

G h o s t   B o x

## Note to the Reader

The following text stands alone, and can be read as such. However, it has been written to accompany an installation of wallpaper and a lathe-cut record played on a repeating turntable. Therefore, references to these works are made throughout.







“Pieces... kept emerging, like bits of wood  
floating up to the surface that only hint at the  
shipwreck below.”

Sarah Dessen

“Nothing here but us recordings.”

Mark Fisher

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## The first floor of The Falcon, Rotherwick - 2002 (or thereabouts)

We are above the pub. It is my job to vacuum in the mornings. The other staff are still sleeping, but I'm up and dressed and heading over to the cupboard I've opened countless times before.

It's an understairs cupboard; the type that slopes front to back, not left to right. It's just big enough to house the vacuum cleaner, along with a few other cleaning things. A can of polish, maybe; a few rags in a bucket.

I opened the cupboard the day before, and the day before that. I've opened it countless times before.

I reach for the knob with my left hand (the knob is on the right hand side of the door) first pulling the door towards and then sweeping it across me in the arc that completes its opening. I reach out (about mid-arc, probably) with my right hand for the vacuum cleaner's upright handle - the flex wrapped in a figure of eight at its back, as I left it yesterday - and wheel it towards me, my left hand still raised, maybe even still on the door, ready to close it once more. And all in a matter of a few seconds, with a little shuffling to allow for the door's return, I should be on my way, bumping and clattering down the stairs.

But on this particular morning, I open the door as usual (left hand guiding the door on its arc across me, right hand reaching for the handle) and there's a space. Not a big space, but more than usual, because the vacuum cleaner has been pushed back, against the back wall of the cupboard. I reach a little further, aware of the unfamiliar movement, the shifting of weight onto the front foot as I tilt ever so slightly into the cupboard.

We look down. There is a box.

## Introduction to diving

I do not *steal* the box.

I ask people if they recognise it, show it to them, show them where I found it. Somehow, I know nobody will claim it. I have to open it and glance briefly through its contents in order to check that it isn't obviously the property of someone I know, or can guess at. The contents leave little impression at first, in the flurry of questions, shrugs, suggestions and a working day.

Alone, later, I lay the contents out carefully - scanning them; choosing a starting point.

We're going to dive in. We're going to surface. Sometimes there will be detail, sometimes gist. Sometimes a series of threads will seem as if they are going to tie up. They won't. The carousel will keep turning, and we'll climb on and dive back off - sometimes sooner, sometimes later. There will be periods of focus, and periods of letting things wash over us. The voices will not all be ours. But some of them will be.

We dive now.



## Surface, in front of the box - present day

Consider the stories this box might hold. Stapled cardboard is closed round it like a tatty book cover while "the role of narrative is declining, the role of the archive... increasing (to) become the dominant symbolic and cultural form."<sup>1</sup> I'm not going to let you see inside it, I'm afraid. Consider me as the trustee of the box. I am your reader, your gate-keeper, choosing what to reveal. Consider the box itself, a container, containing things I see and you do not. You are imagining what it might contain, aren't you?

I am not passive, not a museum employee, guarding this box and permitting viewings (put on the gloves, please). Just as narrative address needed redefining, to include "intradiegetic *you*"<sup>2</sup>, this box-archive cannot be viewed as just a collection of third-person things. We, with our own constantly updating and expanding archives of recorded presence - our loyalty cards and social media accounts and online bank accounts and CCTV appearances - form identities that will outlive our physical bodies. Our life stories - or perhaps we need to start using the term *life archives* - will be accessible for as long as the technology which supports them exists. The box is not a life archive in this sense, though it holds a collection of things which provide evidence of a life, of a moment in a life. But then, it is not acting alone. I, on behalf of us, am acting. It is *my* archive (for now), which I'm sharing (at least, that's what I'm telling you).

Consider the box as storage, like the cupboard it was found in, just an "accumulation of objects. Those objects are each complete in themselves."<sup>3</sup> Consider it as a collection, intentional, whose "objects... do not have that completeness. They only have significance in relation to each other."<sup>4</sup> Through the filter of my looking, a list begins to form, a kind of mental archiving of the contents, a taxonomy occurring from my attempts to make sense of each object in relation to its companions, resulting in "ordered structure... no longer inherent to the collection but imposed upon it,"<sup>5</sup> ready to be told as a story, or several. And I tell and retell, trying out slight variations each time, judging the effect that the shifts in emphasis have on you. The systematic mention of the contents is heady when first revealed, isn't it? And it

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<sup>1</sup> Alphen, E. van, (2014). *Staging the Archive: Art and Photography in the Age of New Media*. London: Reaktion, p.7

<sup>2</sup> DelConte, M. T., (2003). 'Who Speaks, Who Listens, Who Acts: A New Model for Understanding Narrative', PhD thesis, Ohio State University, Columbus, USA, pp. 1-23

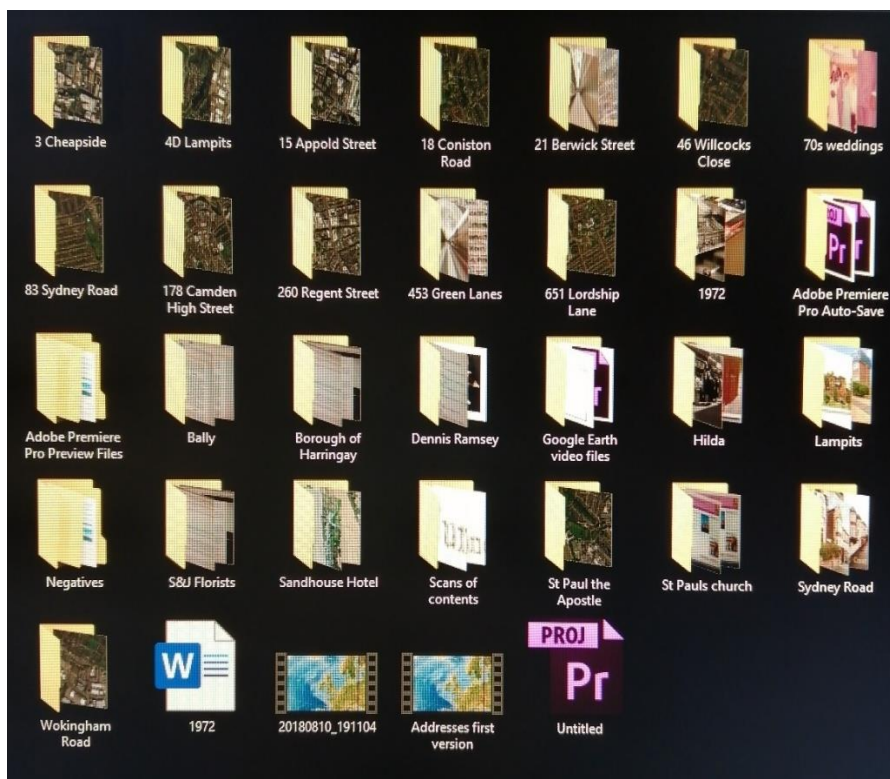
<sup>3</sup> Alphen, p.91

<sup>4</sup> Alphen, p.91

<sup>5</sup> Alphen, p.91

is addictive to be the one to reveal them, fingering the rustling papers as I do, allowing momentary glimpses of documents that only mystify. I combine narratives for you, as writers combine letters of the alphabet to tell you a story, “(not) simply... a combination of letters, but a combination of signs,”<sup>6</sup> a “pastime with past time.”<sup>7</sup>

I divide the box’s contents into chapters: The Sand House Hotel; the greetings card; Hilda. The conventional ordering of addresses and locations creates its own alphabetical, referential story, reordering the contents. The ascending numbers, the a-z: the archival impulse<sup>8</sup> of my computer preferences is an impulse not resisted,<sup>9</sup> as I group and list so that my archive may be easily navigated; essential as I begin to dive into the wormholes of the web, looking for clues, adding to my list of folders, like Boltanski snipping portraits out of obituary notices. These folders are the “result of a repetition of the same syntactical function,”<sup>10</sup> providing a catalogue that is then available, “like a musical score, (ready for) anyone (to) play it.”<sup>11</sup>



1: SCREENSHOT OF MY VISUAL RESEARCH MATERIALS (18.1 GB OR 19,469,913,306 BYTES, AS OF 7/6/19)

<sup>6</sup> Apolloni, A. (2017). ‘The end of the era of endings’, *Eurozine*, p2

<sup>7</sup> Hutcheon, L. (1988), cited by Apolloni, p.2

<sup>8</sup> Alphen, p.21

<sup>9</sup> McElroy et al. (1993) ‘Clinical and theoretical implications of a possible link between obsessive-compulsive and impulse control disorders’, pp.121-132

<sup>10</sup> Alphen, p.94

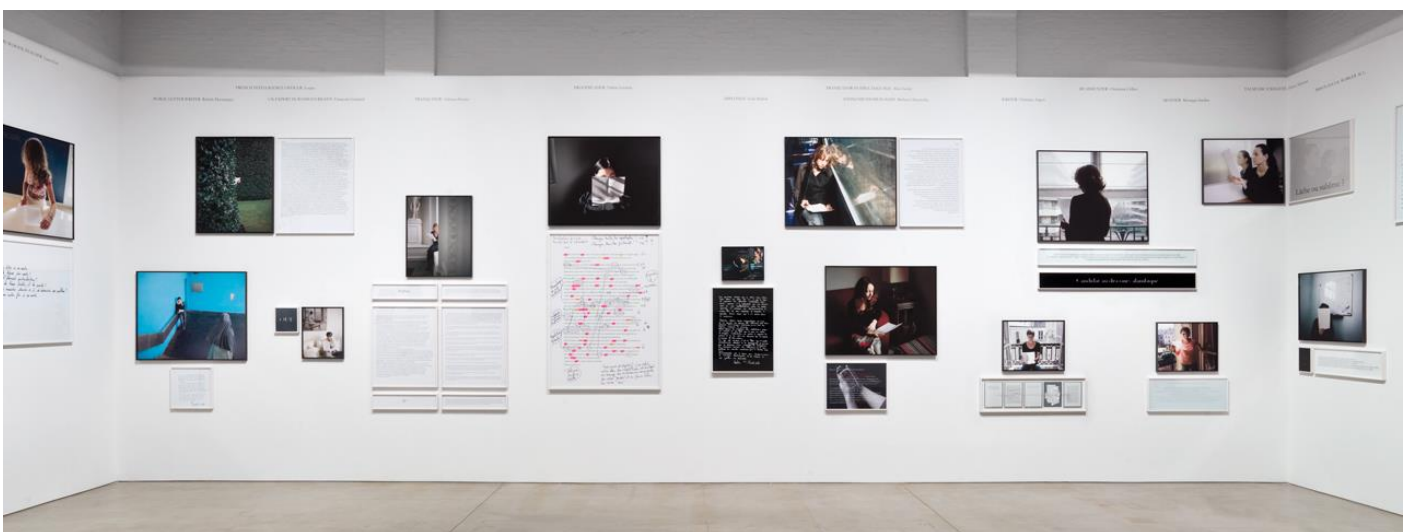
<sup>11</sup> Boltanski, C. (1997), cited by Artspace (2017). “It’s The Idea That’s Important”: Christian Boltanski Thinks Art Is Like a Musical Score that Anyone Can Play’



2: CHRISTIAN BOLTANSKI, *364 SUISSES MORTS* (1990)



3: CONTENTS OF THE BOX AND ITS RESEARCH TO DATE, PRESENTED FOR CRITIQUE IN NOVEMBER 2018



4: SOPHIE CALLE, *TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF* (2007)

## Surface, at a computer screen - present day

If, as Lyotard claims, postmodernism can be defined as "a radical incredulity" toward the religious, political, mythical and scientific meta-narratives which serve(d) to "legitimize the pursuit of knowledge,"<sup>12</sup> then archives of personal material stored online may be considered examples of postmodern narrative, in line with his idea that narrative has a "modest"<sup>13</sup> place in contemporary culture, no longer being meta- but instead rhetorical, performative. The box is almost the opposite of this, its contents folded and contained, seemingly meant only for the owner. But I, as the current trustee of the box, in 2019, have access to such online sources, and I dive and surface, dive and surface, prompted by the box. I create a trail, I examine and save strands and threads which form an "encompassing framework (in which) narratives are embedded,"<sup>14</sup> shifting my role in the traditional writer/reader relationship to something more like detective, rejecting the "cause-and-effect trajectory"<sup>15</sup> in favour of numerous possible trajectories based on my clicks, not on a single path dictated by a storyteller. I trace an online identity of the box, imagining the investigation later - my computer seized, experts following the browsing history and telling themselves this same story, but backwards.

"Over 30 million virtual profiles have outlived their owners,"<sup>16</sup> and the time when the number of dead Facebook users outnumbers the living ones is estimated to be as soon as the 2060s.<sup>17</sup> Facsimiles of lives or digital graveyards will exceed the number of people physically living, probably in my lifetime. And what will these online archives tell us about the people they represent, and about remembrance and the idea of a life story? As the photographs and letters that previous generations have as keepsakes are superseded by this online content, will the way we remember each other be richer, if it draws on so many more archived items than have ever been available before? Or will it actually remove the need for remembrance, if the deceased's online presence continues to interact with us beyond their bodily lifetime?

But I'm not looking for people. At no point do I look for any of the people mentioned in the box. Well, except for the photographer; but that's different. My searches concern locations

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<sup>12</sup> Lyotard, J.-F. (1984), cited by Alphen, p.9

<sup>13</sup> Lyotard, J.-F. (1984), cited by Alphen, p.8

<sup>14</sup> Alphen, p.12

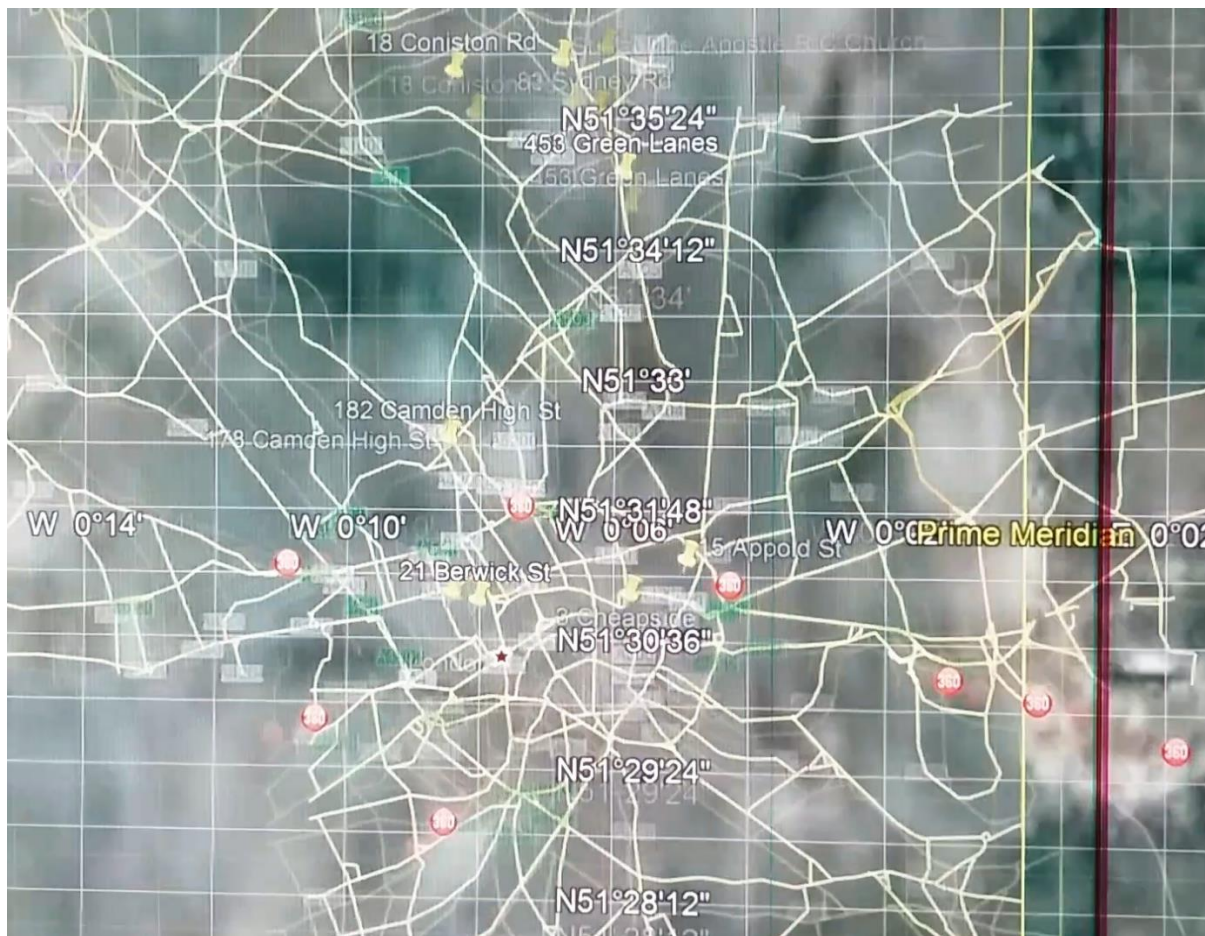
<sup>15</sup> Manovich, L. (2001), cited by Alphen, p.9

<sup>16</sup> *Welcome to Facebook: The World's Largest Digital Graveyard* (2014). [www.talkdeath.com](http://www.talkdeath.com)

<sup>17</sup> *Facebook of the dead*. [what-if.xkcd.com](http://what-if.xkcd.com)

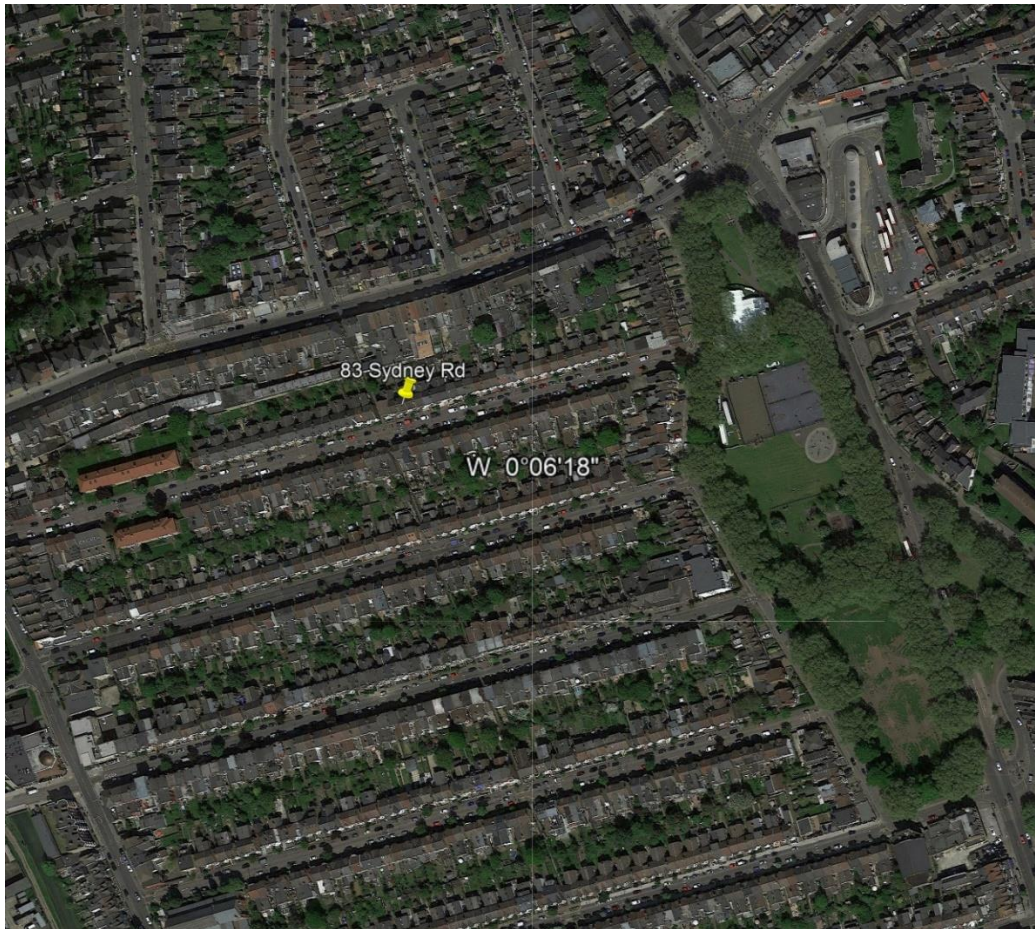


and dates, pockets of space and time which relate to each other, or do not. Places, too, have an online presence.



5: SCREENSHOT OF GOOGLE EARTH TOUR OF GHOST BOX LOCATIONS

## Surface, North London - early 1972



6: SCREENSHOT OF GOOGLE EARTH VIEW OF SYDNEY ROAD

The houses are terraced, the aerial view striped green and brown. It is springtime, then early summer. Most people have replied to their invitation with black ink, looping their letters and exclaiming delight, or occasionally regret. The handwriting is evocative, the shapes of the characters outdated, and the letters and cards are oddly similar, housed in creamy thick envelopes, lined and unlined.

*much pleasure in accepting will be pleased to accept will be delighted*

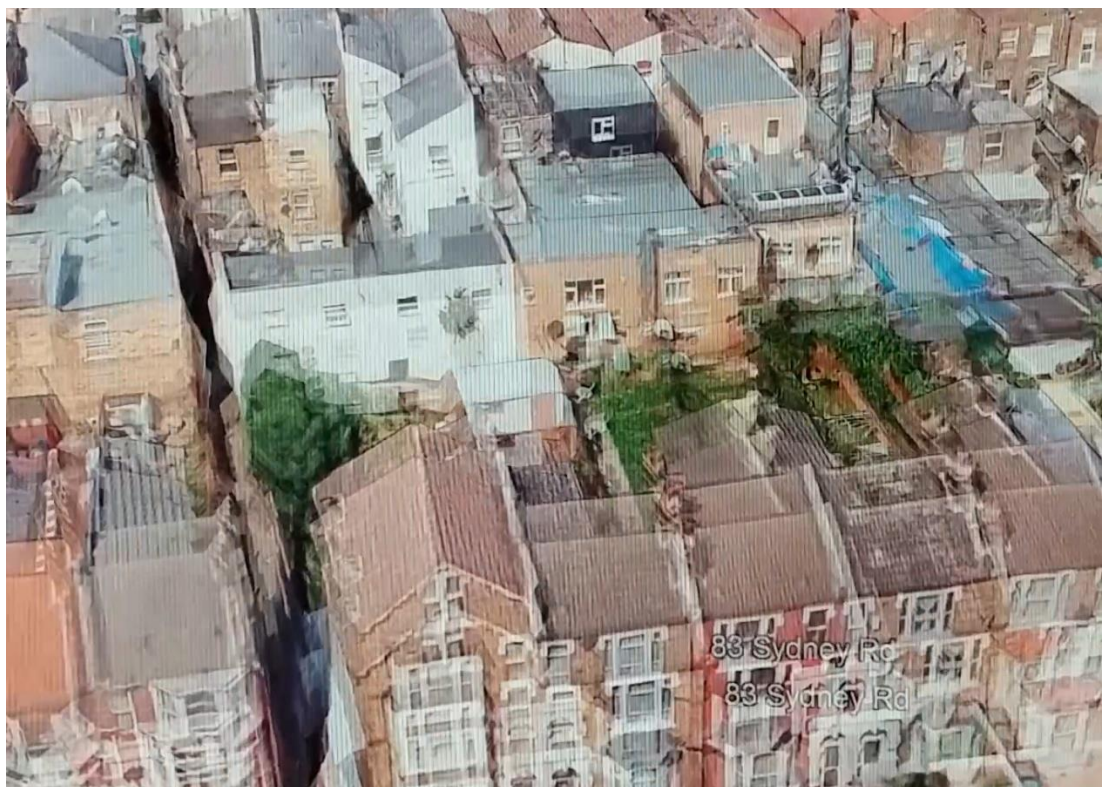
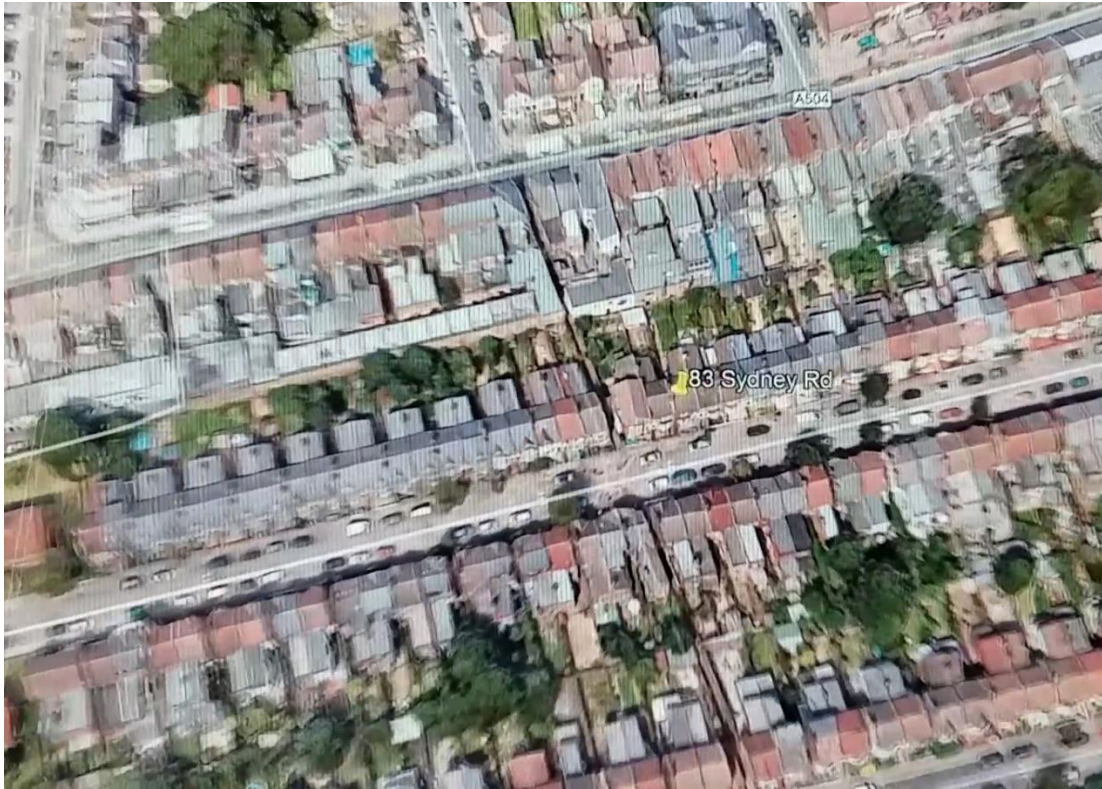
7: CROPPED SCANS OF DOCUMENTS IN THE BOX

83 Sydney Road is behind the white van, the silver car, the post van that might have delivered these pen marks; in an area of comparatively low crime for the region;<sup>18</sup> red-doored and black-; for sale; under grey skies and blue. I can see the buildings from above, and for all of

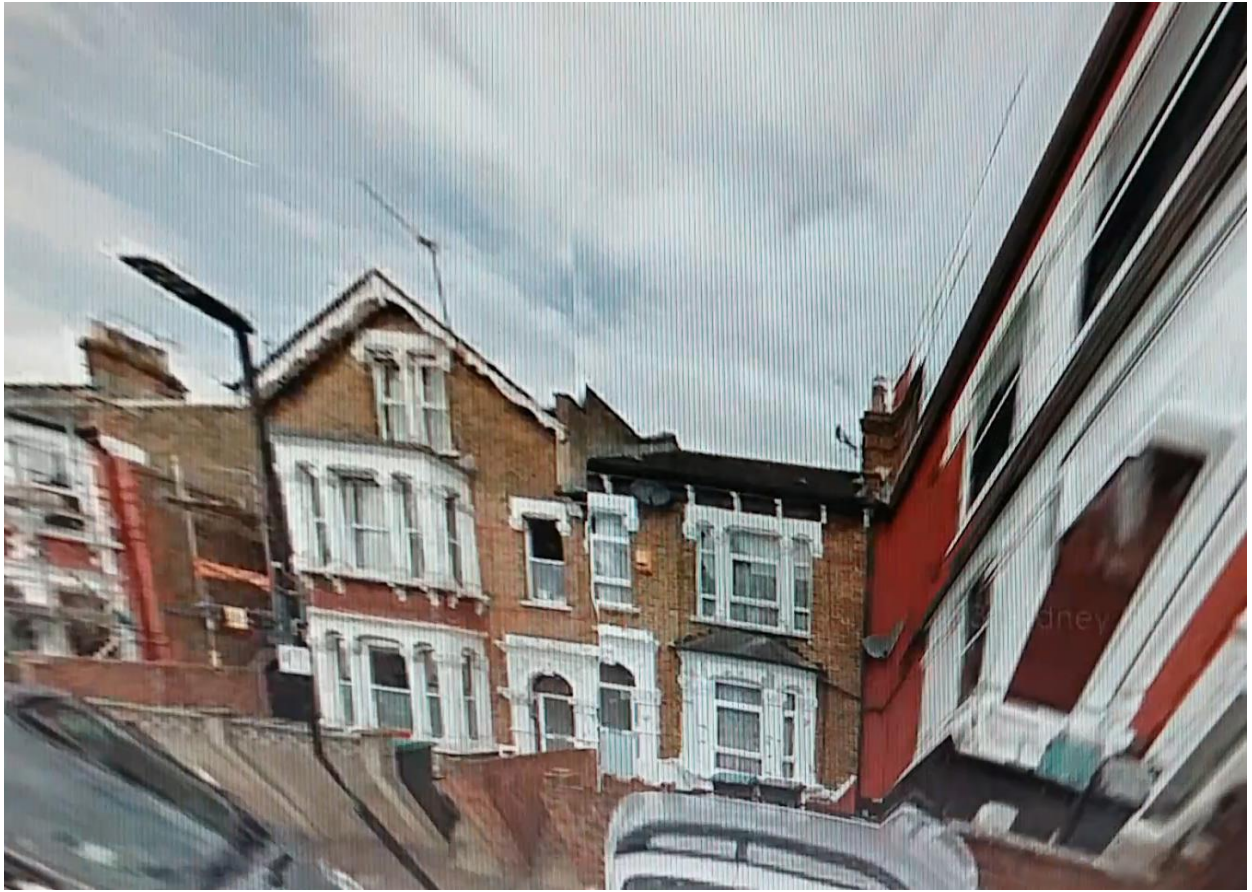
<sup>18</sup> North London violent crime rate comparison map. [www.plumplot.co.uk](http://www.plumplot.co.uk)



the zoom in, it is only when the street view kicks in that the building becomes obstructed. If I move along the road a little, I can look back at the building in all its oblique allure, asking me to step a little closer, free of its white van and beckoning me, as if suggesting that by moving stealthily enough I can trick the vehicle into not being there. It never works.





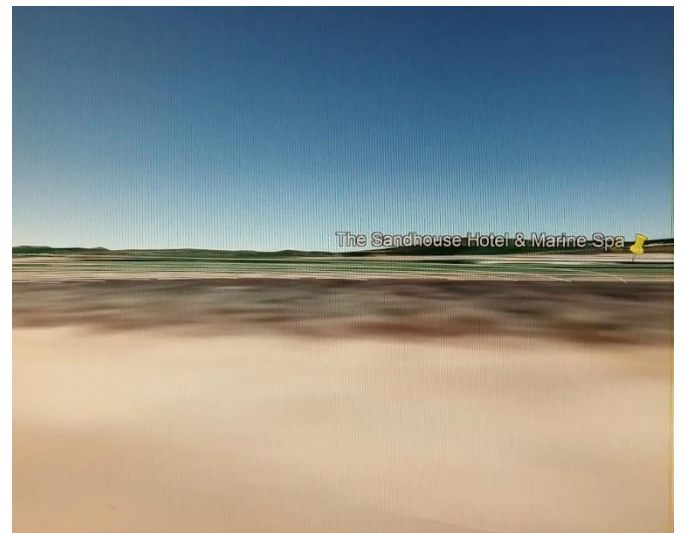
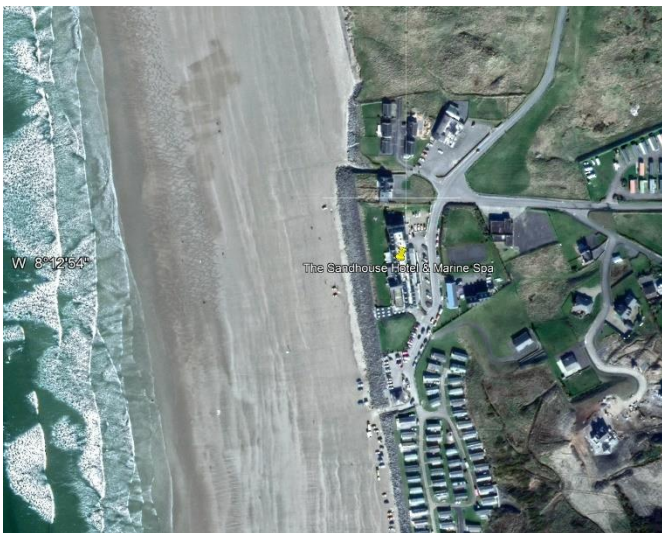


8: SCREENSHOTS OF GOOGLE EARTH DESCENT TO SYDNEY ROAD (4 IMAGES)



I'm annoyed at the non-urban locations too - as clear as the urban ones when seen from the default height - but which flatten maddeningly beneath me as I descend, into their folded-flat foliage and cock-eyed constructions, making less and less sense the closer I get to them. There are far fewer incidental humans here. It's as if the population cannot exist outside the 3D cityscapes, here where the houses flop like a broken pop-up book, and disappear when you turn to face them. Which makes a kind of sense, I suppose.

On the other hand, wonder is to be found in the glitches of transition. Buildings sink into roads, draped in a mesh which mimics their fascias. Buses are stuck in black, beneath which the matrix is exposed, holding the scene up out of the emptiness below. Houses unveil their skeletons, crawling up external walls and looming over outside spaces.



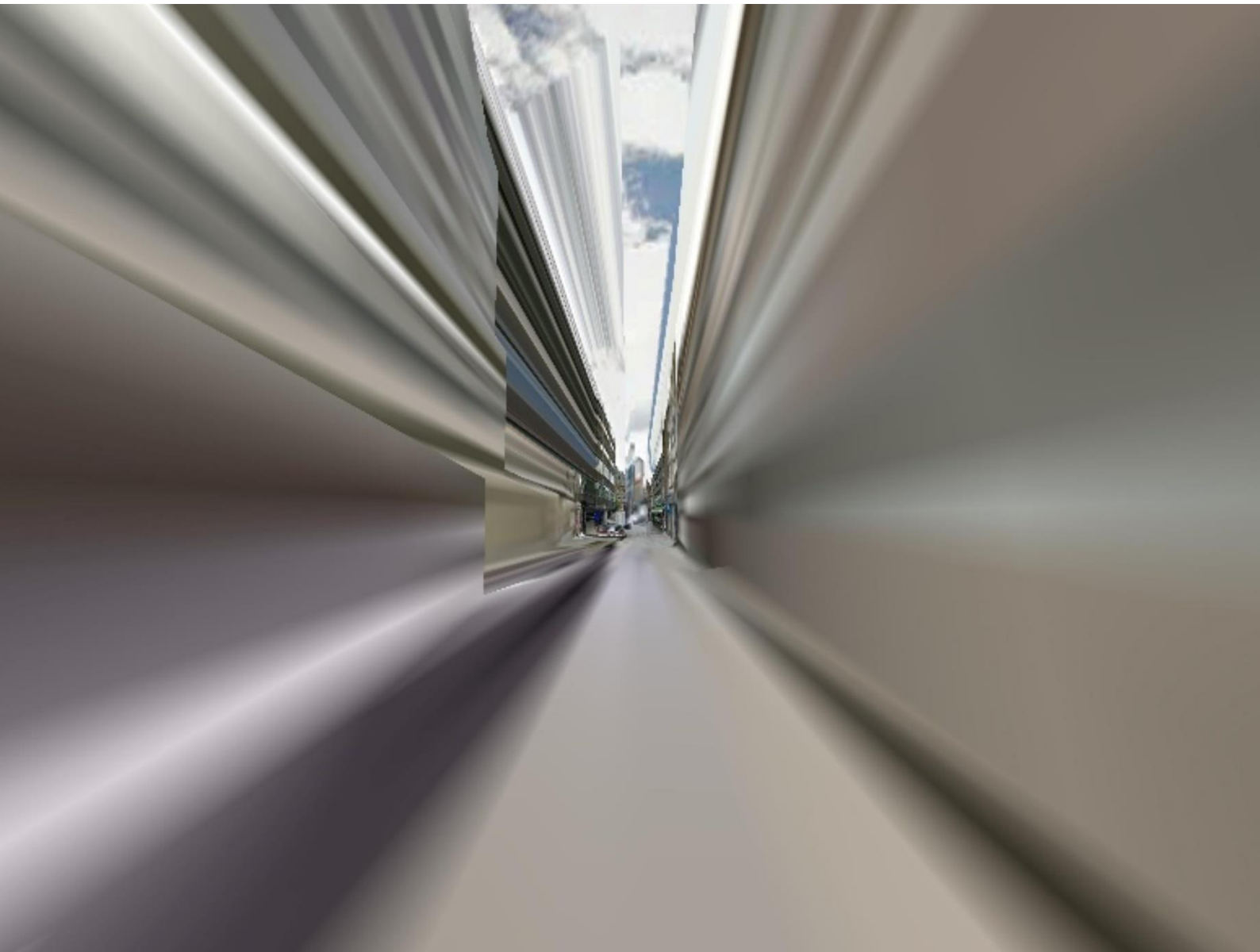
9: SCREENSHOTS OF GOOGLE EARTH DESCENT TO THE SAND HOUSE HOTEL (2 IMAGES)



10: SCREENSHOT OF GOOGLE EARTH VIEW OF GREEN LANES



11: SCREENSHOT OF GOOGLE EARTH VIEW OF REGENT STREET



12: SCREENSHOT OF GOOGLE EARTH VIEW OF BERWICK STREET

Unwitting, unknowable humans are frozen, as if sketched onto an architect's plan. Images from above show streets loaded with tropical colours and soft, trainset bushes, drawing me down, down, closer, closer and then switching abruptly back into the invariable, hard, locked-door grey as I get close enough to really see. I am thirsty for those colours, but the oasis they promised was a mirage. It shimmered, and I fell for it. Thwarted stalker.

I can zoom back out though; catch the image at that moment when it is neither one thing nor the other, when the cold, photographic trees and fences are pulled from their reality and

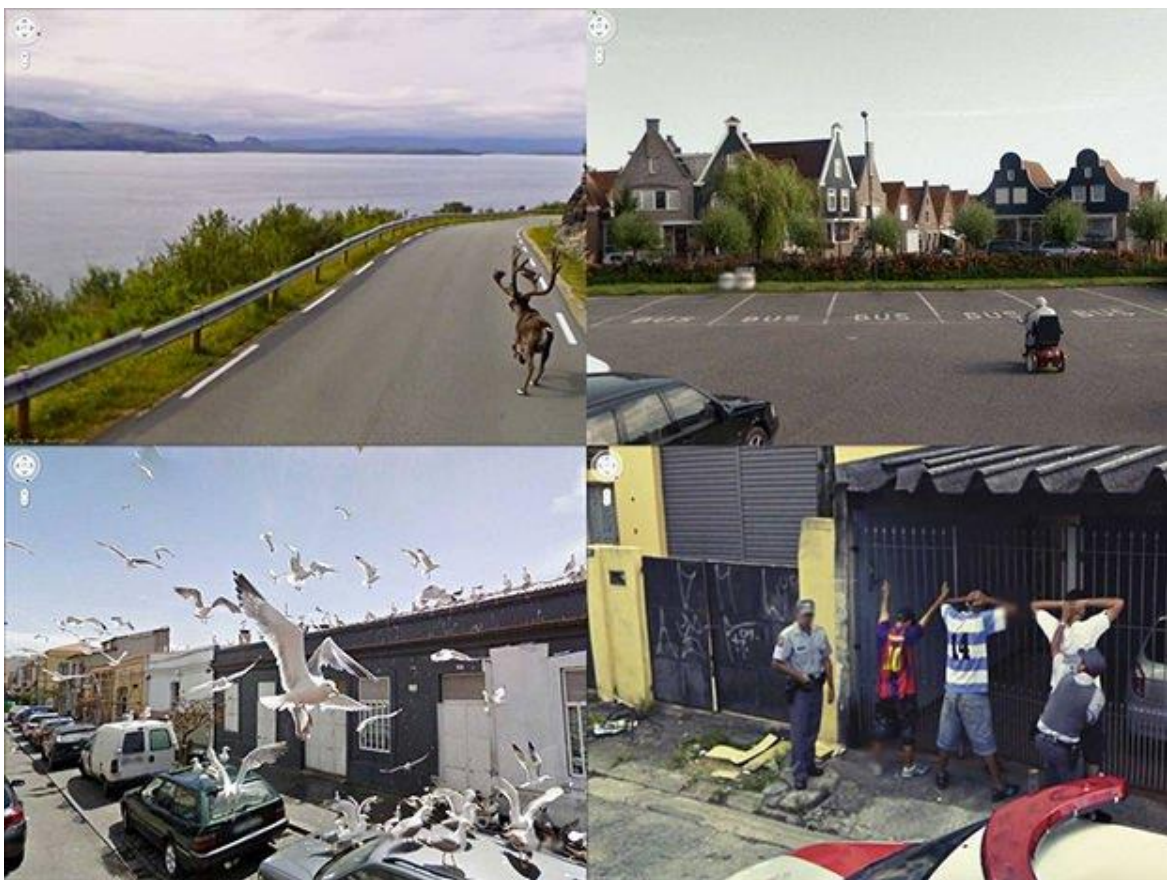


stretch, striping traces behind them before assuming their other, softer, more vibrant versions once more.

Google Earth and Street View as source material



13: CLEMENT VALLA, *POSTCARDS FROM GOOGLE EARTH* (2010-)

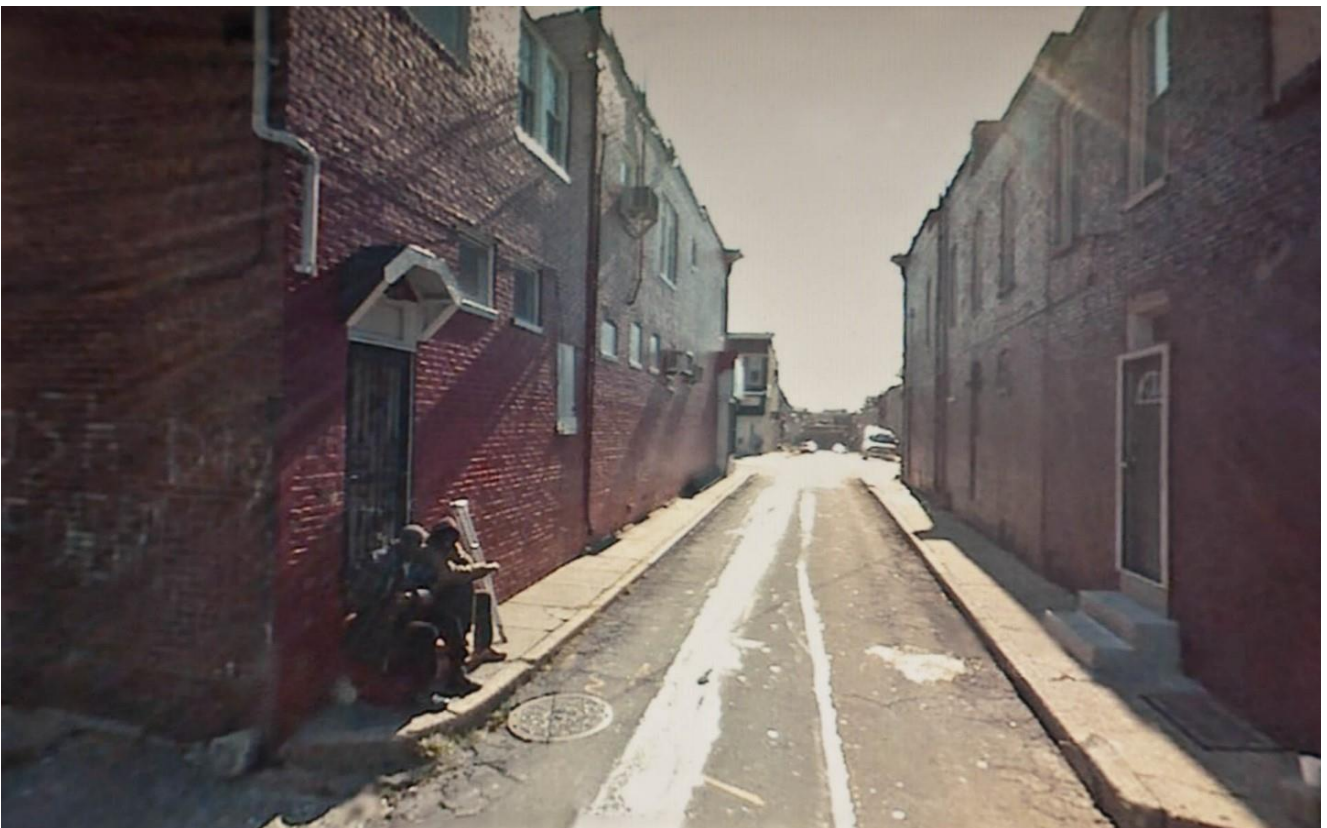


14: MICHAEL WOLF, *A SERIES OF UNFORTUNATE EVENTS* (2011)





15: DOUG RICKARD, *A NEW AMERICAN PICTURE* (2010)



16: DOUG RICKARD, *A NEW AMERICAN PICTURE* (2010)





17: JUSTIN BLINDER, *VACATED* (2017-)

“Google Earth is a database disguised as a photographic representation. These uncanny images focus our attention on that process itself, and the network of algorithms, computers, storage systems, automated cameras, maps, pilots, engineers, photographers, surveyors and map-makers that generate them.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Valla, C. *Postcards from Google Earth*. [www.postcards-from-google-earth.com](http://www.postcards-from-google-earth.com)

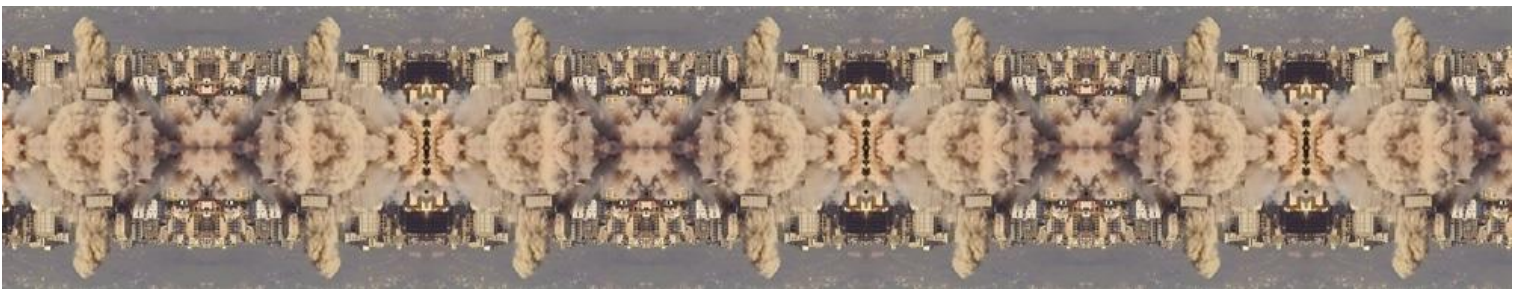
## Surface, shopping streets in central London - spring/summer 1972

The first purchases seem tentative, of lesser value and further apart; a flutter of larger amounts towards the wedding day, on a Saturday in late June. This narrative of a wedding is by far the strongest, though not the only one. And it's loose, refusing to consummate, shifting like Google Earth. Hilda made gowns, among other things.

We're approaching a threshold moment. In just a few years, "a whole world... (will become) obsolete, and the contours of a new (one will begin) to show themselves."<sup>20</sup> Things are kinder in some ways, harsher in others, "before the switch."<sup>21</sup> Punk is about to emerge in response, then Joy Division.

We don't know that yet though. Look laterally. TVs are black and white. Telephones are a luxury. Birkin smiles and poses, her basket in the crook of her arm. Hilda impends behind her and the musician - "bras and tights... suspenders and knickers"<sup>22</sup> half-hidden by apples and oranges - "'come and get your gums 'round me plums,'"<sup>23</sup> - far beyond the woman strutting past piles of boxes, in the "central hub for music and vinyl."<sup>24</sup> "They used to call it the Latin Quarter, because it was full of Europeans."<sup>25</sup> "Oh, Hilda was the one who supplied me with my clothes... they were one-offs. Nobody else had 'em... They were all one-offs, Hilda's."<sup>26</sup>

### Looped regeneration



18: WALID RAAD, *SWEET TALK: COMMISSIONS (BEIRUT) \_ SOLIDERE 1994-1997* (2019)

<sup>20</sup> Fisher, M. (2014). *The Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures*. Hampshire, UK: Zero Books, p.50

<sup>21</sup> Fisher, p.50

<sup>22</sup> Scott, J. cited by *Soho Then: Ep. 1 - Food and Shopping*. [thephotographersgallery.org.uk](http://thephotographersgallery.org.uk)

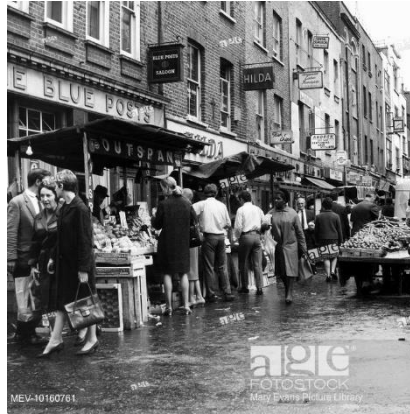
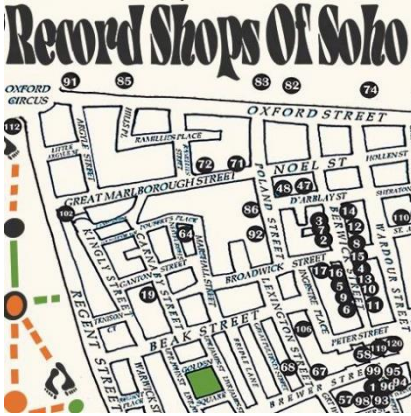
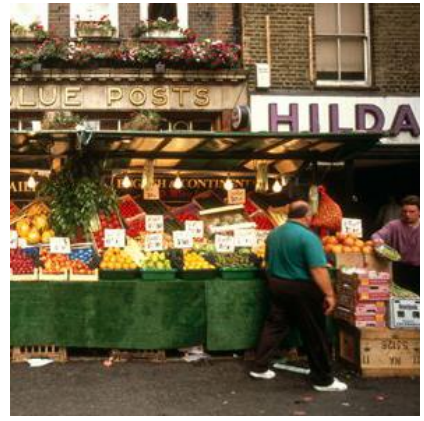
<sup>23</sup> Stannett, L. cited by *Soho Then: Ep. 1 - Food and Shopping*. [thephotographersgallery.org.uk](http://thephotographersgallery.org.uk)

<sup>24</sup> *Berwick Street*. [www.visitlondon.com](http://www.visitlondon.com)

<sup>25</sup> Mussi, C. cited by *Soho Then: Ep. 1 - Food and Shopping*. [thephotographersgallery.org.uk](http://thephotographersgallery.org.uk)

<sup>26</sup> Rottondo, R. cited by *Soho Then: Ep. 3 - Fashion and Tailoring*. [thephotographersgallery.org.uk](http://thephotographersgallery.org.uk)





19: 12 IMAGES RESULTING FROM GOOGLE SEARCH "HILDA 21 BERWICK STREET"<sup>27</sup>

<sup>27</sup> My website is currently the top Google search result for "Hilda 21 Berwick Street" (as of 17.06.19)

20<sup>th</sup> April 1972 / 29<sup>th</sup> April 1972

£5 paid each time for purchase (unknown) priced at £12.60, or £12.60 was left to pay.

Writer used blue ink, signature: Segal/Sejal/Seyal.

8<sup>th</sup> May 1972

Deposit of £2 paid for flowers.

Writer used blue ink, letters are loose and diagonal.

*WREATHS & CROSSES MADE TO ORDER. WEDDING BOUQUETS A SPECIALITY. Tel. 340 2564 (Day & Night)*

22<sup>nd</sup> June 1972

A0402-38

Purchase of XQH964 (Pierrette, beige, £10.50) and DB54363 (Plaisir, white, £5.95) for total of £16.45.

Writer used ink on top copy, this carbon copy has been imprinted in blue.

*EXPERT WATCH MAKERS AND JEWELLERS. REMODELLING OF JEWELLERY AND RESTORATION OF PLATE A SPECIALITY. OVER 180 BRANCHES THROUGHOUT GREAT BRITAIN*

15<sup>th</sup> May 1972

Receipt #61

Deposit of £15 paid for purchase of E/5365 (with alterations) priced at £25, leaving £10 to pay.

An arrangement was made to call on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of May.

The writer used blue ink and made their capitals with a flourish.

*GOWNS. KNITWEAR. BLOUSES. NO MONEY REFUNDED*

23<sup>rd</sup> May 1972

Six purchases of category E (values 00.35 – 00.85), one of category B (001.05) and two of category D (000.60) were made.

Receipt is till printed in black ink. The D and the P of the logo are mirror images of each other.

22<sup>nd</sup> May 1972

R00949-19

Assistant 4/10

Purchase of EB47212 (Pierrette, beige, £10.50) and DB54363 (Plaisir, white, £5.95) for total of £16.45 was made.

Writer used ink on top copy, this carbon copy has been imprinted in blue. Receipt is darker than the others.

5<sup>th</sup> May 1972

Receipt #0580

Deposit of £1 paid for *white, fluffy, fussy/furry large brim*. Arrangement was made to ring when *anything available*.

*MILLINERY – HANDBAGS – LADIES' WEAR, ETC. PROPRIETOR: A. G. SILVERSTONE. ADJOINING TUBE STATION*

undated

Purchase was £14.70 to keep, less £5.00 deposit: £9.70.

Arrangement was made to return if wanting to hire (£8.50, less £5.00 deposit: £3.50)

Writer used blue ink, writing at right angles with the lined paper



rather ordinary and did not have much to reveal. However, in the words "British Film Institute," he sensed someone intelligent, learned, structured, with a sharp, dry humor. He added, "I don't see any maliciousness in this handwriting." On the first page Pierre D. wrote his first name, last name, address and phone number. Opposite this he made a note of the letter codes used on the dials of French telephones: 2=ABC, 3=DEF, etc. Listed in Pierre's address book are 408 names divided in the following manner:

25 A's, 63 B's, 35 C's, 38 D's, 6 E's, 22 F's, 18  
G's, 3 H's, 6 I's, 5 J's, 14 K's, 28 L's, 42 M's, 8  
N's, 10 O's, 21 P's, 13 R's, 19 S's, 13 T's, 1 U,  
12 V's, 3 W's, 3 Z's.

Most of Pierre D.'s acquaintances live in Paris, as he does, but I notice that there are a great number of Italian addresses, twenty-nine to be exact. The other countries include: Algeria (3), Austria (1), Cameroon (1), England (1), Gabon (1), Germany (1), Greece (4), Holland (3), Hong Kong (1), Portugal (1), Switzerland (1), U.S. (5), Zaire (1) and five addresses outside Paris. I leaf through the book. Sometimes different annotations, in parentheses, accompany the addresses and phone numbers. I find a few "husband of . . .," "wife of . . .," "friend of . . .," "transvestite," one "black actor, good comic," and one "Othello V 2 . . ." When a person is deceased, Pierre D. does not cross out the name. He adds "died in . . ." next to it with the month and year, not the day. When a birth occurs, he writes the first name of the child below those of the two parents. This information is usually added in red ink. Isolated in the lower right corner of the last page is this sentence: "The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog."

## Surface, in a park - date unknown

We understand a family. It's the physical proximity of their bodies, the familiarity of the tableau. The box offered these as negatives – classifiable as 'family' but denying me any detail. I've scanned them, so we can see. Glance across the images, gleaning *mum*, *dad*, *baby*. Two boys. Dive deeper. Their faces are intangible. Not pixels now, like my location searches, but grain mimicking skin. Shadows for features. Come back to the surface, comparing foreground with back-. This photographer was unsure of the camera, or of its settings. The family, if that is what it is, are not the focus. Yes, they were meant to be. But it hasn't turned out that way. They are located, but smudgy; the woman on the grass behind is clearer. These would be deleted today, in situ, and others taken. A filter chosen. Shared. Liked. Forgotten.







22: DIGITALLY SCANNED 35MM NEGATIVES FROM THE BOX (4 IMAGES)



23: PHOTOSHOP MANIPULATION OF DIGITALLY SCANNED 35MM NEGATIVE FROM THE BOX

It feels political to blur them further, like I'm censoring. It is selfish. I don't want my investigations coloured by their ordinary faces. I'll say its Verpixelungsrecht,<sup>28</sup> and I'm protecting them. But you and I both know that in order to keep the Box mine (and now yours) I'm going to have to obfuscate them. They can be in the wallpaper, as long as they're not recognisable.

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<sup>28</sup> Jarvis, J. (2010). *'Germany, what have you done?'*. buzzmachine.com



24: DELIBERATELY OBSCURED IMAGE ON GERMAN GOOGLE STREET VIEW



25: GERHARD RICHTER, *MAN SHOT DOWN I* (1988)

I am quiet

Dark  
Knowing  
Secretive

I know things

I show you which way to go  
But I shuffle and you must shuffle me back

I lie in layers  
Just containing  
Just displaying  
Then I shuffle

You can spy through me  
You can magnify, enlarge  
And zoom and swoop over my lines  
But then I'll close and you'll be lost  
I'll close my secrets back into the darkness  
and tuck my lens away under the black

You'll have to prise me open if you want  
my help again  
But I'll have shuffled

Layers conceal most of what you're asking  
for  
I'll illuminate a spot for you  
Though maybe not the one you wanted  
Probably not the one you wanted  
Tilt me, that might help  
Tile my layers

Or close me again and I'll shuffle  
We can just repeat this  
Until  
Until  
Until

## Surface, in front of the wallpaper - haunted

Witness the mind's own machinations; see the paper catching your flight of ideas, patterning them, presenting transient figures and moments; “[w]hat was x becomes y, the line dividing them dissolving”<sup>29</sup> – “I caught Jennie with her hand on it once (...) she turned around as if she had been caught stealing, (...) I know she was studying that pattern”<sup>30</sup>

The paper is a phantasmagoria screen, and we are the “detective-narrator(s)”<sup>31</sup>, searching for our own ghosts, the seeming presence of being superseded by a deferred non-origin.<sup>32</sup> The “figure of the ghost... is neither present, nor absent, neither dead nor alive... the time is out of joint.”<sup>33</sup> Locating the origin of identity or history is inevitably dependent on an existing set of conditions, so that “haunting (is) the state proper to being,”<sup>34</sup> recalling Verwoert’s instruction that one’s grip must be loosened, and the object invoked.

(Invoke your object now, in front of the paper, “rethink... myths of progress, linearity of time and teleological assumptions”<sup>35</sup>)

Fashion and cultural theorists tend to agree that the look of what is generally described as ‘vintage’ is often related to concern for valuable items from a previous period, or nostalgia. Also generally included in this category is reproduction of old designs with contemporary material, or what is sometimes termed ‘retro.’<sup>36</sup>

My wallpaper is not vintage in the sense of the former definition; it was printed last week. It is not retro, either, as it is not designed to evoke the 70s, though the installation as a whole does reference that period, and is therefore closer to what Heike Jenß defines as vintage: “a

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<sup>29</sup> DeLamotte, E., C. (1990) cited by Davison, C. M., (2004). ‘Haunted House/Haunted Heroine: Female Gothic Closets in “The Yellow Wallpaper”’, *Women's Studies*, p. 54.

<sup>30</sup> Perkins Gilman, C. (2009). *The Yellow Wallpaper and Selected Writings*. London: Virago, p.24

<sup>31</sup> Davison, p.61

<sup>32</sup> Davis, C. (2005). ‘Hauntology, spectres and phantoms’. *French Studies*, pp. 373–379

<sup>33</sup> Davis,

<sup>34</sup> Colin Davis

<sup>35</sup> Parikka, J. (2012) p.144

<sup>36</sup> Stefano Baschiera & Elena Caoduro

‘construction of past images and historic looks which can be achieved with original objects as well as new ones that look historic.’”<sup>37</sup>

But while a certain temporal disjunction may occur, it is not based on a nostalgia for lost futures.<sup>38</sup> Rather, it presents the results of a contemporary investigation into a past moment, wheeling all at once into teleidoscopic patterns, then refusing, upon closer inspection, to create symmetry. Transgenerational communication, then: an echo of "undisclosed traumas of previous generations (that) might disturb the lives of their descendants, even and especially if they know nothing about their distant causes."<sup>39</sup> And if this phantom is "the presence of a dead ancestor in the living Ego, still intent on preventing its secrets from coming to light"<sup>40</sup> then it is a dishonest ghost, intending to mislead (tell a story to) the haunted subject to ensure the continued shrouding of its secret: "les lacunes laissées en nous par les secrets des autres."<sup>41</sup> "The object of appropriation... must today be made to speak not only of its place within the structural order of the present material culture but also of the different times it inhabits and the different historical vectors that cross it."<sup>42</sup> Thus the wallpaper's design attempts to make no hierarchy among images (I have failed at that attempt, of course I have) and flips and rotates them, to remove any suspicion of a storyboard.

Neither is the paper nostalgic, in the sense of a "reactionary, sentimental or melancholic"<sup>43</sup> yearning for the past. It does not mourn the present, or progress; it does not indicate "a loss of faith in the future."<sup>44</sup> It is relevant, though, to consider nostalgia in its alternative interpretation as having multiple "meaning and significance... and so... accommodating progressive, even utopian impulses as well as regressive stances and melancholic attitudes."<sup>45</sup> It is certainly true that some "feelings of regret for what time has brought"<sup>46</sup> are woven into this project, as well as the common desire to visit unknowable pasts (and futures), Time Machine style. Furthermore, the project acknowledges a discomfort with inexorable

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<sup>37</sup> Jenß, H. (2005) cited by Baschiera, S. and Caoduro, E. (2015). 'Retro, faux-vintage, and anachronism: When cinema looks back'. *NECSUS European Journal of Media Studies*, p.145

<sup>38</sup> Fisher, pp.2-30

<sup>39</sup> Davis, p.374

<sup>40</sup> Davis, p.374

<sup>41</sup> Abraham, N. and Torok, M. (1987) cited by Davis, p.374

<sup>42</sup> Verwoert, J. (2007). 'Living with Ghosts: From Appropriation to Invocation in Contemporary Art', *Art & Research*, p.3

<sup>43</sup> Pickering, M. and Keightley, E. (2006). 'The Modalities of Nostalgia'. *Current Sociology*, p.919

<sup>44</sup> Pickering and Keightley, p. 919

<sup>45</sup> Pickering and Keightley, p. 919

<sup>46</sup> Pickering and Keightley, p. 920



supersession and the demand for newer, smaller, faster gadgets at the expense of those making them, and a mistrust of the emphasis on constant progress which leaves no space for attachment, then appreciation, then loss. “This disorientation from any sense of continuity or durability increases our sense of ethical perturbation by cutting away the grounds for active dialogue between past and present. All that is left is the negativity of nostalgia – as if, in the headlong tilt of time, all we can do is sigh and lament.”<sup>47</sup> But a positive nostalgia, one which rejects the insistence on temporary and transient and seeks “a viable alternative to the acceleration of historical time”,<sup>48</sup> is one which *can* be seen here – in the making of a record and the printing of wallpaper, rather than a digital projection of a wallpaper design with an attached sound file. I am not idealising. “An active relation to the past has become almost impossible in our contemporary condition, where we have lost a sense of historical location and are locked into an endless succession of depthless presents.”<sup>49</sup>

I just wanted real paper; a little tangibility.

Dive with me back into the box for a moment. Its papers are whispering and shuffling around us. We could find these people and ask them, I suppose. But they are no longer exactly the people we want – temporally, geographically, politically. We can’t ask them *then*.

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<sup>47</sup> Pickering and Keightley, p. 920

<sup>48</sup> Pickering and Keightley, p. 923

<sup>49</sup> Jameson, F. (1991) cited by Pickering and Keightley, p. 923

MR. & MRS. J. WARD

Word

Miss Ward

Ward,

Ward

Ward

Ward

Ward

MR & MRS Roberts

## Surface, in front of wallpaper patterns

Shake your head a little, come back to focus on the plane of the wallpaper. Use it as a visual anchor, a counter to dissociative states, which occur in a mind that is attached to a physical body, still capable of perception of its surroundings, though they may be rendered unreal or absurd.

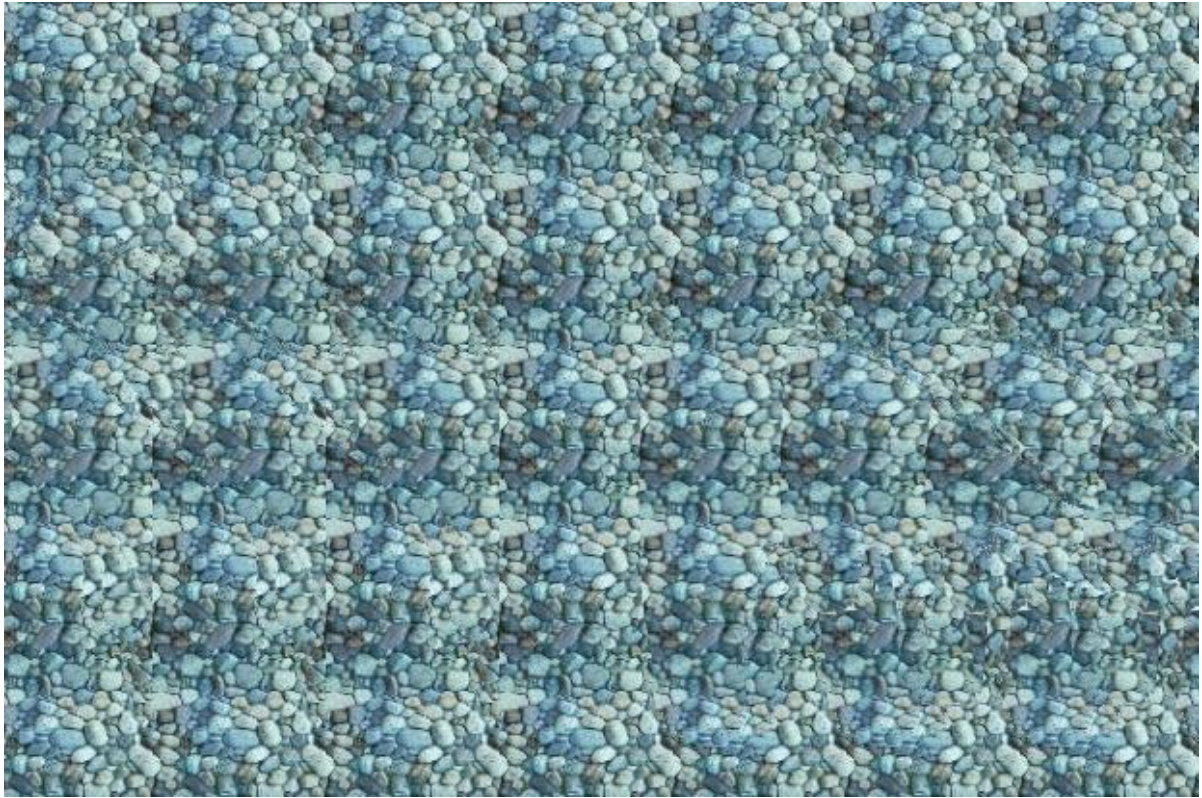
A trellis of damask, stretching and contracting in zigzag repeats, could give sweetly plastered, shifting walls a trustworthy plane, measurable by motif and scale. Patterns can soothe in their repetition, if one focuses on counting, like I used to in my bedroom at Church Road, denying reality. This focus is a type of mindfulness, anchoring the mind in the present experience of viewing, and therefore confirming subjectivity - *I am looking*. This is precarious though, and the way we paper our environments cannot change that. Gilding, one might call it. Not in the sense of gilding the lily; more like using plastic surgery to try to fix a lack of self-esteem.

Patterns can also be an entryway, like in my grandparents' bathroom, where the wallpaper's pattern became three-dimensional when I relaxed my eyes, like those *Magic Eye* pictures in the 90s. This non-focus might be more akin to dissociation, when perception alters to allow illusion, or delusion, or revelation. This could be a "dissolution of subjectivity,"<sup>50</sup> patterns leading one out of oneself. I was always able to blink hard, or shake my head, and my grandparents' bathroom wallpaper would return to the flat plane it had been before. Maybe I was lucky.

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<sup>50</sup> Wells, S. K., (2009). "'Another world,/its walls are thin': psychosis and Catholicism in the texts of Antonia White and Emily Holmes Coleman'. PhD thesis, University of Warwick





27: STEREOGRAM OR 'MAGIC EYE'

Make your luck now. Move at your own pace and in your own patterns across the surface of a remembered wallpaper from childhood, or from your home, or a film. Try to recall its patterns, and the pattern of your looking. Don't look at mine yet, just see the remembered patterns sprawling, as the paper takes on its various roles: characters both benign and otherwise, stage or backdrop or context, and at times - "but I must not think about that."<sup>51</sup> Use the paper as a point of focus - hold onto it, and dissociation might be avoided. Listen: my song will bring you round again.

Now look at my wallpaper.

Dive.

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<sup>51</sup> Perkins Gilman, p.24



28: ZAC LANGDON-POLE, *PARADISE BLUEPRINT* (2017)



29: SONIA BOYCE, *SIX ACTS* (2018)



## Surface, in a comfortable chair by the record player - haunted

Ask yourself now - as the voices fade in and out and the turntable arm lifts, whirrs softly to the outer edge of the spinning disc and drops to start again - where the sound ends and your thinking about it begins. "Hauntology has an intrinsically sonic dimension",<sup>52</sup> a question of hearing what is not here. (Here-ing what is not hear).

The digitally reproduced sound of the crackle of vinyl has been pasted into the audio track of several of my Premiere Pro projects. I was perhaps falling into the trap of reacting to "accelerated times and the impact of digital technologies,... (wanting) to overcome and cure... 'homesickness' for the past via media itself"<sup>53</sup> and believing what digital media in particular is able to pretend to be, with "growing volumes of digitally available (versions of) analogue content"<sup>54</sup> easy to find and often free to use. I would loop the sound, making sure it never ended. But it was invisible looping, a trick. Although wary of "veering towards excavation of curious instruments and odd gadgets just for their own sake"<sup>55</sup> and producing a "vicarious time machine,"<sup>56</sup> creating a record nonetheless felt like an elegant solution to the need for a symbiotic partner to the wallpaper – the circularly shaped container of sound turning in time but resisting progression, providing a temporal aspect to the installation that makes space for looking, while the wallpaper occupies the eyes, making space for listening.

"The crackle of an LP ... remind(s) us that we are interacting with something that is a recording of that which is past."<sup>57</sup> Though not necessarily in this case. The recording is past, yes. The sung words are lifted from the box, translated into voice, recorded, digitally manipulated and pressed onto a record, all before this moment. But the sound is not permitted to end; the player repeats, looping like a carousel, bringing the familiar tune back around and back around again, never complete, always lacking, trapping a moment like a photograph does.<sup>58</sup> The turntable is a loop too, doggedly revolving through the time between the Box and now, unchanged in its mechanism for the most part.

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<sup>52</sup> Fisher, p.120

<sup>53</sup> Niemeyer, K (ed.). *Media and nostalgia: Yearning for the past, present and future*. Basingstoke/New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

<sup>54</sup> Russell, P. (2014) *Re:found footage*. [www.bfi.org.uk](http://www.bfi.org.uk)

<sup>55</sup> Parikka, J. (2012). *What is Media Archaeology?*. Cambridge: Polity, p.144

<sup>56</sup> Russell, P. (2014) *Re:found footage*. [www.bfi.org.uk](http://www.bfi.org.uk)

<sup>57</sup> Fisher, p.21-22

<sup>58</sup> Barthes, R. (1993). *Camera Lucida*. London: Vintage, p.4-5



Some of what has been written on the role of archive footage and found film could equally be applied to the use of these found mechanisms and media instruments, though these seem to be thought about, on the whole, as if they are separate entities. For example, the use of archive footage has been referred to as having “auratic force,”<sup>59</sup> “a particular sense of modernity that is... deeply compelling”<sup>60</sup> and as creating “a gap, a void, a space (which) leaves way for the processes of interpretation and intervention,”<sup>61</sup> whereas media-archaeological works tend to be treated as metacommentaries on media culture, its motifs, its structures, and its ideological, social, psychological, and economic implications.<sup>62</sup>

Fetishism for the past is vast – Instagram filters mimicking outmoded photography long after “the ‘structure of feeling’<sup>63</sup> gave an indication of how successful these images might be if extensively taken up by digital technology,”<sup>64</sup> the return of LOMO, hipsters, dramatic increases in vinyl record production – and the regurgitation of the past in the present often interpreted as indicating taste, stylishness and intellect. Perhaps providing a little ironic counter to the rapidity of social media image sharing, too.

Fisher conjects that past hopefulness is haunting, when looking back onto that prior forward-looking.<sup>65</sup> But we can look both ways. That’s the beauty of a loop; of a carousel. That’s contemporary fashion: revival, with a twist. Anyway, can anything ever be *new* again? Postmodernism will process it, filtering it through ironic discourse, “not articulated simply as mockery, but rather as a rational proof vest that protects... from nostalgia.”<sup>66</sup> But then, “we hardly know what postmodernism was.”<sup>67</sup>

It doesn’t matter – let it loop. Let it sweep you along in its eddy.

Dive.

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<sup>59</sup> Malik, A. (2006) ‘History in the Present’. *Ghosting: The Role of the Archive within Contemporary Artists’ Film and Video*. Edited by Jane Connarty and Josephine Lanyon. Bristol: Taylor Brothers, p.48

<sup>60</sup> Malik, p.50

<sup>61</sup> Malik, p.70

<sup>62</sup> Huhtamo, E. (2016). ‘Art in the Rear-View Mirror: The Media-Archaeological Tradition in Art’, in: Paul, C. (ed.) *Blackwell Companion to Digital Art*. New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, p. 69-72

<sup>63</sup> Williams (1977), cited by Bartholeyns, G. (2014). ‘The Instant Past: Nostalgia and Digital Retro Photography’. In: Niemeyer, K. (ed.) *Media and Nostalgia*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p.52

<sup>64</sup> Bartholeyns, G. (2014). ‘The Instant Past: Nostalgia and Digital Retro Photography’. In: Niemeyer, K. (ed.) *Media and Nostalgia*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p.52

<sup>65</sup> Fisher, p.21-25

<sup>66</sup> Apolloni, p.2

<sup>67</sup> Ihab, H. (2003) cited in Apolloni, p.5



30: HOLLY PESTER, *COMMON REST* (2016)

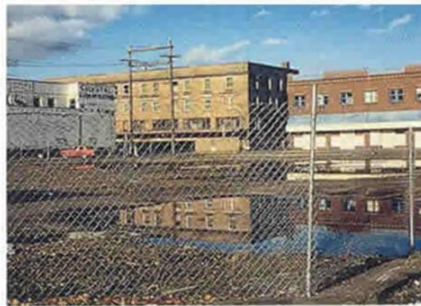


31: KIRSTY HARRIS, *HOW I LEARNED TO STOP WORRYING* (2019 – IN PRODUCTION)

## Surface, revolving

Think about a narrative which is a carousel. It's a variation on the familiar circular or cyclical narrative whose end mirrors or repeats the beginning - like nothing has changed, like it was inevitable - because that simple circularity isn't going to work for us. There isn't a single, repeatable circuit we can tread, either in the Box or in the resulting wallpaper. Graham made a carousel, a series of images which cannot return to its beginning, since there is none. He wanted boredom, he wanted same-old, same-old. But that's more of a conveyor belt, really. We, on the other hand, need horses. We need to move vertically as well as being part of a rotating whole, so that each element of the narrative can shift in its relation to the others, equal and unhindered by fixed associations.

Carousel narratives



32: RODNEY GRAHAM, ABERDEEN (2000)



Robbe-Grillet's *L'Année Dernière à Marienbad* visualises this idea. Characters' costumes change with the camera angle, suggesting that memory is being checked, re-worked, corrected. They repeat phrases, as does the narrator, who sometimes is and sometimes doesn't seem to be the male protagonist we see. Seyrig's unnamed character performs gestures and movements at the instruction of the narrator, repeats them in a series of recurring locations, wearing different clothes and surrounded by different - or more or fewer - mansion occupants. At one point she laughs, and her laugh is echoed by/repeated by/transferred into the mouth of another female, one of the human objects (these objects are not people, but props, or furniture). Seyrig's character's utterance is circular, coming out of her mouth and then into her ear via another person's mouth, ready to be laughed once more, in later scenes. There is a sense that these human objects are stuck like ghosts in loops of time, destined to repeat their words and gestures forever, perhaps inflecting differently next time, perhaps not.

Carousel narratives



33: *L'ANNÉE DERNIÈRE À MARIENBAD* (1961), DIR: ALAIN RESNAIS

As in Robbe-Grillet's novels, the reader/viewer is unable to locate the beginning of this film's narrative. The opening narration - "once more I advance through these corridors" - gives the impression that this is not the speaker's first time here, yet describes in great detail the architectural features and decor of the room as if on a first visit, or in an act of memorising, the type of memorising one might do in a place which *cannot* be returned to. This opening sequence is evocative of the 'memory-palace' or 'method of loci' technique of remembering, which might imply that the narrator is engaging with a self-constructed memory aid rather than materially

inhabiting a place. Equally, given Albertazzi's (also unnamed) character's repeated command to Seyrig's character - "remember" - we could also suppose that this describing of the surroundings is a series of orders: just as he tells her how to position herself, how close she should be to him and where she was last year, so he commands her to remember these rooms and halls, the stucco and the columns, the mirrors and the garden, perhaps as a trigger for the other things she is being directed to remember. It brings to mind a scene in Layton's *The Imposter* in which Frederic Bourdin claims that his 'sister' was complicit in his imposture, because she taught him all the names of the family he was about to deceive, repeating the words "you remember" with each photograph she showed him. Layton shot the whole of this documentary in standard interview style - with the subjects looking off-frame at an unseen interviewer - except for the interviews with Bourdin in which he invariably looks straight into the camera, straight at us. Resnais and Robbe-Grillet have Albertazzi's character looking into the camera too, just a few times, at moments when it seems the viewer is required to take up his role as accomplice. And you're complicit with me, too. I made *Sand House Hotel*, transporting us into stolen images, giving them a temporality that the photographer hadn't intended. But they, and you, are now implicated in my narrative. Ignorance is no defence. They have been "grafted onto other... corpses,"<sup>68</sup> by both of us.

But this box is not ours to inflict linear temporality upon, as we might have to do with moving image. "All the moments of our life occupy the same space, as if future events already existed and were only waiting for us to find our way to them at last, just as when we have accepted an

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<sup>68</sup> Reynolds, L. (2006) 'Outside the Archive: The World in Fragments'. *Ghosting: The Role of the Archive within Contemporary Artists' Film and Video*. Edited by Jane Connarty and Josephine Lanyon. Bristol: Taylor Brothers, p.16



34: SAND HOUSE HOTEL (A CHAPTER OF GHOST BOX)

invitation we duly arrive in a certain house at a given time.”<sup>69</sup>

Anyway, I’d be misleading both of us if I pretended that I’m still thinking about the Box itself, the concrete object with its yellowed papers. I’m too far down the wormhole, seduced by the imagery the Box has prompted me to find. This is no longer a story.

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<sup>69</sup> Sebald, W. G., (2001). *Austerlitz*. Penguin, London. p.257



## Surface in Rossnowlagh, “a broad, sandy stretch of heaven”<sup>70</sup> - end of June 1972

Two people stayed at the Sand House Hotel, in room 12, for two nights. They paid for bed and breakfast. They had afternoon tea, just once. The beach is well-known for surfing<sup>71</sup>, so it may have been busy, “in summer (when) the holiday homes fill up and numbers swell.”<sup>72</sup> “Erosion in the central area was highest between 1951 and 1977. Construction of rock armour, which started with armament of the dune front in front of the Sand House Hotel, has stopped erosion at these locations. The rock armour was not placed in one long protection, but in an ad hoc manner over short lengths. Between these armoured sections erosion has continued, giving the dune front a ragged appearance.”<sup>73</sup> Behind the armour, the Sand House Hotel looms yellow.



35: ROSSNOWLAGH BEACH IN WINTER (LEFT) AND SUMMER (RIGHT)

The photographer has interpreted the hotel’s interior as still, waiting. (Place your own actions here.) The effect is like one of Joseph’s ‘screened stages’ – a stage that appears within a film - creating a "moment of ‘liveness’ within the cinematic.”<sup>74</sup> She is referring to Wes Anderson’s use of these stages to create "miniaturizations of the mourning process and a working through and communal witnessing of the relinquishment of the mourned-for lost object" - "fram(ing) an absent present and love (in combination with grief) for that which has

<sup>70</sup> *Rossnowlagh in detail* (2019). [www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com)

<sup>71</sup> *The History of Surfing in Ireland*. [www.irishsurfing.ie](http://www.irishsurfing.ie)

<sup>72</sup> *Rossnowlagh in detail*

<sup>73</sup> Lynn, V. ‘Rossnowlagh: Donegal County (Ireland)’, *Euroasion*. [copranet.projects.eucc-d.de](http://copranet.projects.eucc-d.de)

<sup>74</sup> Joseph R. (2014). “Max Fischer Presents”: Wes Anderson and the Theatricality of Mourning. In: Kunze, P.C. (ed.) *The Films of Wes Anderson*. Palgrave Macmillan: New York.

disappeared."<sup>75</sup> (Here is nostalgia again. Why does borrowing from the past to create an atmosphere in the present feel like cheating?)

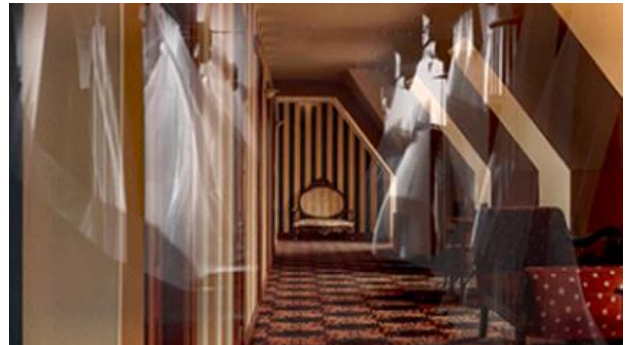
Screened stages



36: THE SAND HOUSE HOTEL



37: THE GRAND BUDAPEST HOTEL (2014), DIR: WES ANDERSON



38: SAND HOUSE HOTEL (A CHAPTER OF GHOST BOX)



39: THE SHINING (1980), DIR: STANLEY KUBRICK



40: A TALE OF TWO SISTERS (2003), DIR: JEE-WOON KIM

<sup>75</sup> Joseph, p. R. (2014). "Max Fischer Presents": Wes Anderson and the Theatricality of Mourning. In: Kunze, P.C. (ed.) *The Films of Wes Anderson*. Palgrave Macmillan: New York.



41: SAND HOUSE HOTEL (A CHAPTER OF GHOST BOX)

I'd go further, and say that staging is implicative, particularly when the stage is empty. It is accusatory, of the viewer (you) perhaps, or of the location itself - the interior sitting mute around the boundary of the scene of something. Or both; you're not off the hook that easily.



I felt like it was duplicitous,

like you'd tricked me with that marketing footage made atmospheric.

I wanted a flicker

## Surface, as a witness

Dupuy talks about "colour-coding of the interior,"<sup>76</sup> claiming that it indicates that "the locus of anxiety in (*A Tale of Two Sisters*) is the house itself (and) invoke(s) a sense of decay and stolen youth."<sup>77</sup> Interiors are signifiers, then, complicit in the action. They become character-interiors, such as The Overlook in Kubrick's adaptation of *The Shining*, the all-but-abandoned apartment building in Babak Anvari's *Under the Shadow*, the school in Dario Argento's *Suspria*, or the tower in J. G. Ballard's *High Rise*.

Character-interiors



42: UNDER THE SHADOW (2016), DIR: BABAK ANVARI

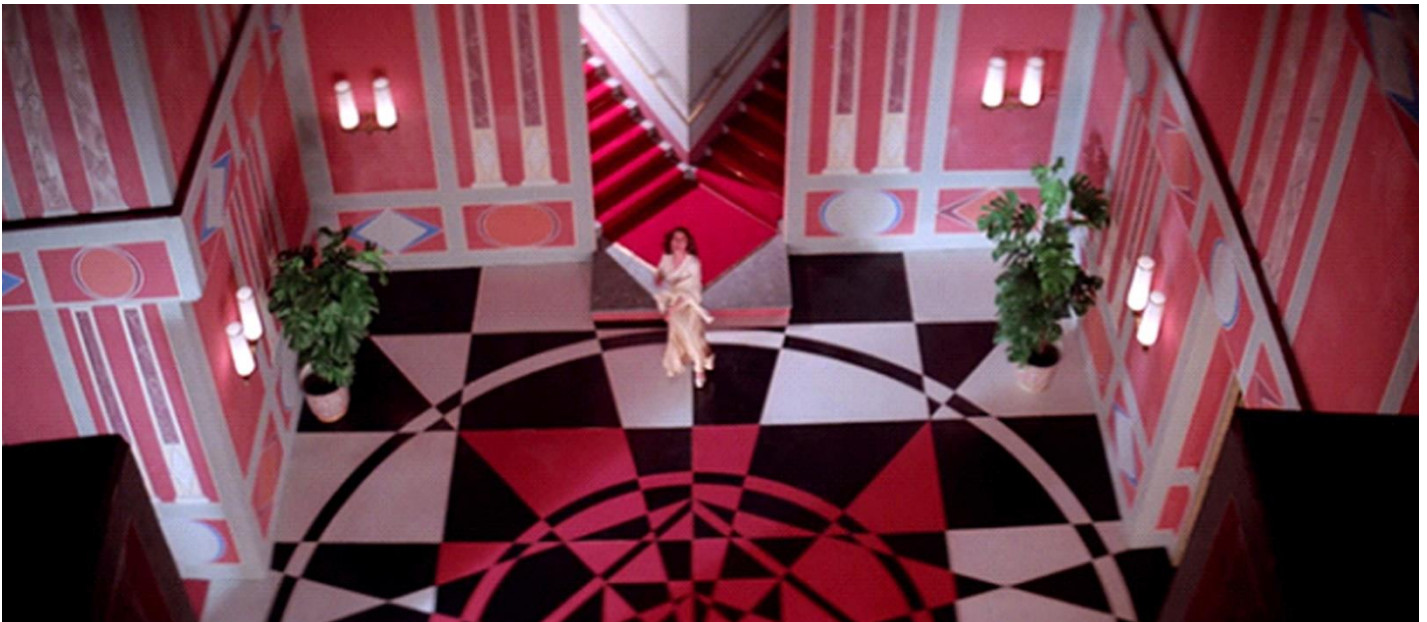
What is it about certain interiors that so convinces us they have personality, agency, an agenda, a persistent history? Perhaps it is due to the unheimlich motifs which populate much of our literature, particularly in childhood (well, mine at least). The sugar house lures Hansel and Gretel in for the witch; the wolf waits for us to arrive, dressed as grandma and tucked into her bed: both houses in on it.

But that literature may exist precisely *because* of this suspicion we have about an empty interior. So then, it could be due to the amount of time we tend to spend in our own domestic environs at the age when imagination is forming? Awareness is expanding, so creating a

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<sup>76</sup> Dupuy, C. (2007). "Why don't you remember? Are you crazy?": Korean Gothic and psychosis in *A Tale of Two Sisters*. *The Irish Journal of Gothic and Horror Studies*; p. 67

<sup>77</sup> Dupuy, p. 67

43: *THE SHINING* (1980), DIR: STANLEY KUBRICK44: *SUSPIRIA* (1977), DIR: DARIO ARGENTO

combination of familiarity and uncertainty as the physicality of our homes creeps into our growing perception of things outside our bodies, and coincides with the beginnings of our ability to understand things symbolically, and to grasp the ideas of past and future.<sup>78</sup> Alternatively, perhaps it is simply an instinctive mistrust of such manufactured environments, that hangs over from a time before they existed. And what are the ingredients of this suspicion, this feeling that a domestic interior may not be entirely benign? Consider Danny, trapped in the maze of the

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<sup>78</sup> Four cognitive stages for child development. [www.learningrx.com](http://www.learningrx.com)



Overlook's tessellating carpet (above). Backwards and forwards are woven together in that pattern, blind alleys flashing red with danger. In the country house, Morris's *Blackthorn* looms dark behind Su-mi and Su-yeon, symmetrical but tangled like a forest fortress. In the bedroom, the chintz is smothering, saturating, sickly (below).

#### Character-interiors



45: A TALE OF TWO SISTERS (2003), DIR: JEE-WOON KIM



46: A TALE OF TWO SISTERS (2003), DIR: JEE-WOON KIM

More than a century ago, Perkins Gilman's narrator is mistrustful: "this paper looks to me as if it knew what a vicious influence it had! There is a recurrent spot where the pattern lolls like a broken neck and two bulbous eyes stare at you upside down."<sup>79</sup> She is breaking down. "The

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<sup>79</sup> Perkins Gilman, p.25

very distinction between past and present is breaking down. In 1981, the 1960s seemed much further away than they do today. Since then, cultural time has folded back on itself, and the impression of linear development has given way to a strange simultaneity.”<sup>80</sup>

And so I leave you, listening, in this little loop of time that I have fixed. It references a memory from 1972, a memory which is not mine. But neither is it theirs, not anymore. And it becomes more and more yours, the longer you listen. You are reminded, the longer it continues. You are reminded. It is familiar.

I leave you, looking. I leave you in front of my patterns, to witness. The images repeat, and so do you, in noticing them. You are reminded. They persist.

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<sup>80</sup> Fisher, p.9

## Tailpiece to diving

You do not *steal* the box.

You ask people if they recognise it. You know nobody will claim it.

Open it and glance briefly through its contents in order to check that it isn't obviously the property of someone you know, or can guess at.

The contents are familiar now, but no more conclusive.

Alone, later, you lay the contents out carefully - scanning them; choosing a starting point.







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