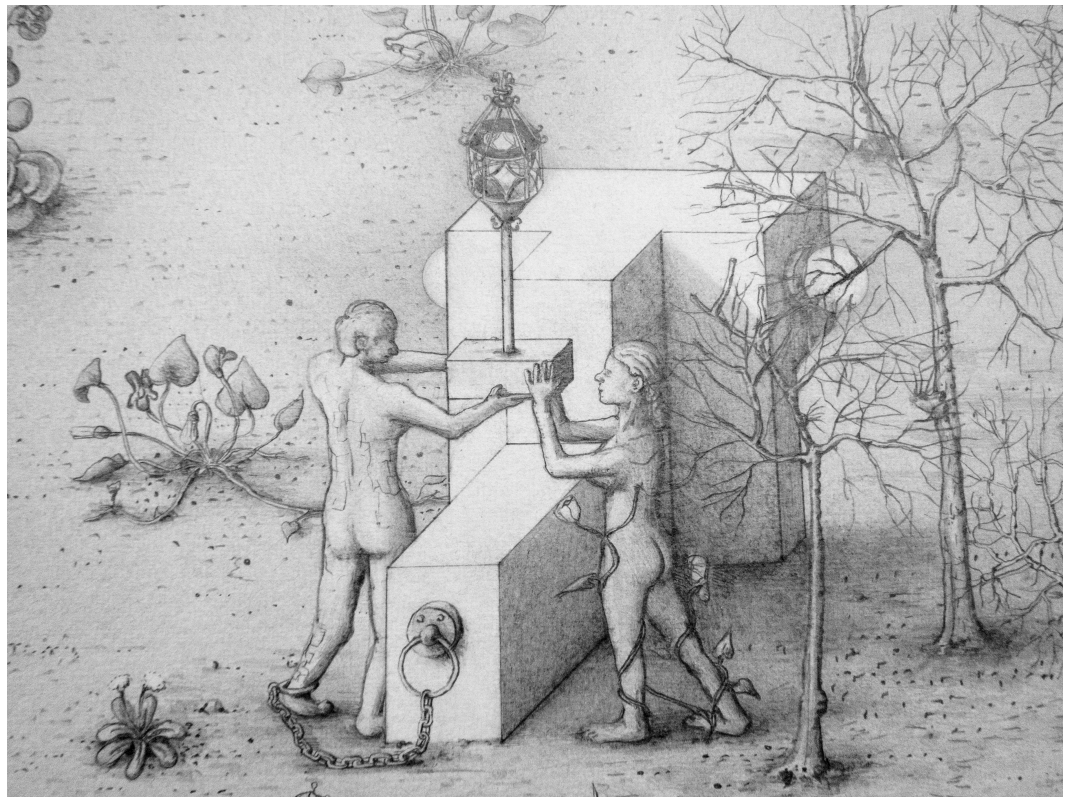
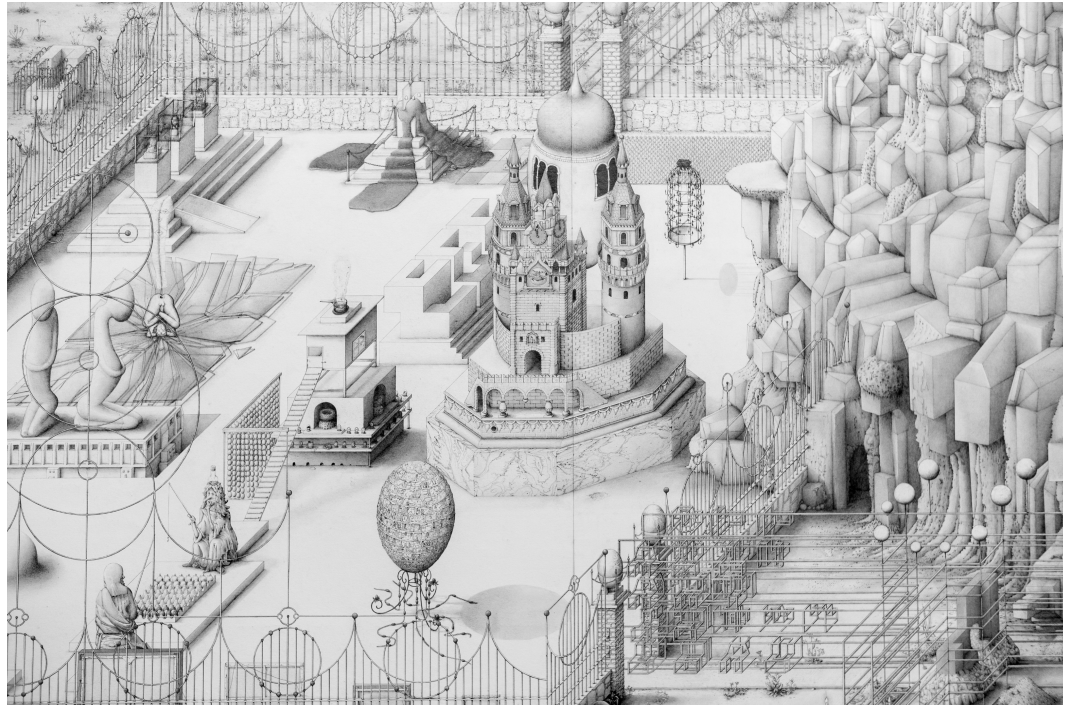
A meticulous and dedicated draftsman, Noble creates dizzyingly elaborate encrypted schemes, drawing from inspirations as diverse as ancient Chinese scrolls and Japanese sculptures, Fabergé eggs and brick walls, eighteenth century pornography and animal rights, Hieronymous Bosch and Oyvind Fahlstrom. The sheer level of detail in his drawings defies the capacity of the eye to see and the mind to fully grasp them."

[<http://www.gagosian.com/artists/paul-noble>]

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## Nobson Newtown

(Names in italics refer to specific works.)

### grid

Geometric grids abound in Nobson. Features follow angular paths. In *Welcome to Nobson* geometric decorations from the Dome of the Rock are picked out in stones on the ground. Regular tiled patterns occur too, squared paving, or the like, in *The Mall* and *Welcome to Nobson*. There are egg-carton forms, cages and contained forms, in *Ye Olde Ruin* these are next to a cadastrated cemetery, while a great gridded structure dominates the upper half of the vista.

*Prisonob* is rigorously gridded, with its rows and columns. *Welcome to Nobson* features a crossroads and labyrinth — enclosed, squared off. There are enclosures everywhere. *Unified Nobson* appears to be organized in square sections or city blocks. There's no tangle of streets here, no narrow winding lanes. Nobson sometimes seems to have been built under an aesthetic of cleanliness — that the clear passage of air will blow away stagnant humors.

There is more generally a deep sense of order to Nobson, in the drawings, because everything is marked out on the coordinates of a three-dimensional grid — x, y, z, lines and points. This offers articulating structure — like an invisible skeleton.

Many of the walls in Nobson, and the great *Egg*, have a regular grid structure that can form the basis for sculpture and imagery, like storyboarding.

Grids, spreadsheets of rows and columns, putting things in boxes helps us organize the world. Cleaning up the world and organizing things into proper categories — a grid is about putting things in contained forms.

Then there's the corollary — *Cathedral* is a pile of stones, and the great bound sculpted forms in *Villa Joe Rear View* conspicuously refuse to conform and instead seem to explode the boundaries of containment.

### projection

Nobson is projected across a paper surface. These are not perspective drawings, but adopt oblique projection, a particular kind of informal 3D rendering.

This is not the way our eyes see the world. There's no vanishing point, no convergence of lines on a point in the distance — parallel lines remain parallel, and the surface extends off into infinity, so there's no horizon either.

These are architectural drawings nonetheless, combining plan, section, elevation in a rendered view. There's a traditional term quite relevant here — 'ichnography' — the ground floor plan that

comprises the depiction of 'ichnoi' — tracks or footprints, marks made by those no longer with us, paths that we may follow again. The term suggests that architectural drawing concerns matters of presence and absence.

## illuminated manuscript

Nobson is bathed in an even light, but not the light of the sun. The light source is outside the viewer's field of vision. The shadows are all at the same angle, and there's no converging perspective, so the light in Nobson must come from a prism or angled slats that are above but parallel to the land, not from a point source such as the sun. The sun in Nobson is not about light.

So the light in Nobson is a function of the projection and its grid, the way Nobson is drawn. Illumination actually therefore comes from the reflective qualities of the paper, shining through the graphite, the drawing, while the angled shadows offer the impression of three-dimensional modeled form. Nobson's light is brightness — tone.

Paul Noble: 'I mostly use hard, or technical, pencils — 4H, 5H, 6H, 7H, 8H and 9H. Each of these hardnesses has its own tone — or a darkness they can't go beyond. The more 9H pencil you apply to your paper doesn't increase its darkness, it simply compresses the paper so that it becomes shiny, reflective and thus a pale mirror.'

These drawings are chirographic, scripted by hand, manu-script. Given the organizing principle that word and letter forms are the basis of so many buildings, features, landforms, Nobson is a kind of illuminated manuscript.

## Mefisty

The pencil work involved in these drawings made over the years takes its toll — Noble's hands bear witness — in graphite stain and callous, in skin and bone — to labor. We see a manifestation of this in the character of Mefisty — a disembodied drawn hand that sometimes seems to mutate into animated forms and creatures, taking on a life of its own. Mefisty brings to mind Mephistopheles, and the pact with Faust, that offer of material immortality in exchange for soul. Mephistopheles is also Lucifer, the bringer of light. Noble says: 'I am the numbers of tone and hardness that bring brightness'.

## technical drawing

The drawing instrument is the technical pencil, intended originally to deliver drawings for use in construction and engineering. It is only since the eighteenth century that architectural plans have been used to guide construction. Before this a drawing might offer a model or idea, but was not considered a direct and deliberate way of translating two dimensions into three. Construction workers, builders and engineers did not work by scaling up technical drawings.

There's an issue here of translation, the relationship of drawing to action, and to materials with which we build. Pencil work involves a combination of graphite and clay. Graphite is both pigment and lubrication, smoothing friction over the paper surface. Clay hardens the soft graphite and modifies the dark tone. The clay base is an index of the earth itself, translated through drawing into building and form. Drawing can, in this way, take us back to elemental basics.

Pencil, technique and material pose questions about modern pictorial space, rendering practice, and their relationship to material experience and reality, such as construction and engineering.

## the digital

The drawings are bled clean of color, leaving only light and tone. This verges on the digital, where there is only black and white, on and off, positive and negative. The digital realm comprises data depicted using discrete discontinuous values. The digital is a means of cleaning up the messy analogue relationship between signal and noise.

In *Sea V: The Carnival Between* we experience an almost digital surface of granular texture and the minor variations prompt a search for a message, a signal in the noise, the texture.

## territory

Marked-out, gridded land, as we see in Nobson, is the basis of territory and possession.

## paths

There are paths and tracks all over Nobson. They're usually neat and tidy. They channel and choreograph movement.

## letters and words

In Nobson, the land and architecture actually and conspicuously embody three-dimensional letter forms: a font of Noble's invention, where material form matters as much, if not more, than the sense and meaning that may be read into these words-in-the-land. Many parts of Nobson have at their core a name, word, phrase, sentence, plotted out in Nobson font. The letters of the font are based upon the three-dimensional, geometric forms of much modernist architecture, houses that have caught Noble's attention, so they resemble architectural forms.

In Nobson, world building is word building. Nobson is conspicuously word-place, text-space, text-scape.

The material forms of words and letters matter. There are connections here with epigraphy — the reading of inscriptions in stone, or of hand-written manuscripts. Graffiti, writing on the wall, marking visit and territory, has here reached an apotheosis. And toponymy, concerned with place

names, with the way memories are preserved in the naming of places, is involved. In Nobson these have become existential features of the environment, with letters shaping, structuring, offering sense and coherence, with words shedding light on things, offering illumination.

Some of the letters and words in Nobson are overgrown, elaborated with ornament, falling into ruin, as in Nobson Central, compromising their legibility. Some have devolved into ciphers and ruins, posing questions, rather than offering illumination.

These connections between words, language and architecture take us back to the Tower of Babel (in the ancient city of Babylon, the 'Gate of God'). People, who shared the same language, built a tower to reach the heavens. God punished this hubris, this arrogance, by confounding the shared understanding and meaning of that original language, by imposing many languages upon people, forcing them to translate in order to understand each other. In place of transparent and resonant communication came the babel, the noise of discordance. The origin of linguistic diversity and incommensurability is here associated with building and architecture.

In this excavation of a myth of architectural origins, in Nobson's fontographic text-scapes, letters and words are much more than their function as communication and representation by virtue of their materiality, their substance, their energy. Here words and letters are not solely symbolic code, but always joined to practices beyond language and communication, charged with libidinal intensity referring not to a process of representation, but to (divine) creativity, productivity, to building in which words function as a center of energy, a productivity in which a word is not defined by what it means (its sense) but by what it does, by the effects it induces, the material environment it creates.

Words are not just the means for the expression of meaning. Separated from thought, inhabited, structuring land and architecture, ruptured from language they can be sites of events, potential explosions of affective potential — 'this could happen here'.

The key to all this is the simple experience that the material world is never equivalent to its representation, where our materiality can never be identified with our words, concepts, efforts at representation, where our materiality is the source of creative energy.

In the aural work *Dot to Dot* the repetition of words leads to a similar emptying of meaning, a quite mesmerizing and meditative metamorphosis of word into sound.

## walls and fences

Many of the blocks, parks, neighborhoods of Nobson are demarcated and contained by walls and fences in stone, brick, or wrought iron, though sometimes, as in *Ye Olde Ruin*, they seem to be elaborate beyond any particular function of enclosure, as if the fencing was purpose in itself.

## chains

Chains are attached to walls and often terminate in (iron) balls. Is this a prison that has lost its guests? Have they escaped accusation and sentence?

In *Ye Olde Ruin* two wrecking balls – black and white, positive and negative – hang from chains over the architectural form of the place name ‘Ye Olde Ruin’. Ominously ready for demolition, or a sentence in the balance?

## museums

Nobson has its museums and vitrines.

Originally homes of the creative muses, inspirational deities, and so sacred locales, museums traditionally offer neat arrangements and categorizations. They contain archives and memories, works of art, beauty, for the purpose of enlightenment. Glass vitrines offer clear illumination in a controlled and framed environment. The calmness of museums is a function of controlling, of domesticating the energy of the creative muses.

## labyrinths

There’s an underground labyrinth in *Welcome to Nobson*, flooded and filled with garbage. There’s a prevalent feeling of the labyrinthine in crossing paths, complex geometries, the folded architectures that request you make sense of them.

The principle of the labyrinth is a powerful one.

Labyrinths are about both containment and release. A prison and puzzle, built by trickster architects or engineers such as Daedalus, here you might encounter death and the Minotaur, monstrous hybrids, an end or an escape. With its network of dark chambers and corridors of caves, the labyrinth is also a maternal world of the womb, appropriate home for testing the identity of human offspring against animal. The labyrinth is a drunken space where axes of orientation (up and down, left and right, back and forth) go astray, where navigation is always hazardous. Its principle is anti-structure — the best labyrinths have no independent Archimedean point to provide orientation and direction. Labyrinths are acephalus structures, anti-hierarchical, anarchic — one never moves ahead, but rather loses one’s head.

## sun

The even light of Nobson doesn’t come from a point source such as the sun. The oblique projection of the drawings means there’s no horizon — the sun is beyond the horizon, outside the frame of the drawings, in a place you can’t go.



But this doesn't mean there is no sun. Detached from its connection with illumination, this sun is a sink hole, a black hole. Absent and shedding no light, the sun is present as a reference point or principle of origin and destination, a singularity. A philosophical concept associated with such a principle is the Greek arche (origin, beginning, authority, sovereignty), the etymological root of architecture, archive, and archaeology. And singularities, points or dots with no dimensions, are ambiguous, both positive and negative simultaneously.

In terms of the metabolic processes, the alimentary flows of the body politic that is Nobson, the sun is solar anus — the hole, the opening from which things come, birth, the origin of life and energy, of excess, of what is not needed simply to sustain the life of one individual. Egg and faeces, excess and waste, are connected.

In Nobson the sun appears as a monument (in *Nobsunshine* the monument depicts a faecal form subject to increasing elaboration and binding). Sometimes the sun is a geometric form, a star-shaped form on rugs. In relation to time, as an origin, dot, point beyond time, the sun is a clock face without hands, a circumference with a dot at the center — zero o'clock, all the time.

And the solar anus is the basis of the 'Eggface' (see below).

## temporality

There is no time of day in Nobson, or you might say that it is always the same — about 10.45 am or the time that we associate with a 45° shadow.

The date in Nobson is indeterminate; it has no date; there is no definitive narrative sequence that can answer the question of what went on; there is only the time of looking at the drawings, encountering the artifacts, and the time that they embody.

In Nobson there is only the moment of encounter and the material witness to time having passed. This is a conjunctural time of then-and-now, kairotic time or actuality, a kind of time rooted in another, in the material persistence, the duration of material things, artifacts.

And with the absence of temporal sequence or date, things mingle, betraying any effort to turn them into a coherent story. It is quite difficult to deal with the nonsensical, rotted, discarded waste, the great garbage heap that is history, unless it is converted into drawings and images, brought to order in accounts, plans and catalogs.

The clock face in Nobson is a circle and a central point or singularity.

## horizon

Between sea and sky is the line of the horizon. The oblique projection of the drawings of Nobson does not include a horizon to their infinite plain, and so the sun, above the horizon, is absent. But there are works that deal with the horizon.

Sea V for example is sea and sky as converging tone, and treated almost digitally in the repeated modular units of sky and beach within which we might read something in the sand. The horizon becomes threshold of discontinuity of understanding, rather than about distance.

## monuments

The sun is depicted as a monument in Nobson and *Nobsunshine*.

Cairns, piles of stones, constructions, sometimes large scale, megalithic, sometimes intimate, all located, marking the land, designed to make an impression. Monuments mark memory, remind and give warning.

Monumental architectures are at the heart of the mnemonic technique of the memory palace, with words and sentences associated with the rooms and vivid features of a building.

## cosmopolis

Nobson, like many cities in antiquity, is a cosmopolis — where the order of things, cosmos, as represented in myth, religion and science, is coincident with, is written into the built environment, the home to a body politic and its metabolic motions.

## holes

There are cave entrances in the great rock in *Ye Olde Ruin*.

*Nobgo*, *Acumulus Nobilatus*, *Nobson Central*, *Lidonob* all have formal entrances to some kind of underground, or underworld. Is this a world away from the light, in which to disappear, hide, escape?

Ingress and egress — these holes in the ground are as much holes in the body politic and prompt reflection upon other holes and orifices in Nobson.

Anus, ovipositor, mouth, nose, ear, urethra, vagina — these are related to reproduction, nutrition, alimentation, and feature prominently in many of Nobson's characters.

Ingestion and excretion, origin and destiny, where the sun is solar anus, origin and sink hole, and where the mouth that speaks, consumes, and vomits forth has a biological axis along the

alimentary canal, and an ideological axis between mouth that speaks, eyes that see, and ears that hear words and signs.

## underworld

We see the entrances, so is there an underground to Nobson — pipes and arteries, a labyrinth of passages?

Have all the living retreated there?

The even light of Nobson illuminates all crevasses. There seems to be nowhere to hide or escape. Except underground, to an underworld? A land of the dead?

## shrouds

There's a great shrouded form in *Welcome to Nobson*.

The abstracted and anthropomorphic forms around Villa Joe also suggest wrapping, and a binding of body. Is there danger here, or repression? Life and death enfolded?

Paul Noble, on the form in *Welcome to Nobson*: 'This is a male presence in the way that the labyrinth is a female presence. I was looking at icon paintings in Crete, Preveli monastery, and saw that the cloaks that covered the sacred figures did the opposite of covering their nudity, they became the flesh itself, and more than that, I saw the monkish imagination depicting first the gaping wounds within the folds of cloth and that these wounds became cosmic vaginas. [...] I saw that the painter used the cloak, not as a robe to hide Christ's nakedness but as a cloth onto which to project a nakedness that penetrates the skin in such a way as to sexualise the Christ image.

The topic here is integument, the way skin and clothing both hold together the body, offering form and identity, both revealing and concealing what lies beneath.

And topology, as in the Klein bottle, that curious inside-out form where inside becomes outside becomes inside.

In *TENT* the word in Nobson font was created out of frame and cloth, as a tent, and so offering a folded interior, a word interior, containment, shelter.

## family

There is some evidence of family life in Nobson, in buildings that are homes of some kind.

Mainly though the family is present as domestication, as order and containment, in relation to creative (re)production.

## dancers

Some figures dance around a skeleton in *Welcome to Nobson*.

Is this a rite of spring? Or are they the Muses?

Paul Noble: 'Here are the Mothers — I'm not sure if they are my Mothers but they are definitely Goethe's and they might also be the women that danced for joy as King David rode into Jerusalem to make that town the new centre of the new Israel. They are definitely the dancers of Matisse's dance. Matisse's dancers danced to turn the clock back against the futurity of the Modernists. Painted in the same year as King Leopold's death and the publication of the Futurist manifesto, I'm sure that behind this painting is a repulsion for the slaughter in the Congo in the rush to reap maximum profits from the Belgian colony's natural rubber resources and the modern obsession with speed. Matisse painted Arcadia.'

We see theater in the stage prop trees, in the formal landscape architectures — places where things might happen. And music in the wind chimes, hand clappers, shakers, wooden bells.

## eggs

Eggs are to be found all over Nobson. They have many valencies.

Source of life, offering secure containment, subject to reproductive control, subject to production for gain (battery farms), consumed as food and nourishment.

Their form is a structural one of containment, an architectural one of the dome. And they may be decorated, as, perhaps excessively, in the jeweled forms of Fabergé.

They emerge excreted from ovipositor, biological orifice.

## eggface

The eggface is when the human rear becomes face.

In Nobson words become more than their lexical meaning when they are transformed into buildings. In a similar way the face detached from the anatomical sense of head is also just a system of surface and holes, and we can see this faciality all over the place.

Now the singularity of the sun, as point of origin and destination — source and sink hole, finds an equivalence in this graphical form that transposes anus, ovipositor, vagina, mouth, eye.

## toys

Some of the smaller, perhaps miniature items, on the great rock in *Ye Olde Ruin*, for example, look like toys. Leftovers of childhood? Sad remnants?

## gates

There are some quite spectacular gates in Nobson, made of wrought iron.

They offer control of ingress and egress of the household and body politic, threshold security at the periphery.

The household is involved because some, *Mr and Mrs Gate*, with their stylized facial and genital forms, merging into each other, indicate that reproductive unit.

## curtains

Noble makes curtains, screens/doorways, thresholds. Made of beads, they sometimes carry a graphic form, such as an hourglass. They are grids through which we pass to the other side.

## Hermes

Hermes is another key figure in Nobson's mythography.

A god of transitions and boundaries, Hermes, as Psychepompos, guided the souls of the dead to the underworld.

Above all Hermes was interlocutor, translator, mediator, messenger of the gods, signal carrier.

Of his powers of interpretation and decryption we might ask: what has happened? Where has everyone gone? Have they just left? What do these remains tell us of what happened here? Are these the remains of what we were? Are we still like this now? Or, are the people who left all this quite different to us?

Hermes gives access to secret knowledge. Hermetic wisdom includes that of alchemy. Investigating the spiritual constitution, or life, of matter and material existence through an application of the mysteries of birth, death, and resurrection, alchemists explored metamorphosis, particularly in the quest for the philosophers' stone, through chemical distillation and fermentation, quickening nature's processes.

Herms are a kind of shrine and statue of the god. From earliest times Hermes was worshipped in the form of a heap of stones or a shapeless column of stone or wood, by the sides of roads, especially at their crossings, and on the boundaries of lands. Later herms combined a head atop a column that carried a phallus on the side.

## gardens

There are several formal gardens in Nobson. And much of the land looks cared for and cultivated. Horticulture is about cultivation and, of course, has its origins in domesticated nature — matters of



containment and control. The gardens, at *Trev's* and *Lidonob*, are contained in glass houses, vitrines.

## trees

There are many trees in Nobson. It seems that few are in full leaf and blossom.

Some are stylized, theatrical stage trees perhaps. Or symbolic trees of life.

Others have been chopped down and are stumps – there is such a forest in *Welcome to Nobson*. *Untitled (Moonowl)* shows a statue of an artisan carving a stump, as an owl in a truncated stage tree stares at us.

The trees connect building and work done on and with nature, landscape architecture with garden, with theatre.

## humanimals

Humans becoming animals becoming human. Metamorphoses. Monstrosity and polymorphous perversity. These are aspects of Nobson's heterology, its concern with otherness.

## graveyard

*Nobsend* and *Ye Olde Ruin* have their graveyards. Statues and tombs are carefully ordered in a kind of a megalithic cosmos, the tombs an illuminated poem, a domestication of death, becoming a monument, in the conjuncture between mortality and materiality. Graveyards are thus another feature of Nobson's hylography.

## statues

Statues, sculptures are a main form in which we encounter the anthropomorphic in Nobson. Some are like caryatids, architectural, merging with buildings and tombs. Others are on plinths. Others are conspicuously works of sculpture, and we might recognize some as works of well-known artists, albeit here transformed by their displacement to Nobson's parks and amenities, and even sometimes altered by the locals.

## Dionysus

In Nobson's irreverence we can see the movements of Dionysus, god of wine and, when we're drunk, of carnival, of unleashed animal spirit.

You don't just have a laugh and poke fun when you're with Dionysus. Dionysus is an androgynous and ambiguous figure, an outsider, a god of epiphany, of altered states, of madness, as well as of the grape harvest, winemaking and wine. As Eleutherios he frees his followers from self-conscious

fear and care, offering opposition to conventional society, and subverts the oppressive restraints of the powerful through wine, music and ecstatic dance. He represents everything that is chaotic, dangerous and unexpected, everything that escapes human reason.

## sleep

You occasionally encounter recumbent figures in Nobson. Their sleeping repose can only be another kind of time outside Nobson's everyday time.

## waste

Nobson as cosmopolis is clearly concerned with cleanliness, order, even beauty. Many cities are mired in filth and pollution. Nobson doesn't seem to be one of these, though waste matter is conspicuously present. Nobson is well managed.

The cosmopolis often involves a compulsion to clean the streets. Tidy up your waste. Deal with waste within the home and keep it clean. Put your garbage out for collection. Don't air your dirty laundry in public. The elimination of waste in the city is connected to an emphasis upon private responsibility and the separation of public and private.

Sense and order are connected. Clean up your language. In making sense it is important to make sure the message is not corrupted by noise and imprecision.

## alimentary flow

The omnipresence of faecal matter all over Nobson is quite Dionysian. Coprography — drawing and representing excrement and all its associated processes and experiences.

Humans express waste just like animals, leaving their mark, their scent. This waste matter is the product of alimentary flows and processes — ingestion, digestion, excretion, metamorphosis of matter into nourishment and sustenance — from mouth to anus. Cosmopolis as the metabolism of body politic.

The basic principle is not that waste is useless leftover. Instead of treating faeces, excrement as filth, to be avoided, hidden, we might realize that it is simply part of alimentary flow — cycles of procurement, nourishment, sustenance. And there's always excess.

Scavenging and reuse of things was a feature of all human societies until the twentieth century when it was seen more fit to simply discard and hide away what was now considered to have no use. In the first agricultural villages we can see how complementary were the alimentary flows. From the field was brought food, processed in the home, grain ground, mixed with water and fermented by yeast, cooked, served and consumed, excess matter excreted and returned to the earth of the field and garden as manure. Cows and sheep, often kept in the home, consume grass,

masticate, process in stomach, produce milk and meat, and they too manure and fertilize the fields. Grapes are harvested from the vine, crushed and fermented with yeast to produce wine that delivers experiences that take us beyond the everyday.

Urban digestive systems have always included the likes of what was held to be a core of civilization in Rome – the main sewer known as Cloaca Maxima, the alimentary canal of the city.

## carnival

Nobson abounds in carnival, caricature and curious comic figures, all over the wall in *Ah*, for example, and on the great *Egg*. Carnival, festival, all sorts of pleasures that can ‘go too far’, comedy, laughter, mockery and satire, not taking things seriously, not sticking to form, to what is right and proper, are all experiences that threaten sense and order.

There have always been anxieties about this kind of thing. The likes of Plato attempted to gain an intellectual high ground by cleansing meaning of nonsense, by seeking a world of pure forms, eliminating what didn’t fit clean categories and tight logic. This involved despising what appeared to be out of place, grotesque, filthy, excessive, illogical and nonsensical, formless. City planners have been concerned to provide underground infrastructures, rules and regulations to control and contain waste and excess, to keep it private, hide it away. In Nobson however, this is all celebrated.

Heterology is concerned with this altogether other (heteros). It implies heterodoxy, opposing orthodoxy, not taking things seriously, and includes scatology as a very concrete and expressive variant. Scatology – laughter and dance, unproductive expenditures, embracing the excess of going too far, mocking the pompous idealism, an effort to think low, subversive, digging invisible tunnels underground that undermine the intellectual high ground.

## garbage bags

There are garbage bags everywhere in Nobson. Waste contained, but in full view and not hidden away. Quite tidy really. Are the bags waiting to be collected for recycling and disposal?

Waste is the inevitable by-product of cleanliness, order, and beauty. Cultivation always involves waste. Communication comprises signal-noise relationships, a message carried by a medium that is never reducible to the message. We might try to exclude and hide waste and noise, but what we put to one side, bury, ignore, has a habit of returning to haunt us.

If waste is discard and matter out of place, excess and of no current need, and if waste is such an essential component of any productive expenditure of energy, in building and running a city, in growing and consuming food, in making sense and meaning, do we not need a theory of the need for such loss? Because there are always wastelands, unproductive expenditures, things one never gets over, since they don’t fit and cannot be redeemed, garbage that cannot be recycled.

Paul Noble on the flooded labyrinth in *Welcome to Nobson*: 'The rubbish that floats in the water are the ghosts of our undisposable present that will continue to haunt us.'

## substance and form

Words and letters as buildings as letters and words.

Processes of emergence and disappearance, intentional or unintentional, of graphical form out of matter, with our attention caught by the material forms that letters and words themselves may take. Thresholds of sense and meaning, as a message seems to emerge from background noise. Marginal states, as anthropomorphic form seems to emerge from faecal forms carved in marble.

This fundamental feature of Nobson is hylography.

Hyle is Aristotle's word for matter and is typically associated with morphe — the form that matter takes. Hylography is the entanglement of matter and making, matter and making sense, writing, mark making, representation, signification.

In *Quarry* words seem to grow out of the living rock. The letter forms of *Nobson Central* are weathered and ruined and appear to have lost all form ... but not quite. The clouds in *Acumulus Nobilitatus* seem take the form of a creatures. Hylography is this emergence of a signal, sense or meaning from background noise, the distinction between figure and ground.

Nobson turns this relationship between form and matter and meaning into an architectural, indeed an existential principle, as letters and words appear to be the very foundation of Nobson, as letter and word slide between meaning and their material substance.

Consider how letters, words, graphical marks, visual and material forms may connect with meaning.

An icon is a sign that is linked to its represented object by some shared quality. A statue in Nobson may look like a person.

An index is a sign that is linked to its object by an actual connection or real relation (irrespective of interpretation). A finger points; the smoke rises over a barbecue in *Nobpark* and tells us it is still working.

A symbol represents its denoted object by virtue of an interpretive habit or rule that is independent of any shared physical quality or contextual relationship with that which it denotes. The written word, sound, the drawn form of a 'stone' has no intrinsic relation to any actual stone or to the substance.

Nobson's hylography interrupts these sign-object relationships. Hylography takes us to the edge, the threshold of making sense. This is why we're always asking questions and looking for signs. This is precisely the sublime, sub limen in Latin, when things slip under (sub) the threshold (limen)

between sense and order and the noise of chaos, between domestication and the wildness of unleashed otherness.

## Prometheus

Promethean energy is a creative principle in Nobson. Prometheus was a Titan, one of that primeval race who came before the gods, descendants of Gaia (earth) and Uranus (sky). He created people out of clay, out of raw matter, defied the gods and gave fire to humanity, the base of creative energy in social and cultural life.

Prometheus comes from that space between substance and the forms of life. For this reason Mary Shelley gave her novel *Frankenstein* the subtitle *The Modern Prometheus*.

## sublime

You look from the top of a precipitous cliff across an ocean that seems to extend into infinity. The sublime has long been recognized as a particular emotional state of being when we look over an edge of experience and are struck with awe, fascination, and fear at the immensity that lies beyond. This reaction is something to do with our human confrontation with what is beyond us and may well be beyond comprehension and containment. The sublime exceeds.

## stones

Stones abound in Nobson, great stone forms too. Some have been arranged, some shaped into buildings, statues, sculptures. Other great stone forms seem to be anthropomorphic sculptures that are bound or carved as if they are bound, as if there is some struggle with their form.

The philosophers' stone is a legendary alchemical substance held to be capable of turning base metal such as lead into gold. For alchemists the effort to discover the philosophers stone was known as the *Magnum Opus* (the great work). The starting ingredient was known as *prima materia* (first matter), the common source or substance, the raw substance that lies behind all things.

## ruins

Ruins are entropic forms, returning to raw materiality, background noise. Entropy is the natural condition of things, a metabolic process. We work to form structures, meanings, buildings, and artifacts, inhabit and communicate, consume and sustain, while wear and tear eventually take over, and we discard what is no longer needed.

Even the inscription in granite cannot sustain itself indefinitely. All buildings, as sand castles on the beach drying in the sun and washed by the waves, will always return to particle components. The buildings, as words, of Nobson, become ruins, ultimately completely mysterious.



Between inhabitation and complete ruin is a hylographic state, where we might still live, making do, repairing as best we might, still able to read the letters, words, signs around us, until eventually it is just too much work and we let go, perhaps even admiring the aesthetic form of what is left, testament to what was. This state of being is a sublime one.