



THIS WAS TOMORROW

*IS THIS THE
FUTURE WE WERE
DREAMING OF?*

A PROJECT BY
ENRICO POLICARDO



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

THIS WAS TOMORROW IS SUPPORTED USING PUBLIC
FUNDING BY ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND (DYCP)

About the Project

Official project description.

For press, listings and partner websites.

This Was Tomorrow: Is This the Future We Were Dreaming Of? is a long-term audio-visual investigation by artist and photographer Enrico Policardo into community-led housing across the UK - cohousing, Community Land Trusts, cooperative living, retrofit and repair.

It looks at places that are functioning in the present, without framing them as models or solutions.

The question throughout is not “does this work?” but something closer to: what futures are still imaginable from where we are now? The title holds the distance between what was promised and what is lived, and the work tries to make that distance visible - not as failure, but as the actual terrain of collective life.

The investigation began in 2022, documenting endangered council estates in London and the utopian ideals embedded in their material form. A residency at ESAD IDEA in Porto shifted the focus: rather than documenting loss, the work now examines how places actually function - across different

models of collective ownership, adaptation, repair and resilience.

This Arts Council England-funded phase reaches across England - from London and the south coast to Cornwall, and up through the North and West.

Supported by Arts Council England through the Developing Your Creative Practice (DYCP) scheme.

Developed alongside Open City (Simon Vickery, Open House Festival Programme Manager), writer and photographer Thaddeus Zupancic, and architectural historian Judith Martin, co-author of the original This Was Tomorrow publication.



ROPERS WALK

IS THIS THE FUTURE WE WERE DREAMING OF ?

London 29/06/2026 - Enrico Policardo

On Subtraction

Everything I do to these images is subtraction.

I take a photograph and reduce it to a single bit - black, white, nothing between - until it stops being a photograph and becomes a map of dots. I take the faces out of the recordings. I take the frame, the glass, the mount off the print and glue it to the wall.

Subtraction from what, though.

From the false perfection of a file - that clean, inhuman, frictionless thing - and back toward the imperfection of the real world, which might be the only perfection there is.

The bitmap does this by misbehaving: the computer introduces its own noise and error, and never the same way twice.

I don't save the result. Every time I need a print I run the reduction again, and every run comes out differently, so no two prints have ever been the same and none can be repeated. It's the opposite of an edition: not one image copied many times, but one source that reinvents itself on every pass. I

could keep the file and print the same dots forever. I choose not to. That refusal is what makes each one unrepeatable - a digital process made to behave like an analogue one, closer to a film print than a file.

I like what the error finds.

Reduced to dots, a place gives up its pockets of humanity: the grain, the wear, the things that don't resolve cleanly. When the result is partly out of my hands, it takes away the burden of deciding everything. I don't much trust the idea that we author our own outcomes anyway.

People are not absent from this work - they're everywhere in it, digging the soil, foraging, planning, going to protests, making the thing with their hands. But a face hijacks you. We attach meaning, we get distracted, and we stop hearing what the person actually did and dreamed. Take the face away and you're left with the voice and the actions.

This project is about imagination, about fuelling it - and imagination needs a gap to work in.

Like reading: the words on the page are only a tool, and you supply the colours, the faces, the smells. That's why I keep the images and the voices apart, and never let one explain the other. It's closer to a book, or a radio drama, than a film: a film hands you everything and you take it in; a book gives you a thread and you do the rest. I remove the face so you have to imagine the person, which is a truer way of meeting them than looking.

The prints are left to wear. Art (mine, who else's) doesn't belong under a bell jar - it isn't a specimen, and it isn't a thing that becomes valuable once the artist is safely dead. The museum and the gallery preserve the past but they congeal the future; collecting singles out the particular, makes one thing exceptional so someone can frame it or sell it. I want the opposite. The work goes outside, where everyone already is, and it's allowed to fade, wear out, decompose, be forgotten.

Watching something fade is in itself an act of care, an acceptance of passing time. Things perish, and it's fine. We celebrate and embalm youth and feel bad when anything ages, dents or dims. In this fear there's the quintessence of capitalism: the fear of losing, of missing out,

of being replaced by someone or something faster, more efficient, more attractive, more hungry, more desperate.

I play my privilege in being uninterested in all this, in my delusion of a world that can see a vibrant orange turning into a timid yellow.

Here's the thing all of this protects. I'm not trying to crystallise places in the memory of what they were or are. I'm trying to preserve the opportunity a place holds - to keep a field a field.

Someone who put me in touch with one of these communities told me, it's just a field, there's nothing to see. There was everything to see. An open ground where people could still decide what happens next. What a privilege to be able to witness that. How many of you have been able to do so? To be somewhere where the soil is so rich that only by walking on it you feel nourished, enriched, more resilient than when you first arrived?

What I'm for - an anarchism ruled by care and intelligence, choices made for the common good, not because I hold some high morality but because the common good is the only thing that gives back without your

having to ask whether it does.
Made with the future in mind.
Not for the now, but to keep
future freedoms open rather than
extracted.

I do talk in absolutes, and I
should own that. Not from
grandeur - I don't think I hold the
key to anything - but because
I'm always, for some reason,
reaching past the particular
for the vector underneath it,
the direction a problem keeps
travelling in as it repeats,
differently, everywhere. There's
a physics to human things, and
I'm naive enough to think I can
half-see it. That's probably why I
make art at all: it's the crack you
can talk through, instinctively
and viscerally, about things you
feel and can't pinpoint but know
are true because you feel them
- without being taken for mad, or
dismissed.

So yes, this is a reminder, mostly
to myself. That we can.

We're echo-systems - we rely
and thrive on each other, on the
reverberations we all generate,
and we suffer from it too.

That dreaming better futures
isn't idle - it's the way we unlock
them. I'm building the confidence
it takes to make those futures
by watching how other people
have made theirs, are making
them, and will. And the work

that reaches some of you won't
speak to many others, and
there's not much I can do about
that. I don't feel my job is to
make it more universal. My job
is to make it, to reflect on it, and
to be at peace with its partiality
- the limits of the message, the
mortality of my body and my
ideas, these prints on the wall.
I'm happy to watch them fade,
keeping company with whoever
can see them for as long as there
is. Forever isn't for us anyway.

We're made to become
nourishment for the next crop of
honey fungus.



Noch-Nicht

MATERIALS

Curation Notes

For anyone printing or installing the work

The images

These aren't ordinary photographs. Each one has been reduced to a map of bits - a field of dots. Most are black and white, one bit, no grey. Some keep colour, but the colour is reduced too: not invented, not added on top, but the photograph's own palette cut down and scattered in the same dither. The colour is taken from the original and reduced, exactly as the tone is - still subtraction, just one step short of black and white.

A bitmap is a map, not a compression - so it can be printed at almost any scale without the usual problems, because there's no compression to break down as it's blown up. And the pattern is in the image, not laid on top of it. The photograph doesn't get noise added to it; it becomes something else. It doesn't mimic film or pretend to be anything it isn't - it is its own kind of object.

That sits at the centre of a digital/analogue ethos that runs through everything here. The reduction is made to misbehave: the process

introduces its own error, and never the same way twice, so no two prints are ever identical and none can be repeated. It's the closest thing to an analogue print in a digital world - a machine made to behave like a hand.

On the wall

The prints are glued or hung directly, unframed. No glass, no mounts, no preciousness. If they wrinkle, fade or tear over the run of a show, that's part of it - the work is allowed to wear, the way anything does that lives in a real place rather than a vault. A framed print behind glass says this is valuable, keep back. This work says the opposite: it goes where people already are, in public and unconventional spaces rather than onto a clean white wall, and it's allowed to age in front of them. Watching something fade is an act of care and acceptance, not a fault to prevent.

For a sense of how this looks in practice - large images pasted unframed into public and institutional space - see the Branded Trash installations at www.enricopolicardo.com

Cross-pollination is important for the project to make sense. No community sees only its own place hung in front of it - one site's images appear at another, and at a third. The point isn't to hand people proof of themselves; it's to let someone else's world land on them, so recognition arrives sideways. Keep this in mind when deciding which images go where: the pairing of image to venue is deliberate, not incidental. Ideally I'd like to be consulted on the curation before it reaches a final stage.

Sizes

Preferred print size is 100 x 140cm, scaling up only where a space genuinely calls for it. The space and the install method set the ceiling.

A note on the side of each image or other configuration

Pre-made A4 caption sheets to accompany the prints are provided with this document (below this section).

Each image should carry a small accompanying text next to it, explaining the bitmap - that what you're looking at is a map of bits, unique and unrepeatable, not a photograph in the ordinary sense.

How a show can work

It's a kit of parts, and it flexes to the space and the budget.

Simplest

A few big prints glued to a wall, a QR code beside them for the audio (<https://thiswastomorrow.co.uk/exhibition>). Nothing to plug in, nothing to break. This is my favourite.

Three channels kept apart

images on one wall or screen, the quotes on another (<https://thiswastomorrow.co.uk/quotes>), the audio on a third or via QR (<https://thiswastomorrow.co.uk/exhibition>). They're deliberately not synced, so nothing explains anything else and each visitor catches a different combination. The quotes are the interview content rendered as text rather than voice - not a transcript, but the substance is there - so someone who can't or won't use the audio still reaches what was said. It runs on a loop, so no one needs to man it.

You mix those to suit - prints only, prints plus a quotes screen, or the full three.

Install

The install adapts to each venue rather than following one fixed method:

Where a wall can be used directly, prints are pasted straight on, unframed.

Where walls can't be marked,
they are ideally hung from the
ceiling and held down with a non-
destructive weight, but left to their
natural swing. Prints with a dowel
top and bottom hang from the
rafters on fishing line.

Outdoor and unconventional
sites are preferred to gallery
walls wherever the work and the
weather allow.

For install details and material
tailored to your space, get in
touch: info@enricopolicardo.com.

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ENRICO POLICARDO (B. 1982, GORIZIA, ITALY)

Photographer and artist based in London. His work
examines how systems of power organise everyday
life - housing and who gets to shape it, waste and what
a consumer economy throws away, and the contested
ground of borders. *This Was Tomorrow*, supported
by Arts Council England, documents communities
across the UK who took housing into their own hands.

Creative Director of *ReThinkable* Festival on the Italy-
Slovenia border (Nova Gorica / Gorizia, European
Capital of Culture 2024-2026) and an Affiliate Research
Fellow at the University of Nova Gorica.

enricopolicardo.com / thiswastomorrow.co.uk

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