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## ***The Peter & nou Project: A Beginning***

‘Truth is a matter of the imagination.’

Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness*, 1969

One morning in 2014 I awoke from a vivid dream and in those fuzzy moments between sleeping and waking I could remember that dream clearly. In it, my younger self was animated - smiling, waving and popping a pill - on the side of a huge digital billboard in the film *Blade Runner* (Dir. Ridley Scott, 1982). Suddenly I was reminded of something which I thought I had quite forgotten – that in *Blade Runner* there is an image of me woven into the landscape of Scott’s 2019 Los Angeles, caught between an advertisement for Coca Cola and a sultry, smoking geisha. My search for that forgotten and now remembered image in *Blade Runner* was the start of what would become a major research project - ongoing to this day - and now the subject of this thesis.

Speculative, indeterminate and disorienting, the works of my research, which for ease of discussion I have collectively entitled *The Peter & nou Project*, grew organically and imaginatively, initially without a distinct map or territory. What started as an exploration of my relationship with the cultural object that

is *Blade Runner* took on a life of its own in many respects, resulting in works which, though made in a particular order and with a grounding in linear narrative, began to affect each other in ways I could not have predicted. Ideas which appeared rooted in fact became science fiction (and vice versa), authorial voices turned out to be unreliable and the bodies of the works' protagonists began to merge. One singular narrative for the project became impossible to distinguish and even the author of the works became hard to pin down. *The Peter & nou Project* is a disorientating, fantastic and at times absurd constellation of works which revels in its multiple, mutating 'truths'.

But as I was saying, one morning in 2014 I awoke from a vivid dream and in those fuzzy moments between sleeping and waking, in that time of semi-consciousness, in this altered state, I began imagining what would become *The Peter & nou Project*...

## ***The Peter & nou Project: A Description***

*The Peter & nou Project* consists of, to date, four interwoven artworks:

- *Peter* (2014), Single Channel Digital Video, 29:55 minutes
- *nou* (2018), Single Channel Digital Video, 18:01 minutes.
- *Peter & nou* (2018), Publication, *Good Press*, Glasgow, Scotland.
- [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) (2018 - Ongoing), Website.

These four works are the focus of this thesis, along with the underpinning research of *The Peter & nou Project* carried out from January 2014 to April 2018. A short piece of archival footage - *The Horizon Object* (Video, 4:55 minutes, 2014) – is the defining attribute shared by the works of the project.

The project offers a significant contribution to a recent trend in British contemporary art which David Burrows and Simon O’Sullivan have called ‘fictioning’, a term which broadly refers to practices which blur the boundary between reality and fiction. There is a renewed interest in fictioning in contemporary practice and our wider culture. The emergence of phrases such as ‘post-truth’ and ‘alternative fact’ into our cultural landscape is indicative of current challenges to truth, particularly as a mechanism for

asserting political dominance (McIntyre, 2018: xiv). Reality has become a relative term, foregrounding and problematising perception in everyday life. There is, therefore, a political and ethical urgency for artists to engage fictioning as a practice so that art might map out new territory, promote new perspectives and suggest alternatives to the political climate in which it is made.

Through its dense weave of methodological approaches - including, but not limited to, use of the archive, science fiction tropes, the cut-up, altered states and intertextuality - *The Peter & nou Project* operates beyond the gallery space. The project challenges stories told by moving image, literature and biography forms. Where once such stories might have been consumed and accepted as the truth, *The Peter & nou Project* demands a reappraisal of such forms and our relationship to them, resulting in a calling into question of truth on both a personal and cultural level.

## How to Access *The Peter & nou Project*

### 1. The Videos

The videos *Peter* (2014) and *nou* (2018) are on the USB provided or can be accessed via [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) (see below).

The videos *Peter* (2014) and *nou* (2018) are also available to view via these Vimeo links:

*Peter* (2014): <https://vimeo.com/118989354>

*nou* (2018): <https://vimeo.com/266847565>

Other videos listed in the *Timeline of Practice* can also be viewed via Vimeo at <https://vimeo.com/janetopping>.

### 2. The Book(s)

The publication *Peter & nou* (2018) has been provided and comprises two books (one containing two postcards), a sticker, an envelope and address slip. Also provided is an envelope containing A 35mm 208-ish Frame Version of *Blade Runner* (2018) – this is the package you would have received, had you sent off the envelope that comes with the publication.

Also included is a set of five badges. These replicate the 'refresher buttons' on [www.rabbitcottonoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottonoothcottonrabbit.com) and were given away at the launch of *Peter & nou* (2018).

### **3. The Online Artwork**

[www.rabbitcottonoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottonoothcottonrabbit.com) is an online artwork. It contains all works completed since January 2014, along with much of the research towards those works and some unfinished or abandoned works. There is no way to control what you see and hear when you visit this work and no two visits to [www.rabbitcottonoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottonoothcottonrabbit.com) are the same. Please refer to Appendix 0.1 for more information about the structure and operation of [www.rabbitcottonoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottonoothcottonrabbit.com).

## Methodologies of This Text

This thesis is a reflective and interpretive account of the project, one which adopts three main strategies with respect to critique, authorial voice and image organisation. These strategies echo methodologies evident in *The Peter & nou Project* and are employed so that this text may become a valuable element of *The Peter & nou Project* as it continues to develop.

Though the intended readership of this thesis is an academic one, the text will also serve as *The Peter & nou Handbook* – a kind of field guide to or map of the project - an aid to future thinking and making, allowing for points of departure. Strategies evident in this text are:

### 1. Critique: Close Reading of the Works

A close reading of the works which make up *The Peter & nou Project* is employed in this thesis as a strategy for reflection and elucidation. Focus is on the formal and conceptual aspects of individual works and the importance of their source materials in their success. Throughout the text, relationships between the works will be noted and their effect on each other considered.

My scrutiny of the works of the project will consider how the languages of video, publication and the web function, in conjunction with my strategies of making, to create a fabric of new narratives from old. The framework for reflection is intermittently augmented by appropriate analysis of external influences at the time of making, of previous works, of exhibition and other contexts in order to be as comprehensive as possible.

Looking, searching and sifting through layers is part of a viewer's experience of *The Peter & nou Project* reflected in this thesis by my use of close reading.

## 2. Two Tones of Voice

While the main body of this thesis is a critical analysis of *The Peter & nou Project* aimed at the scholar, I employ the footnote as a second tone of voice. The inclusion of two orders of information is intended as an admission of the impossibility of a single authorial voice while revealing the processes of my research and drawing together the discourse of scholar and fan.

Present throughout the project are multiple voices (including those of unreliable and alien narrators) which prevent a clear definition of a single author and so complicating notions of truthfulness. In this thesis, the main

body of the text can be considered as the academic, external voice while the footnote can be thought of as something more internal – the inner thoughts of the artist and writer. The footnotes divulge threads which are connected to the main body of text but which are, due to the restrictions of this thesis, necessarily left hanging. The language of the footnotes is often un-academic, offering the reader a change of pace and tone while mirroring the inclusive and interdisciplinary nature of my practice-based research.

Tacita Dean has described the retrospective texts that accompanied her works in the curated exhibition *An Aside* (2005) as 'asides'. In these texts

the artist articulates beautifully the working-through of her practice, not as explanation but, as she informs us, as an "aside": 'independent yet connected.' (Morra, 2008: 54)

Similarly, the footnotes of this thesis are intended to introduce or develop 'threads of conscious and unconscious desire, of incidence and accident, of memories and musings, of free association and asides.' (Morra, 2008: 54) while revealing the process of research as a working-through of ideas.

Communities within popular science fiction discourse are often mixed – the fan and the academic often sharing the same platform<sup>1</sup> - and this thesis attempts to be true to my research interests as an artist, academic and fan of popular science fiction. The reader may choose to ignore the footnotes for a less fragmented reading experience, though fragmentation is also key to *The Peter & nou Project* itself. My footnotes are experimental and as Frances Stark (2010) has said, 'could become a gimmick [sic] or an honest articulation of the workings of the mind'.

Each chapter of this text is introduced by an epigraph, intended to offer the reader one context for the text that follows.<sup>2</sup> As a reflection of the multiple narratives at work in the project and of the fragmentary and often evasive nature of practice-based research, this thesis has three 'alternate' endings.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For instance at WisCon, the feminist science fiction and fantasy convention held annually in Madison, Wisconsin which programmes academic papers alongside fan discussion, kids workshops and gaming.

<sup>2</sup> Font fact - this thesis is written in Avenir Book - a geometric sans-serif typeface designed by Adrian Frutiger in 1987. The word avenir is French for "future" and Avenir is also currently used as the city of Amsterdam's corporate identity, by the Co-op and Snapchat.

<sup>3</sup> An early version of this thesis was organised as a 'Choose Your Own Adventure' book. Needless to say, this text became absurdly complicated almost immediately and I dropped the idea in favour of the more conventional text you are reading now. The artwork [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) is as close to a personal adventure as the project (currently) gets.

### 3. Two Types of Image

Mirroring my use of two tones of voice, this thesis also uses two orders of image to support the text. The first type of image can be described as academic – representative of the work discussed. The second type of image makes visible some of the processes of research and making. These images are of objects related to the works of *The Peter & nou Project* and include diagrams, previous artworks and evidence of the work and its research territory in the world. This second order of image offers a context for the project and I think of them as being similar to ‘kipple’, Philip K. Dick’s term for:

useless objects, like junk mail or match folders after you use the last match or gum wrappers of yesterday's homeopape. When nobody's around, kipple reproduces itself. For instance, if you go to bed leaving any kipple around your apartment, when you wake up the next morning there's twice as much of it. It always gets more and more.  
(Dick, 1968: 53)

However, the image-kipple of this thesis is not useless (as in Dick’s definition) but is an acknowledgement of the hierarchies of image that exist in the ‘real world’ and online and which may be conflated by the researcher. The illuminations and misunderstandings that moving between orders of image (and text) can engender is one effect of *The Peter & nou Project* which this thesis will mirror.

## ***The Peter & nou Project: A Context***

Before I introduce the project in detail, I offer the following brief context for my practice overall.

*The Peter & nou Project* is one strand of an interdisciplinary art practice which admits its keen engagement with pop culture made so accessible and malleable, particularly in the last decade, by the ubiquity of information available via the Net and affordable filmmaking software. My practice unashamedly pulls the majority of its material from online sources and so its products are often superficially less reminiscent of contemporary art than they are of mainstream science fiction film.

I have an interest in using literary figures in my practice which dates back to 2005 and the solo exhibition *They Are the We of Me* (Glasgow's Gallery of Modern Art, 2005) which was a visual and imaginary exploration of the works and life of the writer Carson McCullers, comprising drawings, paintings and sculpture. In 2008 I became a tutor on the Fine Art Programme at the University of Cumbria Institute of the Arts (of which I am currently Programme Leader) and the interdisciplinary nature of our course influenced my practice significantly. Almost immediately my practice expanded to include

filmmaking, photography and the written word and broadened its scope beyond the literary to include speculative fiction, feminism, the archive, intertextuality, the screen and the life and works of writers Naomi Mitchison and Philip K. Dick. My practice is also fuelled by an interest in pre-existing screen versions of what could be considered my work, by which I mean that much of my working practice involves tracking down moving and still images which can be stitched together to tell a narrative of my invention. For instance, my 2015 video *White Wash Death Watch* (Fig. 1) consists entirely of scenes from the film *Death Watch* (Dir. Bertrand Tavernier, 1980) a science fiction film made in Glasgow which uses the decrepit, pre-gentrified state of my home city to signal a future in decline, two years before Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* would 'invent' the post-modern cityscape.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *White Wash Death Watch* is a ten-minute video which removes everything but shots of Glasgow, Scotland and Romy Schneider from *Death Watch*. To focus on the landscapes of 1979 Glasgow and the West Coast of Scotland was admittedly a sentimental act. *Death Watch* has been described as 'a nostalgia-fest' and 'for Glaswegians, a remarkable, dreamlike vision' (Glasgow Film Theatre, 2016), which is absolutely my experience of the film. Watching *Death Watch* I experienced for the first time, nostalgia for a time and place which I had, being 7 years old in 1979, effectively not known. I am clearly not alone. Alison Young's interview with the director Bertrand Tavernier is entirely concerned with his and the crew's relationship with Glasgow. (Young, 2014).



Fig. 1: Screen Shot of *White Wash Death Watch* (2015) (Credit: the author).

The way that information can appear equivalent when using the Net as a resource has encouraged me to think of myself as a scholar, a fan and an artist – a fractured self with whom I believe many artists who work in academia would also identify. As a result, the tone of much of my practice flits unselfconsciously between academic discourse, seemingly inconsequential pop-cultural knowledge and personal revelation.

In 2014 when I began to make the works which would become *The Peter & nou Project*, I was watching a good deal of feminist and queer science fiction. Of particular interest were *Technology/Transformation: Wonder Woman* (Birnbaum, 1978-1979), *Born in Flames* (Borden, 1983), *Liquid Sky* (Tsukerman, 1982), *Conceiving Ada* (Hershman-Leeson, 1997) and *Gravity*

and *Grace* (Kraus, 1996) all of which have had an influence on my current practice, from my appropriation and collaging of televisual images to my use of science fiction narratives to voice previously unheard, mainly feminist, stories. At this time I was also aware of a developing discourse around technology's influence on storytelling with the publication of essays such as *Future Fictions: How will stories be told in the future?* (Cheng et al., 2013: 191-199) and the increasing visibility of science fiction as a means of experimentation in both literature and contemporary art, including works such the collaborative text *Futureways* (McBride, R. (ed.) 2005) and Marvin Gaye Chetwynd's (as was) performance *Home Made Tasers* (2015).

Informing my thinking around the start of the project were my experiences of watching films on video in the 1980s<sup>5</sup> and the atmospheric qualities of British speculative fiction on television, particularly *Stars of the Roller State Disco* (1984) directed by Alan Clarke and *The Stone Tape* (1972) written by Nigel Kneale. I was also intrigued by ways that the documentary form could be used to re-evaluate historical events or as a tool of deception and so I was watching Peter Watkins' documentaries *The War Game* (1965) and *Punishment Park* (1971), Orson Welles' *F for Fake* (1973) and *Room 237* (2012, Dir. Rodney Ascher). Johan Grimponprez's *Dial H.I.S.T.O.R.Y.* (1997) was an important work

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<sup>5</sup> from *Bugsy Malone* (1976) to *Zombie Flesh Eaters* (1979) via *The Monster Club* (1981).

of political collage for me during the initial stages of making *Peter* (2014), as were the works of Adam Curtis and, of course, Christian Marclay's unequalled collage film *The Clock* (2010). I was also watching a fair amount of user-generated content on YouTube such as *Kittens, Inspired by Kittens* (2008)<sup>6</sup> and *Harrison Ford (My Wife! My Family!)* (2008).

Contemporary influences during the making of the project include works by Hito Steyerl, Camille Henrot and many Afrofuturist works I encountered at the exhibition *Into the Unknown: A Journey Through Science Fiction* (2017), an exhibition which seemed to offer my practice a contemporary context and encouraged me to think that my use of science fiction tropes and narratives within a fine art context was shared within a community of practice.

Particularly important were Soda Jerk's video installation of *Astro Black* (2007-ongoing) and Nuotama Frances Bodomo's *Afronauts* (2014) both of which are concerned with creating alternative histories with the use, in part, of the broadcast archive. The anxieties of future communication as depicted in Wanuri Kahiu's *Pumzi* (2009) and the faking of an archaeological past in Larissa Sansour/Soren Lind's *In the Future They Ate From the Finest Porcelain* (2016) were also in my mind as I began to make *nou* (2018).

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<sup>6</sup> Kind of a post-net (*nostalgia*) (Dir. Hollis Frampton, 1971).

While making *nou* in 2017 I was immersed in the science fiction and biographies of Naomi Mitchison and reading key feminist science fiction including Joanna Russ' *The Female Man* (1975) and Octavia Butler's *The Parable of the Sower* (1993). Late in 2018, I discovered Richard Littler's blog and books which feature Scarfolk, 'a town in North West England that did not progress beyond 1979' and in which 'hauntology is a compulsory subject at school' (scarfolk.blogspot.com, 2019) (Fig. 2).

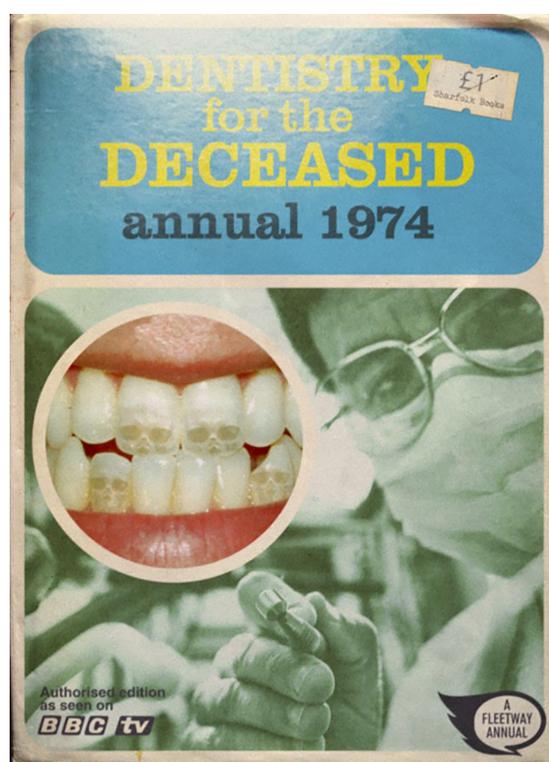


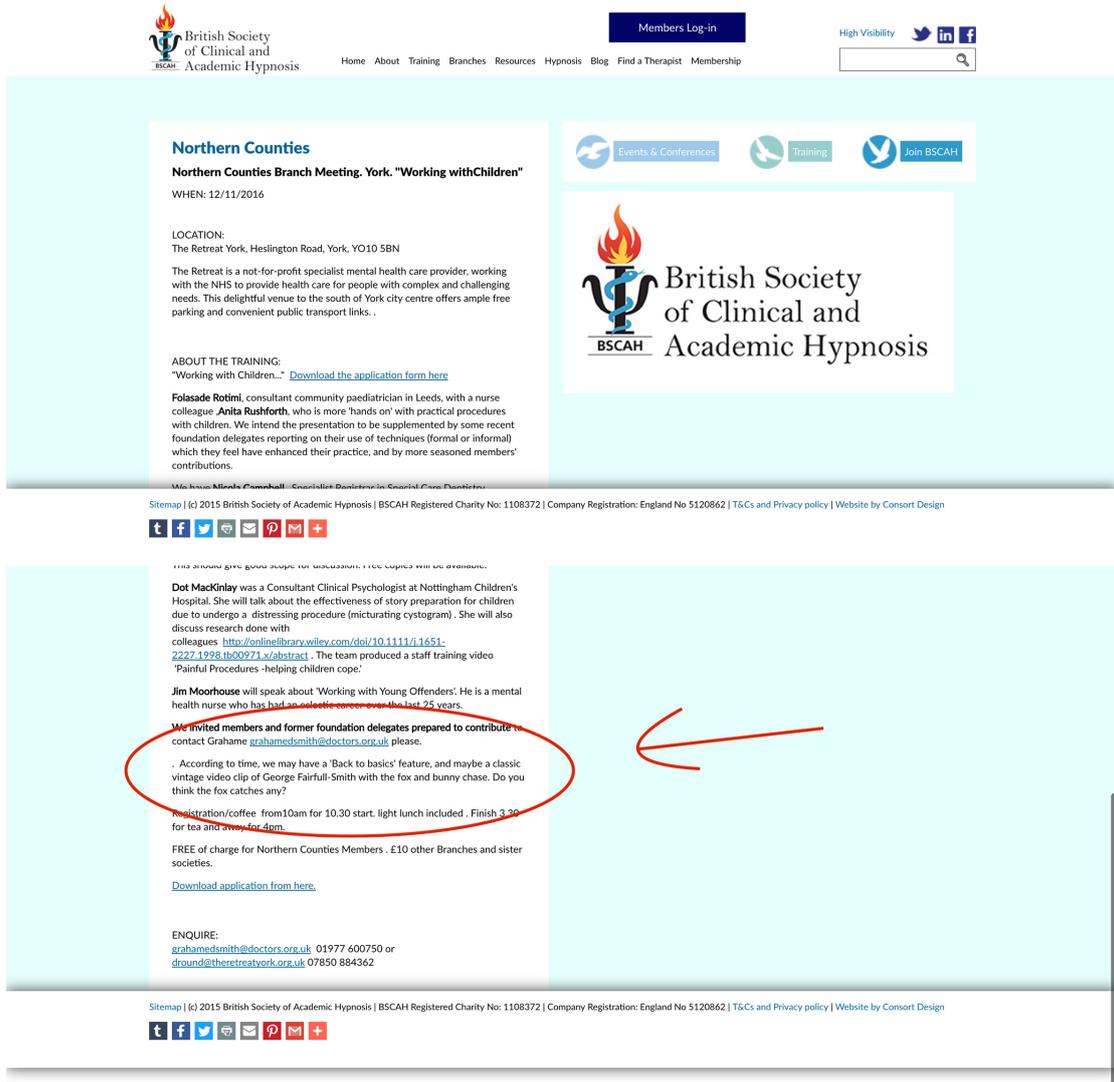
Fig. 2: This won't hurt a bit – Scarfolk's *Dentistry for the Deceased annual 1974* (Credit: Richard Littler).

This range of influences both historical and contemporary, literary and pop-cultural, though in the main fictional, feed the project with a relatively broad range of sources and methodologies, resulting in an interdisciplinary practice which is not easy to pigeonhole. As a result, my work is able to contribute to

a range of discourses across discipline areas including fine art, filmmaking and literature, opening up new areas of discussion and offering fresh perspectives in each.<sup>7</sup> For instance, after its screening as part of group exhibition *The Luck of Edenhall* (2014), *Peter* (2014) went on to win Best Philip K. Dick Short Film at *The Fifth Annual Philip K. Dick Science Fiction Film Festival*, New York (2017), screened in film festivals internationally including *ANTIPHON*, Kochi-Muziris Biennale, Kerala – curated by Lux Scotland (2017), *The 31st Hamburg International Short Film Festival* (2015) and *The 12<sup>th</sup> International Festival Signes de Nuit*, Paris (2014) and was the focus of discussion at a number of conferences and symposia, including at Mildred’s Lane, Narrowsburg, New York (2014) and Arts Research Initiative 2 (ARI:02), University of Cumbria, Carlisle (2014).

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<sup>7</sup> And even dentistry. In 2016, Dr Mike Gow contacted me so that he might watch *Peter*, having seen its description on [www.janetopping.com](http://www.janetopping.com). Mike turned out to be a general dental practitioner and a Clinical Director of the Dental Anxiety Management unit at The Berkeley Clinic in Glasgow. In fact, my childhood dentist’s son had donated all his father’s hypnosis textbooks to Mike and I shared my copy of *Hypnosis and Healing* with him too. A couple of months later it appeared in the programme for the British Society of Clinical and Academic Hypnosis Northern Counties Branch Meeting, York. “Working with Children” (12 November 2016) (Fig. 3).



(Fig. 3): 'The Horizon Object' on the programme of the British Society of Clinical and Academic Hypnosis Northern Counties Branch Meeting, York. "Working with Children" (12 November 2016) (Credit: the author).

nou (2018) premiered at Glasgow International 2018 and went on to screen in competition in *The 16th International Festival Signes de Nuit* (Paris, 2018) and as part of *The Psychedelic Film and Music Festival*, New York (USA, 2018). The web-work [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) was a major component of the group exhibition *The Influencing Machine* (nGbK, Berlin, 2018) and the accompanying reader of the same name (2019). Since

publication in April 2018, the set of books *Peter & nou* (2018) has been the focus of a paper at the Cumbria Research and Innovation Conference, University of Cumbria, Lancaster (2018), presented at numerous book fairs internationally and is currently stocked at Tenderbooks, London Centre for Book Arts and the ICA. *The Peter & nou Project* continues to contribute to multiple discourses within a range of academic and non-academic spaces.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See Appendix 0.8 for details of where and when *The Peter & nou Project* has engaged a range of audiences.

## ***The Peter & nou Project: An Introduction***

'I didn't know if I could play. I remember lessons. I don't know if it's me or Tyrell's niece.'

Rachael (Sean Young) in *Blade Runner*, 1982

*The Peter & nou Project* utilises methodologies including collage, intertextuality and the 'science fictioning the real' (O'Sullivan, 2017:1) to interrogate contemporary concerns of memory, authorship and the distributed image while testing the possibilities that intertextuality offers storytelling. The project proposes different ways of being in the world 'by cutting familiar lines of association and reassembling new worlds, as visible, for example, in practices of sampling collage, montage, or the cut-up'. (Gunkel, 2017: 3)

*The Project* often uses flagrantly appropriated elements from popular science fiction films (particularly *Blade Runner*, 1982) and the biographies and science fiction works of Philip K. Dick and Naomi Mitchison, using them as material. These established, familiar lines of association are cut-up and reassembled into new narratives and alternate realities which in turn, by dint of their contradictory nature, become self-perpetuating drivers of yet more

narratives.<sup>9</sup> The project is therefore a continuously developing dense weave of quotations, narratives and changing realities.

At the heart of the project is a short piece of archival video footage - a section of the BBC Television documentary *Hypnosis and Healing* (1982, Dir. Michael Barnes) in which I was hypnotised by my dentist (Fig. 4).

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<sup>9</sup> I could pretend that my interest in the cut-up technique came directly from Burroughs and Gysin (1978) but, I'm sure like many folk, I was introduced to the idea by David Bowie as he explained how he used the cut-up to write lyrics in *Cracked Actor* (Yentob, 1975). And anything David does...



Fig. 4: Screen shot of the artist and her dentist in *The Horizon Object* (Credit: BBC Television/the author).

The hypnosis went like this:

Dentist George W. Fairfull Smith attached four balls of cotton wool onto the length of rotary dental drill. These, he said, were three little rabbits, being chased by a hungry fox. Needing a place to hide, the rabbits wondered if I would allow him to drill a hole in my tooth, into which they could run. Fairfull Smith would then plug that dental burrow quickly, before the fox had a chance to catch up. I agreed straight away. I watched the cotton wool rabbits go round and around, while Fairfull Smith gave me a filling, without anaesthetic. The whole thing was filmed by a BBC camera crew and broadcast on TV in 1982. (Topping, 2014)

This piece of broadcast archival footage is the key element of the project,

driving the production of multiple works while acting as a tool of transformation and change within individual works. So crucial is this fragment of footage to the project that I have titled it *The Horizon Object* and Chapter 1 is dedicated to a discussion of it.



Fig. 5 Screen shot of *Peter* (2014) (Credit: the author).

Chapter 2 focuses on the video *Peter* (2014) (Fig. 5). In this work *The Horizon Object* slices and slips into the film *Blade Runner*.<sup>10</sup> In *Peter*, the use of this archive footage seems able to conflate fact and fiction, or at least make it

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<sup>10</sup> Incidentally, the documentary *Hypnosis and Healing* (from which *The Horizon Object* was snipped) was broadcast on the BBC in 1982 - the year of *Blade Runner*'s release in the cinema. Other items of note with respect to 1982, the television screen and mainstream film are the release of Tobe Hooper's *Poltergeist*, Steven Lisberber's *Tron* and Tommy Lee Wallace's *Halloween III: Season of the Witch*. Written by British SF Television genius Nigel Kneale, *Halloween III: Season of the Witch* is particularly terrifying in the way that it makes the familial TV screen a 'trigger of badness' (Fowler and Pratt, 2019). 1982 definitely feels like the year in which mainstream film began to be haunted by the apparatus of broadcast media.

difficult for the viewer to tell them apart. *Peter* invites the viewer to call into question their memory or cultural understanding of *Blade Runner*, dragging the viewer into *Blade Runner's* plot of faulty memory and uncertain identities. In *Peter*, *The Horizon Object* is used both to claim and alter the past.

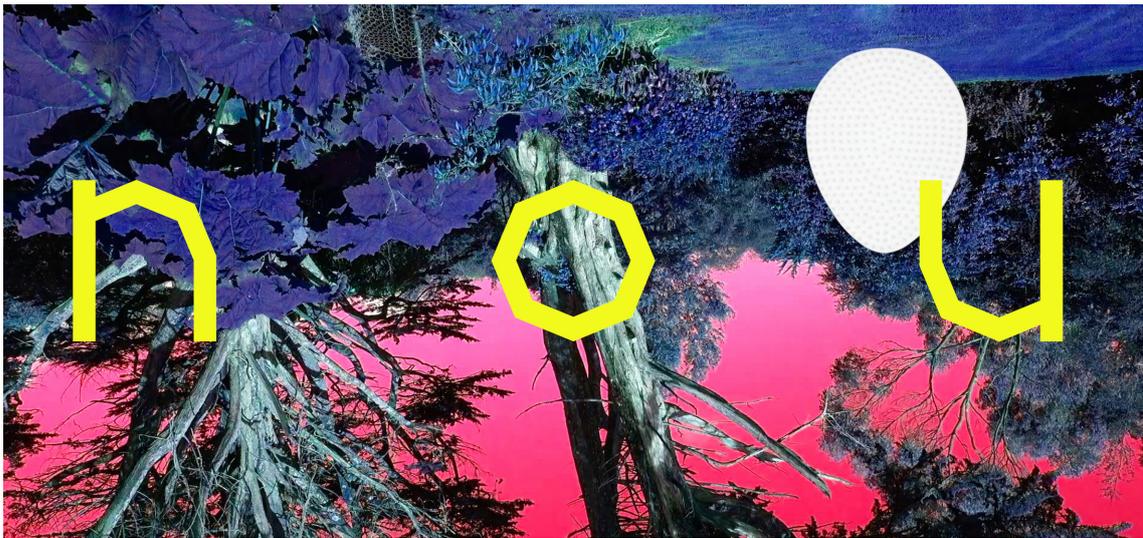


Fig. 6: *nou* (2018), Screen shot with title (Credit: the author).

The video *nou* (2018) (Fig. 6) is the focus of Chapter 3. *nou* reframes the radical life and works of writer Naomi Mitchison, in particular her feminist science fiction novel *Memoirs of a Spacewoman* (1962), creating a new discourse around Mitchison's contemporary importance. *nou* is a speculative fiction of a new kind of alien invasion in which the eponymous narrator becomes caught by the process of hypnosis and trapped in the tooth of a child. In *nou*, the archive footage is the setting for a narrative that merges bodies to create a new being, rendering distinctions between the

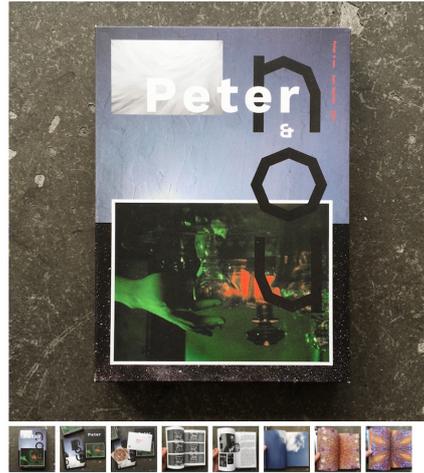
artist/author, the hypnotized child and the alien 'nou', blurred. In *nou*, *The Horizon Object* changes the future, mutating my ten-year-old body into an alien/human hybrid.

Discussed in Chapter 4, the publication *Peter & nou* (2018) (Fig. 7) consists of two main books, versions of the videos *Peter* and *nou*, securing and developing the bond between those two narratives. Another part of this publication is the flick book *A 35mm, 208-ish Frame Version of Blade Runner* (2018). Just as the publication's design refers to the virtually obsolete format of the DVD, so the flick book refers to the virtually obsolete 35mm film from which it was made. The *Peter & nou* publication is one way in which *The Peter & nou Project* manipulates the textures, speeds and qualities of the moving image by its translation into new (or rather old) formats.

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PETER & NOU by Jane Topping

£22.00

Published by Jane Topping with Good Press

2 x Book, 2 x Postcards, 1 x Sticker, 1 x Return Envelope, packaged in a card slip case.  
Peter: 135mm x 190mm, 120 pages, black and white digital printing throughout, perfect bound.  
Nou: 135mm x 190mm, 224 pages, full colour digital printing throughout, perfect bound.

A beautiful package by Glasgow based visual artist Jane Topping. Acting as documents to document, this DVD size double book package brings forth two video projects; Peter and Nou. An extension but very much its own deal, this is worth every drop. There are special bonuses too - a sticker for your laptop, plus an envelope which, for a limited time period, will allow you to post to a PO Box and in return receive an additional book - wowie!

Nou is so NEW there isn't much to tell, follow this link for more:

<https://rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com/>

Peter on the other hand:

"The best Blade Runner sequel is Peter by Jane Topping" Matt M. Lloyd, Glasgow Short Film Festival, 2017.

Peter (Dir. Jane Topping, 2014) re-frames what is considered a classic of dystopian cinema (Blade Runner, 1982, dir. Ridley Scott) with the intention of positioning the artist within the text and so implying that such radical gestures are not only warranted and necessary, but also implicit in the contemporary viewer's experience of watching film.

Peter manipulates found footage and narrative voice to reveal difficulties of viewer identification when watching Blade Runner. Peter makes use of wholesale appropriation of 'facts', both visual and textual, personal and public, in order to create a new reality around the film. The use of personal biography and the trope of the unreliable narrator are key elements in the discussion of the illusive nature of truth at the core of Peter.

Quantity:

ADD TO CART

Fig. 7: Peter & nou (2018) (Credit: Good Press Website).

Lloyd  
11, 2017

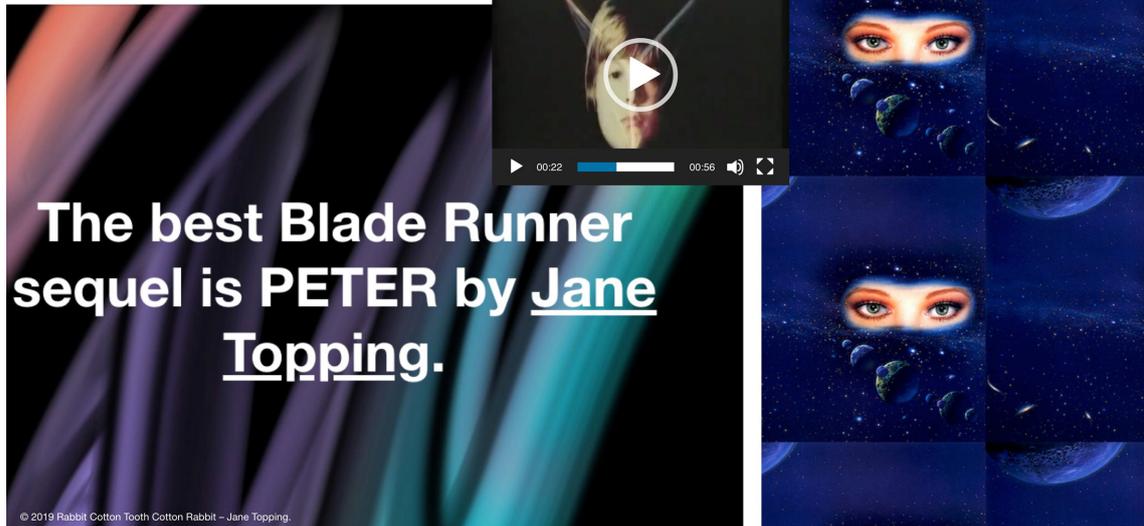


Fig. 8: Screen Grab of [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) (Credit: the author).

[www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) (Fig. 8) is an online artwork and the focus of Chapter 5. The work is a WordPress website which contains all video

works I have made since 2014 and fragments of research that have influenced *The Peter & nou Project*. Though the work foregrounds access to the videos *Peter* and *nou*, [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) is essentially as a digital wunderkammer - a cut-up, intertextual cabinet of curiosities.

### Aims and Methodologies of *The Peter & nou Project*

While specific aims and methodologies for individual works differ, it is possible to state the following as a limited framework from which *The Peter & nou Project* develops:

The project proposes that a single piece of archive footage (*The Horizon Object*) might be a useful tool of fictioning, offering an opportunity to discuss cultural resonances and readings within a fine art practice and beyond.

The works make use of recognisable tropes of popular science fiction in order to critique and recontextualise them, demanding that such, often masculine, texts be put to use in the service of more inclusive narratives which may be at odds with their source material. The project often repurposes autobiographical and biographical texts, slotting them into or wrapping them around established texts as a way of altering them, often

covertly. The entire project is bound up in complex system of intertextuality which is concerned with disrupting notions of the original and creating spaces – beyond the gallery space - in which new narratives can develop. In *The Peter & nou Project*, videos are also books, books are also websites and websites are also art works. By refusing to prescribe an order in which to view its constituent parts, the project tests the necessity of a linear narrative in respect of a viewers' desire for understanding and asks the viewer to imaginatively 'join the dots' between the works as the 'truth' may lie in the interstices.<sup>11</sup>

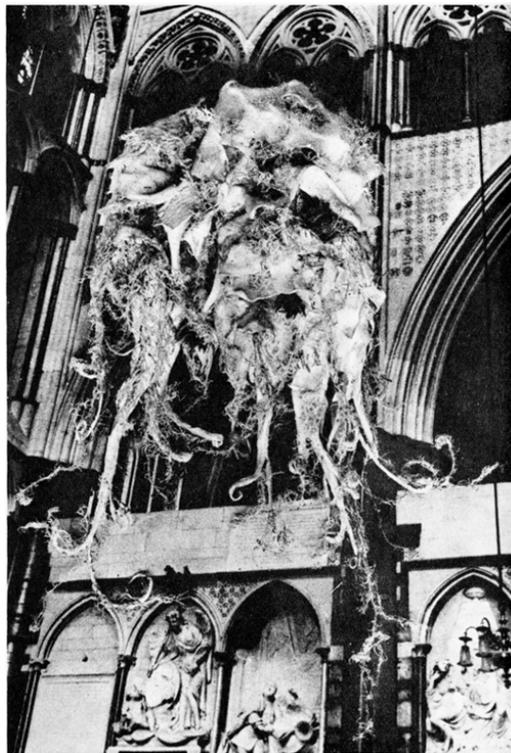


Fig. 9: Alien matter grows unbidden and unchecked in the interstices of Westminster Abbey in *The Quatermass Experiment* (1953) (Credit: BBC Television).

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<sup>11</sup> Just as the alien in *The Quatermass Experiment* (1953) grows and expands in the spaces between architecture (Fig. 9).

## The Cut-Up

The cut-up is an important strategy found at all levels the project. The work appropriates and collages found texts in order to build new stories using the fragments of old ones.<sup>12</sup> In the first instance, texts, films, novels, biographies, television programmes, artworks, conversations, interviews, photographs and audio are excised from their source material and rearranged.<sup>13</sup> These new works may then be cut-up and cannibalised to make further narratives which in turn are chopped still further, or more correctly they are unravelled and jumbled up, online. The web work [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) reveals the source materials and associated scraps of *The Peter & nou Project* and by randomising the fragments of research, the content of the project is revealed to be nebulous and at times contradictory. Thus works are recycled to create ever more contradictory yet, thanks to the presence of *The Horizon Object*, nonetheless cohesive stories.

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<sup>12</sup> It seems to me a bit unnecessary to even mention these strategies of making post-net, now we're so way beyond Jameson's postmodern prevalence of pastiche. 'Appropriation is no longer signalled, it's just assumed I think' said Mark Fisher in 2014.

<sup>13</sup> I'd venture that the use of the cut-up technique throughout the project, alongside the project's prolific use of contradictory material - of high and low cultural moving image artefacts - and its intertextual nature, mirrors Burroughs' own interest in the medium of film as 'both/and: not dogmatically *either* Beauty *or* the Bestseller, not art *or* commerce, not paper *or* celluloid...' (Harris, 2019: xi). *The Peter & nou Project* refuses to take a firm position on notions of 'quality'.

## Creating Connections and Building Cracks

The project's use of differing materials, methods and modes of distribution introduce links and fissures between works, binding and fracturing narratives, preventing any coherent understanding of time and space, resisting a definitive reading of an individual work or the project as a whole. The viewer may read between the works of *The Peter & nou Project* in order to build an understanding of the world of the project. Just as J.G. Ballard's isolated non-place in *Concrete Island* (1974) is actually a place of action, the in-between places of *The Peter & nou Project* created by the gaps between the tangled threads of the works' media and narratives are also places of action, where the viewer's own mind may solidify connections and imaginatively flesh out the speculative world of the project.<sup>14</sup>

### In the Junkspace, Kipple

Rem Koolhaas' (2013: 3) term 'junkspace' describes the real-world architecture that 'remains after modernisation has run its course or, more precisely, what coagulates while modernisation is in progress, its fallout.'

Omar Kholeif has interpreted junkspace from a post-digital perspective as

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<sup>14</sup> A little like the way Stoppard took the in-between spaces of *Hamlet* and speculated a new interstitial narrative for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern (Stoppard, 1966).

a blistery in-between space, where audiences actively flit back and forth from being viewers to active content producers, as well as distributors of content in all of its forms. (Kholeif, 2016: 27)<sup>15</sup>

Developing these two definitions, it is easy to imagine that junkspace and Philip K. Dick's 'kipple' are connected and that junkspace is the real-world place where kipple would naturally accumulate and mysteriously multiply. My own interpretation goes further and proposes that junkspace and kipple exist not only in reality but also in the mind of the viewer and that it is in this *imaginative* junkspace - where cultural kipple accumulates and circulates - that some narratives of *The Peter & nou Project* unfold. The intertextual form of the project necessitates a flitting back and forth by the viewer. This movement between works carves out a kind of internal junkspace in which the viewer may attempt to stitch together a cohesive whole from distinct elements of the project. In so doing the viewer weaves an overarching though incomplete world for the works with the warp and weft of *The Peter & nou Project's* speculative narratives. It is the viewer's discrete experience of cultural artefacts, including their ownership of an experience of *Blade Runner* for example, which, when met with the works of the project, enables the project's narratives to expand and gain traction in the mind of the viewer,

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<sup>15</sup> I recently spent an entire Sunday flitting back and forth between re-watching Tarkovsky's *Stalker* (1979) on DVD while reading Geoff Dyer's personal reflections on *Stalker*, *Zona* (2012). My unhurried, lazy toggling between the respective narratives of film and book, between ruminations on Dyer's personal life and Tarkovsky's film-making process rekindled my love of the film. I found myself eking out the duration of *Stalker*, a film that is well-known for its already languid pacing. If you get a free Sunday, I recommend trying it.

outwith my control. Thus *The Peter & nou Project* is a galaxy of told, untold and never-to-be-told stories, developing in the space (and time) between works, fed by the cultural kipple which circulates in the mind of the viewer.

## Introduction 0.1

### Fiction as Method

'In an era of stress and anxiety, when the present seems unstable and the future unlikely, the natural response is to retreat and withdraw from reality, taking recourse either in fantasies of the future or in modified visions of a half imagined past.'

In *Watchmen*, 1987, Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons (p31 of Chapter 5)

In an increasingly homogenized present, creating alternative pasts, presents and futures can be a politically charged action.<sup>16</sup> *The Peter & nou Project* generates new circumstances by weaving together material of a personal (and broadcast) archive and from outside of the conventional art-world culture. This interlacing of the archive with known cultural objects (such as *Blade Runner*) and speculative narratives creates a dense hybrid tapestry which operates in important ways, both spatially and temporally. The project makes use of this hybridity and begins to work on its own terms, producing

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<sup>16</sup> As exemplified by previously mentioned works of Afrofuturism and feminist science fiction, this notion of sci-fi as political act is now firmly part of mainstream media, for instance in the science fictioning of a near future dystopian England in recent BBC television series *Years and Years* (2019) and in the HBO series of *Watchmen* (2019), which is almost entirely concerned with race relations in the USA.

an autonomous world driven by its own constructed narratives. The project recycles and re-uses its own motifs, knotting one narrative to another to another, producing an intricate mesh of works. In his *Art Practice as Fictioning (or, myth-science)* Simon O’Sullivan articulates this particular logic of art practice as:

a ‘fictioning’: the production of images which are out of time (untimely) – that speak back to their producer; and the layering of motifs to produce an accretion of sorts, resulting in an opacity. (O’Sullivan, 2015: 4)

In my practice, the function of such intricacy and indeed, opacity is to urge the viewer to imaginatively make sense of the work by encouraging speculation and in so doing contributing to the development of the project’s mesh of narratives.

Over the period of making *The Peter & nou Project* the use of fiction, and particularly science fiction, as a tool of contemporary art-making has become increasingly visible.<sup>17</sup> The use of science fiction in my contemporary practice allows for a presentation of other future-fictions in the here and now (O’Sullivan, 2017: 6) and so can be utilised as a means of resistance as it is enables the suggestion of alternative futures ‘beyond the ones available in this current political moment, beyond what neoliberalism holds for us’

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<sup>17</sup> Emerging from the Visual Cultures Public Programme at Goldsmiths, the book *Futures and Fictions* (Gunkel, H., Hameed, A. and O’Sullivan, S. eds., 2017) is a galvanising text in this context.

(Gunkel, 2017: 3).

In their *Fictioning: The Myth-Functions of Contemporary Art and Philosophy*, David Burrows and Simon O'Sullivan (2019: 1) define and map out 'a set of practices and theories of mythopoesis, myth-science and mythotechnesis' which they define as 'the myth-functions of contemporary art and philosophy.'<sup>18</sup> These practices are not exclusive of each other as *The Peter & nou Project* makes clear, as the project could be described as having elements common with at least two of these fictioning practices – for instance, the creation of a new being in *nou* might be identified as a mythopoesis while the use of hypnosis throughout the project could be an example of myth-science in action. More generally, the project is what Carrie Lambert-Beatty (2009) would term as 'parafiction' – a contemporary art practice which is concerned with deception. One which does not perform

its procedures in the hygienic clinics of literature, but has one foot in the field of the real. Unlike historical fiction's fact-based but imagined worlds, in parafiction real and/or imaginary personages and stories intersect with the world as it is being lived. [...] these fictions are experienced as fact. (Lambert-Beatty, 2009: 54)

This is especially true of *The Peter & nou Project* as it uses a piece of the broadcast archive as the warp through which it incorporates the weft of

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<sup>18</sup> See Appendix 0.2 for definitions of these and other terms used by this thesis.

popular science fiction, autobiography and the lives of historical figures, creating an interlaced fabric of robust alternative realities. It is the project's deployment of this 'fabric' across moving image, publication and Net media, which offers a distinctive approach to fictioning practice.

One important tool of fictioning in *The Peter & nou Project* is the appropriation and activation of *Blade Runner* (1982).

## Introduction 0.2

### (Retro) Fitting in *Blade Runner* (Part 1)

'maybe this is what happens when you spend too much time with a movie: you start thinking about it when it's not around, and then you start wanting to touch it. i've [sic] been watching 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY regularly for four decades, but it wasn't until a few years ago i started thinking about touching it, and then over the holidays i decided to make my move. why now? i don't know. Maybe i wasn't old enough to touch it until now. maybe i was too scared to touch it until now, [...] plus it's TECHNOLOGY'S FAULT. without technology, i wouldn't have been able to spend so much intimate – and, ultimately, inappropriate – time with the film.'<sup>19</sup>

Steven Soderbergh, 2015

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<sup>19</sup> Here, Soderbergh is discussing his reasons for making *The Return of W. De Rijk* (2015), his film that is an edit of Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, which reduces the original's running time by approximately forty minutes (the W. De Rijk of the title is a reference to the man who slit Rembrandt's *The Night Watch* (1642) with a knife, in 1975). Despite the admission of the title, at the request of Warner Bros. and the Stanley Kubrick Estate, the film is no longer available on Soderbergh's website, and I've not seen it. But anyway, you understand my reason for including this quotation – much of my practice is the result of spending far too much inappropriate time with *Blade Runner*.

*Blade Runner* (1982) is a crucial thread in the video *Peter*<sup>20</sup> and necessarily the *Peter* 'half' of the publication *Peter & nou* (2018).<sup>21</sup> In these narratives, my image is revealed as being part of the landscape of the film. One reason that *Blade Runner* is able to incorporate such an element within it is that it is already a post-modern cacophony of visual quotations, contradictory images and objects pulled from across time.<sup>22</sup> The film is constructed, in Ridley Scott's words, so that 'every incident, every sound, every colour, every set, prop, or actor had significance within the performance of the film' (Bukatam, 1997: 10) and it is this rich detail that offers an opportunity for *Peter* to reveal a significant and perhaps previously overlooked detail of the film – that of my image as a hypnotized child embedded in *Blade Runner*'s 2019 Los Angeles.

Additionally, the notion of *Blade Runner* as a collection of moving images and historical referents is useful when attempting to reveal a 'new' image in the film. In her essay *Ramble City: Postmodernisms and "Blade Runner"*,

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<sup>20</sup> *Blade Runner* crops up as material in a good deal of my practice not discussed in this thesis.

<sup>21</sup> The back cover of *Peter & nou* is made to resemble a DVD box, as if *Peter & nou* is yet another version of *Blade Runner* to add to its multi-verse of narratives and formats.

<sup>22</sup> In fact the title of Scott's film originates in William Burroughs' *Blade Runner: A Movie* (1979) which in turn borrowed its title from Alan E. Nourse's pulp novel *The Bladerunner* (1974). The story goes that while adapting *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (Dick, 1968), screenwriter Hampton Fancher included the phrase 'blade runner' from the Burroughs title he could see in his bookcase. Scott seized on the phrase, little knowing that his was an appropriation of Fancher's appropriation of Burroughs' appropriation of Nourse's phrase. As Oliver Harris writes in his introduction to the 2019 edition of *Blade Runner: A Movie*: 'It's because Scott's appropriation occurred by happenstance rather than design that its intuitive genius and unwitting aptness is so Burroughsian.' (Harris, 2019).

Giuliana Bruno (1987: 74-75) observes that in *Blade Runner* 'The past has become a collection of photographic, filmic, or televisual images.' and that the viewer is 'put in the position of reclaiming a history by means of its reproduction.' Similarly, the viewer of *Peter* is asked to re-imagine *Blade Runner* with respect to a fresh context for the film which hangs on the televisual image. The dense collage of photographic and moving image of which *Peter* consists mirrors the rich aesthetic surface of *Blade Runner* and Bruno's highly visual reading of *Blade Runner*, allowing for *Blade Runner* and *Peter* to become conflated. In *Peter*'s world of fragmented temporality, Bruno's (1987: 75) description of *Blade Runner* applies, as 'the research of history finds its image, its photographic simulacrum, while history itself remains out of reach.'

The revelation of my image in *Blade Runner* is supported by the complex relationship of the eye to memory in the film. *Blade Runner*'s plot reveals that an image cannot support memory unconditionally. Kaja Silverman (1991) has noted that *Blade Runner* highlights the extent to which 'radically falsified 'recollections' may be the only ones to which we have access'. This observation is interesting with respect to the aptness of *Blade Runner* as a tool of fictioning throughout *The Peter & nou Project* in which the accuracy of

the viewer's memory versus the evidence of their eye (and ear) is consistently challenged.<sup>23</sup>

The project also makes use of the ways that *Blade Runner* exists in the real world. After its commercial and critical failure in 1982, the film found a following when released on VHS. It is interesting that this admittedly flawed film (Sammon, 2017) should benefit from this hardening of the viewing experience, but it is its many flaws that make *Blade Runner* (and the works of *The Peter & nou Project*) so repeatedly watchable. *Blade Runner* now exists as multiple DVD releases and with the five-disk Ultimate Collector's Edition<sup>24</sup> release, five different versions of the film were effectively repositioned as an official sequence of works.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> In *Peter* memory is evoked and then called into question through the search for an image which remains tantalisingly out of reach.

<sup>24</sup> *Blade Runner* (2007), Directed by Ridley Scott [DVD], Ultimate Collector's Edition (Fig. 10).

<sup>25</sup> *Blade Runner* has expanded into three novels all written by K.W. Jetter (a SF writer and friend of P.K. Dick) - *Blade Runner™ 2: The Edge of Human* (1995), *Blade Runner™ 3: Replicant Night* (1996) and *Blade Runner™4: Eye and Talon* (2000). These are authorised sequels licensed by the Dick estate which take into account discrepancies between *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (Dick, 1968) and five versions of Ridley Scott's film, as well as adding their own contradictions to the overall *Blade Runner* narrative. Incarnations of *Blade Runner* on multiple platforms and media have created a thick-text - a cult text by Eco's definition (Eco, 1998) - and are an influence on the complex and contradictory structure of *The Peter & nou Project*.

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Fig. 10: *Blade Runner* (2007), Directed by Ridley Scott [DVD], Ultimate Collector's Edition

(Credit: DigitalDingus).

Just as Philip K. Dick thought that his original novel and the film adaptation reinforced each other and that they were 'two halves to one [...] meta-artifact [sic]' (Baker, 2009: 200), *Blade Runner* is a set of multiple film texts which display repetition and multiple truths as an object in and of itself. In this respect, *Peter* could be categorized as another remake - another facet of the *Blade Runner* meta-text - sitting within *The Peter & nou Project*. The intertextuality of *Blade Runner* narratives and real-world objects are intentionally mirrored by *The Peter & nou Project*, allowing for their blending. While there are other contemporary art works which reflect on *Blade Runner*

or use it as source material<sup>26</sup>, *The Peter & nou Project* actually develops the *Blade Runner* narrative and is therefore able to sit comfortably within its cultural mesh, enabling renewed contemporary discourse around *Blade Runner* and its themes.

Another important element of *The Peter & nou Project* is the use of hypnosis. While the use of my hypnotised image works in the main to foreground an altered state of consciousness, its reception is affected by the viewer's experience of hypnosis from a broader cultural context and in particular their experience of hypnosis in film and television.

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<sup>26</sup> Two recent examples are Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster's performance *Extourisme* (2018) and Terence Broad's research project *Autoencoding Blade Runner* (2016).

## Introduction 0.3

### Hypnosis on Screen

'MISSY: Wanna know how it works?

CHRIS: What, do you swing a pocket watch in front of people's faces?

MISSY: You watch a lot of television. Now, you are feeling very  
sleepy...'

*Get Out* (2017, Dir. Jordan Peele)

Years before I was interested in making use of my own childhood experience of hypnosis in *The Peter & nou Project*, I was fascinated by the power-play and gothic aesthetics involved in the hypnosis that I saw on screen. An early work which foregrounds hypnosis is *Well, What Would YOU Do, I Mean Exactly What is it that You Would DO?* (Fig. 11). Exhibited in the group exhibition *Little Magazine* at SWG3, Glasgow in 2010, the work appropriates imagery from *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (Weine, 1919) and uses mirroring and the juxtaposition of image and text to literally question the viewer's relationship to free-will.



Fig. 11: *Well, What Would YOU Do, I Mean Exactly What is it that You Would DO?*, Screen prints and oil on canvas (2010) (Credit: the author).

A second work that developed around this time was *Arise* (Fig. 12) – a mixed media work in which a painting of hands - in a typical magician-type pose - sits above three 3D paper Pythagorean objects.<sup>27</sup> Here, the magician or hypnotist has conjured brand new objects from some art detritus<sup>28</sup>, making new art from old, seemingly without the need for the artist's hand at all. The

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<sup>27</sup> made from a discarded screen print advertising the two-person exhibition *Vocal Sans* by Ciara Philips and myself (Glasgow Print Studio, 2010).

<sup>28</sup> or art-related kipple perhaps...

work appears to be in the process of making itself, the melodramatic painting of poised hands taking control of its paper sculptures.<sup>29</sup>



Fig. 12: *Arise*, Oil on MDF and folded screen print (2012) (Credit: the author).

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<sup>29</sup> There is a comparable moment of magician-style theatrics in *The Horizon Object*, as a bib is unfurled by the dental nurse between myself and the dentist (Fig. 13).



Fig. 13: A dramatic bib flip in *The Horizon Object* (2014) (Credit: BBC Television/the author).

While there are many gothic tales in early cinema which involve scheming and scandalous hypnotists, hypnosis is also a frequent subplot in both 'women's film' of the 1940s and the science fiction genre.<sup>30</sup> This makes my experience of hypnosis at the dentist particularly useful when speculating fictions, as hypnosis on screen employs a range of tropes, including transference of power, loss of free will and the uncertainty of memory.

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<sup>30</sup> A notable work in a fine art context is Tony Oursler's *Imponderable* (2015-216), an installation which 'weaves together a social, spiritual, and empirical history of the virtual image that overlaps with the artist's own family history.' (MoMA, 2016).

Additionally, *The Peter & nou Project* may exploit the generally negative perception that a viewer has gleaned of hypnosis from film and television.<sup>31</sup>

As Deirdre Barrett (2006: 17) notes in her essay 'Hypnosis in Film and Television', even when hypnosis on screen is depicted as being beneficial, it is often portrayed as terrifyingly powerful and perpetrates many negative stereotypes. For instance, in many films which have been loosely based on a real-life suspected case of reincarnation<sup>32</sup> hypnosis may be undertaken for medical reasons, for instance to recover memory. However their message is that those who undergo hypnosis may unwittingly end up reliving traumatic experiences from their previous lives. Barrett (2006: 18) observes that 'An absolute postulate of these films is that material recalled under hypnosis is unerringly accurate no matter how farfetched.' The notion that recall under hypnosis is fundamentally authentic is at work in *The Peter & nou Project*. As *The Horizon Object* becomes intertwined with the fictions proposed in the works, the documentary record of my hypnosis at the dentist acts as a kind of evidence of veracity.

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<sup>31</sup> and since most viewers have little direct experience of hypnosis, this cliché is easy to maintain and focus towards the creation of new narratives.

<sup>32</sup> Including *Night of the Demon* (Tourneur, 1957) and the seminal film (and book) of the 1950s dealing with re-incarnation & hypnotic regression, *The Three Faces of Eve* (Johnson, 1957). FYI, a line from *Night of the Demon* opens Kate Bush's *Hounds of Love* (1985), an old favourite of mine.

Hypnosis in popular film is often depicted as being able to extract repressed, real memories and also to implant complex new ones. Both of these culturally understood depictions of the 'dangers' of hypnosis are put to use within *The Peter & nou Project* in order to support narratives which are deeply concerned with the identification of real and false memories.<sup>33</sup>

As Barrett observes, using examples of positive depictions of hypnosis in mainstream film,

the emphasis is virtually always on it as a means to influence or control another person – depicted from another's vantage – not on the altered state of consciousness from the subject's perspective. (Barrett, 2006: 21)

This is certainly the case in *Hypnosis and Healing*, the original BBC documentary from which *The Horizon Object* emerges, as emphasis is firmly placed on my role as an experimental subject. As a challenge to this, point-of-view and subjectivity are manipulated across the works that make up the project, sometimes implicating the viewer in the hypnosis experience. *Peter* suggests that that the viewer may be an equivalent to the child under hypnosis via the punctuation of images of a laboratory mouse, the audio buzz of machinery and by the inclusion of repetitive imagery.<sup>34</sup> *nou* (2018) places the viewer clearly in the position of the protagonist, seeing the world

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<sup>33</sup> and the impossibility of attempting to somehow master or manage memory.

<sup>34</sup> In Jordan Peele's 2017 film *Get Out*, the same effect is achieved though the noise and image of a spoon stirring coffee in a cup.

from behind the protagonist's eyes. Both approaches seek to create the circumstances in which the viewer may share the experience of the hypnotised child - an altered state of consciousness.

It is well known that in *Heart of Glass* (Herzog, 1976), the majority of the actors played their parts in a hypnotic state.<sup>35</sup> Perhaps less well known is that Herzog intended to begin the film with a scene which would hypnotise the audience and to end it with one in which they were awakened from their trance.<sup>36</sup> The effect of using hypnosis as an apparently active methodology in a moving image work (rather than simply as part of a plot) is to enable the creation of a dream-like space in which narratives can play out in ways that are not tied to reality - a key to *The Peter & nou Project's* fictioning. The use of hypnosis in the project helps to build doubt into the works.

Utilising the collective impression generated by mainstream film and television that an aim of hypnosis is for an individual to gain power over another, *The Peter & nou Project* explores the fears and fantasies of its viewer. The fact that the moment of hypnosis that permeates the project is 'real' – part of a documentary – makes it especially effective. As most of us do not wish to think that we are easily susceptible to suggestion or that we

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<sup>35</sup> which crops up in *Peter*.

<sup>36</sup> a methodology used by Lars von Trier in his 1991 film *Europa*.

might be greatly influenced by the actions of others, a viewer would rather 'identify with the observer not the subject of this overwhelming phenomena.' (Barrett, 2006: 26) This proves impossible within *The Peter & nou Project* as the viewer is never allowed to maintain the position of observer. The use of hypnosis embeds conflicting feelings of tension, empathy, suspicion and concern into *The Peter & nou Project*. In this way the project puts on-screen hypnosis to use in a significantly new way – strategically it has as a destabilising effect - forcing the viewer to question their relationship to reality.

## Introduction 0.4

### The Archive

'That trip to the dentist was your last appearance on the record. After that you simply disappeared from the database.'

Ofelia (Belinda Becker) in *The Sticky Fingers of Time*, 1997

In *An Archival Impulse*, Hal Foster (2004: 3) identifies seemingly disparate artists<sup>37</sup> as in fact sharing 'a notion of artistic practice as an idiosyncratic probing into particular figures, objects, and events in modern art, philosophy and history.' Foster (2004: 5) characterised such practice as pointing to an archival impulse which, though not new, had a distinctive character in that it was 'recalcitrantly material, fragmentary rather than fungible' and indeterminant, often presented as proposals 'for further elaboration or enigmatic prompts for future scenarios.' Foster (2004: 5) describes the nature of these archives as at once 'found yet constructed, factual yet fictive, public yet private'.

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<sup>37</sup> Sam Durant, Tacita Dean and Thomas Hirschhorn.

*The Peter & nou Project* similarly takes shape through the identification and utilisation of the archive via found objects, cultural figures and events.

However, unlike many artistic practices which range around archival sources, the project situates only *The Horizon Object* firmly at its centre, using it as a kind of anchor for the works of the project.

*The Horizon Object* is notable as belonging to both an official and a personal archive - a BBC television broadcast which was archived by my family – and it is as a piece of both official and personal archive, not as mere found footage, that it is of importance to my practice. The project takes my personal archive (once plucked from the official archive) and reintroduces it into the cultural landscape, to become archive once more, but in a new context. Simultaneously, the BBC footage loses the power and authority it once embodied by the attrition of its original context. The works of the project serve to reframe *The Horizon Object* within the landscapes of both real and imaginary landscapes. For instance, as it is placed into a fictional 2019 Los Angeles and into the real film that is *Blade Runner* it conflates fiction and fact irrefutably. In recontextualising *The Horizon Object* within a variety of works, it is no longer a piece of the archive frozen in time or fixed in form. Instead, it is a ‘found lost moment’ which ‘functions

as a possible portal between an unfinished past and a reopened future.’

(Foster, 2004: 15)

My use of *The Horizon Object* embodies the notion of the archive as a tool of creation which is essential to the ambition of the project, to turn ‘belatedness into becomingness, to recoup failed visions in art, literature, philosophy, and everyday life into possible scenarios of alternative kinds of social relations’ (Foster, 2004: 5) and in so doing, the project calls into question perceived notions of reality.

*The Peter & nou Project* shares genre similarities with Maja Borg’s *Ottica Zero* (2007) which incorporates archive footage and uses a documentary form to tell a feminist story of the near future. Borg’s work has been described as existing ‘at the intersection of documentary, fiction and experimental film fusing the languages of these genres into a compelling, visually rich and politically astute body of work.’ (Dzuverovic, no date). What separates *The Peter & nou Project* from Borg’s work (and the work of artists who make more general use of the archive) is my personal relationship to *The Horizon Object* and the complex and mutable nature of that archive material as it is put to work across the project. The project’s use of *The Horizon Object* as both a central anchor and a mutable tool which ranges

across multiple works sets *The Peter & nou Project* apart from art works which are concerned mainly with using the archive as a way to recontextualise a single moment of the past or to propose a single future.

## Introduction 0.5

### The Poor (Self) Image and a Thing Like Me

'The poor image is a rag or a rip, an AVI or a JPEG, a lumen proletariat in the class society of appearances, ranked and valued according to its resolution. The poor image has been uploaded, downloaded, shared, reformatted, and reedited. It transforms quality into accessibility, exhibition value into cult value, films into clip, contemplation into distraction.'<sup>38</sup>

Hito Steyerl, 2012

*The Peter & nou Project* is littered with poor images – one might even say that poor images are the project's material of choice. Poor images signal their origins by retaining their poor qualities, and so bring some of their cultural significance and context into the project's narratives.<sup>39</sup> Despite its loss of status with respect to the hierarchies of resolution, Steyerl is sure of

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<sup>38</sup> This quotation could be the very definition of my ongoing series of video works, each titled *A 35mm 208-ish Frame Version of Blade Runner* and each a twenty-six second-long digital version of *Blade Runner* made out of scraps of original 35mm film stock. More of these in Chapter 4...

<sup>39</sup> Most of the works are made using still and moving images downloaded from the Net. After years of craving the hi-res image, the moment 4K was affordable I rushed out and bought a Sony RX1. I soon realised that such high quality images are something so sharp and hyper-real that I didn't seem to have the biological or technological ability to actually see them. By the way, there's a great bit on the technical and sexual aspects of the Sony RX1 in David Cronenberg's novel *Consumed* (2014), so it remains my favourite camera.

the strength and usefulness of the poor image, much as Walter Benjamin (1936) was of the photographic image reproduced in the magazine. Steyerl (2012) proposes that the loss in 'quality' necessitated by the transference of (often rare) material on sites such as YouTube and ubuweb is offset by the benefits of accessibility to many. She proposes that the use of such material, alongside 'the development of video technology will jeopardise the elitist position of traditional filmmakers and enable some sort of mass film production: an art of the people.' (Steyerl, 2012: 39). This is playing out as I write, as the user-makers of YouTube, working en masse, develop new genres of the moving image and share their archives.<sup>40</sup>

Steyerl goes onto say that

imperfect cinema diminishes the distinctions between author and audience and merges life and art. Most of all, visuality is resolutely compromised: blurred, amateurish, and full of artefacts. (Steyerl, 2012: 40).

Through the deployment of *The Horizon Object* and by the use of autobiographical and biographical imagery, *The Peter & nou Project* makes a significant contribution to the discourse around Steyerl's imperfect cinema,

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<sup>40</sup> Works of mine such as *Screen Used* (2016) and *Virtual Reality Porn Female P.O.V. Kitten Edition* (2016) interrogate user-generated content directly by adopting frameworks of unboxing and ASMR videos.

of the archive and autofiction, as the project merges real life and the art world, artist with audience.<sup>41</sup>

In her essay, *A Thing Like You and Me*, Steyerl (2012: 49-50) argues that the stresses, strains and responsibilities of subjecthood are becoming intolerable for the individual, and that this has resulted in a desire to become an object (such as an image in a video) - to become 'the material aspect of the image, with the image as thing, not as representation.' Steyerl (2012: 51) proposes that the desire to become a thing, like an image, is a recent phenomenon, 'the upshot of the struggle over representation' which has been taking place since the equal rights movements of the 1960s. Steyerl proposes that to become an image, yet to be able to exert control over the stereotypical qualities of that image that may arise, the individual should seek to participate in the image and all that entails.

This would mean participating in the material of the image as well as the desires and forces it accumulates. [...] Images are violated, ripped apart, subjected to interrogating and probing. They are stolen, cropped, edited, and re-appropriated. They are bought, sold, leased.

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<sup>41</sup> It follows that Steyerl's blurring of author and audience is a major influence on the type of video which is created and consumed online and that this merging of maker and viewer, along with the physical closeness of the body to the screen when occupying either position, is relatively new. *The Peter & nou Project* investigates this maker/viewer hybrid particularly successfully in the form and functionality of the work [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com). Other works which play with maker/viewer connectivity (specifically the body moving through a permeable screen) are *Teeth* (2014) and its re-make *Teeth II* (2015), in which my body appears in Rick Deckard's (Harrison Ford) apartment in *Blade Runner*.

Manipulated and adulated. Reviled and revered. To participate in the image means to take part in all of this. (Steyerl, 2012: 52-53)

*The Peter & nou Project* makes use of a found image of self – *The Horizon Object*. The context and effect of this footage varies across the project but its deployment serves to test Steyerl’s proposal, enabling me to participate fully in the material of the image by both existing within it, and by taking control of it. In turn the project uses my image to produce new narratives which alter the context and the reading of the original poor image.<sup>42</sup>

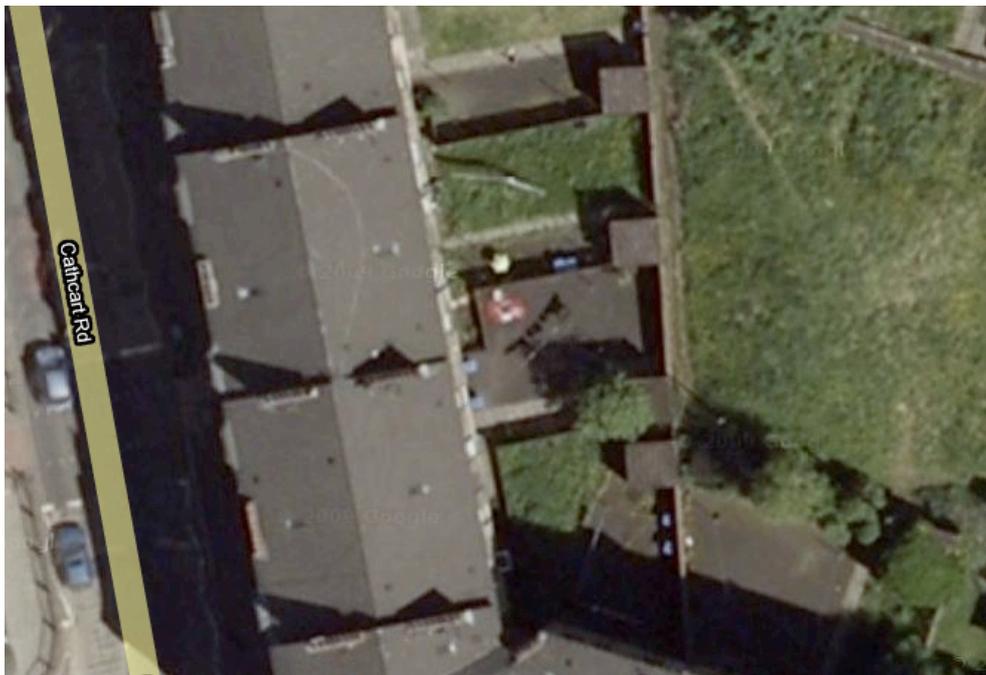


Fig. 14: Sunbathing in my back garden circa 2008 (Credit: Google Maps).

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<sup>42</sup> Incidentally, a couple of years before Steyerl published her essay *In Defence of the Poor Image* and four years before I thought about using my image in a BBC documentary as a tool of practice, my interest in my own poor image was piqued. In 2010 I was footering around with Google Maps and found a very poor image of myself in my back garden, sunbathing on a red blanket (Fig. 14).

## Introduction 0.6

### Let's Just Call it SF

'Probably more so than any other genre, science fiction defies definitional closure, if only because the transgression of genre boundaries is already part of its unique tradition.'

(Jeanne Cortiel, 1999: 3)

One reason that *The Peter & nou Project* is difficult to define with respect to genre or discipline is that it is difficult to settle on clear-cut definitions of science fiction forms (of which speculative fiction can be considered a subset)<sup>43</sup> and it is arguably this questionable and mutable status which makes science fiction forms such pleasingly pliant material with which to propose alternative realities.

In her 1971 essay *The Image of Women in Science Fiction*, Joanne Russ defines science fiction as:

*What If Literature*. All sorts of definitions have been proposed by people in the field, but they all contain both The What If and The Serious Explanation; that is, science fiction shows things not as they

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<sup>43</sup> A simplistic distinction between hard and soft science fiction might be that hard science fiction is generally scientifically rigorous and operates within scientific principles as we currently understand them, while soft science fiction is more flexible in terms of the rules and laws of science. Speculative fiction is a term now most closely associated with soft science fiction, fantasy and feminist utopias and dystopias.

are characteristically or habitually are but as they might be and for this 'might be' the author must offer a rational, serious consistent explanation, one that does not (in Samuel Delany's phrase) offence against what is known to be known. (Russ, 1971 in Cortiel, 1999: 3-4)<sup>44</sup>

The use of 'The What If' is woven throughout *The Peter & nou Project*, acting as a driver of narratives and of viewer speculation<sup>45</sup> supported by 'The Serious Explanation' that is *The Horizon Object*. As a child I was hypnotised by my dentist though how that event might have, for instance, triggered an alien invasion of my body is never made explicitly clear. The narratives and alternative worlds of the project are not exactly supported by scientific rationality. Though Russ' definition does allow for both hard and soft science fictions, science fiction has changed since Russ wrote her definition. As Cortiel states:

Since less empirically rigid sciences, such as psychology or the social sciences, entered the realm of popular knowledge, science fiction has opened its doors to explorations of 'inner spaces' and social relations. (Cortiel, 1999: 4)

Making use of the potential of inner spaces, social relations and altered states - all specialisms of both Philip K. Dick and Naomi Mitchison - is fundamental to the fictioning of *The Peter & nou Project*.<sup>46</sup> The use of real

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<sup>44</sup> italics in original.

<sup>45</sup> What if she was in *Blade Runner*? What if her body was invaded by an alien?

<sup>46</sup> Mitchison has described her early (and relatively sensible) experiments with drugs thus: 'Well we found the chloroform and we thought what fun this would be. So we gave one another doses of chloroform, but we did it standing and if we felt that we had to sit down,

lives and already existing fictions within the project, grounds the work within historical realities, a position not entirely symptomatic of science fiction. The term speculative fiction may be a subset of what is considered science fiction, but it is also a useful umbrella term for fiction which contains certain attributes that do not exist in the real world. As the works of *The Peter & nou Project* contain elements of science fiction, feminism, fantasy and the supernatural, as well as being rooted in reality and to various historical figures, the project might be most accurately described therefore as working not within the science fiction but the speculative fiction genre.

However, there is another kind of fiction at work with in the project, that of autofiction – a term used mainly in literary criticism to refer to a form of fictionalised autobiography.<sup>47</sup> My way into autofiction came through the written work of Chris Kraus.<sup>48</sup> I was specifically interested her use of the confessional tone and her deployment of her own biography as material while occupying multiple roles within her texts.<sup>49</sup> Kraus' foregrounding of female agency and

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we'd stopped.' (*Memoirs of the Spacewomen*, BBC Radio 3, 2016). In comparison, Philip K. Dick's drug taking was considerably more advanced.

<sup>47</sup> One author associated with autofiction is Emmanuel Carrère, who is also the author of my favourite book on Philip K. Dick, *I Am Alive and You are Dead* (2006).

<sup>48</sup> In 2014 I was also reading Kathy Acker's *Blood and Guts in High School* (1984) in which the protagonist, like the hypnotised child in *The Horizon Object*, is named Janey. A coincidence which makes me squeamish.

<sup>49</sup> The result being that one is never quite sure just how autobiographical the works really are.

her use of 'I' have been hugely influential during the making of *The Peter & nou Project*.

Just as *The Peter & nou Project* resists categorisation, a definition of Kraus' *I Love Dick* (1997) is hard to pin down - is it 'An autobiography, a piece of fiction, a series of essays, a work of critical theory?' (Walsh, 2015).

Kraus' protagonists (Chris or Catt or S\*\*\*) are female anti-heroes - women who use their real-world failures as material, yet who have agency and make choices. *The Horizon Object* is a recording of a moment in time when agency was taken from the child being hypnotised and so its use throughout the project can be viewed as an attempt to re-claim, re-examine and re-interpret this moment and to re-purpose this 'real-world failure' as an agent of positive change. And so, with autofiction taken into account, another framing definition for *The Peter & nou Project* might be this Frankenstein's monster of labels: Autofiction + speculative fiction + science fiction = auto-speculative-science fiction.

Due to these varied modes of approach across the project I think it best to describe *The Peter & nou Project* as SF – a useful abbreviation of multiple forms which Donna Haraway describes in her *Staying With the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* as:

SF: science fiction, speculative fabulation, string figures, speculative feminism, science fact, so far. (Haraway, 2016)

By describing *The Peter & nou Project* as operating within a range of SF multiples, the project retains its category-defying nature and its peculiar agency which enables its contribution to discourses across a range of disciplines, while leaving the project open to enable the making of as yet unknown future works. From now on, this thesis assumes *The Peter & nou Project* as operating in the diverse field of SF.

## Introduction 0.7

### Feminist Worlding

'In looping threads and relays of patterning, this SF practice is a model for worlding. Therefore, SF must also mean "so far", opening up what is yet-to-come in protean entangled times' pasts, presents, and futures'

Donna Haraway, 2013

Worlding is part of a fictioning practice fundamental to *The Peter & nou Project*. Distinct from world-building,<sup>50</sup> worlding is a practice which looks beyond design to create a world which 'addresses how relations between entities and things actually become manifest and have continuity' (Burrows and O'Sullivan, 2019: 257). Worlding may take place around a world contained within another text, as in the relationship between Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) 'in which the worlding of a world beyond Europe can be said to support colonial narratives.' (Burrows and O'Sullivan, 2019: 257). Something more like feminist worlding is at work in *The Peter & nou Project*, for instance in the

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<sup>50</sup> which can be described as specifically associated with science fiction and fantasy writing and refers to the invention of imaginary places which are based on logic and often scientific fact.

relationship between *Blade Runner* and *Peter* in which the worlding of a world beyond *Blade Runner* supports the insertion of my image into *Blade Runner*.

The works that make up the project are distinct yet connected to one another – and not only by the presence of *The Horizon Object* in each. What is unusual within the context of practice-based research is that the works of the project tell a range of autonomous stories which in turn affect the readings of each other and the production of further works. *The Peter & nou Project* sets up an evolving alternative world, one which rejects a fixed historical context, questions the patriarchy and which is concerned with resisting human exceptionalism.

In *Memoirs of a Spacewoman* (1962) Naomi Mitchison creates a world in which humans and non-humans can communicate while remaining distinct species. Of interest to Mitchison is the sexual liberation and individualism of her future society. In *The Camille Stories: Children of Compost* in *Staying with the Trouble* (2016), Donna Haraway imagines a multi-species society in which human, non-human and hybrids coexist. Like the world of Haraway's *Children of Compost*, the feminist worlding of *The Peter & nou Project* - which occurs for the most part in the work *nou* (2018) - is less concerned with

female individualism and sexual liberation than the bringing into existence a world, made resolutely from fragments of a recognisable reality, in which an alien/human hybrid exists. However *The Peter & nou Project* complicates Haraway's model of feminist worlding as not only does it create a world into which a new being is brought forth (nouJane), but it is also a world in which that new being appears to have made the art works which enable her existence.<sup>51</sup> That her existence has implications for the meaning of other works of the project (which in turn will have implications for works that have yet to be made) complicates this world still further.

It is important to note that feminist worlding can set up a space which may not necessarily speak the language of academic feminism. Much mainstream genre fiction<sup>52</sup> has been appropriated by feminist discourse in order to critique its origin and intent, and to enable discussion of the female image and body in (Western) popular culture<sup>53</sup> and *The Peter & nou Project* can claim to add a new dimension to this historic and ongoing feminist practice.

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<sup>51</sup> In this thesis I shall refer to nou and nouJane by using the female pronoun. See a footnote in Chapter 3 for a short rationale...

<sup>52</sup> Such as science fiction, fantasy, dystopian and utopian literature.

<sup>53</sup> Made forty years apart, *Liquid Sky* (1982, Dir. Slava Tsukerman) and *Annihilation* (2018, Dir. Alex Garland) are both great examples of films which make use of tropes and clichés of popular science fiction in order to reposition female and queer bodies firmly within mainstream spaces of the cinema and streaming television respectively.

One consequence of using tropes found in popular science fiction as source material in the project is that the boundary between feminist theorist and feminist activist is dissolved and therefore the work is able to address non-academic and non-art audiences via accessible language and media. The result is that the project functions to use science fictional tropes in order to challenge the dichotomies of access to knowledge as well as patriarchal constructions of reality. The project serves to 'counteract sexist manipulation in the areas where it is most effectively perpetuated: popular culture and the media'. (Corteil, 1999: 6) and expands access to its outcomes by applying an inclusive approach to exhibition. The work has met a wide range of audiences at film festivals, screenings, performances, online and in academic and educational contexts, in addition to exhibition within gallery spaces. In this way the project has contributed to a comprehensive and also at times niche range of discourses, including those of science fiction, the psychedelic, transgressive filmmaking, documentary and performance.

Informing my thinking around *The Peter & nou Project* is Ursula K. Le Guin's essay *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction* (1986), in which she re-imagines narrative as a feminist project. Instead of the heroic, masculine hunter as the framework for all storytelling, she urges a respect for the actions of the more passive gatherer:

If, however, one avoids the linear, progressive, Time's-(killing)-arrow mode of the Techno-Heroic, and redefines technology and science as primarily cultural carrier bag rather than weapon of domination, one pleasant side effect is that science fiction can be seen as a far less rigid, narrow field, not necessarily Promethean or apocalyptic at all, and in fact less a mythological genre than a realistic one. (Le Guin, 1986/1988: 153-154)

As the works of *The Peter & nou Project* are firmly grounded in a gathering of cultural objects of the recent past and present, the project ensures that its fictioning is plausible and its world a distinct possibility. The project fictions a world which looks like our own, though the narratives of the works ensure that that world is changed. The world of *The Peter & nou Project* is a kind of feminist worlding and an SF, but realistic one, set not in some unrecognisable far future but in the here and now (and then).

## Introduction 0.8

### Adaptation and Intertextuality

'As for my own role in the BLADE RUNNER project, I can only say that I did not know that a work of mine or a set of ideas of mine could be escalated into such stunning dimensions.'

Philip K. Dick, 1981

Towards the end of his life, Philip K. Dick was involved in the pre-production process which adapted his novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968) into Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*. The book and the film share common elements, but many key elements of the book, specifically those which relate to narrative complexity around doppelgängers and doubling (and which are not well-suited to the blatant presentation of a visual medium) are left out of the film version of the book.<sup>54</sup> The discrepancies between book and film did not concern Dick, who described the book and film as two halves of one

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<sup>54</sup> I assume that this was also a concern for Fassbinder in 1978 when adapting Nabakov's *Despair* (1936) for the screen as it was for me, a lover of the novel who was, I think unavoidably, frustrated by Fassbinder's version, despite the presence of Dirk Bogarde. My favourite *Despair* is Stephen Sutcliff's video (2009). Incidentally, for over 15 years now I've been making and remaking an image based on this time shifting text from *Despair*: 'Thus the future shimmers through the past. But enough, let that summer day be in focus again: spotty sunlight; shadows of branches across the blue car; a pine cone upon the footboard, where some day the most unexpected of objects will stand; a shaving brush.' (Nabakov, 1936).

'meta-text', two separate but equal elements that comprise one whole. Dick wrote:

After I finished reading the screenplay, I got the novel out and looked through it. The two reinforce each other... You read the screenplay and then you go to the novel, and it's like they're two halves of one meta-artwork, one meta-artifact [sic]. (Dick, 1981 in Landon, 1991: 92)

Brooks Landon suggests that Dick's conception of novel and screenplay as meta-artwork demands that:

we attempt to see both written text and film as part of the same hermeneutic system, one whose interpretation emerges from dialectical comparison – a search for equivalences rather than a gleeful cataloguing of apparent infidelities. (Landon, 1991: 99)

Brian Baker (2009: 201) notes that 'this idea has found its way into screen adaptations discourse, though the work of Sarah Cardwell.' Baker (2009: 201) explains that by developing J. Dudley Andrew's suggestion that because of the frames of ideology, culture and intertextuality all adaptations refer to a 'prior whole', 'Cardwell proposes that the literary 'source' text, and the screen adaptation form one 'meta-text'' and that this approach allows for a later adaptation to draw from an earlier adaptation as well as from the original source. In other words, both source material and adaptation can be described as versions

of a kind of prior *ur*-text; the process of adaptation is multiple. This emphasis on intertextuality, as well as the meta-text's anteriority, of

course defuses charges of parasitism with regard to the adapted text: *there are no originals, only copies.* (Baker, 2009: 202)<sup>55</sup>

Developing this, *The Peter & nou Project* considers *Blade Runner* as an artefact which is not a single thing but a matrix of ideas developed by a number of authors over a number of platforms. The works of the project and the works that make up *Blade Runner* the cultural object are a coalescence of narrative threads which do not begin or end but are instead informed and enriched by their coalescence. One result of this is that the works of the project can be easily thought of as being a part of *Blade Runner's* complex cultural whole. Another is that any notions that a viewer may have concerning linear time in relation to that coalescence are quickly rendered redundant.

Practically speaking, the development of affordable software, in concert with the possibilities of dissemination that the Net offers, has virtually erased any notion of the original. The ways in which we now consume and manipulate texts means that a timeline of making is often impossible to define, rendering original, copy and copies of copies indistinguishable. *The Peter & nou Project* uses the existence of the meta-text of '*Blade Runner*'<sup>56</sup> as the

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<sup>55</sup> italics in original.

<sup>56</sup> which include the original novel, the many versions of the film, the K.W. Jetter novels, the 2017 'sequel' *Blade Runner 2049* (Dir. Denis Villeneuve) and other developments of the *Blade Runner* meta-text – a complex network of interconnected objects which tend to be located in the science fiction genre. One obscure iteration I came across recently is a skirt

unsteady fabric into which to new narratives are stitched. The intertextuality of the project allows its works to exist outwith a clearly defined time-line, enabling them to effectively feed each other, resulting in an always evolving constellation of narratives and readings.



Figs. 15 and 16: Vivienne Westwood Hobos skirt (1984) (Credit: Vivienne Westwood).

With *The Horizon Object* as connecting device, works of *The Peter & nou Project* augment *Blade Runner*, becoming part of the meta-text which Philip K. Dick once described.

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from Vivienne Westwood's 1984 collection Hobos, which combines images from *Blade Runner* with 18<sup>th</sup> century almanacs (Figs. 15 and 16).

## Chapter 1

### The Horizon Object

'Jane is having her first filling, but without a pain killing injection. This film will show how patients, dentists and doctors are using hypnosis.'

The Narrator, *Hypnosis and Healing*, 1982



Fig. 17: *The Horizon Object*, Screen shot with title (2014) (Credit: BBC Television/the author).

*The Horizon Object* is a five-minute section<sup>57</sup> of *Hypnosis and Healing*<sup>58</sup> which was filmed in my dentist's surgery in 1981 just a short walk from my childhood home in Glasgow (Fig. 17). On that day my dentist George W. Fairfull Smith was filmed by a BBC documentary crew as he used hypnosis to enable him to drill and fill one of my teeth without the need for anaesthetic. With the addition of an explanatory voice-over, title and a short interview with Fairfull Smith, this footage became the opening of the BBC documentary. Until recently, I believed that the programme was part of the BBC *Horizon* series<sup>59</sup>, but in fact it was as a stand-alone documentary, directed by Michael Barnes<sup>60</sup>, who had worked on *Horizon* from 1972-1976. Despite this or rather because of this apparent category error of my memory, I shall continue to refer to this five-minute section of the documentary *Hypnosis and Healing* as *The Horizon Object*.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> 04.55 minutes to be accurate.

<sup>58</sup> The documentary is described on IMDB as: 'An investigation into the uses, and abuses, of hypnosis both in controlling pain and its use in police work in assisting witnesses with recall of crime scene details which may or may not be accurate.' (IMDB, no date). This problematizing of memory, an important element of the documentary as a whole, is a key element of the video *Peter* (2014) which in turn is connected to the mutability of the project's narratives as a whole.

<sup>59</sup> According to the BBC TV website, '*Horizon* tells amazing science stories, unravels mysteries and reveals worlds you've never seen before.' (BBC, no date).

<sup>60</sup> Currently, Barnes is Director, Writer, Executive Producer and founder of production company Periskope.

<sup>61</sup> I'm sticking with the title *The Horizon Object* for aesthetic, metaphoric and pop-cultural reasons really, as the use of this footage in *The Peter & nou Project* has something in common with notions of the horizon in a broad sense. Just as a horizon can never occupy the same space as that of its observer, so it is impossible for the viewer of *The Peter & nou Project* to view *The Horizon Object* clearly or in isolation. For the viewer, *The Horizon Object*'s reality changes as it shifts between fictions, its essence just out of reach. Like the horizon, *The Horizon Object* is not stable, static or easy to define. More broadly, the title

Broadcast in 1982, *Hypnosis and Healing* is concerned with the uses of hypnosis in clinical and other settings. The programme was recorded as it was broadcast by my uncle, Peter Topping, on his Sony Betamax video recorder and he gave the tape to my parents after broadcast. By the time our family got a video recorder,<sup>62</sup> VHS had become the standard format, and so Uncle Peter's Betamax tape featuring my hypnosis at the dentist was left in a drawer, unwatched until I dug it out, had it transferred to DVD and edited out 'my' section of the programme, thereby making *The Horizon Object*, in February 2014.<sup>63</sup>

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*The Horizon Object* is reminiscent of 'the event horizon', which can be defined as a region in space-time beyond which events cannot affect an outside observer, 'the boundary at which the gravitational pull of a massive object becomes so great as to make escape impossible.' - thank you Wikipedia. In *The Peter & nou Project*, *The Horizon Object* is indeed inescapable. *Event Horizon* (1997) is the title of a film directed by Paul W. S. Anderson, the premise of which is reminiscent of *Alien* (1979) and the reception of which was very similar to that of *Blade Runner* (1982). But I digress.

<sup>62</sup> An exciting moment for any child in the 1980s. The first thing I remember taping was the music video for *Love is a Battlefield* by Pat Benatar, from Channel Four's *The Chart Show* in 1986. Benatar's video culminated with a group of supposed prostitutes revolting against their pimp by performing a defiant dance, choreographed by Michael Peters. Peters also choreographed the zombies in Michael Jackson's *Thriller* and the two works are really very, unsettlingly, similar. Thanks to our video recorder, I could practise both dance routines ad nauseam.

<sup>63</sup> You could describe the process of making *The Horizon Object* as illustrative of the phases of video 'defined in terms of their dominant technologies (transmission, analogue recording and playback, digital recording and playback)' (Newman, 2014: 2) from BBC broadcast in 1982 to my present day practice.

*The Horizon Object* could be said to exist as many versions of the same moment in time,<sup>64</sup> but the version discussed in this chapter is the digital version which I use as both material and tool in various ways and to various ends across *The Peter & nou Project*. *The Horizon Object* is the linking thread between the works of *The Peter & nou Project* - a thing that the works have in common – but is also a thing which is pleasingly mutable. It is an object that appears to act beyond the expected rules of physics - it allows the image of a child under hypnosis to move across narrative and media, appearing to move through time and space. *The Horizon Object* can help conflate fact and fiction or at least make it difficult to tell them apart. In *The Peter & nou Project*, it opens up cracks, allowing for the seepage of information between works. *The Horizon Object* also allows for the merging of chronologies and bodies, rendering distinctions between the artist-author, the hypnotised child and the other, difficult to define. It moves between the works, cutting into and slipping between speculative futures and re-imagined

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<sup>64</sup> These include: the event itself, the raw footage of the event (which surely no longer exists as the BBC had no policy of archiving until 1978 and wiping tapes at the BBC continued well into the 1980s), the edited footage of the event that ended up in the programme *Hypnosis and Healing*, the broadcast event of the footage (and by this I mean the broadcast of *Hypnosis and Healing* and the event of watching it and of taping it at the moment of broadcast), my memory of the event (Appendix 0.4), my mum's memory of the event (Appendix 0.5), the memory of the event in the minds of others (for example Dr George W. Fairfull Smith, the dental nurse and the crew who worked on the film), the descriptions of the event in academic papers (Appendix 0.6), the Betamax tape of the event, the DVD digital transfer of that footage, the .avi version of that footage, the version of the footage that is used in *Peter* (2014), the version of the footage that is used in *nou* (2018), the version of the footage that is used in *Peter & nou* (2018) and the version of the footage that is used in [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com). There are other ways in which *The Horizon Object* exists, but you get the picture – there are many versions of what happened that day and none are definitive.

pasts, becoming different in every new context. *The Horizon Object*<sup>65</sup> is a real thing, a recording of an actual event and an artefact, but in *The Peter & nou Project* it is also a tool and a broken thing<sup>66</sup> - a cut-out that cuts through, required to function in multiple ways, towards multiple narratives. Within the project, *The Horizon Object* can, through its form and its 'own charge and materiality make transversal cuts through time and destabilise the chronotopes to which [it belongs].' (Hameed, 2017: 3).

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<sup>65</sup> My decision to make *The Horizon Object* available online only as a random choice of an algorithm on [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) means that it is not possible to chose to watch *The Horizon Object* in its original context, maintaining its elusive nature.

<sup>66</sup> It has been 'snapped' off the whole of the *Hypnosis and Healing* documentary.

## The Form of *The Horizon Object*



Fig. 18: *The Horizon Object* (2014) (Credit: BBC Television/the author).

*The Horizon Object* is low resolution and has the 4:3 aspect ratio of a television broadcast.<sup>67</sup> A young girl sits in a dentist's chair, a dentist to her right. The machinery of the dental surgery and the child's clothing locate this footage in the past (Fig. 18). The dentist talks inaudibly with the child as a male narrator explains that 'Jane is having her first filling, but without a pain

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<sup>67</sup> In H(A)PPY (2017) Nicola Barker could be talking about *The Horizon Object* when she describes an examined image as being of 'a time when images became grainy, a time of discord, of mischief, of fracture and of pixellation. A time without True Clarity. A time of blurred edges' (Barker, 2017: 6).

killing injection. This film will show how patients, dentists and doctors are using hypnosis.<sup>68</sup> The child nods, appearing to give her consent to a procedure. The dentist has a distinctive accent, perhaps from the Western Isles of Scotland?<sup>69</sup> As he gestures towards a rotary dental drill and some rotating balls of cotton wool, he asks the child to imagine

that this little bit of cotton wool is a baby bunny and this is a mummy bunny and when I turn on the engine they're going to go round and round and round. (Fairfull Smith, 1981)

Occasionally the camera angle changes to occupy the child's point of view, showing the rotating drill and cotton wool balls as if from the dentist's chair.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> See Appendix 0.3 for a full transcript of *The Horizon Object*.

<sup>69</sup> In fact, Dr. George W. Fairfull Smith was born in Chocaya in the Potosí department of Bolivia.

<sup>70</sup> There's a smiley face badge pinned to the wall beyond the dental drill in this shot from the child's POV (Fig. 19). There's so much I like about this. Though the exact origins of 'The Smiley' are contested, it has been a symbol of youthful rebellion since the early '60s. Jon Savage has written that 'The Smiley has travelled far from its early 1960s origins, changing like a constantly mutating virus: from early-70s fad to late-80s acid house culture, from millennial txt option to serial killer signature and ubiquitous emoticon.' (Savage, 2009) It's a badge once worn by The Comedian in Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons' *The Watchmen* (1987), albeit found with his blood splattered across its face (you can now buy them pre-splattered). Because of its longevity, probably due to its mutable nature, and because of its slightly sinister overtones, I chose to include an image of the dentist's smiley badge on the back cover of *Peter & nou* (2018).

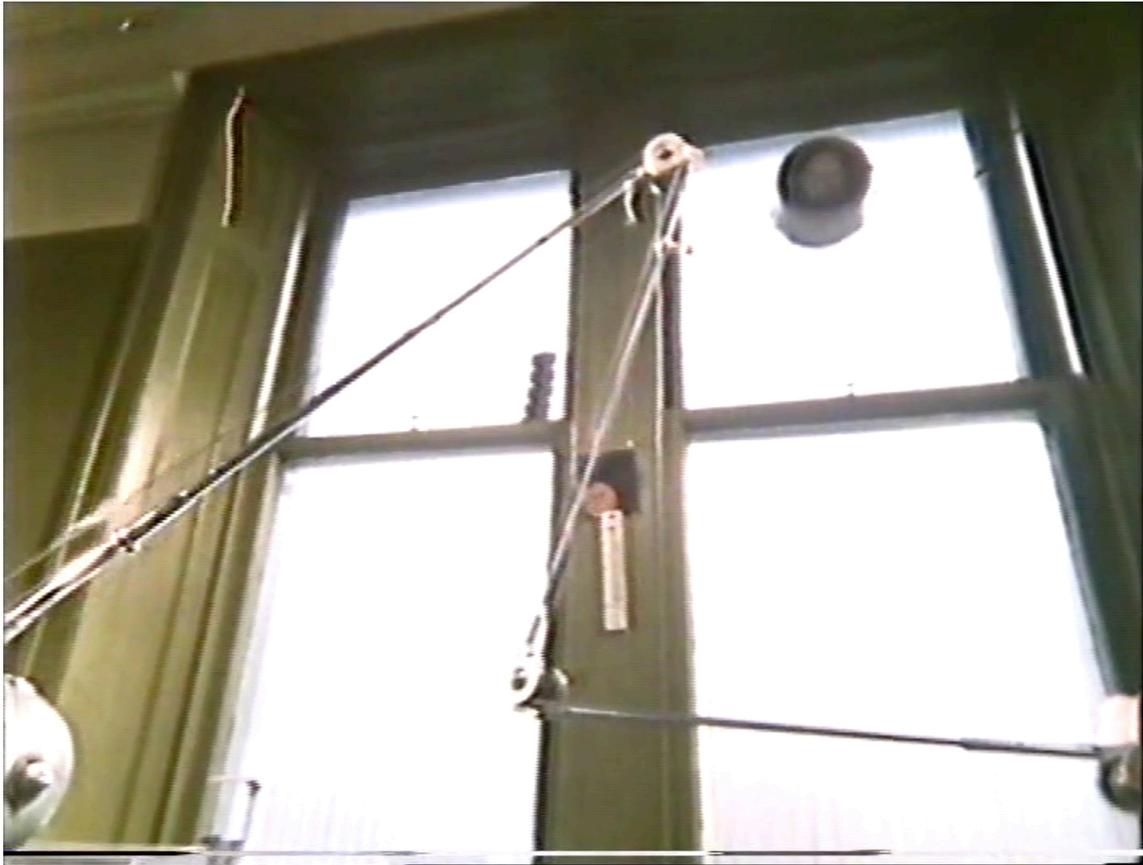


Fig. 19: *The Horizon Object* (2014), child's POV with smiley face (Credit: BBC Television/the author).

After watching the cotton wool balls for a time the child appears to be under hypnosis, indicated as she raises her left hand (Fig. 20).<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> This is a classic of hypnosis induction, the idea being that as the subject's left arm rises up, seemingly by itself, the subject moves deeper into hypnosis. I remember lifting my left hand at the time, not because I was under hypnosis (I didn't think I was) but to *look* like I was hypnotised, to make sure that I ended up on TV.



Fig. 20: My hand rises up in *The Horizon Object* (2014) (Credit: BBC Television/the author).

Now the dentist introduces the idea that the rabbits are being chased by a fox and that the girl might save them by allowing them to hide in her tooth. There is a short exchange between dentist and child during which she describes the fox and agrees to let the rabbits hide in her tooth.<sup>72</sup> Before the dentist drills and fills the girl's tooth without anaesthetic (Fig. 21), there is a single shot of the face of a female dental nurse.

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<sup>72</sup> This narrative has striking similarities to the opening scene of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (Carroll, 1865) during which a girl, also in an altered state of consciousness, plunges after a rabbit and into a hole leading to an alternative world...



Fig. 21: My tooth is drilled and filled in *The Horizon Object* (2014) (Credit: BBC Television/the author).

After the procedure, there is a short discussion between dentist and child concerning the imagined fox, before she is helped out of the dentist's chair and led out of the surgery (Fig. 22).



Fig. 22: Leaving the dental surgery in *The Horizon Object* (2014) (Credit: BBC Television/the author).

In a brief interview with the dentist<sup>73</sup> at the end of *The Horizon Object*, he describes the apparent success of the procedure as being down to the fact that 'at this particular age they have a tremendous ability to just imagine and this is the whole secret of this technique.' (Fairfull Smith, 1981)

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<sup>73</sup> I'm not the first filmmaker to make use of the dental surgery as a location which brings about time travel. In Hilary Brougher's *The Sticky Fingers Of Time* (1997) a trip to the dentist has devastating consequences for two protagonists – one is killed while the other becomes a 'time freak', moving uncomfortably between futures, presents and pasts - between what will be and what might have been. (Figs. 23 and 24)



Figs. 23 and 24: A terrifying 'dentist' and an attempt to figure things out in *The Sticky Fingers of Time* (1997) (Credit: Crystal Pictures, Good Machine, Isen Robbins Productions).

### The Child of *The Horizon Object*

I am the ten-year-old hypnotised child of *The Horizon Object*. The male narrator and the dentist refer to me respectively as Jane and Janey<sup>74</sup>, supporting my identity as the hypnotised child. Despite my presence both visually and audibly in the videos *Peter* (2014) and *nou* (2018), the identity of the hypnotised child is complicated by its ubiquity within *The Peter & nou Project*. For instance, that complication arises in *Peter* due to the possibility of an unreliable narrator and in *nou* because the child's body may have become combined with that of an alien being. Throughout the project the identity of the child in *The Horizon Object* is slippery and ill-defined, changing with each new circumstance described by the works. This encourages an aura of speculation around the footage, and by implication

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<sup>74</sup> Even as a child I found this version of my name grating and so it is testament to the character of George Fairfull Smith in all other respects that his calling me Janey didn't put me off going to the dentist for good.

around *The Peter & nou Project*, assisting the building of alternative and interchangeable narratives.

*The Horizon Object* offers me access to a version of myself which I recognise but which is not entirely supported by my memory of the event itself. For me, this was an early indication that *The Horizon Object* might operate as evidence that personal memory is mutable and that the past is essentially unknowable within my practice. In the narratives of the individual works, the identity of the hypnotised child is deliberately stated and then contested. This is magnified by the conflicting identities of the child created by the interlinked relationships between the works. The child-self of *The Horizon Object* is complicated by *The Peter & nou Project*.

#### Pool & Portal

It could be argued that there is necessarily a narcissistic relationship between myself and *The Horizon Object*,<sup>75</sup> however *The Horizon Object* is not simply a reflective pool, it is also a portal. It opens a door to the past, allowing a viewer to step back in time as they watch a piece of the televisual archive.

*The Horizon Object* has impact beyond that of a family home-movie due to

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<sup>75</sup> and I admit that allure of watching oneself on screen, particularly as a child, is undeniable.

its inclusion in a scientific documentary and its subsequent televisual broadcast, ensuring that the hypnotised child of *The Horizon Object* – the artist-self - is legitimised by exposure to wider communities.<sup>76</sup> This legitimisation is amplified as *The Horizon Object* is fetishised and re-framed for its appearance before new audiences and in new narrative contexts across the project.<sup>77</sup>

### Power & Control

*The Horizon Object's* purpose in the project cannot be characterised as operating solely within what Frederic Jameson (1997) termed the 'nostalgia mode' as the project is not concerned with *reproducing* the qualities of *The Horizon Object* in order to make a new historical past.<sup>78</sup> Rather my use of *The Horizon Object* reclaims a moment from the past - a moment which involved the loss of personal agency as I was under hypnosis. This loss of agency was then amplified by being recorded, broadcast, distributed and studied, resulting in the creation of multiples of my image which were beyond the

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<sup>76</sup> Including not only the audience of the BBC documentary, but also as it turned out the readership of a couple of medical journals. See Appendix 0.6 for a discussion of my experience by Gibson and Heap in *Hypnosis in Therapy*, 1991.

<sup>77</sup> For instance, this feature of *The Horizon Object* is exaggerated in *Peter*, by the presence of the BBC documentary footage in *Blade Runner* - a circumstance used by the narrator in an attempt to boost her social status amongst her peers.

<sup>78</sup> And anyway, as Ofelia (Belinda Becker) says in *The Sticky fingers of Time* 'Nostalgia has no meaning in non-linear time.'

scope of my control. By employing and recontextualising *The Horizon Object* in my practice, I am able to take back control of my image-self in an act of self-actualisation which inverts the power dynamics depicted in *The Horizon Object*.

The peculiar fascination that *The Horizon Object* has for me as a piece of familial archive is broadened in *The Peter & nou Project* by the introduction of new contexts for the footage, often rooted in popular culture, which encourage the potency of *The Horizon Object* to resonate with various audiences. The hierarchies of power evident both in and around *The Horizon Object* are revealed and re-imagined by *The Peter & nou Project* which reclaims my broadcast and hypnotised self and uses it to propose alternative versions of the past, future and present of which I am now firmly in control.

### Altered States

That *The Horizon Object* is a recording of a child's altered state of consciousness is highly significant in the context of *The Peter & nou Project*. *The Horizon Object* captures a time before selfhood and a time when the developing self of the child is further compromised by being placed under hypnosis. The child of *The Horizon Object* is both experimental subject and

object of scrutiny, and this confusion of status adds to the uncertainty of the footage. The doubt and suspicion that the act of hypnosis on the body foregrounds opens up the events of *The Horizon Object*, ensuring that they are questionable. This contentiousness makes *The Horizon Object* an excellent tool of narrative speculation that can mutate and imitate. The disputable nature of *The Horizon Object*, due in part to the presumed altered state of the child under hypnosis, is one way in which it is an effective agent of change within an art practice concerned with speculating fictions and questioning truths.

### The Textures of Television

In 1982 when *The Horizon Object* was originally broadcast, there was a cachet associated with appearing on television. It follows that in order to retain its powerful pre-Internet status, the physical qualities of *The Horizon Object* must be evident across *The Peter & nou Project*. Its form must refer to its original televisual broadcast context if *The Horizon Object* is to reflect the circumstances in which it is placed as if it had always been there, as an 'authentic fake' (Eco, 1998). If *The Horizon Object* was not textured - not gritty and fuzzy or if it looked as if it were digital in origin - it would be of little use as a tool of fictioning, as to a viewer it might appear as an

insignificant and widely available scrap of digital flotsam.<sup>79</sup> Its visual ricketiness is therefore another way that *The Horizon Object* is an effective tool of change within the works of *The Peter & nou Project* as it has the ability to trouble the viewer. It may appear separate from yet refer to both its original and its various new contexts. *The Horizon Object* can appear to slide off a page, cut through a screen and weave in and out of artworks. It can move from the television to the digital screen, from the pages of a book into the Net. In this way the footage haunts the works that comprise *The Peter & nou Project* as a spectre that slips through walls (or rather screens), moving in ways which makes time appear out of joint. When at work within *The Peter & nou Project*, *The Horizon Object* gives image to the past and embodies the trace, marking the absence of a presence.

### A Rendered Body

*The Horizon Object*, with its analogue aesthetic and its recording of the body, can operate both before and after the cinematic as an aesthetic experience. It appears to exist as a recording of a performance for the screen, yet is also a recording of a body, cut-up and cut loose from its origin, already rendered into pieces. In his discussion of the album *My Life in the*

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<sup>79</sup> just some more cultural kipple.

*Bush of Ghosts* by Brian Eno and David Byrne (1981), Cary Wolfe (2010: 292)

describes the analogue as 'spooky or spectral for the regime of rendering because, among other things, it depends on the interplay of material forces and bodies' which are not:

wholly subsumable or predictable by programs or schemata, simply because the interplay of real magnitudes in space-time is fundamentally and even inexhaustibly contingent, creating a reservoir of complexity and contingency that is, in principle, bottomless. (Wolfe, 2010: 292-293)

In principle then, the translation of analogue to digital as exemplified by *The Horizon Object* could be said to be fundamentally 'wrong' and as such, open to infinite possibilities of manipulation and reconfiguration. This is one reason that *The Horizon Object* can slice and slide into new circumstances and stories, appearing at home in all and yet also none – it seems infinitely complex. This contingency also has implications for the development of the project as it permits the use of *The Horizon Object* in future works, presuming that all and none are the final home<sup>80</sup> of a restless ghost, defiant in its placelessness. The spectre that is *The Horizon Object* is that "'corrupting" and "contaminating" work – but also the haunting or spectral character' (Wolfe, 2010: 293) which weaves together the works of *The Peter & nou Project*.

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<sup>80</sup> or do I mean resting place?

## A Hauntological Object

In *Specters of Marx* (1993) Derrida coined the term 'hauntology' (*hantologie*), a term which both Mark Fisher and I came across in the pages of the *New Musical Express* in the 1980s.<sup>81</sup> Derrida's hauntology was a development of his theories of trace and *Différance* and, as Fisher describes:

referred to the way in which nothing enjoys a purely positive existence. Everything that exists is possible only on the basis of a whole series of absences, which precede and surround it, allowing it to possess such consistency and intelligibility that it does. (Fisher, 2014: 18)

Hauntology is concerned with time and Derrida makes use of the phrase from *Hamlet* 'the time is out of joint'. Like the ghostly figure of a dead King, the figure of the spectre is one which 'cannot be fully present: it has no being in itself but marks a relation to what is no longer or not yet' (Hägglund, 2008 in Fisher, 2014: 18).

Fisher (2014:18) defines hauntology neatly and appropriately for a post-digital context as '*the agency of the virtual*, with the specter understood not as anything supernatural, but as that which acts without (physically)

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<sup>81</sup> Forgive the presumption that we were both lying on our stomachs on our respective bedroom floors reading the same issue of the NME.

existing.<sup>82</sup> *The Horizon Object* can be described as virtual, in that it is a thing which cannot be definitively described - a thing which is at once *no longer* and *not yet*. It is its indefinable qualities that allow *The Horizon Object* to be manipulated into new versions of itself, always occupying a state of becoming. *The Horizon Object* has hauntological agency and, as a piece of material at the heart of *The Peter & nou Project*, could be defined as Fisher's (2014: 18) first identified direction of hauntology: 'that which is (in actuality) *no longer*, but which *remains* effective as a virtuality (the traumatic "compulsion to repeat", a fatal pattern)'.<sup>83</sup> However, as one might expect, this definition cannot accommodate the variations of *The Horizon Object's* role across the project. For instance in *Peter*, *The Horizon Object* is consistently promised and yet little seen. In *Peter* then, *The Horizon Object* could be said to be an example of Fisher's (2014: 18) second sense of hauntology: 'that which (in actuality) has not yet happened, but which is *already* effective in the virtual'.

My use of *The Horizon Object* restores and repurposes an image of a past childhood, while the unearthing of the videotape and its transformation into digital material initiated the movement of a flickering, granular version of my past self through time and space. Both actions allow my childhood self to

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<sup>82</sup> emphasis and parentheses in the original.

<sup>83</sup> emphasis and parentheses in the original.

haunt alternative imagined futures, some of which are already in the past.

*The Horizon Object* thus exploits and expands the 'gaps and fissures' (Fisher, 2014: 2-3) deliberately built into the multiple knots of narratives which make up *The Peter & nou Project*, allowing for its creeping movement along Fisher's 'fabric of the corridor of time'. Gaps are created by the interaction of the doubt between fictions of *The Peter & nou Project* and the 'reality' of *The Horizon Object*, the nature and effect of which are profoundly interstitial.

#### The Future is Not Cancelled, But it Will Be Televised

Fisher has observed that in the final episode of *Sapphire and Steel* the main characters appear to be trapped out of time in a space described by another character as 'nowhere, and it's forever'. Fisher (2014: 6) interprets this situation as being 'prophetic for a general condition: in which life continues, but time has somehow stopped.' In *The Peter & nou Project*, *The Horizon Object* challenges Fisher's cancelled future by its reanimation as the mechanism by which new futures, pasts and presents are proposed. Fisher contends:

that the 21st-century culture is marked by the same anachronism and inertia which afflicted *Sapphire and Steel* in their final adventure. But this stasis has been buried behind a superficial frenzy of 'newness', of perpetual movement. The 'jumbling up of time', the montaging of

earlier eras<sup>84</sup>, has ceased to be worthy of comment; it is now so prevalent that is no longer even noticed. (Fisher, 2014: 6)

*The Peter & nou Project* transforms *The Horizon Object* from a piece of broadcast archive into a kind of personal anachronism as a positive political act and a potential way out of Fisher's observed torpor. The project jumbles up time by using scraps of images, sounds and texts from twentieth and twenty-first-century pop culture and literature, combining these with *The Horizon Object* not simply as a form of visual fastness which gives the appearance of movement, but as triggers and supports for the activation and movement of *The Horizon Object* across the works of the project. *The Horizon Object* could be described as a thing which documents a lost future - a potential not realised (and in the narrative of the video *Peter* this is made explicit) - but crucially, the works of *The Peter & nou Project* offer alternative futures and potentials which reinvigorate *The Horizon Object*, allowing it to play novel roles in the creation of alternative narratives. *The Peter & nou Project* undermines the psychological perception that the future has been cancelled by reinvigorating *The Horizon Object* as an object that operates at my behest. *The Horizon Object* is not merely a ghost of childhood which haunts the works, but can also be likened to Frankenstein's monster - a

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<sup>84</sup> Reminiscent of Douglas Coupland's definition of 'Decade Blending: In clothing: the indiscriminate combination of two or more items from various decades to create a personal mood: *Sheila* = *Mary Quant earrings (1960s) + cork wedgie platform shoes (1970s) + black leather jacket (1950s and 1980s)*.' (*Generation X*, 1991)

chopped up, remade and reanimated version of my childhood self, now capable of outwitting the laws of physics. As either a ghost that can move through screens or a rendered and rebuilt monster, *The Horizon Object* is always a mechanism of change. It is a cut-up, and as such has political agency. Within *The Peter & nou Project* its unusual form engenders agency which challenges authority – the authority of the broadcast image, of memory, of a singular personhood and of a predetermined, inevitable future.

### A Strange Simultaneity

Fisher (2014: 9) observed that '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'. This contemporary state of simultaneity is useful when weaving SF from fragments of other things as, if the contemporary viewer is unable to notice a specific recycled image amongst a string of other recycled images, then fictions made from scraps of cultural products can be made to be easily absorbed by a viewer. And yet 'discrepancies in texture' (Fisher, 2014: 11) are essential when attempting to create *believable* alternative timelines, something that is specifically developed by *The Peter & nou Project's* intertextual nature. Within the project, analogue textural richness rubs

against the smooth 'clarity' of the digital image - like Asger Jorn's sand-paper covered *Mémoires* (1959) in the bookcase – in moving image, book and online forms. The discrepancies of texture between *The Horizon Object* and its various surroundings function to make the viewer aware that they are watching a time that is out of joint, never allowing the viewer 'to fall into the illusion of presence.' (Fisher, 2014: 21). Thus *The Horizon Object*, with its analogue 'crackle' sitting within digital works, has an anachronistic, disruptive dynamic which facilitates fictioning in the context of the project.

There is an important political effect at work here too. The complex temporality of *The Peter & nou Project* which *The Horizon Object* enables signals a refusal to give up on 'the desire of the future' (Fisher, 2014). While the presence of *The Horizon Object* across the project does, at times, evoke a sort of melancholia or a nostalgic empathy for the child it features in the viewer, *The Peter & nou Project's* proposal of fresh futures, presents and pasts emerge from a frustration with given reality and are a genuine attempt to open up seemingly closed or previously unimagined horizons for the viewer, through a process of inter-temporal mashing. Through my deployment of *The Horizon Object* – certainly a ghost of *my* life – the project intertwines the personal and the cultural as a strategy to both propose and reveal *positive* alternatives to reality.

## Chapter 2

### Peter (2014)

'The best sequel to *Blade Runner* is *Peter* by Jane Topping.'

Matt Lloyd, Director of Glasgow Short Film Festival, 2018

*Peter* (2014) is a 30-minute, single screen video which takes the form of a documentary in which the narrator recalls her appearance in Ridley Scott's 1982 film *Blade Runner*. *Peter* weaves *The Horizon Object* into the fabric of *Blade Runner*, using the work and biography of Philip K. Dick as a loom-like tool. The result is a repositioning and a forced reappraisal of what is considered a classic of post-modern science fiction in a post-digital context.

Crucial to the success of *Peter* is uncertainty.<sup>85</sup> The possibility of doubt is fostered in *Peter* by the accumulation and combination of facts and fictions, and by the inclusion of *The Horizon Object's* hypnotised child as narrator.

The momentum of *Peter* is driven by the promise of the image of the child, in the form of *The Horizon Object*, appearing in *Blade Runner* and *Peter* seems

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<sup>85</sup> Speculation lies at the heart of *Peter*, the narrative of which turns on the fact or fiction of the narrator's image appearing in *Blade Runner*. As *Peter* does not substantiate or refute this narrative, it would be inconsistent and even contradictory to the aims of my practice do so in this thesis.

to move towards that revelation.<sup>86</sup> The relentless searching evident in *Peter* - of the narrator repeatedly watching versions of *Blade Runner* and probing her own memory – is shared with the viewer, making them an active participant in the work. The viewer becomes a detective, mirroring the plot of *Blade Runner* itself.<sup>87</sup>

*Peter* merges two moving image forms - the documentary and the essay-film - or rather in *Peter*, what begins as a straight-forward documentary about the narrator and the film *Blade Runner* develops into a more speculative and thoughtful text on the inconsistencies of personal memory, shared cultural knowledge and storytelling.

### *Peter* and Chris Marker

The form of *Peter* was influenced, at times unconsciously, by the work of Chris Marker, specifically his *Sans Soleil* (1982). In fact, three works of *The Peter & nou Project* each share formal qualities found in Marker's loosely

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<sup>86</sup> A similar approach was used by Barthes in *Camera Lucida* (1980), his analysis of photography organised around an image of his mother which is never shown, 'almost as though making it present would banalize his desire, or reduce it.' (Doane, 1999).

<sup>87</sup> And just FYI: 'The film is set in a dystopian future Los Angeles of 2019, in which synthetic humans known as replicants are bio-engineered by the powerful Tyrell Corporation to work on off-world colonies. When a fugitive group of advanced replicants led by Roy Batty (Rutger Hauer) escapes back to Earth, burnt-out cop Rick Deckard (Harrison Ford) reluctantly agrees to hunt them down.' (Wikipedia, no date).

bound trilogy of works *La Jetée* (1962),<sup>88</sup> *Sans Soleil* and *Level 5* (1996).

While *nou* explores similar time-travelling territory to *La Jetée*<sup>89</sup> and

[www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) could be seen as an extension of

themes of digital narrative found in *Level 5*, *Peter* mirrors Marker's

development of the documentary form into what Sarah Cooper (2008: 114)

describes as 'the quintessential essay film'.



Figs. 25 and 26: Screen shots from *Vicki & Alex, Like the Clouds: Final Edit* and *Vicki & Alex, Like the Clouds: Melissa Edit* (both 2015) (Credit: the author).

Like *Sans Soleil*, *Peter* uses the moving image interspersed with still images,

to build a narrative. In *Sans Soleil*, though the narrator is female, the main

protagonist is male – the imaginary cameraman Sandor Krasna. Similarly in

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<sup>88</sup> Here's a knot of coincidences – David Peoples, the second screen writer of *Blade Runner*, also wrote the screen play for *Twelve Monkeys* (1995), Terry Gilliam's version of *La Jetée*. *Twelve Monkeys*, like *nou*, makes use of the physiological dimension of the tooth as an object and a place which may be inhabited – in *nou* by an alien and in *Twelve Monkeys* by a tracking device from the future: 'It's in the tooth, right Bob?' (Gilliam, 1995).

<sup>89</sup> Though perhaps most clearly marked in *La Jetée*, Marker's exploration of the relationship between time and the photographic image can be found in works across his oeuvre and similarly across *The Peter & nou Project*. These themes are also evident in many of my other works, such as *Vicki and Alex, Like the Clouds* (2014-2015) (Figs. 25 and 26), *Untitled (for Ursula and Naomi)* (2018) and *A 35mm 208-ish Frame Version of Blade Runner* (2017-Ongoing).

*Peter* a female narrator describes a number of male protagonists,<sup>90</sup> imagined (or rather re-imagined versions of real people) by the narrator. In *Peter, Sans Soleil's* epigraph (taken from Racine in the French version and T.S. Eliot in the English - both of which concern time) is replaced with text which concerns memory, specifically – and crucially - false memory (Fig. 27).

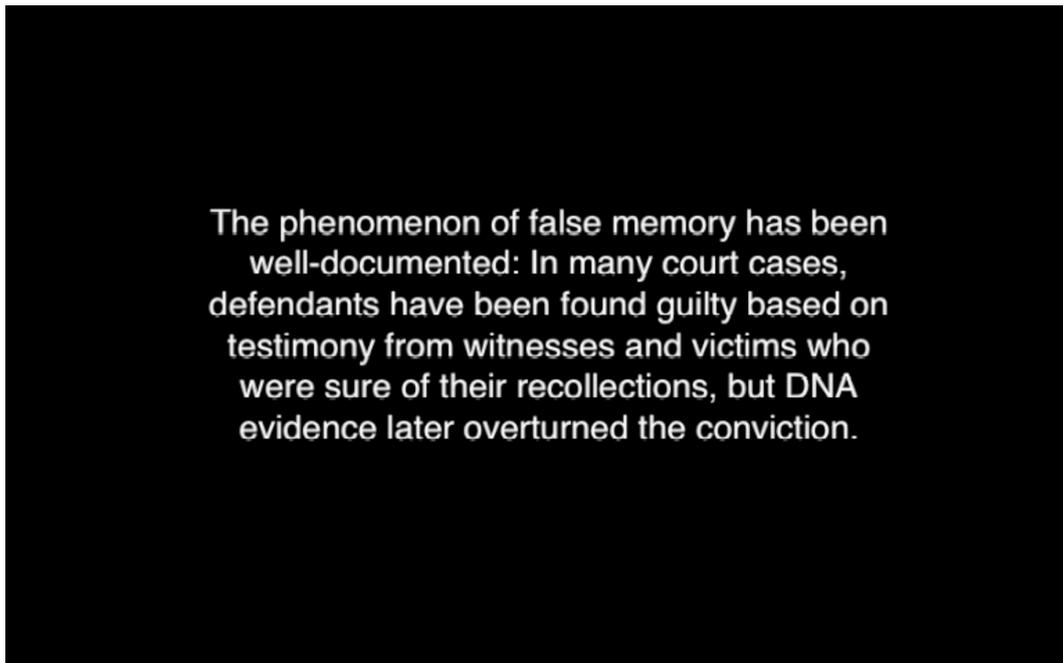


Fig. 27: One introductory text screen in *Peter* (2014) (Credit: the author).

In *Sans Soleil*, the female narrator reads from Krasna's letters to create a 'commentary, which reflects both obliquely and directly on the images we see.' (Cooper, 2008: 115), while in *Peter* commentary is provided by a female voice whose story, though her own, is similarly oblique and direct. *Peter* borrows a tactic found in *Sans Soleil* – the narrator is not given an assumed

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<sup>90</sup> who drift in and out of the narrative as the work progresses and include the narrator's Uncle Peter, her father, the dentist, Philip K. Dick and Ridley Scott.

name – in order that the voice is that of a documentary commentator. This acts to counter any authoritative break that may surround the female voice and may be amplified in *Peter* as the commentary is not voiced by a professional actor. While *Sans Soleil* employs fragments of many films, *Peter* concentrates on just one – *Blade Runner*. *Peter's* narrative is particularly concerned with the cityscape of a fictional 2019 Los Angeles (replacing Marker's real-world Tokyo) and it is perhaps in the use of cities that *Peter* and *Sans Soleil* have most in common. In both works:

the cityscape is fleshed out before it becomes a stage for the fabrication of memories and realms, a place of life and substance, and also the locus of access to the insubstantial. (Cooper, 2008: 119)

In *Peter*, Cooper's 'insubstantial' is present in the video's preoccupation with the fragile, indistinct and inconsistent nature of memory, both the memories of a possibly unreliable narrator and those of the viewer, as *Peter* asks them to question their personal and cultural memories of *Blade Runner*. In this way, *Peter* develops Marker's *Sans Soleil*, reworking the 'documentary's relation to the real and to experience, through the profound calling into question of the viewing self.' (Copper, 2008: 120).

## Peter and Philip K. Dick

The life and works of Philip K. Dick underpin the research for and the conceit of *Peter*.<sup>91</sup> Originating from the fact that *Blade Runner* is based on Dick's novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968), the plot of *Peter* mirrors many of the concerns specific to Dick's novel and Scott's adaptation, particularly notions of false memory and doubling. Dick's oeuvre is populated with characters who are confused, paranoid and unreliable, often existing within worlds in which free-will is revealed to be an illusion. In *Peter*, the narrator is revealed to be similarly unreliable, her agency and authority never definitively confirmed.

One specific example of *Peter's* use of Dick's fiction and biography is the link made between the hypnotised child of *The Horizon Object* and *VALIS* (Dick, 1981). The narrative of *Peter* states that the events recorded in *The Horizon Object* happen at the same time as Dick writes *VALIS*.<sup>92</sup> This connection of

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<sup>91</sup> In 2017, three years after I had completed *Peter*, I met artist Mark Aerial Waller who told me about the novel he co-authored, *PHILIP* (2007). The novel emerged from a science fiction writing workshop held at Project Arts Centre in Dublin in 2007. Workshop participants – Cosmin Costinas, Rosemary Heather, Francis Mckee, David Reinfurt, Steve Rushton and Mark himself – collectively wrote a novel envisioning the last week of the year 2019, inspired by the worlds of Philip K. Dick and it's well worth seeking out. The book is evidence that Dick's work and life are excellent material with which to make new fictions. What the book doesn't attempt (while *The Peter & nou Project* does) is to successfully weave itself into the cultural object that is *Blade Runner*.

<sup>92</sup> As the narrator says: 'in 1981, when I was being hypnotised by my dentist, Philip K. Dick was writing *VALIS*' and both *did* occur in 1981. Fact!

two recorded events<sup>93</sup> - the filming of the hypnosis and the writing of *VALIS* - link the action of creation of these two material objects in time.<sup>94</sup> The narrator of *Peter* describes both events as emerging from altered states of consciousness - of authorial and participant confusion - comparing Philip K. Dick's 'drug-addled, schizophrenic and mixed up' (Topping, 2014) state of mind to the effects of hypnosis on the mind of a child.<sup>95</sup> This connection, one of many 'coincidences' in *Peter*, functions to bind the narrator's story to reality, while simultaneously casting doubt on the veracity of her recollections.<sup>96</sup>

One example of *Peter's* contribution to the vibrant academic discourse around the life and work of Philip K. Dick took place at The Fifth Annual Philip K. Dick Science Fiction Film Festival, New York, USA, 2017, at which *Peter* won Best Philip K. Dick Short Film. *Peter's* reception at the festival was fascinating as during one post-screening discussion it became clear that the audience of The Philip K. Dick Science Fiction Film Festival – a festival 'by

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<sup>93</sup> Really, they are two acts of recording which are both recorded.

<sup>94</sup> Other similarities between *VALIS* and *Peter* can be found in their convoluted plots and their use of the author surrogate - Philip K. Dick is the main protagonist in *VALIS* and I claim to be *Peter's* author and narrator.

<sup>95</sup> In *The Exegesis of Philip K. Dick* (2011), Dick claims that *VALIS* was among the works he wrote following a series of visions which may have originated from 'VALIS' – the Vast Active Living Intelligence System - and were possibly religious in origin. The origin of the visions was a pendant and Dick's encounter with the pendant is mentioned in *Peter*.

<sup>96</sup> This narrator might be as paranoid and confused as Philip K. Dick, or as paranoid and confused as a character in a Philip K. Dick novel.

filmmakers for filmmakers' which screens 'films which question viewers [sic] reality with ideas and concepts which are not normally found in conventional stories' (The Philip K. Dick Science Fiction Film Festival, no date) - seemed to accept without question that I was in *Blade Runner*. This made discussion around *Peter*, *Blade Runner* and Dick's biography a complicated and protracted affair which generated more questions than either I or *Peter* were able to answer.<sup>97</sup> For this audience, confidence gave way to doubt and curiosity.

#### Mice and Doubt

*Peter* is littered with textual doubles, coincidences and cultural references, not all of which are instantly recognisable but which nonetheless offer *Peter* a depth and richness which allows for satisfying repeat viewings.<sup>98</sup> Throughout *Peter*, doubt is encouraged in the mind of the viewer by the insertion of pop-cultural references, particularly from science fiction film, and by

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<sup>97</sup> Though perhaps I shouldn't have been so shocked at the audience's trust in the documentary form. The programme also included a documentary which purported, with total seriousness, to present scientific proof of alien abduction and the insertion of alien DNA into human bodies. Excruciating - and perhaps indicative of our contemporary 'post-truth' political reality.

<sup>98</sup> This thickness of text is one which *Blade Runner* and other cult films of the 1980s and before exhibit as a result of their directors' approaches to narrative and cinematography which were, at the time of their release, indicative of the post-modern. Since then this strategy has been developed into the seemingly ubiquitous 'Easter Egg' - cynically deployed hidden 'treasures' placed in films - which necessitate close and repeated viewing of a film post cinema release and are really a short-cut towards 'cult' status, driven by the economic benefits that fan culture can bring.

contradictions between image and text. The use of mice in *Peter* is a good example of how cultural references are put to work in two ways. *Peter* begins with a series of text screens which describe the phenomenon of false memory, interspersed with moving images of a white mouse held in the palm of a human hand (Fig. 28). The text screens refer to 'MIT neuroscientists' (Fig. 29) and the figure holding the mouse is wearing a lab coat, so both text and image work together to suggest a scientific and documentary context for the video.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Something similar occurs in *Us* (2018, Dir. Jordan Peele) when an early scene cuts to images of rabbits in cages in what appears to be an institutional context. As in *Peter*, Peele's suggestion is that the 'real world' of the film may be an elaborate experiment by unknown others. Later in *Us* we might understand the rabbit imagery to mean that there will be retribution for human mistreatment of non-human animals. Either way, societal and biological hierarchies are problematised in *Us*. Just as *Blade Runner* is cultural material given a new context by *Peter*, in *Us* Peele makes use of a known cultural event – *Hands Across America*, a public charity event which took place in 1986 and during which approximately 6.5 million people held hands for fifteen minutes in an attempt to form a human chain across the contiguous United States – in order to ground his fiction and reframe a historical event.



Fig. 28: A mouse in *Peter* (2014) (Credit: the author).

In a step toward understanding how these faulty memories arise, MIT neuroscientists have shown that they can plant false memories in the brains of mice. They also found that many of the neurological traces of these memories are identical in nature to those of authentic memories.

Fig. 29: Text screen in *Peter* (2014) (Credit: the author).

The laboratory mouse in *Peter* is Algernon (Fig. 30) - a character in the science fiction film *Charly* (1968) itself an adaptation of Daniel Keyes' novel

*Flowers for Algernon* (1966).<sup>100</sup> In the novel and film adaptation, Charlie, a man of low intelligence is transformed into a genius by medical experiment. Before his transformation, Charlie is introduced to the mouse Algernon who has already undergone the same experiment and who is able to beat Charlie at simple texts. So, while the inclusion of the lab mouse at the start of *Peter* helps to set a scientific scene, it also encourages viewer concern by foregrounding themes of experimentation on animals and the trope of the 'mad scientist'. These connections may reveal a viewer's feelings of unease with respect to the scientific community and in turn encourage empathy for the child in *Peter* who is also the focus of an experiment.<sup>101</sup> Additionally, as the number of mouse moments increase over the length of *Peter*, a viewer may wonder if they too are an experimental subject when watching *Peter*.

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<sup>100</sup> M.J. Ryder has written on the relationships between human/non-human and human/machine in *Flowers for Algernon* (Ryder, 2019: 54-65).

<sup>101</sup> There's a similarity to be drawn between my televised image and the figure of Wilbur Mercer in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*. Mercerism is a kind of religion in the novel, inspired by the sufferings of a single person - Mercer - which can be watched on television. Richard Viskovic has defined Mercer in the following way: 'He is a historical figure. He is an old man climbing a hill to his death. He is the actor Al Jarry on a stage. He is an 'archetypal entity from the stars, superimposed on our culture by a cosmic template' [...] He is a real person [...] He is everyone joined together in fusion. He is no one – a person who never really existed. Mercer figures at the centre of the novel, but he is a figure of myth and uncertainty.' (Viskovic 2013: 167 in Moosavi 2018: 35). So too the child of *The Horizon Object* is a figure of uncertainty.

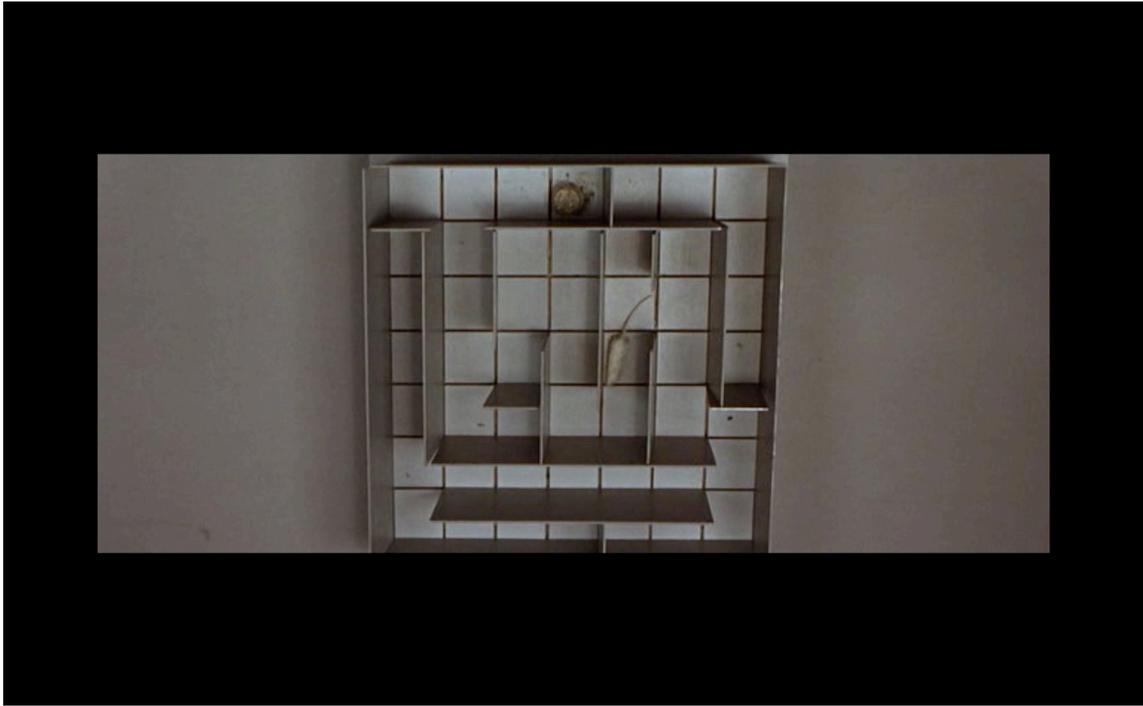


Fig. 30: Algernon in a maze in *Peter* (2014) (Credit: the author).

Algernon the mouse appears throughout *Peter* to encourage these possible effects. Whether these effects are based on a viewer's recognition of Algernon and his context, on their opinion of scientific experimentation or on the possibility of their own hypnosis is not important. What is significant is that the accumulation of such fragments from differing cultural areas across the video makes *Peter* captivating for a range of audiences across a range of disciplines, each able to appreciate at least some if not all of the cultural references present.

## The Viewer Detective

*Peter* also makes use of subtle contradictions of image and text to make a detective of the viewer. For instance, early in the video, the narrator describes the life of her Uncle Peter, as family photographs support her narration. However these images are not always what they appear to be.<sup>102</sup>

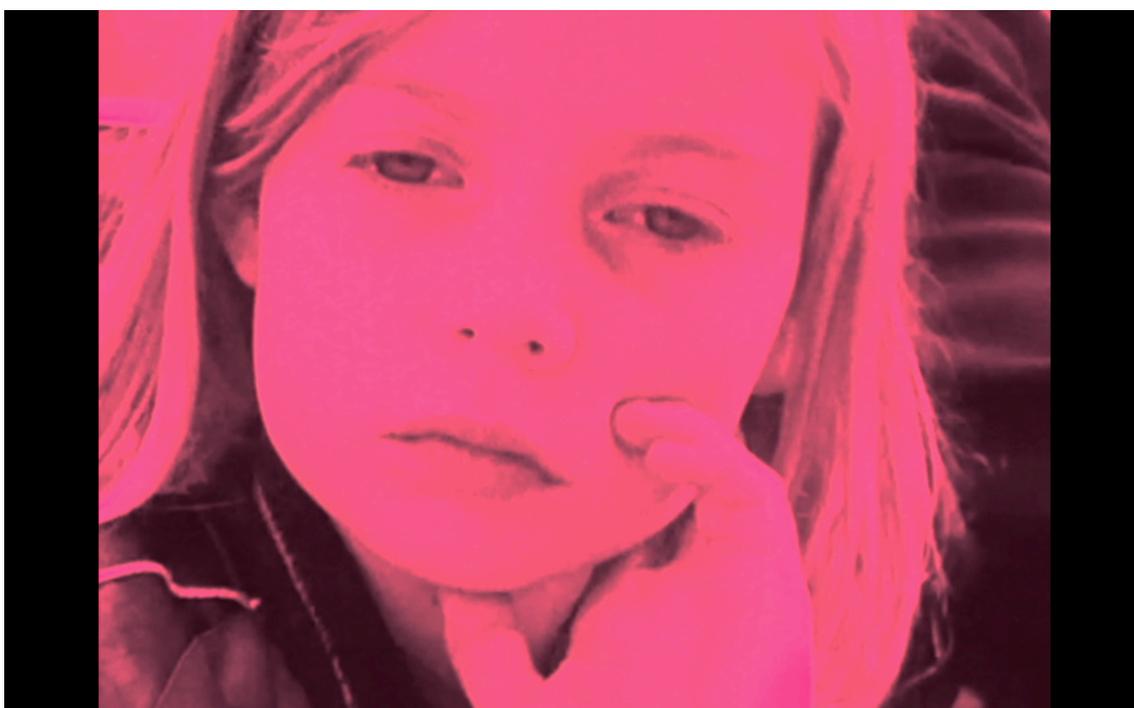


Fig. 31: Yella Rottländer plays me in *Peter* (2014) (Credit: the author).

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<sup>102</sup> There are far too many twists and turns of image vs. text and of fiction vs. fact in *Peter* to discuss each in detail here - in fact to do so would be to destroy much of the effect of *Peter* for any future viewer - so I remain pretty tight-lipped about such moments. But here's one. The narrator's younger self is 'played' in *Peter* by the actress Yella Rottländer (Fig. 31) in Wim Wender's *Alice in the Cities* (1974) - a film that, like *Peter*, is about searching. This gesture is really a bit of personal wish fulfilment - in every scene of that film Rottländer looks like the super-cool kid I like to remember myself to be.



Fig. 32: Uncle Peter, no Philip K. Dick in *Peter* (2014) (Credit: the author).

The image purporting to depict the narrator's Uncle Peter is actually an image of Philip K. Dick, something that only a viewer with knowledge of Philip K. Dick would immediately recognise (Fig. 32). For that viewer, the seeds of narrative doubt are sown early on in *Peter*. For other viewers confidence in the narrator continues for a while longer, until they too recognise an inconsistency between image and text which makes them question the reliability of the narrator. For some viewers, confidence in the narrator is retained throughout.<sup>103</sup> The deployment of 'clues' garnered from different knowledge territories – alongside the way that many of these incongruous combinations of image and text are bolstered by what appears

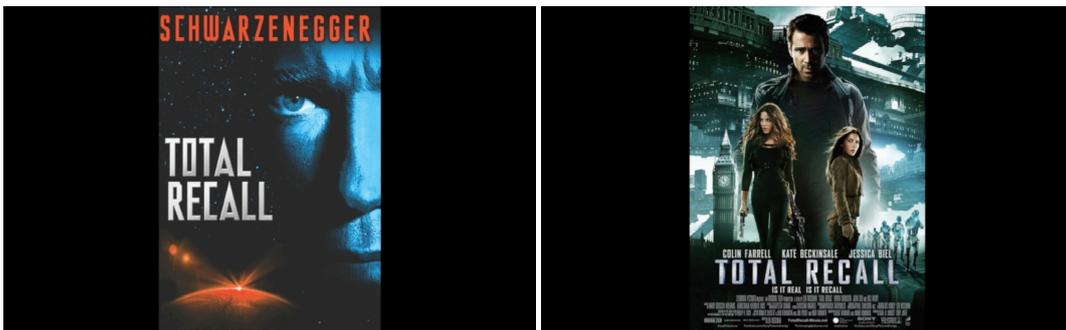
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<sup>103</sup> I bumped into an old friend recently who introduced me to her new partner as 'Jane. You know, the one who's in *Blade Runner*.'

to be 'fact' - makes *Peter* an interesting prospect for an audience as there is no definitive reading of its narrative. This leads to a situation in which individual audience members have disparate and presumably contradictory experiences of *Peter's* narrative – an exciting result of *Peter's* twisting of the documentary form. The unreliable combination of image and text and its deployment throughout *Peter* is put to use as a strategy which is essential to promote, in any viewer, active curiosity and intrigue in the sensation of not knowing.

## Total Recall

The use of images which contradict the spoken text is one strategy employed in *Peter* that casts doubt upon the documentary format and the veracity of the narrator, but there are others. Some image and text combinations are 'factual', but are called into question by the accumulation of other images and texts within *Peter*. One example of this is the introduction of '*Total Recall*' into *Peter*, by the narrator, supported by still images (Figs. 33 and 34) and text screens.



Figs. 33 and 34: *Total Recall* Mark 1 and Mark 2 in *Peter* (2014) (Credit: the author).

*Total Recall* was adapted from Philip K. Dick's short story *We Can Remember It For You Wholesale* (1966), first in 1990 by director Paul Verhoeven and again in 2012 by director Len Wiseman. The plot of both the short story and the film adaptations is a gift for *Peter* in that they specifically recall and re-foreground concepts of faulty memory and doubling crucial to *Peter's*

narrative, and so are able to develop the connection between Philip K. Dick's obsession with identity and doubling and the narrator's tale. *Total Recall* is an example of a narrative object which embodies its own plot – a text which acts out ideas of replication and uncertain identity – an adaptation which itself is re-made. The mistrust that the protagonist feels towards his own memories in the plot of *We Can Remember It For You Wholesale* is doubled, and then redoubled for the reader/viewer by the creation of the two film adaptations, the second of which even references the first. The '*Total Recall*' described in *Peter*, though supported with images of the two films' posters and Wikipedia entries,<sup>104</sup> becomes a complex weave of narratives for the viewer of *Peter*, particularly when sandwiched between descriptions of Philip K. Dick's own, often paranoid, fiction and biography. *Total Recall* is a presentation of reality in *Peter* - a discussion of cultural objects supported by visual and textual evidence of their existence - yet they are rendered suspect by their accumulation and the density of their presence in *Peter*. The effect is that the viewer experiences evidence which feels as if it is going nowhere, that is perhaps suspect by dint of its convolution - an effect necessary for the success of *Peter* as a whole.

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<sup>104</sup> A source deliberately chosen for its evolving mutability.

## Hypnosis and the Viewer

Like *Total Recall*, *Peter* is an object which acts out its own plot, plunging the viewer into a quagmire of memory - real, false and possibly implanted – with hypnosis at the centre.

Hypnosis is employed in *Peter* in two ways, both of which make an active participant of the viewer, just as the narrator of *Peter* is an alleged participant in *Blade Runner*. First, the narrative of *Peter* places the hypnotised child of *The Horizon Object* at the heart of the video. Second, *Peter* itself acts as if it may be an induction to hypnosis.

The hypnosis in *The Horizon Object*, described in detail in *Peter*, is crucial to the success of *Peter*. It describes a changed state of consciousness in the child and so in the narrator herself. Hypnosis is a procedure during which consciousness is altered and the power of suggestion is at work. According to popular culture, it is a time during which memories may be altered, implanted or recovered. As *Peter's* story is told by a narrator who was once hypnotised as a child, so her memory must be considered problematic by the viewer.

While the effectiveness of *The Horizon Object* as a tool for fictioning is discussed throughout in this thesis, it is worthwhile highlighting some of the ways in which the form of *Peter* attempts to hypnotise its viewer, or perhaps more accurately, makes use of the idea in the mind of the viewer that they may be hypnotised by watching *Peter*. In this way *Peter* asks the viewer to question their own conscious state. This text has previously noted two moments which imply viewer hypnosis by *Peter* - the positioning of the viewer in the dentist's chair, watching the repeated loops of a rotary dental drill from the point of view of the child under hypnosis and the frequent appearances of experimental subject Algernon the mouse (at one point trapped in a never-ending maze). A third way that *Peter* appears to hypnotise is by the manipulation of the form of the moving image, specifically via repetition and speed. A fourth is achieved by the tone of the voice-over which is deliberately calm, assured and verging on the monotonous throughout.<sup>105</sup>

The use of repetition and speed as tools may be exemplified by the prolonged and lingering footage of a hand passing in slow motion over delicate glass objects (Fig. 35). The hand glides across the glasses, languid

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<sup>105</sup> In fact the narrator's voice (my own) was slowed down using GarageBand, and at times it does sound a little manipulated and stretched out, like an audio version of pulling toffee. See Chapter 3 for a discussion of the voiceover in *nou*.

and trance-like, before flipping upside down, changing colour and repeating its action (Figs. 36 and 37).



Fig. 35: A gliding hand in *Peter* (2014) (Credit: the author).



Fig. 36: Hands merge in *Peter* (2014) (Credit: the author).



Fig. 37: A hand flips and repeats in *Peter* (2014) (Credit: the author).

This section of *Peter* acts as a transition from a relatively straight documentary form to a more poetic text. In another reference which will be 'invisible' to some viewers, the footage is taken from the film *Heart of Glass* (1976), which was allegedly shot while many of the actors were under hypnosis (Licata, 2012). Like the recognition or otherwise of Algernon the mouse, knowledge of the actors' state of consciousness in *Heart of Glass* is not necessary for the viewer to experience the gentle stroke of *Peter's* magical hand at work, nor the movement from the didactic to the poetic. The slow speed and the shift in colour palette is enough to signal a break from realism and a move into an alternative, possibly hypnotic, state. The hand drifts slowly, smoothing the air above the glasses and soothing the viewer as

they watch. The action is not one which appears useful to the plot of *Peter*, but one which is mesmeric, helping to create the illusion that *Peter* is both *about* hypnosis and able to *induce* hypnosis in its viewers – a film which, unusually, deepens its relationship with its viewer by enacting its content.

### (Retro) Fitting in *Blade Runner* (Part 2)

In a 2015 interview with *Cineuropa*, Matt Lloyd, director of the Glasgow Short Film Festival named *Peter* as his number one short film of 2015, describing it as

a spectacular weaving together of archive footage, personal biography and downright lies, a philosophical meditation on visual truth, inspired by and drawing heavily on Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*. (Lloyd, 2015)

*Blade Runner*, in comparison to more conventional science fiction tales of action and adventure, offers the viewer a complex, contradictory and undetermined narrative and space. Scott Bukatman (1997: 8) has noted that although much science fiction is a 'vehicle for satire, social criticism and aesthetic estrangement', it is the specific aesthetics of *Blade Runner* which make it a text able to withstand and even welcome the interjection of further texts. *Blade Runner* is unusually visually dense, with Ridley Scott's detailed layering producing 'an inexhaustible complexity, an infinity of surfaces to be

encountered and explored' (Bukatman, 1997: 8). Additionally, *Blade Runner* doesn't explain itself. Central issues of plot are left hanging across all versions of the film and because of this the viewer 'is forced to make constant inferences in order to understand the detailed world that the film presents (Bukatman, 1997: 9). Like *Peter*, *Blade Runner* is a film which encourages speculation and resists explanation.<sup>106</sup>



Fig. 38: Screen shot from *Teeth* (2014) (Credit: the author).

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<sup>106</sup> One vehicle for this sustained uncertainty in *Blade Runner* is the constant bewildered look worn by the viewer's surrogate, Harrison Ford's character, Deckard. Thank you to Mark Wilson for pointing this out, as it is a look with which I am so inured (and, frankly, enamoured) that I forgot that it is also a key element in the videos *Teeth* (2014) and *Teeth II* (2015) both of which place Harrison Ford (as Deckard) in another, even more, bewildering situation (Fig. 38) The video *John* (2016) expands this world of perplexed leading men to include actor John Simm (Fig. 39).



Fig. 39: A perturbed John Simm in *John* (2016) (Credit: the author).

Ridley Scott's film, like Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, is so dense with imagery – with visual kipple – that it results in 'a kaleidoscopic accumulation of detail... in every corner of the frame.' (Bukatman, 1997: 10). Because of this, the narrator's image in *Blade Runner* as described in *Peter* may be just another, previously unnoticed, layer in *Blade Runner's* 'seven hundred-layer layer cake' (Sammon, 2017: 496).

Crucial to a fan's interest in *Blade Runner* are the errors evident in the film's production and the inconsistencies apparent across the multiple versions of the film – adding layers to Scott's cake and inviting speculation. As previously mentioned, the *Blade Runner* 'world' exists across many media and platforms

and because of this it is easy to think of *Peter* as both another version of *Blade Runner* and as an artefact created by the multiple versions of *Blade Runner*. Unusually for an artwork, *Peter* 'retrofits' itself into the grand narrative of the production of *Blade Runner* and its multiple versions released since 1982.<sup>107</sup>



Fig. 40: Screen shot of the ZX Spectrum version of *Blade Runner* (1985) (Credit: CLR Group).

Retrofitting is a term used by academics and fans alike to describe the postmodern aesthetic of *Blade Runner* and

can serve as a useful and convenient metaphor for *Blade Runner* as a whole. In the film, a noir narrative is retrofitted onto science fictional

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<sup>107</sup> In addition to films and books, there are at least three computer game versions of *Blade Runner* that I know of, the earliest of which was launched in 1985 (Fig. 40).

speculations about human definition and development. (Bukatman, 1997: 61).

As *Peter* has been retrofitted into *Blade Runner's* cultural narrative, so *The Horizon Object* is retrofitted into *Blade Runner* itself, instigating the revelation of a concealed image in *Blade Runner*. *Peter* and *Blade Runner* share a space in which old buildings are not renovated but made habitable and machines are kept operational with the addition of a previously useful but now redundant piece of tech placed on another placed on another. The result is a visual experience in which objects are mixed up and time appears out of joint. In this space, the appearance of yet another image that is out of time and place (that of a hypnotised child) is therefore to be expected.

### *Blade Runner* and Prosthetic Memories

While this text proposes that the range of cultural references found in *Peter* need not be consciously recognised by a viewer in order to have some sort of effect, it is nonetheless worth considering if the viewer who has not seen *Blade Runner* can nevertheless appreciate the themes of faulty memory, the unreliability of the eye and the impossibility of a singular narrative which permeate *Peter*. According to Alison Landsberg's definition of prosthetic memories, such a viewer may be unknowingly conscious of these themes

through the assimilation of these philosophical ideas derived from pop-cultural references, visible on our screens and in 'real world' circumstances.<sup>108</sup>



Figs. 41 and 42: New Look does *Blade Runner 2049* (2017) (Credit: the author).

While technology has always played a crucial role in the mass dispersal of information, the Net has created a paradigm shift in the speed that information is shared globally, and has the capacity to 'create shared social frameworks for people who inhabit, literally and figuratively, different social spaces' (Landsberg, 2004: 8). It is this technology-driven collective experience that Landsberg claims results in a new form of public cultural memory.<sup>109</sup> Landsberg argues:

that the technologies of mass culture and the capitalist economy of which they are a part open up a world of images outside a person's

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<sup>108</sup> One recent example of *Blade Runner* seeping into the real world which caught my notice was the window display of clothing shop New Look in Carlisle (Figs. 41 and 42). Not only is the shop selling clothes which would not look out of place as costumes in any version of *Blade Runner*, but two of the protagonists in *Blade Runner 2049* (2017) are named Joi and Luv.

<sup>109</sup> which she terms 'prosthetic memory'.

lived experience, creating a portable, fluid, and nonessentialist form of memory. (Landsberg, 2004: 18)

For Landsberg, cultural memories no longer naturally belong to anyone - they do not have exclusive owners or authors. Instead the Net can be said to have 'made it increasingly possible for people to take on memories of events not "naturally" their own.' (Landsberg, 2004: 9). As a result of our personal engagement with shared information via the Net, an individual person experiences the prosthetic memories (the collective, circulating stories of history), as 'part of one's personal archive of experience, informing one's subjectivity as well as one's relationship to the present and future tenses.' (Landsberg, 2004: 26). This is one reason that *The Peter & nou Project* can be described as effective from a post-digital perspective – because at the time of making and exhibition (2014-present) shared cultural knowledge can be assumed to be of greater depth and reach than ever before.

Landsberg describes *Blade Runner* as a cultural artefact which reveals an anxiety about how to ground identity. This is actioned in *Peter* through the trope of the unreliable narrator whose memory, and therefore identity, is rendered questionable. By repositioning my autobiography in connection to *Blade Runner* in order to rewrite it, *Peter* operates similarly to Landsberg's (2004: 46) observation that *Blade Runner* gestures 'toward the liberating and

potentially progressive possibility opened up by freeing identity' from essentialist logic. Exemplified in *Blade Runner* and put into action in *Peter* is Landsberg's (2004: 46) proposal that if 'identity is largely a product of memory and if authenticity is no longer an essential component of memory, new possibilities are available for individual and group identity.'

The use of *Blade Runner* as a support for the narrative of *Peter* may be understood as indicative of a personal desire to rewrite history through the narrative of memory which flows from a fundamental 'desire to be a social, historical being.' (Landsberg, 2004: 47). *Peter* places a personal yet shared cultural narrative – my hypnotised and broadcast image in *The Horizon Object* - into new circumstances. Its conflation with *Blade Runner* positions the hypnotised child a cultural artefact and as such a prosthetic memory in the making. *Peter* asks the viewer to experience and re-experience a moment of cultural history – of *Blade Runner* – through the lens of *The Horizon Object*, in order to rethink, reframe and ultimately rewrite it.

## The Voight-Kampff Test and *Peter*

Just beyond the halfway point of *Peter* sits the only 'genuine memory' in the work – an account of a trip taken by the narrator and her boyfriend. The narrative is presented in scrolling text form (Figs. 43 - 47), distinguishing it from the other text screens in *Peter*, and its description of events connects to *Blade Runner* in two ways. First, the text makes direct reference to Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*. Second, *Blade Runner* is invoked by the quality of the memory itself.

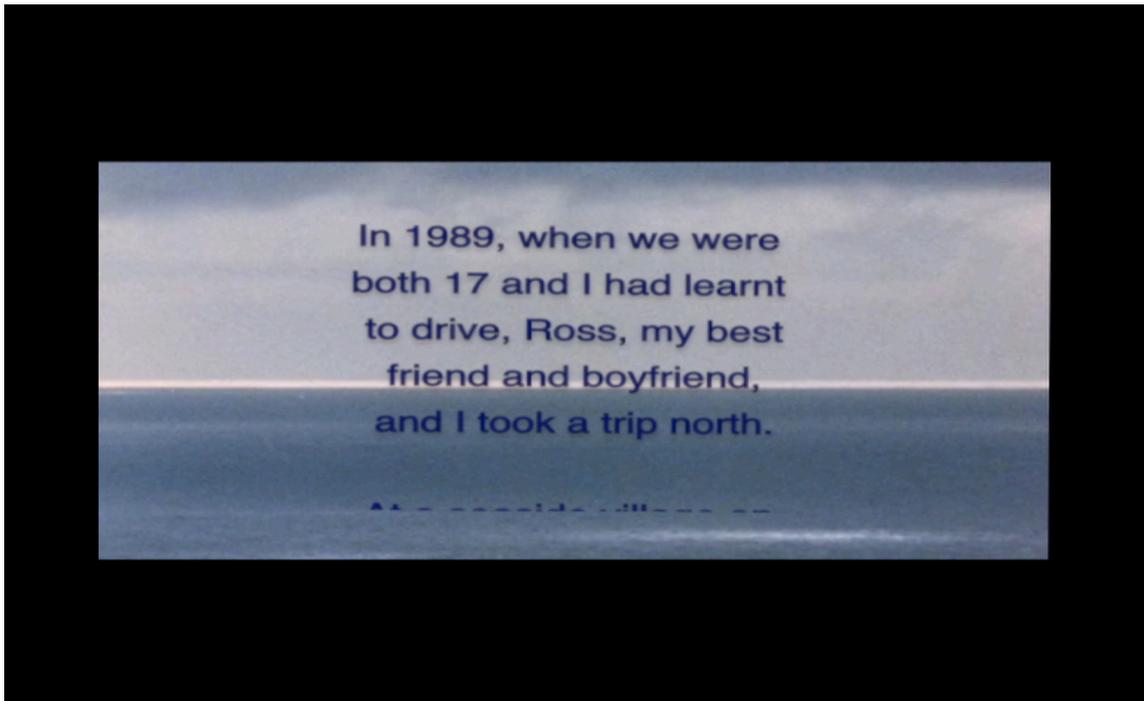
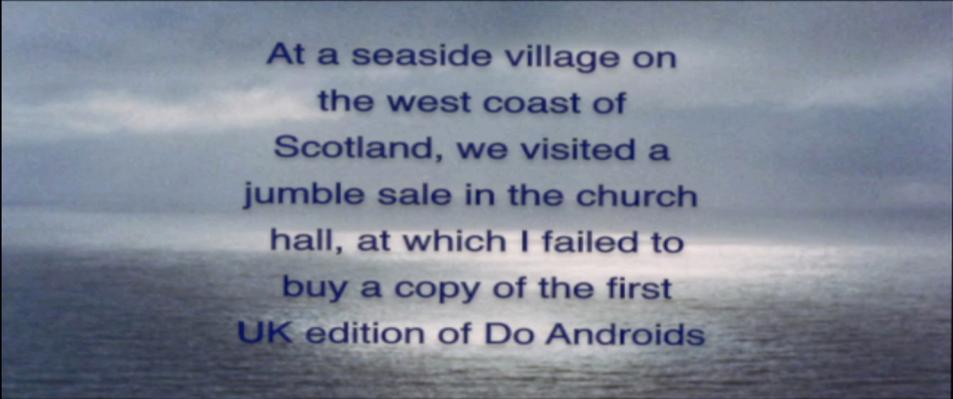
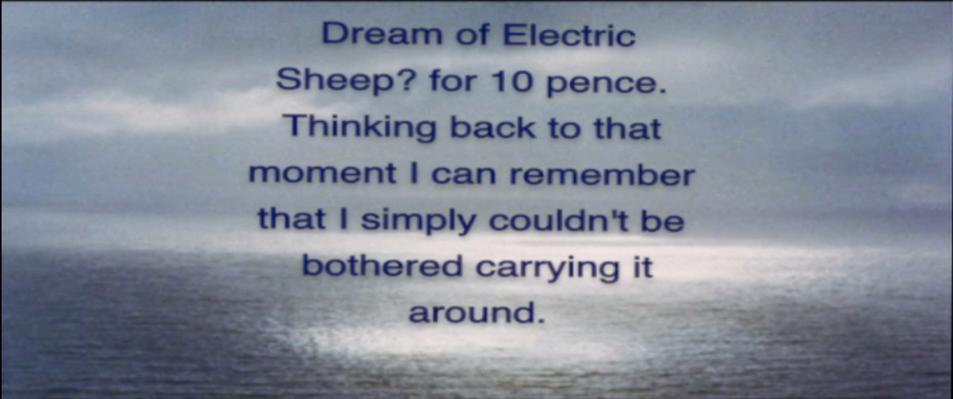


Fig. 43: A memory scrolls in *Peter* (2014) (Credit: the author).

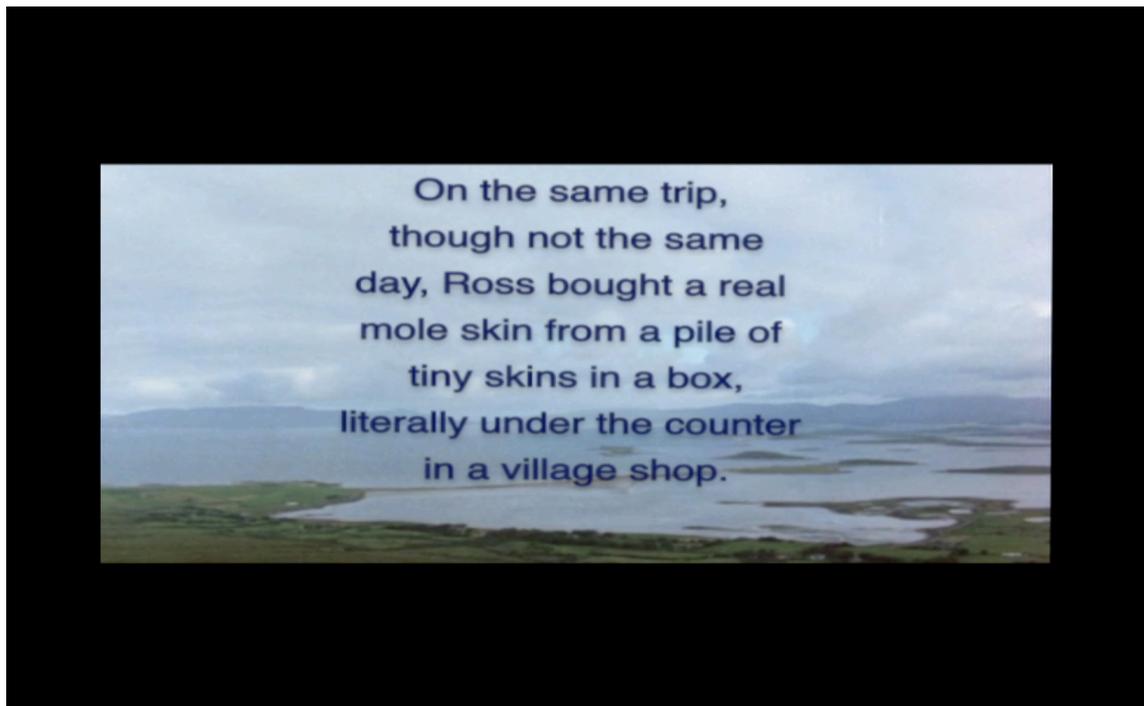
A scroll of text is centered over a background image of a seascape with a cloudy sky. The text is in a dark blue, serif font. The scroll is slightly curved, suggesting it is unrolling.

At a seaside village on  
the west coast of  
Scotland, we visited a  
jumble sale in the church  
hall, at which I failed to  
buy a copy of the first  
UK edition of *Do Androids*

A scroll of text is centered over a background image of a seascape with a cloudy sky. The text is in a dark blue, serif font. The scroll is slightly curved, suggesting it is unrolling.

Dream of Electric  
Sheep? for 10 pence.  
Thinking back to that  
moment I can remember  
that I simply couldn't be  
bothered carrying it  
around.

Figs. 44 and 45: A memory scrolls in *Peter* (2014) (Credit: the author).



Figs. 46 and 47: A memory scrolls in *Peter* (2014) (Credit: the author).

The content of this memory aligns with dramatic moments in the narratives of both *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and *Blade Runner*. In both book and film, when a Blade Runner needs to distinguish between a replicant and

a human, they do so by administering the Voight-Kampff test.<sup>110</sup> The test is a series of questions, intended to provoke an empathic response in the suspect, while bodily functions such as respiration, blush-response and movement of the iris are monitored by the Voight-Kampff machine.<sup>111</sup> As animals are now all but extinct in the toxic and irradiated 2019 Los Angeles, the Voight-Kampff questions use animals, often in peril, as emotional provocation.



Comic by Stephen Collins/The Guardian

Fig.48: Stephen Collins' cartoon, November 2019 (Credit: Stephen Collins/The Guardian).

In *Peter*, the memory describes buying

a real mole skin from a pile of tiny skins in a box, literally under the counter in a village shop. It looked like a miniature, elegant rug for a dolls' house. (Topping, 2014)

<sup>110</sup> Spelled 'Voigt-Kampff' in Dick's original novel.

<sup>111</sup> This Stephen Collins cartoon is a great example of how something so seemingly specific, such niche knowledge, has entered into the realm of public understanding, as Landsberg predicted. This cartoon (Fig. 48) featuring the Voight-Kampff machine ran in *The Guardian* in November 2019 – the same month and year in which *Blade Runner* is set.

This description, with its emphasis on an animal pelt, of it being hidden in a box and on its delicate and appealing nature, could have come straight out of a Blade Runner's Voight-Kampff Handbook.<sup>112</sup> *Peter* itself can even be described as a version of the Voight-Kampff text with the viewer in the position of a Blade Runner, attempting to identify fact from fiction through a form of scrutiny. In this way *Peter* not only acts out its own plot of uncertainty but also embodies considerations of the real and the fake of both Dick's novel and Scott's film. Thus *Peter* is woven into the cultural artefact *Blade Runner* in ways that other art works, which may appropriate a single, distinct element of a cultural artefact, are not. This is further developed by the intertextual movements of *Peter*, not only as it is adapted to be part of *Peter & nou* (2018) or as it is integrated into [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) but as it is taken up and adapted by other artists.

One example of this is Alex Hetherington's publication *Jane Topping Newspaper, or (Memoirs of a Spacewoman)* (2018) made to accompany my solo exhibition *She Was a Visitor* (2018) (Figs. 49 and 50). This short edition newspaper<sup>113</sup> uses images and text from *The Peter & nou Project* as a

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<sup>112</sup> I've just checked *Blade Runner* prop enthusiast website [propsummit.com](http://propsummit.com) and no, *The Voight-Kampff Handbook for Blade Runners* doesn't exist – yet.

<sup>113</sup> Only forty were produced.

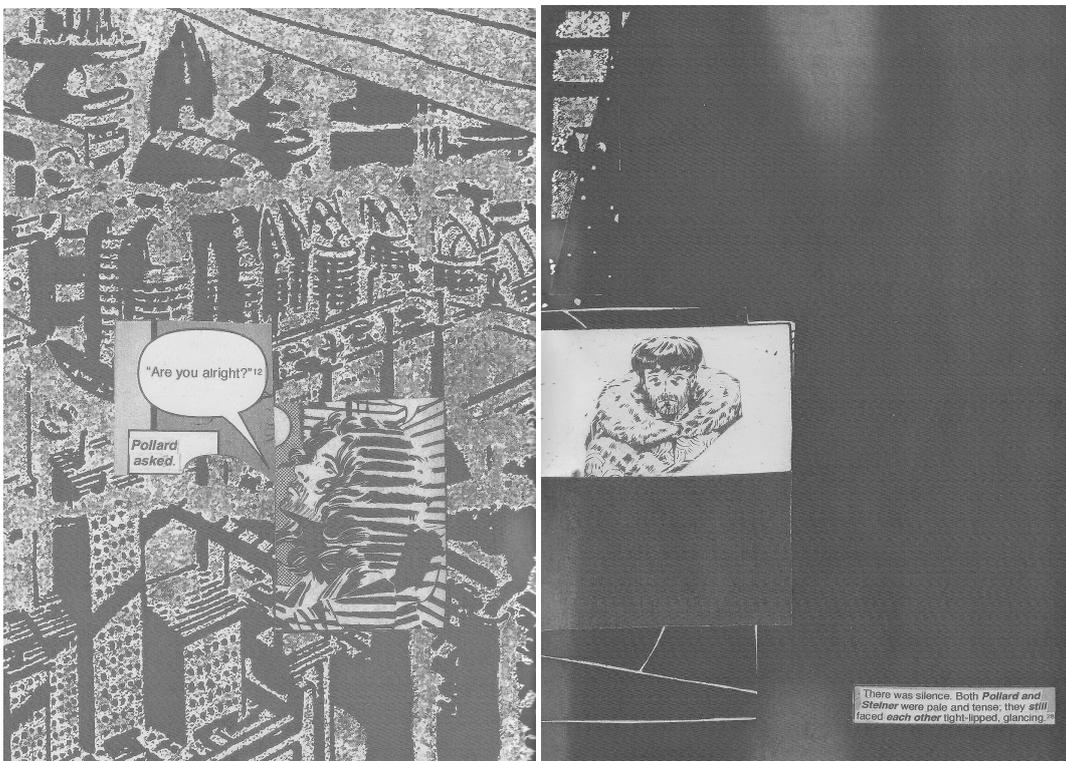
framework on which to hang deliberations around light, colour, filmmaking and the hypnotic.



Figs. 49 and 50: Cover and page 4 of *Jane Topping Newspaper, or (Memoirs of a Spacewoman)* (2018) (Credit: Alex Hetherington).

A second example of the project's influence is Alex James Pollard's *The Precognitive Painting Programme* (2019). Having seen *Peter* in 2017, Pollard uses a similar approach to fictioning in this publication which uses a cut-up technique to insert himself into the cityscape of *Blade Runner's* 2019 Los Angeles (Figs. 51 and 52). Cutting images from *Blade Runner Annual* (1982), Pollard draws a scruffy beard onto the replicant Rachael, transforming her into an avatar of the artist named Pollard, placing her on an 'important-style

chair'<sup>114</sup> and enabling her to talk, via a 'holographic vidphone' and almost entirely in the collaged words of Philip K. Dick, with a very dead Rudolf Steiner<sup>115</sup> (Pollard, 2019). In Pollard's witty and thoughtful publication an alternative reality is once again created with an insertion of an artist into *Blade Runner*.



Figs. 51 and 52: Two pages from *The Precognitive Painting Programme* (Pollard, 2019)

(Credit: Alex James Pollard).

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<sup>114</sup> That'll be Mackintosh's Argyle chair designed for the Argyle Street Tea Rooms in Glasgow's Buchanan Street in 1897 and also in *Blade Runner*.

<sup>115</sup> His image being a cut-up of William Scott Pyle's drawing of Steiner on his deathbed (no date).

## Looking – and Not Finding

Just as the narrative of *Blade Runner* is concerned with the problematic evidence of the eye, ultimately *Peter* is also concerned with looking - sifting through artefacts, searching through the past and digging up memories - for something lost and thus attempting the impossible task of psychic reconstruction. While *The Horizon Object* is the focus of the narrator's and the viewer's search in *Peter*, finding it is not the goal - the search is the object. The search enables a narrative journey in which *Peter* becomes an increasingly wistful and poetic description of the narrator's early life. *The Horizon Object* operates as an old photograph might - as a trigger for reminiscence, sometimes provoking anxiety, at other times a nostalgic fondness. Significantly, the motif of the hypnotised child (and as the narrator of *Peter*, her world view) proves an unobtainable condition – *le temp perdu*. In *The Horizon Object* and in the speculative worlds in which it operates, the unknowableness of the past is made doubly impossible by the child's hypnotic condition. Just as in *Blade Runner*, Deckard (Harrison Ford) uses the Esper machine<sup>116</sup> to search beyond the surface of a still image in the hope of uncovering clues that are initially unseen, so *Peter* acts as the machine that

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<sup>116</sup> a fictional piece of equipment in *Blade Runner* which can be used to analyse still images beyond their surface in 3D. Audio of Harrison Ford and the Esper Machine at work can be heard over the credits of *Peter*.

the narrator uses to search beyond the surface of *The Horizon Object* in order to re-examine their past, hoping to discover lost truths, to find evidence of something (a) new.

### *The Horizon Object into Blade Runner*

The dense, layered, retrofitted aesthetic of *Blade Runner* is one reason that *The Horizon Object* might sit within the film, unnoticed, for years, but there are aesthetic qualities shared by *The Horizon Object* and *Blade Runner* which help Peter slip the one into the other. As the *Blade Runner* landscape 'is a collage of everything else' (Topping, 2014) the film is a kind of cut-up, making insertion of another cut-up in the form of *The Horizon Object* into *Blade Runner's* space not only easy to manage, but significant to the plot of *Blade Runner* as the action makes the hypnotised child one of the very few 'real' female humans in *Blade Runner*.<sup>117</sup>

Another advantageous similarity between *Blade Runner* and *The Horizon Object* is the coincidence that they were both filmed in 1981 and released to the public in 1982.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> if the child is indeed human...

<sup>118</sup> and so, as previously mentioned, their similar textures connect them in time.

The context that *Peter* describes also helps to insert *The Horizon Object* into *Blade Runner*, as it explains why *The Horizon Object* was useful to special effects supervisor Douglas Trumbull during the production of *Blade Runner*<sup>119</sup>, why Ridley Scott deliberately kept my image in the final edit of *Blade Runner*<sup>120</sup> and how he was able to do so.<sup>121</sup>

That time is fragmented in *Peter* also allows *The Horizon Object* to travel easily into *Blade Runner*. In *Peter*, time is out of joint.<sup>122</sup> *Peter*'s narrative generally unfolds from 1982 to the present day, but it also jumps around, referring to times before and after these dates. An example of fragmented time in *Peter* is the description of the future 2019 Los Angeles of *Blade Runner*, proposed by Dick in 1968 and by Scott in 1982, as a 'real' space in which my image (the child-image of *The Horizon Object*) exists while I was at university in 1989. *The Horizon Object* and *Blade Runner* exist across time, as objects which are out of time and as such they can be neatly woven together.

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<sup>119</sup> *Peter*'s narrator claims that Scott needed some video footage and had none other to hand. Actually, in *Peter* this real-life effects guru is wrongly named as Doug Turnbull. More doubt and fictions, but this time down to a genuine error.

<sup>120</sup> My image is the ideal front for a sinister corporation.

<sup>121</sup> By presenting the image as part of the landscape of *Blade Runner*, on a digital billboard.

<sup>122</sup> Philip K. Dick published *Time Out of Joint* in 1959, *Infinite Jest* (Wallace, D.F., 1996) has *Hamlet* running through it and Nabokov's *Pale Fire* (1962) is named from a line in *Timon of Athens*. Even Stella Gibbons' *Cold Comfort Farm* (1932) - a book that is a hilarious pastiche of Thomas Hardy and contains a surprise videophone - references *King John*. Clearly we are all swiping context from Shakespeare - the original original.

Finally, there is a short fragment of *The Horizon Object* visible at the end of *Peter*. The fragment appears on the right of the screen, occupying the same space that had held, a moment before, a clip of *Blade Runner* in which a large digital billboard depicts a smoking geisha (Figs. 53 and 54). Due to their placement, it seems as if face of the child in *The Horizon Object*, could easily slip through the screen and slot neatly into the digital billboard space of *Blade Runner*. *The Horizon Object* appears to be such a good fit for *Blade Runner* that it may have even been sitting right behind the image of the smoking geisha all along, revealed only by the concentrated gaze of *Peter's* narrator and viewer.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> This conflation of the child-image and the *Blade Runner* landscape actually happened in the real world – in the Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson essay ‘Shooting the Messenger’ (2020) – more of which later...



Figs. 53 and 54: My image follows the image of the geisha in *Peter* (2014) (Credit: the author).

## MacGuffin and Red Herring

*The Horizon Object* could be described as *Peter's* MacGuffin, as it drives the narrative yet it is perpetually just out of sight, promised yet not conclusively revealed. However Hitchcock's definition of the MacGuffin (Truffaut, 2017: 137) as a device which drives forward a narrative but about which the audience doesn't much care, is not entirely true of *The Horizon Object* as it works within *Peter*. In order that the viewer engage with *Peter*, they must care enough to want to see the narrator's image in *Blade Runner*. A successful viewing encounter with *Peter* could be described as one during which the viewer becomes immersed in the density of the text, perhaps also beguiled by the narrator, and turns detective, scrutinizing and searching for *The Horizon Object* alongside the narrator. The viewer cares about the narrator's quest to find her image in *Blade Runner* as the narrator's search is also their own – both narrator and viewer are concerned with the possible failure of their personal memory of *Blade Runner*.

However, *The Horizon Object* is also something of a red herring in *Peter*. It may drive the narrative, yet its presence distracts the viewer from *Peter's*

nostalgic and anxious reflection on youthful potential.<sup>124</sup> It is *Peter's* narrative, working in cooperation with a viewer's memory of *Blade Runner* (be it personal or 'prosthetic') which enhances feelings of 'futuristic melancholy' which is 'very much at odds with its literary source, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*' (Jameson, 2005: 57). By the end of *Peter*, it perhaps matters little if the image of the narrator as a child is seen as part of the scenery of *Blade Runner*, or even if it is seen at all. The search has been the thing.<sup>125</sup>

### Just Strange Enough

In *Peter*, although *The Horizon Object* is part of a greater narrative that foregrounds false memory and the manipulation of consciousness, the events of *The Horizon Object* are presented as fact, giving the at times unlikely narrative of *Peter* a spine of truth. The inherent strangeness of *The Horizon Object* as a thing - that the narrator has access to her hypnotized self on a television programme broadcast in 1982 - is just strange enough to be convincing for a viewer, working a little like an urban myth.<sup>126</sup> It is because of

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<sup>124</sup> While the narrator of *Peter* exhibits nostalgia for a lost future and a potential unrealised, for instance with the line '*Remember when you were young, and shone like the sun?*' (Topping, 2014 paraphrasing a lyric from Pink Floyd's *Shine On You Crazy Diamond*, Gilmour, Waters and Wright, 1975), by placing the image of the narrator into *Blade Runner*, *Peter* makes that child-image live forever, full of youthful potential yet trapped – in *Blade Runner* and under hypnosis - and so unable to fulfil that potential.

<sup>125</sup> As Ursula K. Le Guin (not Hemmingway) said: 'It is good to have an end to journey toward; but it is the journey that matters, in the end.' (Le Guin, 1969).

<sup>126</sup> an unlikely story that is rooted in reality.

*The Horizon Object's* strangeness that it so successfully supports the narrative twist on which *Peter* turns. In *Peter*, *The Horizon Object* is instrumental as a thing of perhaps little apparent significance in itself,<sup>127</sup> but is a tool by which the viewer may recognise the hybridity of their own psychological constitution and the surrounding objects of cultural production. In *Peter*, *The Horizon Object* is put to work in an innovative way as it simultaneously reveals the porous nature of cultural objects and of individual consciousness itself, making clear the powerful potential of the archive as a tool within a fictioning practice which proposes alternative realities.

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<sup>127</sup> beyond my personal archive.

## Chapter 3

### *nou*

'When we were a child, we were hypnotized by our dentist.'

The Narrator, *nou* (2018)

*nou* (2018) is an 18-minute, single channel video which takes the form of a transmission received by being or beings unknown, sent by the eponymous *nou*. *nou* initially grew as a response to Naomi Mitchison's feminist science fiction novel *Memoirs of a Spacewoman* (1962), sharing and developing aspects of Mitchison's novel. *nou* is a tale of space travel, hypnosis and transformation in which the protagonist *nou* leaves the alien world of her home planet and travels through a kaleidoscopic tunnel, only to emerge in the tooth of a child who has been hypnotised by a dentist. The video performs the well-known science fiction trope of alien invasion, reframing it from a feminist perspective, in order to foreground the fluid nature of identity and to problematise a human-centred world view.

One recurring theme of *nou* is that of the post-human condition and the

introduction of a qualitative shift in our thinking about what exactly is the basic unit of common reference for our species, our policy and our relationship to the other inhabitants of this planet. (Braidotti, 2013)

In *nou* this way of thinking is encouraged by the presence of non-human and human beings - the alien animal, the human animal and the hybrid.

*nou* was intended as a work which would both reflect and contradict *Peter* - their connections and their differences supported by both the publication *Peter & nou* (2018) and [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com). Like *Peter*, *nou* makes use of *The Horizon Object* as a tool to move through time and space, speculating an alternative past and by implication alternative futures.<sup>128</sup> In *nou*, *The Horizon Object* aids the conflation of human and non-human bodies, in order to, as Donna Haraway (2016: 1) would have it, 'make kin'. *nou* recontextualises *The Horizon Object*, placing it at the centre of a SF narrative,<sup>129</sup> one which has important repercussions for the identity of the narrator in *Peter* and for the process of reproduction itself.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> While *Blade Runner* does not feature in the plot of *nou*, its 'rightness' to be connected by association is suggested by Fredric Jameson's observation that *Blade Runner* 'signals the passage from the classic or exotic alien to the representation of the alien other as the same [as human form] (Jameson, 2005: 141). This merging of the human and the other is definitely a concern of the plot of *nou*. However, there is at least one visual reference to *Peter* by way of *Blade Runner* in *nou* - the Institute on *nou*'s home planet is depicted as series of images of Frank Lloyd Wright's Ennis House, the tiles of which are a prominent feature in *Blade Runner* Deckard's apartment. Pure fan fact territory here, I know.

<sup>129</sup> A similar approach was used by Werner Herzog in *The Wild Blue Yonder* (2005).

<sup>130</sup> At times, *nou* shares a nostalgic quality with *Peter*, encouraged by the presence of *The Horizon Object*. At one point, *nou* makes reference to the wide-open mouths and windows of children - a line stolen from David Lynch. In one of my favourite descriptions of a youthful

nou's narrative is bookended by text screens which appear to catalogue the video for an archive.<sup>131</sup> These screens are in English and are reminiscent of screens that appear in *Alien* (1979) and *Blade Runner* (1982),<sup>132</sup> and which are a staple interface in many science fiction films (Figs. 55 and 56).

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mentality, in Mark Cousins' *Scene by Scene* interview Lynch states that: 'I think there's a time in you to go out and gather things and they say that when you're little, the window is wide open, and then the window closes, not all the way, but it closes for safety reasons, so stuff stops coming in and you can work with, you know, things that are there.' (Lynch, D., 1999).

<sup>131</sup> How or why the viewer is accessing this apparently official information is not made clear – the narrative of *nou* does not explain who received, recorded and catalogued the transmission. Perhaps this is a message which was picked up on the way out of a tooth and archived before it could reach nou's home world and so plays a role in sealing her fate? If this 'record' was intercepted before it could reach its intended recipients, perhaps nou's location remains unknown to her 'beautiful sisters and brothers' and so no rescue mission could be attempted from her home world? But I'm getting ahead of myself here. Basically, we are watching an *archived* transmission of some kind - an echo of the form of *The Horizon Object* itself.

<sup>132</sup> 'The PURGE screen' is a screen that is shared by these films, causing fan speculation that *Alien* and *Blade Runner*, both directed by Ridley Scott, are set in the same future universe.

Data Transmission Retrieval Event

Origin of Transmission: Unknown

Date of Transmission: Unknown

Data Transmission Retrieval Event

Ends

Figs. 55 and 56: Text Screens open and close *nou* (2018) (Credit: the author).

Their function is usually two-fold – to offer an aesthetic context for the technology of the film and to act as moments of exposition. In *nou* the

opening and closing text screens offer a context and mechanism for the delivery of *nou*'s story, whilst emphasising *nou*'s physical isolation.

The contextual text screen is just one of a series of science fiction filmmaking tropes that are used to build *nou*. In fact *nou* could be read as a series of

frames that are not only recognizable by the audience as belonging to a sort of ancestral intertextual tradition but that also display a particular fascination. (Eco, 1984)

In *nou*, these fascinating intertextual frames include an alien from a dying planet comes to Earth,<sup>133</sup> aliens watch Earth from a distant planet (and also on television),<sup>134</sup> space travel has a psychedelic aesthetic<sup>135</sup> and alien invasion of the human body.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> See also *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (1976, Dir. Nicholas Roeg, based on the novel by Walter Tevis, 1963) – a film I watch with probably unhealthy frequency and which I used as an element in the video *Disaggregated Industries AKA The Man Who Fell to Millom* (2018). I was commissioned by the *Moving Mountains Festival* to make a film about Ghyll Scaur Quarry in Millom, Cumbria. Acutely aware of my 'outsider' status, my approach was to imagine discovering Millom, its rich industrial past and its people, through the eyes of an alien – literally a man who fell to Earth (I use Thomas Jerome Newton's (David Bowie) tentative first steps on Earth in the video) - sifting through images found in the ether. Using a collage technique, I pieced together a science fiction narrative for the town of Millom, haunted by the poetry of Norman Nicholson, to a soundscape by Mark Vernon (Figs. 57 and 58).

<sup>134</sup> This crops up in many alien invasion narratives, but when making *nou* I was thinking specifically of H.G. Well's *War of the Worlds*, first serialised in 1897 and published in 1898. Actually, who am I kidding? When I was wondering about a familiar starting place for *nou*, I was really thinking about *Jeff Wayne's Musical Version of The War of The Worlds* (1978) and perhaps this is important, as it was released near to the date of the broadcast and recording of *The Horizon Object* in 1982 and I was listening to it on my Sony Walkman around that time.

<sup>135</sup> See the 'star gate' in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, (Kubrick, 1968), of course.

<sup>136</sup> *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, 1956 and 1978; *The Thing from Another World*, 1951 and *The Thing*, both the 1982 and 2011 versions.



Fig. 57 and 58: Screen shots of *Disaggregated Industries AKA The Man Who Fell to Millom* (2018) (Credit: the author).

When describing the cult nature of the 1942 film *Casablanca* (Dir. Michael Curtiz), Umberto Eco observes that

the authors mixed a little of everything, and everything they chose came from a repertoire that had stood the test of time. When only a few of these formulas are used, the result is simply kitsch. But when the repertoire of stock formulas is used wholesale, then the result is an architecture like Gaudi's Sagrada Familia: the same vertigo, the same stroke of genius. (Eco, 1984: 202)

*nou* attempts this complex and multifaceted collage of references, all recognisable and 'used wholesale', in order to offer the viewer a dense, satisfying text. The sheer number of 'stock formulas' used assists the veracity of *nou's* tale, fleshing out her world with rich detail, weaving a patchwork of motifs which appear to support each other by dint of their accumulation and the similarity of their origins in genre fiction.

## nou's Report

The majority of *nou* is narrated by the eponymous *nou*.<sup>137</sup> After introducing herself<sup>138</sup> by name, both visually<sup>139</sup> and audibly, she states, over a silent clip of *The Horizon Object*, that 'When *she* was a child, she was hypnotized by her dentist.' *nou* then details some aspects of life on her home world, including the activity of studying television broadcasts emanating from Earth. She and her fellow beings are scientists, who are particularly interested in observing and communicating with other beings.

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<sup>137</sup> *Nou* (with a capital N) was also the nickname of Naomi Mitchison.

<sup>138</sup> In this thesis I shall refer to *nou* as female as she speaks with a female voice, as her 'original' body is never seen, as Naomi Mitchison was female and as the child with whom *nou* merges is female. However, due to her multiple identities across *The Peter & nou Project*, attributing a specific gender to *nou* is not really possible, nor is it particularly desirable or necessary in the context of her story.

<sup>139</sup> The fact that *nou*'s name is a neat ambigram is entirely down to Mathew Walkerdine's suggestion of the font Favorite Song as being an appropriate 'alien' font for the publication *Peter & nou* (2018). I then reasoned that an ambigram would be formed if *nou*'s name was not capitalized – something I regret a little now as I attempt to type *nou* as a title and at the start of quite a few sentences in this thesis. The video *nou* and the publication *Peter & nou* were made concurrently.

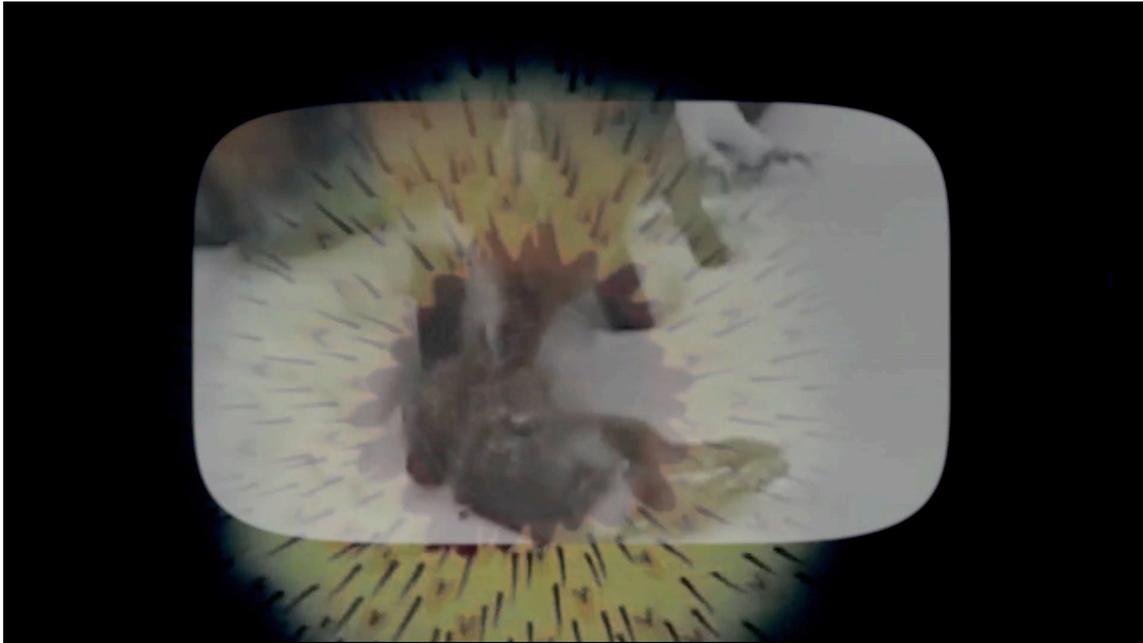


Fig. 59: nou dreams a collective dream of disaster in *nou* (2018) (Credit: the author).

After dreaming of a disaster (Fig. 59)<sup>140</sup> nou goes on a mission in an egg-shaped craft. The video then shifts into abstraction, depicting a kaleidoscopic tunnel which operates as a literal transitional stage during which an electronic female voice recites a series of encounters with recognisably Earth-bound non-human and human animals (Fig. 60).<sup>141</sup> nou then appears to 'wake up' in a white space (Fig. 61) and as she tries to piece together what has just happened and ascertain where she is, *nou* reports that her attempts to communicate with her home world seem to be unsuccessful.

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<sup>140</sup> A disaster which appears very much like the killing of rabbits by a fox.

<sup>141</sup> Another reference to the prominent use of animals in the questions of the Voight-Kampff empathy test in both *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* (1962) and *Blade Runner* (1982).



Fig. 60: The kaleidoscopic tunnel in *nou* (2018) (Credit: the author).



Fig. 61: Whiteness in *nou* (2018) (Credit: the author).



Fig. 62: A bustling street in *nou* (2018) (Credit: the author).

In time she sees a rotary dental drill (a short clip of *The Horizon Object*) and describes being led out of a room into what is shown to be a bustling street (Fig. 62). As nou states that 'When we were a child, we were hypnotized by our dentist', *The Horizon Object* plays out, almost in its entirety, and the details of the process of hypnosis unfold (Fig. 63).



Fig. 63: *The Horizon Object* in *nou* (2018) (Credit: the author).

It is revealed that elements of nou's report and the narrative that induces hypnosis in the child at the dentist have striking similarities. One *précis* of *nou* might be that an alien, travelling through space, becomes caught in the induction to hypnosis as seen in *The Horizon Object*, becoming trapped in a tooth of the hypnotised child.



Fig. 64: nou's name flips in *nou* (2018) (Credit: the author).

### nou's Nominative Determinism

The name nou is unusual. When written, nou is not capitalised and is a rotational ambigram (Fig. 64). It is nou herself who points out this aspect of her name, suggesting that looking at something from all angles is not unusual on her home world and that the writing system with which she is familiar, operates under different rules to that of standard Earth texts.<sup>142</sup> It could be argued that nou's name indicates that she is stable – that no matter which way up she is, she is always legible, readable, the same - making her an ideal candidate for time space travel. This steadiness of character is

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<sup>142</sup> Naomi Mitchison noted that one difficulty for the writer of speculative fiction is the limitation of using a recognisable language when voicing an alien. She wrote that 'My own dodge in *Memoirs of a Spacewoman* was never to allow actual speech to extra-terran life forms, but instead have the "I" in the story put into words what they are communicating.' (Mitchison, 1981) In *nou*, the alien is the 'I', speaking in the language of the hypnotised child.

evidenced by the fact that although nou's status and situation changes across the narrative of *nou*, she has a consistent inner monologue. This nominative 'steadiness' is not necessarily contradictory to nou's fractured identity, collaged from sources already mentioned. nou's name is an indication that a fractured and collaged identity might still behave steadily when tested. nou notes that her name 'looks the same when written for the mirror as when scratched into the earth' (Topping, 2014) offering the viewer an impression of two very different surfaces, one elemental, the other both technological and magical. While this detail offers the viewer a cultural context for nou these surfaces also introduce the idea that the elemental, technological and magical coexist, hinting towards the ritualistic and technological situation of hypnosis in a medical setting.

When spoken, the name nou sounds similar to a noise that might occur when teaching spoken language or to the early language attempts of a child.

Again, the action of this is two-fold. It offers a context for nou's alien culture while signalling towards the future possibilities of nou's journey - the notion of (re)learning language and the body of a child.

## *nou's* Feminist Credentials

In many science fiction texts, recognisable tropes and clichés usually operate from a human-centric<sup>143</sup> point of view and are often employed metaphorically in order to pass comment on ideological, political or ecological issues in the contemporary world. However, in *nou* these tropes are viewed entirely from an alien perspective and are directly connected to the female voice and body (of *nou* and of the child). While it is not unusual for a science fiction narrative to be told from an alien perspective, *nou* develops this by allowing *nou* to speak with a female voice and fosters empathy by placing the viewer directly behind *nou's* alien eyes for the entirety of her report.

In an unpublished letter, Joanna Russ noted that 'Women in disguise as aliens or in disguise as "women" turn up in SF written by women quite interestingly.' (Lefanu, 1988: 18). However, as Sarah Lefanu has stated:

Female protagonists are not a *sine qua non* of feminist science fiction. [...] Nor do female protagonists a feminist story make. (Lefanu, 1988: 18)

One distinctly feminist action at work in *nou* is that the alien protagonist is the narrator of her own story. *nou* is also example of a female in mutable form – her physical identity is unclear and at times confused. It is this

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<sup>143</sup> and often masculine

apparent contradiction between nou's authorial voice<sup>144</sup> and her fluidity of identity which hallmarks *nou* as a piece of feminist SF. Susan Wood (1978 in Lefanu, 1988: 20) has pointed to images of women which she 'finds predominant in science fiction as being those of woman as hero, as heroine and as alien.' Lefanu goes on to say that:

These images do not come from nowhere, nor are they simple opposites of old stereotypes. They demonstrate how science fiction and feminism can engage in a fruitful interplay that releases the writers' imaginations to explore new relations between ideas of inside and outside, self and world. (Lefanu, 1988: 20)

*nou* can be thought of as exactly this – a meditation on the internal and external, on self and other and on the horror, or pleasure, of becoming.

By appearing to trap an alien in a narrative loop of hypnosis,<sup>145</sup> *nou* effectively defamiliarises the already defamiliarising situation of hypnosis. *nou* explores gender identity and the post-human body through this 'process of 'estrangement', thus challenging normative ideas of gender roles;' (Lefanu, 1988: 22). SF is the means by which *nou* breaks down narrative certainties and questions 'notions both of femaleness and of character' (Lefanu, 1988:

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<sup>144</sup> Just like the authoritative (and sinister) lab coat wearer in *Peter*, authority in *nou* is suggested as being related to nou's role as a scientist. While this is an extrapolation and merging of the authority of the dentist over the child in *The Horizon Object* and the cliché of the mad scientist, I'm beginning to wonder if my interest in the alleged authority of the scientist is also connected to my early training as a biochemist.

<sup>145</sup> implied by the similarities of nou's narrative and the narrative of the induction to hypnosis in *The Horizon Object*, though the video does not explain if one narrative affected the other or if either were the deliberate or accidental cause of the bringing together of nou and the hypnotized child. Like *Blade Runner* and *Peter*, *nou* doesn't explain itself.

23), ultimately offering a means to construct a new subject – to make kin - a hybrid of the alien *nou* and the hypnotised child. This merging of bodies and the construction of a new being opens up possibilities around the de-centering of a coherent self while foregrounding a feminist anthrodecentric position for *nou* and, significantly, for future works of the project.

### *nou* and *Memoirs of a Spacewoman*

Key to the text of *nou* are the writings and life of Naomi Mitchison, specifically her 1962 science fiction novel *Memoirs of a Spacewoman* which 're-imagines science, specially biology, along [...] utopian lines.' (Donawerth, 1997: 30)

Although not well known for her science fiction works, within her vast canon of mainly historical fiction sits Mitchison's *Memoirs of a Spacewoman*,<sup>146</sup> several short SF stories and two further novels, *Solution Three* (1975) and *Not By Bread Alone* (1983). As noted by Jenni Calder:

The [science fiction] genre was entirely compatible with [Mitchison's] fictional preoccupations, allowing her to pursue her interest in quest narratives as well as enabling her to bring ideas about science, experimentation and ethics into her stories. (Calder, 2019: 346-347)

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<sup>146</sup> Hereafter referred to as *Memoirs*.

It is evident that *Memoirs* has been an inspiration for many science fiction stories.<sup>147</sup> My appropriation of moments from Mitchison's work and life promotes Mitchison as a notable writer of feminist science fiction, encouraging fresh discussion around her SF work and radical life while contributing to the academic discourse around her writing and contemporary influence. *nou* began this process through exhibition and discussion in relation to SF and fine art with its launch as part of the Glasgow International Festival 2018 alongside Ben Graham's multi-media adaptation of his 'discordian sci-fi' novel *Amorphous Albion: A Warp in Progress* (2018).<sup>148</sup> Expanding *nou*'s influence beyond SF and emphasising its novel complexity of narrative within a filmmaking context, *nou* also screened in the International Competition Cinema in Transgression Programme at the 16<sup>th</sup> International Signes de Nuit Short Film Festival, Paris, 2018, a programme which featured

films out of norm and order, between fiction and documentary, characterised by complex audio-visual languages, unpredictable associations based on unconscious, metaphorical and metonymical proceedings. (<http://www.signesdenuit.com/>, no date)

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<sup>147</sup> The first chapter of *Memoirs* shares similarities with Ted Chiang's 1998 short story *Story of Your Life* which was the basis for Denis Villeneuve's film *Arrival* (2016). While these narratives focus on linguistic determinism, their shared interest in squid-like, alien bodies may have something to do with the weird biology and divergent evolutionary route of radial non-human animals being catnip to writers, including Mitchison, looking for alien models.

<sup>148</sup> Also screening that night was Neil Bickerton's video/poem *Hey, everywhere you have dreams* (2018). Another aspect of Neil's practice is his Konch Poetry Podcast in which folk read their favourite poems. I took part in this using another piece of the family archive – a 1976 audio recording of me reciting the poem, by an unknown Scottish author, *Hopeless Wi' Hats*. You can listen to it here: <https://soundcloud.com/konchpoetry/hopeless-wi-hats-read-by-jane-topping>

and the inclusion of *nou* is evidence of *nou's* hybrid form, composite narrative and contemporary relevance.

Many of *nou's* experiences are based on Mitchison's life, adapted from moments described in her many autobiographies,<sup>149</sup> from fragments of her poems and prose and from *Memoirs*. In *Memoirs*, Mary the spacewoman of the title participates as an equal with men, aliens and animals in scientific pursuits and has a specialism in communication with other beings.<sup>150</sup> The goal of Mary's scientific research is not to control nature or exploit alien beings but to enter into a communicative partnership with other beings in order to better understand them. *Memoirs* often feels ahead of its time with its underlying themes of feminism, biological and cultural determinism and the post-human condition. Sarah Lefanu (1988: 77) has noted that *Memoirs* is 'as much as anything [...] about cultural relativism.' In *Memoirs*, Mary's encounters with alien beings and their worlds act as metaphors, allowing for Mitchison's speculative discussions of contemporary concerns. *nou* develops this approach by enacting contemporary concerns of hybridity and reproduction. Like *Peter*, *nou* does not simply tell, it demonstrates its narrative.

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<sup>149</sup> For instance, there's a scene on *nou's* home planet that describes hundreds of tiny beings in cages - a reference to the Mendelian experiments on guinea pigs undertaken by Naomi Mitchison, her brother John Haldane and their friend Aldous Huxley when they were children.

<sup>150</sup> Like Mary the spacewoman, *nou* is a scientist and a communicator.

In *nou*, the narrative of *Memoirs* is inverted and the human Mary's aim of understanding alien beings through immersive cohabitation and communication becomes the aim of the alien being nou. As Mary studies alien beings while living alongside them, nou takes this a step further, appearing to merge with the body of her human subject.

nou + Jane = nouJane

In *Memoirs*, Mary takes part in an experiment in which she accepts a graft of an alien being onto her thigh. Her biological connection with the alien causes Mary to become secretive and protective of the graft. She becomes unable to think 'scientifically' or report dispassionately on the experiment as it unfolds. She is changed during her symbiosis with the grafted alien. It follows that in *nou*, although nou remains objective as she makes her report, as she becomes trapped in the tooth of the hypnotised child Jane, they too would be changed by their bodily alliance – together they become something different, new. Mary the spacewoman named her alien graft Ariel and their connection was one similar to that of mother and child. As nou and Jane

merge<sup>151</sup> in the narrative of *nou*, a name must be found to describe the result of their hybridisation. I call this new kin, nouJane.<sup>152</sup>

### nou's Voice

While *Peter's* narrator could be described as being a 'voice on high' - an expert within *Peter's* documentary form - in *nou* the narrator is embodied and speaks from a place within the visual action. *nou* recollects and voices her own story and her voice operates in combination with the video's audio<sup>153</sup> and visual narrative (which, unlike in *Peter*, is often abstract and unfamiliar) to help viewer identification with an unfamiliar situation, helping *nou* and the viewer to become fellow adventurers.

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<sup>151</sup> Evidence for this might be exemplified by *nou's* changing use of pronouns throughout her narrative journey, moving from the 'we' of her home planet to the 'I' of space travel and finally to the 'we' of the dental surgery.

<sup>152</sup> or should I mean nouhuman? If asked, *nou* might name her new hybrid self as Seth Brundle (Jeff Goldblum) does in *The Fly* (1986) – Brundlefly.

<sup>153</sup> Ambient sound is employed to support *nou's* narrative. I worked with sound artist Mark Vernon (meagre resource productions) in the development of *nou*, introducing contextualising audio and ghostly noise to the work. Vernon's practice includes the digital manipulation of field recordings and found sounds into audio works. For instance, Mark recently bought some used C90 audio tapes, buried them in a box with magnets for a few days in a place related to their origin, dug them up and made a new audio work with their remains. That's beyond ghostly - it's *Frankenstein* at work. For *nou*, sound design included specific sound-scapes for *nou's* home-world, the kaleidoscopic space-time travelling tunnel and the dental surgery, all of which create an audio story that supports *nou's* narrative.

Kaja Silverman (1988: 49) notes that any 'voice-over is privileged to the degree that *it transcends the body*.'<sup>154</sup> and in *nou* this transcendence operates to cast doubt on the *form* of the body which she inhabits and which is never seen, allowing for a mutable, imagined body capable of hybridisation. However Silverman also states that:

Conversely, [the voice-over] loses power and authority with every corporeal encroachment, from a regional accent or idiosyncratic 'grain' to definitive localization in the image. (Silverman, 1988: 49)

By this definition the voice-over in *nou* could be described as problematic as *nou* speaks with a Scottish accent. However, in the case of *nou*, the similarity of *nou's* voice to my own creates a confusion of authorship and reveals that the identities of *nou*, the child in *The Horizon Object* and the artist are inevitably enmeshed. This vocal connection between *nou* and myself is supported by the use of *The Horizon Object* in *nou*, in which the child is heard to speak with a Scottish accent. This allows *The Horizon Object* to sit neatly within the story of *nou* while theorising that there has been a vocal assimilation between *nou* the alien and the hypnotised child. In other words, *nou's* Scottish accent gives credence to a narrative in which *nou* and hypnotised child merge, creating *nouJane*.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> emphasis in the original.

<sup>155</sup> *nouJane* is a *new Jane* – meaning that after *nou*, the artist is not 'herself'. It follows that after *nou*, the narrator of *Peter* must be considered to be not the artist 'Jane', but the being *nouJane*. Thus *nou* creates a new narrative frame for *Peter*, one in which the narrator is an alien/human hybrid with her particular motivations. This then has an effect on possible



Fig.65: Nathan Bryce (Rip Torn) finds a copy of Thomas Jerome Newton's LP *The Visitor* in *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (1976) (Credit: British Lion Film Corporation and Cinema 5).

The corporeal encroachment that the Scottish accent brings to *The Peter & nou Project* connects the narrators of *nou* and *Peter*, indicating that they are perhaps part of a broader narrative which has yet to be revealed. The use of the Scottish accent also tethers the world of both *nou* and *Peter* to the reality of their making, so that while they are SF, they also have traction in the 'real world', complicating their facts and fictions.

*nou*'s voice is both observational, autobiographical and speculative, articulating what is unseen. *nou* recalls her past in an attempt to explain her present. Though her body is unseen she is embodied from the outset, clearly

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readings of the narrative of *Peter*, one being that *nouJane* may have orchestrated the placement of her image into *Blade Runner* in order to communicate with her home-world via the broadcast image, just as Thomas Jerome Newton (David Bowie) does in Nicolas Roeg's *The Man Who Fell to Earth*. Newton records and publishes the vinyl LP *The Visitor* (Fig. 65), in the hope that his alien family will hear it on the radio. Heartbreaking stuff.

identifying herself at the start of the video and referring to her senses throughout. Similarly to Silverman's description of the voice of the dead man in Billy Wilder's *Double Indemnity* (1944), nou's embodied voice<sup>156</sup> speaks "'over" the image track only because of drastic circumstances [...] in *extremis*.' (Silverman 1988: 53).<sup>157</sup> nou's is therefore a voice that carries the authority of exceptional circumstances, despite the doubts and unknowns of her narrative. Over the duration of the video, nou unpicks these circumstances, using detective work in order to 'make her report as if telling a story'.<sup>158</sup> nou's report offers the viewer insight into her psychological state, but is not made for that reason. nou's report is made as a record of her mission and, as far as she is aware, may be heard by no one else. Circumstances around nou's narrative are similar to those of Curtis Bernhardt's *Possessed* (1947), an example of a 'woman's film' with the relationship between a woman and a male doctor at its centre.<sup>159</sup> Silverman has observed that:

In *Possessed* [...] an unconscious woman is injected with a drug which induces her to speak on command. What she is obliged to produce in this way is, of course her past, which flashes onto the screen as her

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<sup>156</sup> Embodied yes, but given multiple bodies by being named as and identifying as an alien, by having sensual qualities which appear non-human, by having a Scottish accent, by looking like a child being hypnotized by her dentist and by the artist's name in the credits. nou's identity is irresolute.

<sup>157</sup> emphasis in the original.

<sup>158</sup> This intention, voiced at the beginning of the video, marks nou as other. Unlike Western scientific tradition, represented in *nou* by the dental surgery, her roles as scientist and poet/storyteller do not appear to be mutually exclusive.

<sup>159</sup> Other examples are *The Spiral Staircase* (1946) and *The Snake Pit* (1948).

voice embarks upon its regressive journey. Interiority is thus extracted through an action upon the body. (Silverman, 1988: 59)

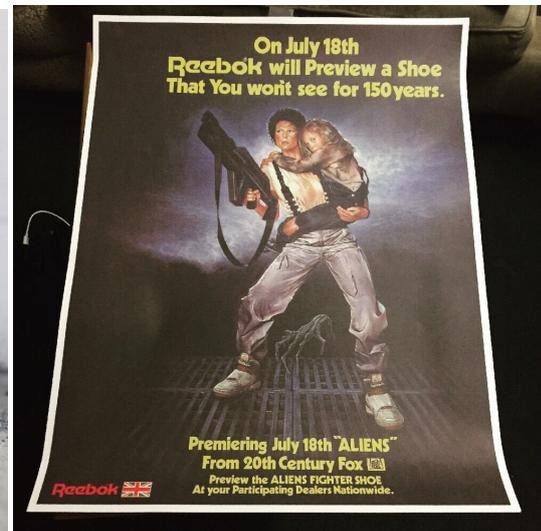
In *nou*, the unconscious woman's equivalent is the child at the dentist, hypnotized into an altered state of consciousness and what she is obliged to produce in this way is her spoken report. Interiority is thus extracted by action upon a body – the action of hypnosis on the child's body - which creates the circumstances of *nou's* (or rather *nouJane's*) narrative.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Thinking of the future of the project and how this alien invasion might function, there is a dark parallel which can be drawn between with the creation of *nouJane* and the body-colonisation dynamic central to the *Alien* (1979) and *Aliens* (1986). Is *nou* in danger of bursting from *Jane's* chest? Or perhaps *nou* may come to 'drive' *Jane* in a more sinister way than the parity of the hybrid '*nouJane*' suggests. Might *nou* 'operate' the body of *Jane*, from inside the tooth, in a similar but significantly more integrated way to Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) driving the anthropomorphic Power Loader in her fight with the alien (ironically in defence of a young female child)? (Figs. 66 and 67). Perhaps wearing Ripley's trainers will help me to figure this out..? (Figs.68 and 69).



Figs. 66 and 67: Left: Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) operating the P-5000 Powered Work Loader in *Aliens* (1986) (Credit: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox). Right: Ripley and Newt (Carrie Henn) in a publicity shot (Credit: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox).



Figs. 68 & 69: Left: The Reebok Alien Stomper High released 2016 (Credit: WearTesters) Right: A publicity poster that comes with the trainers (Credit: eBay seller mags3461).

## nou's Language

Throughout the video, nou's use of pronouns mark changes in her narrative. On her home planet nou is 'we', indicating that she lives or thinks communally, unconcerned with the individual. When alone, travelling through the time and space and upon awaking in whiteness, nou refers to herself as 'I', indicating that these spaces, which are visually empty, have encouraged her to think inwardly. When nou sees the rotary dental drill, she appears to acknowledge that she is seeing through the eyes of another, and here nou's 'I' again becomes 'we'. The end of nou's narrative introduces *The Horizon Object* with 'When we were a child, we were hypnotized by our dentist.' Recalling nou's initial declaration that 'When *she* was a child, she was hypnotized by her dentist' here nou indicates that she is aware of her hybrid status as nouJane - the *she* of Jane has become the *we* of nouJane. As nou and Jane become one, nou's use of language supports this becoming. The evident intricacies of nou's mutating language thus proposes that the consideration of language is of crucial significance when postulating alternative beings in order to reconsider the self and the 'other' in a post-human context.

## nou's Unseeing Eyes

While *Peter* and its source material *Blade Runner* are concerned with the problematic evidence of the eye, *nou* is often concerned with the failure of sight entirely, with *nou* given agency by the sensual evidence she gathers *other than* by sight.<sup>161</sup> In general, *nou* places little importance in the sense of sight, for instance her written name is visually duplicitous,<sup>162</sup> she understands that 'watching only goes so far' and she goes on a mission after 'seeing' a prophetic future in a dream. For much of the journey detailed in her report, *nou* can discern little detail of her immediate environment or circumstances. As she travels, the sky spins around her and then transitions into a tunnel of kaleidoscopic colours and shapes. After this she sees only whiteness or darkness<sup>163</sup> and when *nou* eventually sees an image of a rotary dental drill, her understanding of the image has been prefigured by her hearing the noises of the dental surgery. Even when seeing her new circumstances *nou* is uncomfortable with her vision, which she describes as 'all consuming' and she goes on to describe the dental surgery in terms of her other senses; the olfactory 'the air smells chemical, clinical' and the audible 'the buzz of the mechanical, powered by the electrical.' *nou*'s mistrust of her sense of sight

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<sup>161</sup> For instance, when *nou* is in the hallucinogenic time-space tunnel or inside a tooth, (the shape of which mimics an eye), *nou*'s sight does not help her understand her predicament.

<sup>162</sup> though to be fair, the name *nou* is audibly duplicitous too.

<sup>163</sup> and at first the whiteness is so without form that she fears she may be blind.

and her reliance on her other senses mark her as other and recall the behaviour of non-human mammals, intertwining nou's body with those of the rabbits present in the dentist's hypnosis induction.

### What nou Watched

However, on nou's home world if not on her mission, sight *does* play a role as nou describes having watched transmissions from Earth. These are shown to be isolated fragments of three films, each concerned with observation.



Fig.70: *Playtime* (1967) in *nou* (2018) (Credit: the author).

In a clip of Jacques Tati's *Playtime* (1967) (Fig. 70) night is falling and Tati's M. Hulot has met a friend who invites him into his modern, glass-fronted flat.

This sequence is filmed entirely from the street, the camera observing Hulot and the residents of the building through the floor-to-ceiling windows. By watching, nou takes the place of the Earth-bound viewer, as if her feet were planted on the street outside the apartment while her eyes remain on her home world. By watching this 'broadcast' from her home planet, nou already straddles two worlds.

nou also observes Delphine<sup>164</sup> from Éric Rohmer's 1986 film *Le Rayon Vert* (Fig. 71).<sup>165</sup> Delphine watches the sun slipping below the horizon, in the hope of seeing the titular green ray so that, according to Jules Verne, her thoughts and those of others are revealed. Here nou observes Delphine's searching for magic, perhaps identifying with her desire to know what lies beyond the self, both as a scientist and a poet.

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<sup>164</sup> Actress and filmmaker Marie Rivière.

<sup>165</sup> The inclusion of this piece of film is also a nod to Tacita Dean's 2001 film *The Green Ray*. Dean's film appears to capture the last 'green' ray of the dying sun on 16mm successfully, while other filmmakers who filmed the scene using digital video were not. According to Dean, the green ray 'proved itself too elusive for the pixilation of the digital world' (Dean, 2011).



Fig.71: *Le Rayon Vert* (1986) in *nou* (2018) (Credit: the author).



Fig.72: *Altered States* (1980) in *nou* (2018) (Credit: the author).

The quality of the imagery of a figure (Fig. 72), struggling to remain upright in a room filling with fast moving water, indicates that nou is watching a third

broadcast via a secondary camera - a recording of CCTV or surveillance footage. This fragment is part of Ken Russell's *Altered States* (1980) in which a scientist (William Hurt) attempts to access new states of consciousness via hallucinogenic drugs and a sensory deprivation tank. The plot of *Altered States* is reminiscent of the plot of *nou*, and both films share an interest in psychedelic imagery. As the quality of this imagery points to a surveillance camera, *nou*'s interest in this fragment suggests that she may be a keen observer of human struggle.

This emphasis on alien observation, placed at the start of *nou* deliberately mirrors the opening lines of H. G. Wells' *War of the Worlds*<sup>166</sup>, and is the first indication that *nou* and her alien 'sisters and brothers' are perhaps sinister monitors of human activities.<sup>167</sup>

Arguably, the most recognisable piece of found footage used in *nou* is one which is not specifically linked to *nou*'s observations from her home planet (though that is implied). It is a moment taken from *Poltergeist* (Dir. Tobe

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<sup>166</sup> 'No one would have believed in the last years of the nineteenth century that this world was being watched keenly and closely by intelligences greater than man's and yet as mortal as his own; that as men busied themselves about their various concerns they were scrutinised and studied, perhaps almost as narrowly as a man with a microscope might scrutinise the transient creatures that swarm and multiply in a drop of water.' (Wells, 1898).

<sup>167</sup> The use of these clips is also a development of the use of the more discrete use of film references in *Peter*.

Hooper, 1982), when a blond child<sup>168</sup> touches the white noise of a domestic TV screen (Fig. 73).<sup>169</sup>



Fig.73: *Poltergeist* (1982) in *nou* (2018) (Credit: the author).

As Grafton Tanner has observed:

The television has the propensity to seem infested with ghosts [...] like the phonograph and the radio, the television asserts gaps between the information they relay and their electronic forms, providing the feeling that some unseen force animates them. (Tanner, 2016: 6)

In *Poltergeist*, the television is a portal between the world of the living on Earth and a kind of purgatory for the restless dead. The child is their conduit

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<sup>168</sup> The actress Heather O'Rourke, looking, usefully, pretty similar to the child who is hypnotized by her dentist in *The Horizon Object*.

<sup>169</sup> This is the image used on most posters and advertising associated with *Poltergeist* and I've used it in my practice a fair bit too, particularly in the video *Screen Used* (2016) as well as in *nou*, as it is an effective visual short hand which quickly infers the hauntological aspects associated with the domestic screen.

between worlds and as the child touches the television screen there is a visual and audio effect akin to an electrical charge. The child then turns to the camera, announcing 'They're here'. With knowledge of this moment in *Poltergeist's* plot, the viewer understands that the television screen and transmissions through the screen may be dangerous, and by implication, so too may nou's mission. If a viewer is unfamiliar with the plot of *Poltergeist*, this image of a child getting 'too close' to the television screen echoes warnings of parents to their children, another indication that nou's mission and purpose may not be benign.<sup>170</sup> Unlike the often 'invisible' references to film in *Peter*, the fragments in *nou* each communicate a meaning useful to the narrative of *nou*, without requiring the viewer to have prior knowledge of their original context.

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<sup>170</sup> The implication that nou may be an evil alien invader in the tradition of *War of the Worlds* is intended only to create a little tension at the beginning of *nou*. In my mind, nou is not malevolent or even disruptive - she is an open, honest and curious being. The effects of her arrival in the dental surgery are, bar the clear inference of hybridisation with her presumably unknowing human subject, not yet known. That is a subject for future works...

## Non-human Animals in *nou*<sup>171</sup>

While I have previously proposed that the child in *The Horizon Object* is the equivalent of a laboratory animal (via the metaphoric character of Algernon the mouse in *Peter*), *nou* is populated with many non-human animals which work to develop the post-human conditions of *nou*.<sup>172</sup>

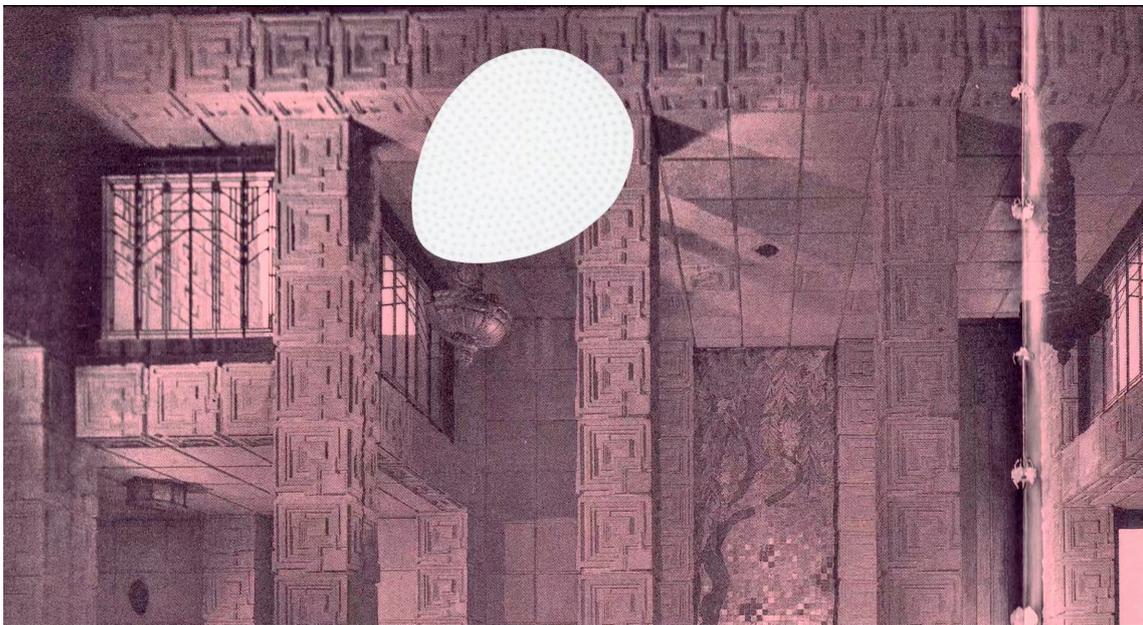


Fig. 74: *nou*'s spacecraft in *nou* (2018) (Credit: the author).

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<sup>171</sup> In the future Earth (Terra) of *Memoirs*, Mary can communicate with many indigenous non-human animals, admittedly with some more successfully than others. These non-human animals work collaboratively with the human scientists in their experiments involving alien physiology and society. Thus *Memoirs* can be considered a post-human text in which one of Mary's aims is to *think herself into* the position of the other so that she may successfully communicate with alien beings and the indigenous non-human animals of Earth. In *Memoirs*, dogs are particularly keen to assist the humans in their experiments.

<sup>172</sup> Two of the animal stories present in *nou* were first told to Professor Mark Wilson in Snæbjornsdottir/Wilson's Radio Animal unit, a component of their *Uncertainty in the City* project and were included in Snæbjornsdottir/Wilson's *Uncertainty in the City* exhibition at The Storey Gallery (Sept. - Nov. 2010) and in the resulting publication. Thanks to Mark for unearthing these stories from my memory bank, enabling me to recognise the similarity between my personal encounters with non-human animals and the animal-centric scenarios of the Voight-Kampff test in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and *Blade Runner*.



Figs. 75 - 77: Three screen shots of the opening credits of *Mork & Mindy* (1978-1982)  
(Credit: American Broadcasting Company).

When nou takes off in her egg-shaped spacecraft<sup>173</sup> (Fig. 74), she leaves the blue ground of her planet, spins through a pink and orange sky (Fig. 78) and emerges in a kaleidoscopic tunnel of mirrored shapes,<sup>174</sup> shimmering in tones of rust and yellow (Fig. 79).<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Recalling Mork's spaceship (Figs. 75 - 77) in *Mork & Mindy* (1978-1982).

<sup>174</sup> The visual effect of the tunnel, while referencing the wormhole familiar from so many science fiction films, is also reminiscent of an eye - another nod to the importance of the eye in *Blade Runner* and to the Voight-Kampff test's use of encounters with non-human animals to provoke an emotional response, detailed in Chapter 2.

<sup>175</sup> In fact it's some manipulated footage of a stream running into the sea at Carradale Bay next to Naomi Mitchison's former home. Actually, a good proportion of nou was filmed in Carradale, Kintyre, Scotland in August 2017. For instance, the images of nou's homeworld were shot in the garden of Mitchison's Carradale House. The house is now privately owned by folk who are clearly sick to the back teeth of people ringing the bell and asking if they can take a look around the house. You can't. Luckily the dogs stayed inside and only a friendly ginger tom interrupted what turned out to be some surreptitious guerrilla filmmaking.



Fig. 78: nou leaves her planet in *nou* (2018) (Credit: the author).

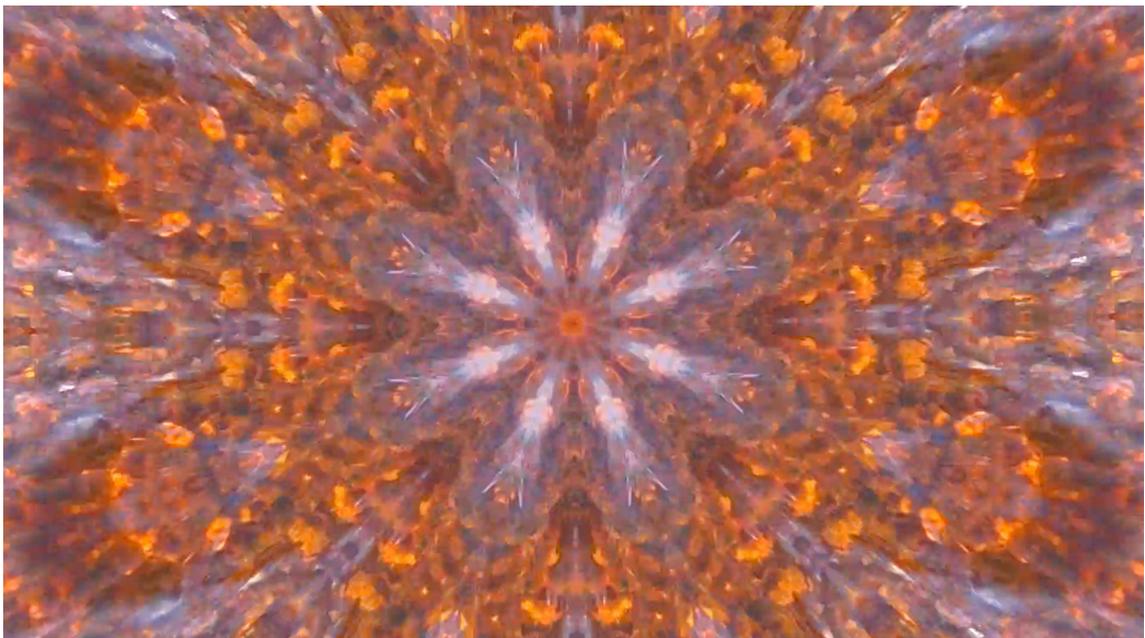


Fig. 79: nou goes deep into the psychedelic tunnel in *nou* (2018) (Credit: the author).

As nou moves deeper into this tunnel (taking the viewer with her), a robotic voice<sup>176</sup> narrates scenarios concerning the relationship between a self and non-human animals. Here are three examples:

You are on a train. As it stops at a station you look out of the window and see a fox. It is mangy and skinny. It has a piece of blue pipe wedged over its muzzle.

You find a dead wasp on a window ledge. You put it in an empty matchbox and make a little pillow and quilt for it to lie in out of tissue. You carry it around in your pocket for a week. Then you put it in the bin.

You buy a cheap, fake tiger-skin jacket for ten dollars and wear it all year round. One day you open up the lining and discover that the fur is real. (Topping, 2018)

These evocative non-human animal encounters are spoken in a flat monotone, as if part of a digital 're-programming' of nou, and the viewer's, memory.

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<sup>176</sup> A voice made using one of Microsoft's electronic voices that will read aloud Word documents – I forget which one. I've used these disembodied voices in other works too, including *Vicki and Alex, Like the Clouds*, a series of videos in which 'female' and 'male' robots discuss a photographic prop seen in *Blade Runner*, and in *Eggs and Aliens*, a PowerPoint presentation that I ended up giving 'remotely' at the Whitechapel Gallery in March 2018. Snow had trapped me in a sit-in Greggs in Glasgow (a Belgian bun and a black Americano FYI), so I re-wrote my talk to be 'spoken' by Fiona, the electronic female Scottish voice in Microsoft Word, slowed down as far as she goes. Fiona's voice spoke for me at *The Curios Society*, with Professor Robert Williams and Dr Kate Briggs, an event that was part of *Mark Dion: Theatre of the Natural World*. Though of course I was annoyed to miss the event and to hang out with Kate and Robert, there was a tiny part of me that felt pretty smug. Now back in my flat, sitting under a blanket and watching an episode of *Columbo* (I think it was *A Deadly State of Mind*) while Professor Robert Williams progressed my presentation on cue, I could watch folk posting about it on Instagram. Thank you Robert, for stepping into the role of my 'Igor' for those crucial twenty minutes. Refer to Appendix 0.7 for a transcript of *Eggs and Aliens* which develops some ideas around alchemy, the female mad scientist and alien communication.

The kaleidoscopic, hallucinogenic tunnel may also describe an internal, psychedelic journey of the mind.<sup>177</sup> In the tunnel, nou, placed in an altered state of consciousness, is 'reminded' of encounters with non-human animals, the details of which signal that the stories are human in origin. There is an inference that these imprinted (or implanted) memories may be of use to nou, perhaps to help her orientate for the new circumstances that await at the exit of the tunnel. Similarly, during the opening scenes of Jonathan Glazer's 2013 *Under the Skin* and before we see an alien body, we hear a voice, seemingly learning language. Scarlet Johansson's (as it turns out) alien can be heard repeating vocal sounds, as if becoming familiar with a mouth and voice of a new body. Like nou, Johansson's alien learns about her new planet while learning one of its indigenous languages, as she travels.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> And this aspect of nou was clearly recognised by its inclusion in the Psychedelic Film and Music Festival, New York, 2018. This film festival is specifically interested in developing the international discourse around science fiction, horror, fantasy, surrealist and virtual reality films, music and stage performances. Panel discussions within the festival explore 'the altered states of consciousness and truth behind the vibrant and enduring psychedelic culture', of which nou is a part. (BWW News Desk, 2018) Director Dan Abella describes the works in the festival as being 'united by their capacity to heal by radically altering our consciousness from the everyday state into an ecstatic or transcendent state.' (Abella, 2018) Strong stuff, and I have to admit, not one of nou's original aims.

<sup>178</sup> Much of *Under The Skin* was shot in the centre of Glasgow. A friend of mine watched them film the scene in which Scarlet Johansson collapses in the street in an area near my studio, an area which another friend has described, with total accuracy, as 'like something out of a fucking Breughel'. The utter alien-ness of Johansson's character revealed in *Under the Skin* is nothing in comparison to the weird sight of a film star lying down outside McDonald's the bakers on Argyle Street (Fig. 80). So weird, in fact, she became a meme (Figs. 81 and 82).

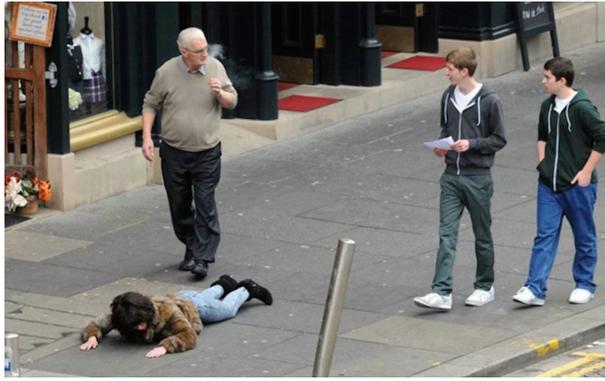


Fig. 80: Johansson flat out on Argyle Street, Glasgow (Credit: Millionews).



Figs. 81 and 82: Johansson's fall goes viral in 2014 (Credit: The Curious Brain).

There is a clear relationship between the non-human animal encounter stories that nou hears and the hypnosis induction story that the child hears from the dentist. In both cases, stories of non-human animals are used as tools. The story of a fox chasing rabbits recounted by the dentist echoes nou's experiences, particularly of her vision of the end of the world. These events may occur simultaneously - as nou listens to the non-human animal stories in the tunnel, so the child undergoing hypnosis listens to the story of

the rabbits being chased by a fox.<sup>179</sup> At this moment, nou and the child exist in similar states of altered consciousness and it is perhaps because of this simultaneous loss of control, in combination with the similarity of the two stories, that the child and nou become conflated, combined and ultimately hybridised. The stories may be the mechanism by which nou and the child are brought together to become nouJane. nou's time in the kaleidoscopic tunnel is hypnotic, repetitive and mesmerizing<sup>180</sup> resulting in the alien travelling through space and the child being hypnotized by her dentist being under similar 'spells',<sup>181</sup> both of which make use of deep emotional connections between animal species in order to (magically or hypnotically) draw them together. One consequence of these emotive stories concerning non-human animals in *nou* is to trouble the viewer. These, often unpalatable, stories may arouse a visceral response of the body while their structure places the viewer (along with nou) as the protagonist at the heart of their narratives, implicating them in the circumstances described. Thus this element of *nou* forces a profound, even timely, reappraisal of the viewer's relationship to other species.

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<sup>179</sup> Alternatively, nou's vision of the end of the world may occur as a result of her watching a transmission of *Hypnosis and Healing* or *The Horizon Object* in *Blade Runner* on her home planet. I guess we'll never know.

<sup>180</sup> We know this because we, the viewer, experience it from nou's point of view.

<sup>181</sup> These could be described as having elements in common with the subgenre of fiction termed folk horror, including the use of repetition within ritual and tales of non-human animals working on the human body.

## Making Oddkin

In *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (2016), Donna Haraway envisions a world in which there is no hierarchy between human and non-human animals, but instead there exists a kinship between species. In Haraway's Chthulucene, relationships between species are closely interwoven and symbiotic in nature. In order to avoid environmental disaster, Haraway (2016: 102) argues for a reduction in the world's human population with her call to 'Make kin, not babies!' Haraway (2016: 2) asks that we think of making 'kin as oddkin rather than, or at least in addition to, godkin and genealogical and biogenetic family' so that we might question to whom we are responsible and so reshape kinship. Echoing her description of a cyborg as depicting the pleasure of connection between human and other living creatures, making oddkin requires us to make 'unexpected collaborations and combinations' (Haraway, 2016: 4) in order to create a world without the human at its centre. In *Memoirs*, Mitchison clearly depicts this often pleasurable connection between human and non-human beings and in her acceptance speech for the Science Fiction Research Association's Pilgrim Award, Haraway acknowledged Mitchison's work by dedicating her own 'first contact' with science fiction

in honor of Naomi Mitchison's *Memoirs of a Spacewoman*, where no contact forged by a communication specialist goes either unrewarded or unpunished. (Haraway, 2013)

The hybrid being nouJane cannot simply be defined as a cyborg as

according to Haraway:

Cyborgs were never just about the interdigitations of humans and information machines; cyborgs were from the get-go the materialization of imploded (not hybridized) human beings-information machines-multispecies organisms. (Haraway, 2013)

However, Haraway continues:

Cyborgs were always simultaneously relentlessly real and inescapably fabulated. Like all good SF, they redid what counts as – what is – real. (Haraway, 2013 )

nouJane is a construct which redoes what counts as real.<sup>182</sup> She is a being who is conjured via the narrative of *nou* from fragments which are at once relentlessly real (the recording of the hypnotised child) and simultaneously fabulated (nou the alien). *nou* then offers a new way of reassessing established biological and ideological boundaries of what constitutes 'the

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<sup>182</sup> Another example of a fabulated alien being is that of Sun Ra, who declared to be an alien visiting Earth from Saturn. Described as a myth-scientist who 'addresses questions around origins and kinship, rejecting family filiations and alliances for myths of cosmic existence without beginning or end.' (Burrows and O'Sullivan, 2019) *nou* shares many of these concerns. In *Space is the Place* (1972), the medium of transportation Sun Ra chooses for his planetary resettlement is music, while the medium of transportation in *nou* appears to be hypnosis. Both could be said to be immersive and transformative experiences which open doorways to altered states of consciousness. Both Sun Ra's and nou's narratives are based on the SF trope of travelling through time and space within the mind. And, in what is a refection of Sun Ra's approach to myth-science via performance, *nou's* narrative sets the scene for future developments of *The Peter & nou Project* some of which must surely, even inevitably, require a turn to performance in order to develop the story of nouJane.

creation' of new beings through a species of SF. In fact, *nou* makes kin. Like Haraway's fictional Camille in her *Children of the Compost* stories, nouJane is made not through heteronormative reproduction but through SF. nouJane is a fabulated child, oddkin who has potential beyond the human.<sup>183</sup> By their combination, both nou and Jane extend the other.

As previously stated, *nou* is a video which is connected to *Peter* and makes kin in a way that circumvents heteronormative reproduction. It is interesting therefore to consider the relationship between *nou* and *Peter* in the light of Kathleen Loock's video essay *Reproductive Futurism and the Politics of the Sequel* (2019). Loock's video examines the problematic treatment of systems of reproduction in *Blade Runner 2049* (Dir. Denis Villeneuve, 2017) in comparison to those in the original 1982 *Blade Runner*. Loock describes the sequel's focus on 'generationality and biological reproduction as a radical departure from *Blade Runner's* dark and gloomy fictional world' in which no one, not a replicant nor a human, appeared destined to survive. Loock's video essay argues that *Blade Runner 2049's* step into heteronormative reproduction is the result of the

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<sup>183</sup> The creation of nouJane in *nou* carries with it an anxiety which is also at the heart of *Blade Runner* in which 'the terror of motherless reproduction associated with technology is clearly located as an anxiety about the ensuing loss of history.' (Doane, 1999: 116)

sequel form and its reliance on a dialectics of repetition and continuation. The sequel is bound to a linear understanding of time and it is this formal characteristic of linear time that introduces a generational element – and indeed: a possible future – into the *Blade Runner* story. (Loock, 2019)

*nou* avoids a reproductive futurism that normalizes stereotypical gender scripts, heterosexuality and biological reproduction by its non-hierarchical and non-linear temporal relationship to both *Peter* and the other works in the project. As no work in *The Peter & nou Project* can be described as being a sequel of another, this enables the project to take an exciting and progressive approach to on-screen reproduction, which has implications for how we might reconsider reproduction outwith the fictional frame.

Haraway (2016: 217) states that in order to make oddkin, 'SF is indispensable.' She is particularly interested in the approach of Ursula K. Le Guin, describing her stories as:

capacious bags for collecting, carrying, and telling the stuff of living. 'A leaf a gourd a shell a net a bag a sling a sack a bottle a pot a box a container'. (Haraway, 2016: 118)

In the context of *The Peter & nou Project*, one might develop that list to include another set of containers - an egg, a tunnel, a tooth (Fig. 83) and a hypnotised child.



Fig. 83: Looking into the tooth-container, date unknown (Credit: the author).

## nou as SF

By offering a complex narrative and a hallucinogenic visual experience, *nou* swerves Le Guin's aforementioned Time's-(killing)-arrow, presenting instead a looping narrative of fluid identities. Instead of a 'techno-hero', *nou* suggests a heroine of changing identity and indeterminate gender and the merging of non-human and human animals in order to make kin 'when she/we were a child'. *nou* presents the post-human as being firmly in place in our current reality – alive and well since an act of hypnosis recorded on videotape in 1982.

Although *nou* travels along what could be described as an arrow-straight trajectory of a kaleidoscopic tunnel, *nou* frequently makes reference to spaces which are analogous to Le Guin's carrier bag. *nou*'s references to burrows, eggs and to small, confining spaces (such as her description of being within a tooth) act to cocoon *nou* in womb-like safety. At one point in the narrative, *nou* mentions previous training which enables her to cope with her confinement within a tooth. The specificity of this training, which presumably occurred on her home world, indicates that the insertion of *nou*'s body into a carved-out cavity in a tooth, and *nou*'s emergence into the head<sup>184</sup> of a human child was always the aim of *nou*'s mission. SF has long offered writers and artists the opportunity to propose alternatives to contemporary attitudes to gender, sex relationships and systems. *nou* is less concerned with gender categories than with proposing new mechanisms of movement and reproduction, growth and development, conflation and transformation. *nou* proposes not only a radical biological hybridity as a way of making kin, but also a realistic and perhaps more achievable imaginary ontology which extends human capacity of thought to accommodate the 'other' in both *nou*'s world and our own.

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<sup>184</sup> and crucially, into the mouth of that head, so that *nou* may voice her story.

Within the scope of the project, this has implications not only for the narrative of *Peter* but for the identity of the author of *The Peter & nou Project* itself and thus contributes a new approach to authorship and the artist-self in the context of SF and art practice. Beyond the scope of the project *nou* has a sensitising function, priming the viewer for a reassessment of the self and the 'other' with respect to what might be – or may already be – kin.

## Chapter 4

### *Peter & nou* (2018)

'Don't use ANY of this'

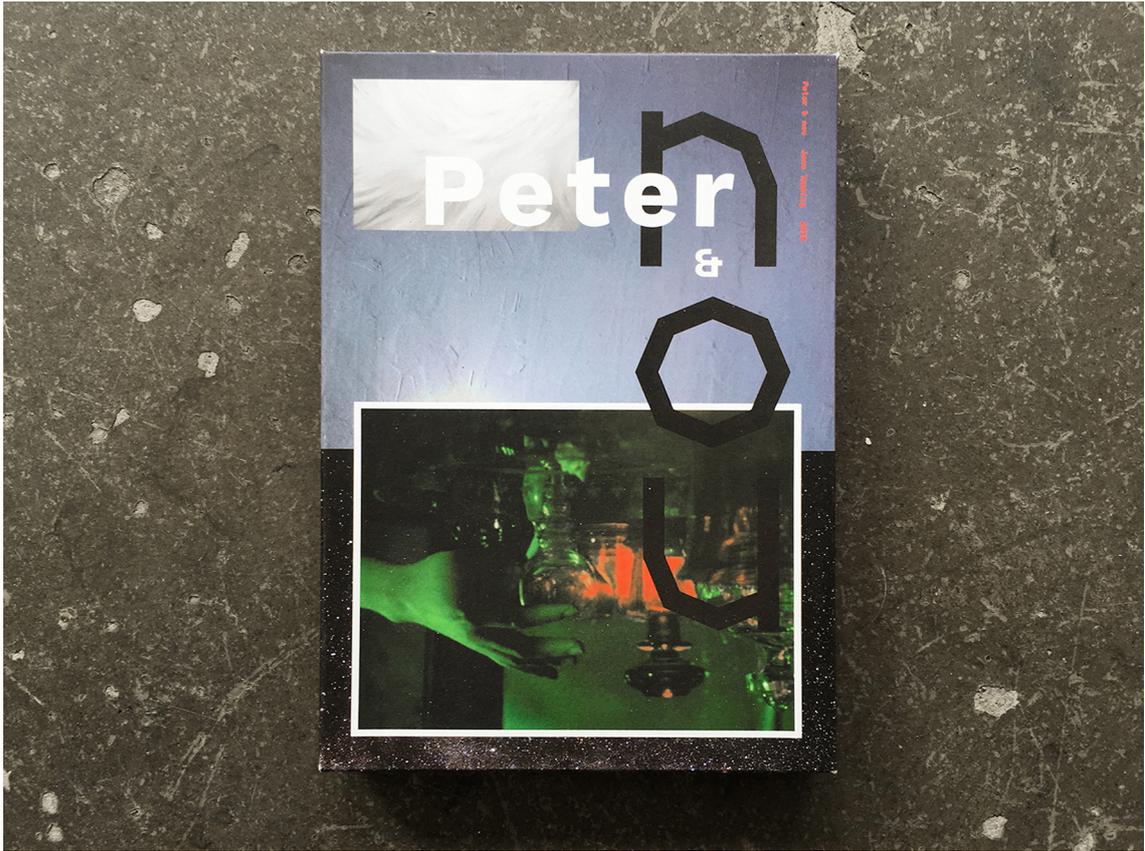
Jane Topping, *Peter & nou*, 2018

*Peter & nou* (2018)<sup>185</sup> is a publication which secures the bond between the videos *Peter* and *nou* while making a clear link between their narratives and the form and content of [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com). The book is an experiment in adaptation which transports visual and textual narratives of the videos *Peter* and *nou* from moving image to the page, taking the formal and conceptual opportunities that the move brings to develop and thicken the worlds of *Peter* and *nou*.

*Peter & nou* consists of two books, two postcards, a sticker and an envelope (containing an address slip) in a box (Figs. 84 - 86).

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<sup>185</sup> ISBN: 9878-1-9995858-0-8. Graphic design by Matthew Walkerdine and published by Good Press, Glasgow.



Figs. 84 and 85: *Peter & nou* (2018) (Credit: Good Press).

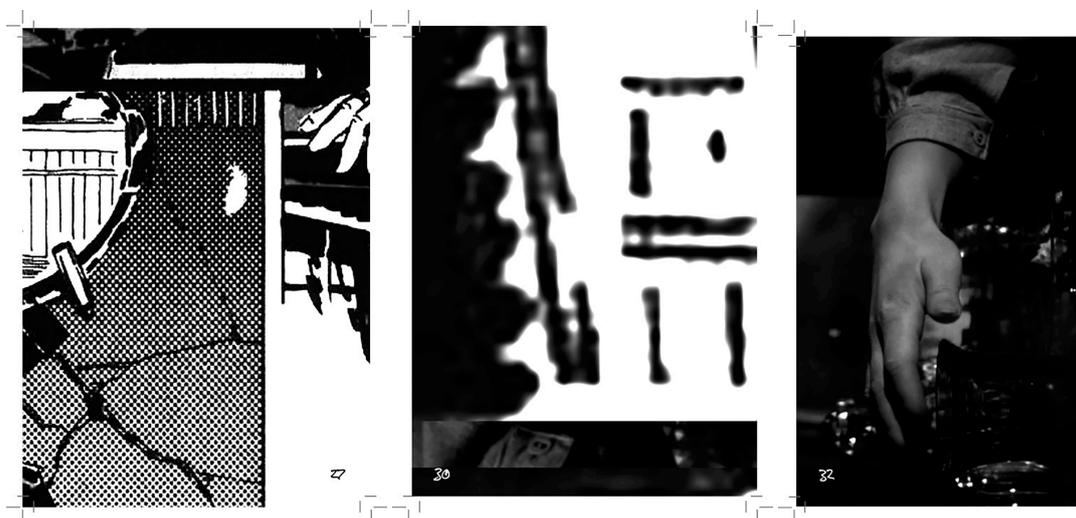


Fig. 86: *Peter & nou* (2018) (Credit: Good Press).



Figs. 87 and 88: Front and back covers of *A 35mm 208-ish Frame Version of Blade Runner* (2018) (Credit: the author).

A third book, *A 35mm 208-ish Frame Version of Blade Runner* (2018) (Figs. 87 and 88) was available for one year only by post, if the reader sent off the enclosed envelope to the PO Box Peter & nou before 28 April 2019. *Peter & nou* is a translation of digital video into the analogue format of the book,<sup>186</sup> an act which foregrounds ideas of obsolescence in the mind of the reader/viewer, themes which are developed in the flick book *A 35mm 208-ish Frame Version of Blade Runner*.<sup>187</sup>



Figs. 89 - 91: Three pages of *Transit #3 and everything crooked will become straight*, in which elements of *Peter* and *The Blade Runner Annual* (1982) are combined and transcribed into book form (2016) (Credit: the author).

<sup>186</sup> A process which has been part of my practice since my contribution to *Pist Protta 71* (Topping, 2012), developed for the exhibition *The Nabokov Project* and associated publication *The Nabokov Paper* (2013) and first attempted in relation to *Blade Runner* specifically with my contribution to *Transit #3 and everything crooked will become straight*, (Topping, 2016, Figs. 89 - 91).

<sup>187</sup> Given away for free at the launch of the publication were five badges (Fig. 92). These were made as a homage to Richard Hamilton's badge made for the launch/rebranding of Tate Britain in 2000 which references *Blade Runner* Deckard's interaction with the photographic image via his Esper machine with the quote 'Gimme Hard Copy' (Fig. 93).



Fig. 92: Badges given away at the launch of *Peter & nou* (2018). (Credit: the author)



Fig. 93: Richard Hamilton's badge for the Tate Britain relaunch (2000) (Credit: Argy58)

## The Box

In order to offer a context for its contents, the box of *Peter & nou* wraps images around the books, all of which can be found in the videos *Peter* and *nou*. The abstract images include textures of space, chalky surfaces, fur, a kaleidoscopic circle and a view of a dental drill (Figs. 94 and 95).<sup>188</sup>



Fig. 94: Textures wrapping *Peter & nou* (2018), front box view (Credit: Matthew Walkerdine)

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<sup>188</sup> which some readers may recognise as the view from the dentist's chair.



Fig. 95: Textures wrapping *Peter & nou* (2018), back box view (Credit: the author)

Other images are of Harrison Ford (as Deckard in *Blade Runner*), Yella Rottländer (as the narrator as a child in *Peter*) and a rabbit. Bringing these images together unites the protagonists of both *Peter* and *nou*, mingling the complex knot of the project's narratives with their various origins. The images on the box are mainly screen-shaped, mirroring their original cinematic and televisual forms (and the forms of the videos *Peter* and *nou*) while signalling

towards the structure of [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) and online viewing more generally.

## The Design

*Peter & nou* is designed to imitate a DVD box set.<sup>189</sup> The multiple elements of this publication mimic the hallmarks of various 'collector' DVDs of *Blade Runner* that have been published over the years. The box, sticker and flick book of *Peter & nou* give the publication the fleshed out feel of a 'collector's item', aimed at 'fans'. The design of *Peter & nou* also replicates a real-world 'problem' experienced by completists<sup>190</sup> – to get hold of the last element of the publication, one must surrender another element (the envelope and address slip), therefore decreasing the collectability (and crucially the 'value') of the object as a whole.

This mimicry of one object by another (of a DVD by a book) shares similarities with the slippery identity of *The Horizon Object* - a mimetic thing which is an event, a Betamax video, a DVD and a digital moving image available online.

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<sup>189</sup> Though the publication appears to be DVD box set, it contains no DVDs. This seeming omission of the moving image is doubled for the reader who has viewed the videos *Peter* or *nou* and who recognises the publication as an adaptation of existing moving image works.

<sup>190</sup> Meaning an obsessive, typically indiscriminate, collector or fan of something.

The pseudo DVD format of the publication *Peter & nou* acts as a parody of an object, echoing the status of *The Horizon Object* as a simulacrum.<sup>191</sup>

The publication's reference to the virtually defunct medium of DVD additionally recalls the way in which *Blade Runner* became a cult phenomenon after its failure at the box office in 1982 (Sammon, 2017). The home video market brought *Blade Runner* into the living rooms of a generation of science fiction fans, including myself, many of whom had been too young to see the film upon its initial release. The density and richness of the film can be more studiously examined and appreciated on video (and later, DVD), with the viewer's ability to pause, rewind and repeat. Laura Mulvey (2006: 144) has observed that there is 'narrative cinema in which delay opens up alternative narrative opportunities, displacing the desire for the end' and that digital technology has put this opportunity for delay into the hands of the viewer. That viewer then becomes a critic, able to halt the flow of a scene and extract it from the flow of narrative development. Mulvey continues:

the scene is broken down into shots and selected frames and further subjected to delay, to repetition and return. In the course of this process, hitherto unexpected meanings can be found hidden in the

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<sup>191</sup> For another beautiful piece of pop cultural simulation, see Gillian Wearing's *Family History* (2007) which manages to be an exhibition catalogue, photo album and a kind of *Smash Hits* annual all at once.

sequence, as it were, deferred to a point of time in the future when the critic's desire may unearth them. (Mulvey, 2006: 144)

By virtue of its success on VHS, *Blade Runner* was one of the first films with which viewers could put this delay into practice. The built-in delay and postponement of an end is employed in *Peter*, for instance, through repetition and omission, in order to cast doubt on the narrative tale. Delay is also at work in the publication *Peter & nou*. The publication offers the viewer of the videos *Peter* and *nou* an enriched experience by the change of speed and opportunity for delay offered by the book format and with the addition of, in the case of the book *Peter* in particular, notes and extrapolations not available in the videos.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> For instance, the inclusion of previously unseen images and texts which relate to the narrative of the video *Peter*, such as the Pink Panther-shaped bubble bath bottle (Fig. 96) and a definition of Philip K. Dick's term 'kipple'.

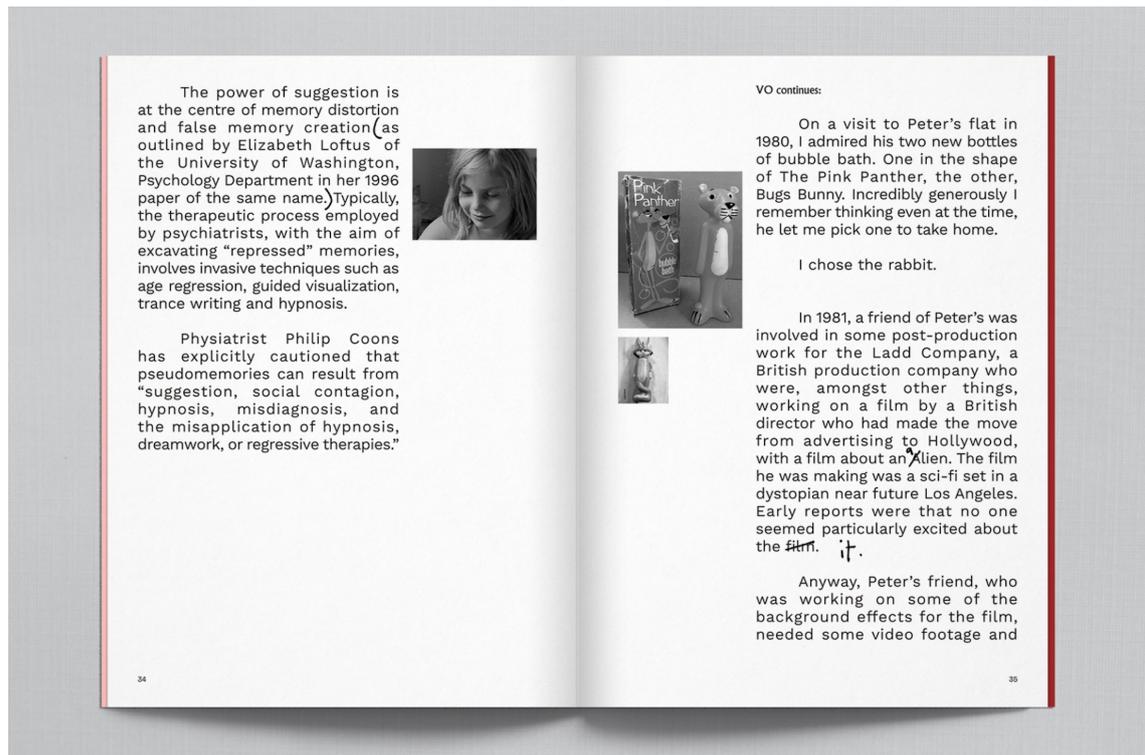


Fig. 96: Inside the *Peter* half of *Peter & nou* (2018) (Credit: Matthew Walkerdine)

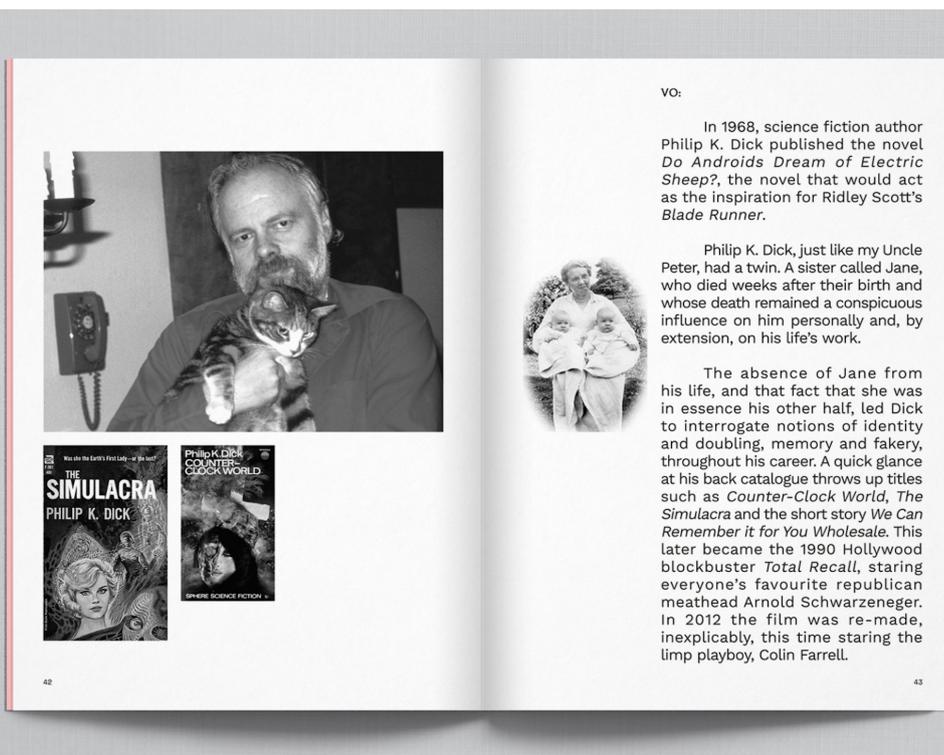
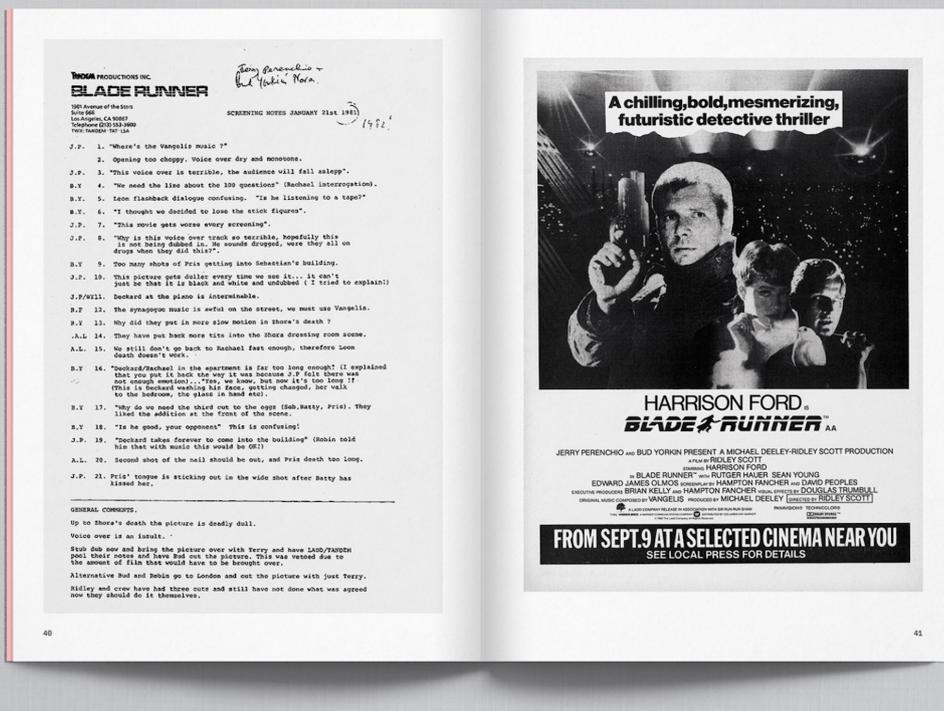
These augment and thicken the fictions of *Peter*, deepening the connections between the works of *The Peter & nou Project* while ensuring that an experiential order of works and therefore a linear narrative is not possible to discern. In this way the design of *Peter & nou* aids development of the already contradictory narratives of the project as a whole, increasing its fragments and its interstices – the kipple in the junkspaces - and encouraging the piecing together of new narratives by the reader/viewer, each with their own imaginative possibilities.

## *Peter the Book*

As *Peter* the book was published in 2018 while *Peter* the video was first screened in 2014 the publication gave me, as director and now author, the opportunity to correct 'mistakes' visible in *Peter* the video,<sup>193</sup> echoing the existing multiple versions of *Blade Runner* while also questioning if anything in this dense web of fiction and non-fiction, media and platforms, can be considered a mistake. Further 'errors' were placed into *Peter & nou* which intensify and enhance the intriguing uncertainty surrounding the project's narratives as a whole. The use of multiple languages and tones of voice within *Peter* the book (including typed text, the hand written text, direction to a possible filmmaker and found images) create a knot of fictions which are impossible to untangle. *Peter* the book resembles a shooting script, but for a film which has already been made (Figs. 97 - 99).

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<sup>193</sup> Such as the omission of *Heart of Glass* (1976) in the credits of *Peter* – apologies Werner.



Figs. 97 and 98: Levels of information in *Peter* the book (Credit: the author).

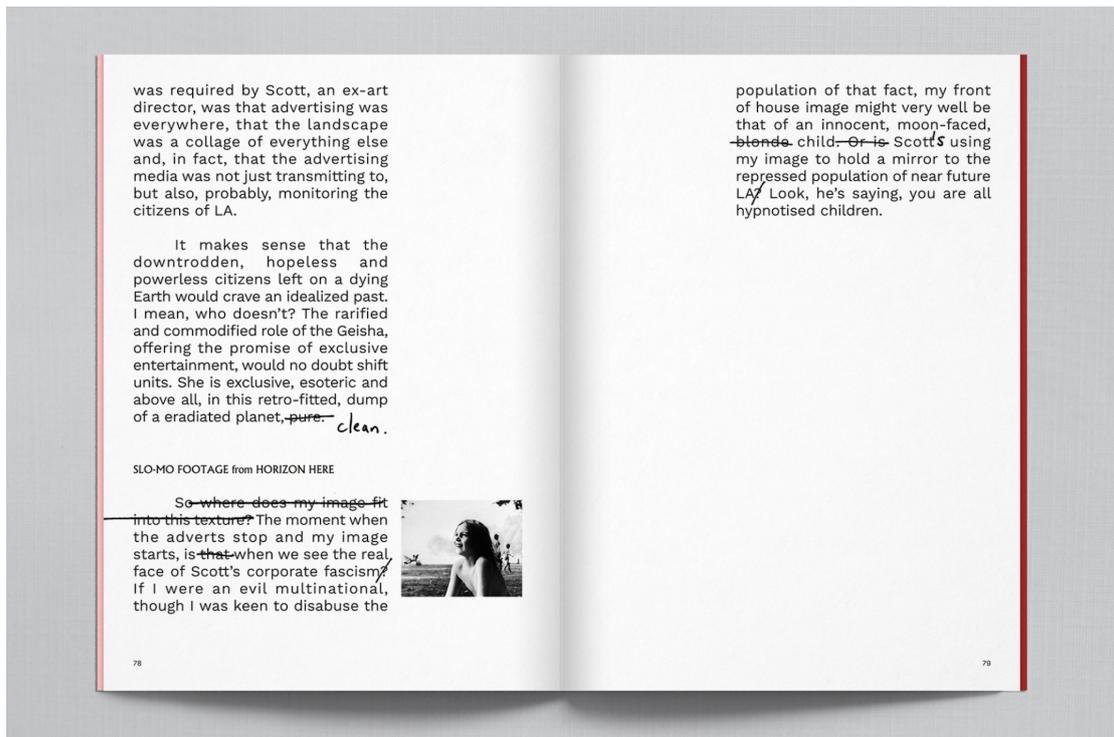


Fig. 99: Levels of information in *Peter* the book (Credit: the author).

The back cover of *Peter* consists of texts, collaged from the texts of video and DVD releases of *Blade Runner* and altered to continue the project's motive of deeply situating my image within the *Blade Runner* narrative (Fig. 100).<sup>194</sup> In these texts I am both actor and character, playing the role of a detective searching for her own 'image-copy', solidifying the relationship

<sup>194</sup> In part the texts reads: 'JANE TOPPING (Jane Topping) prowls the steel-and-microchip jungle of 20<sup>th</sup> century Glasgow and 21<sup>st</sup> century Los Angeles. She's a woman stalking criminal replicant images. Her assignment: find them. Their crime: wanting to be human. The story of PETER is familiar to countless fans. But few have seen it like this. Welcome to a steamy, futuristic thriller set in a world of dazzling deception! TOPPING plays a sharp, rugged detective on a mission to track down her own image, her replicant doppelgänger, a genetically engineered human image-copy of superior strength, intelligence and everlasting youth. This book contains never released sequences of graphic violence and mice that were edited out of the original theatrical release. Excellent performances, riveting adventure, sizzling suspense and a startling score make PETER a brilliantly compelling visual masterpiece that will thrill and amaze you like never before.' (Topping, 2018).

between the replicants of *Blade Runner* and the 'replicant' cloned and broadcast image of myself that can be seen in *The Horizon Object* and searched for in *Peter* (2014).



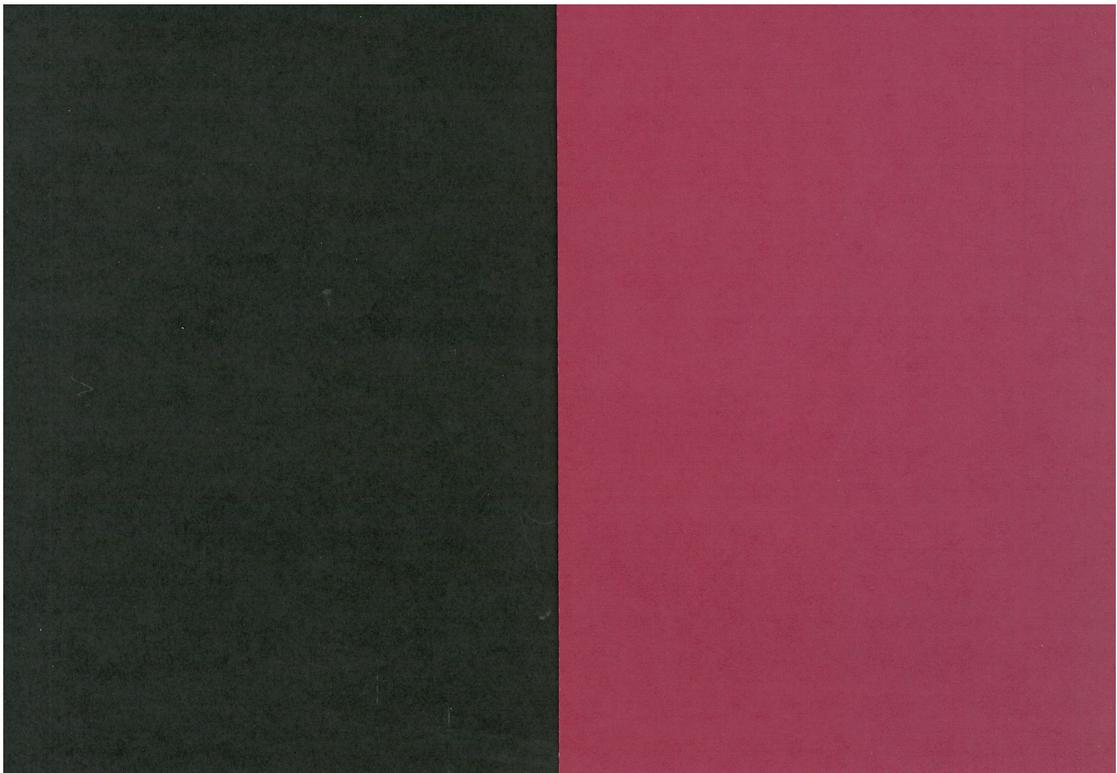
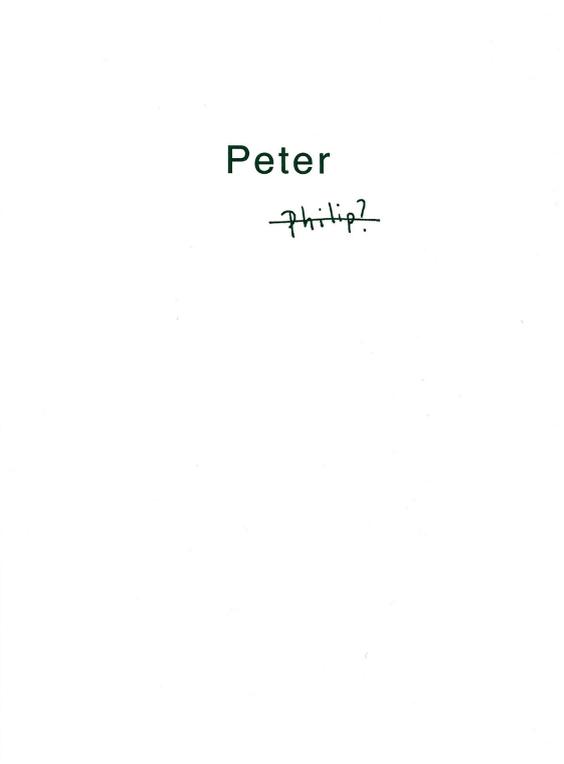
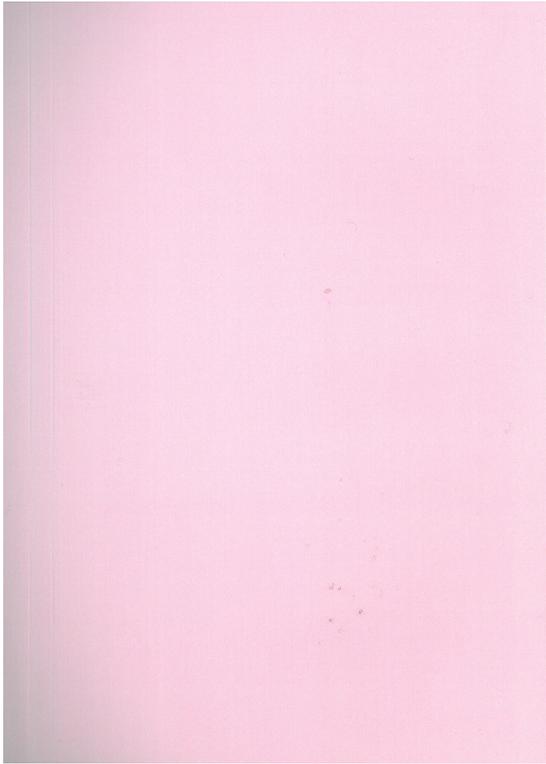
Fig. 100: Back cover of *Peter* the book (Credit: the author)

*Peter* can be read as a stand-alone story of how my image appears in *Blade Runner*. However, the origin of *Peter's* authorship, like that of all the works in the project, appears confused and evasive in this book format.

The book echoes the narrative structure of *Peter* (2014), moving from a documentary form into a more informal essay style, as the author shifts focus from positing historical and biographical facts to ruminating on her life. Some elements of *Peter* (2014) are left virtually unchanged in *Peter* the book, but others have offered the opportunity to interpret the moving image for the page in exciting ways. For instance, in *Peter* (2014), there are sections of the video during which the visual field slowly changes from pale to dark pink over a period of time as the audio narrative continues. In *Peter* the book this pink transition occurs on the inside covers of the book. In *Peter* (2014), these moments of developing colour, from light to dark, situate the viewer in their own head, offering nothing to distract the eye. In *Peter* the book, the front inside cover is pale pink while the back inside cover is dark pink (Figs. 101 and 102), suggesting that the book itself is contained within the head of the reader and that something has 'developed' during the elapsed reading time.<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> Other specific references to the moving image present in the book include the repetition of imagery of the dental drill (Topping, 2018: 28-30) and the mouse in the maze (Topping, 2018: 32-33), while audio is referenced by 'Tick. Tick. Tick. Tick...' (Topping, 2018: 33) (Fig. 103) and by consistent mentions of both female and male voice-overs.



Figs. 101 and 102: The end-papers of *Peter* the book (2018) (Credit: the author)

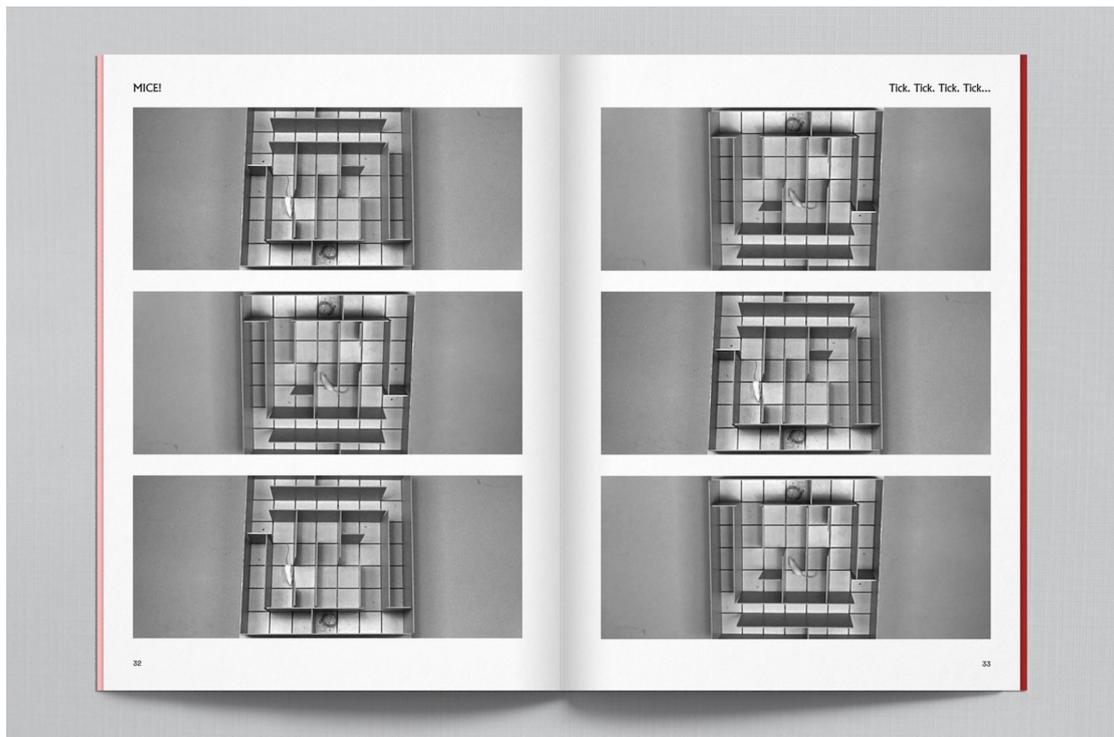


Fig. 103: Time ticks away for Algernon in *Peter the book*, 2018 (Credit: Matthew Walkerdine).

As *Peter the book* develops the author, presumably also the maker and narrator of *Peter* (2014), appears to make ever more frequent alterations to the text - crossings out, scribbled corrections, instructions and questions appear with increasing urgency as the book progresses - suggesting a developing confusion as to what story the narrative of *Peter* should tell and how to tell it. This apparent uncertainty in the mind of the author not only supports the theme of faulty memory at the heart of *Peter* but speaks to the complexity of turning research into narrative of any kind.

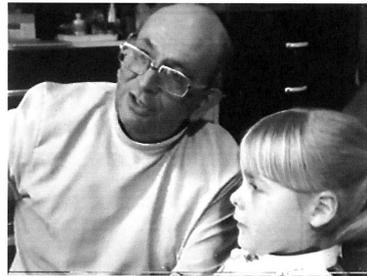
*Peter the book* ends the search for my 'replicant image-copy' with two images of the dentist and child (Figs. 104 and 105).

ANIMAL MEMORY HERE

TEXT SLIDE? ESPER MACHINE AUDIO?

See? There it is.

Stop. Go back. Watch it again.



90

91



OVER BLACK

Why investigate? Investigated with words  
concrete definition - my own definition.  
Investigate because, investigate because  
investigate with my definition, that  
the investigation with my definition  
is wrong. That definition is the  
investigation of the person. The  
the definition of the person is  
wrong and wrong. The definition of the  
investigation. At the end of the  
investigation with my definition.

END

92

93

Figs. 104 and 105: Dentist, child and doubt towards the end of *Peter* the book (2018)

(Credit: the author)

The text placed directly before these images reads 'See? There it is. Stop. Go Back. Watch it again.' (Topping, 2018) and appears to be the voice of a reader/viewer suggesting that the searched for image has indeed been identified during a repeated reading or viewing of *Peter*, giving credence to the proposal that it can be found in *Blade Runner*. However, on page 93 this evidence is undermined. With the exception of the word 'END', all the text on this page has been made purposefully illegible and this scoring out continues on the next page of 'the script' (Fig. 106).

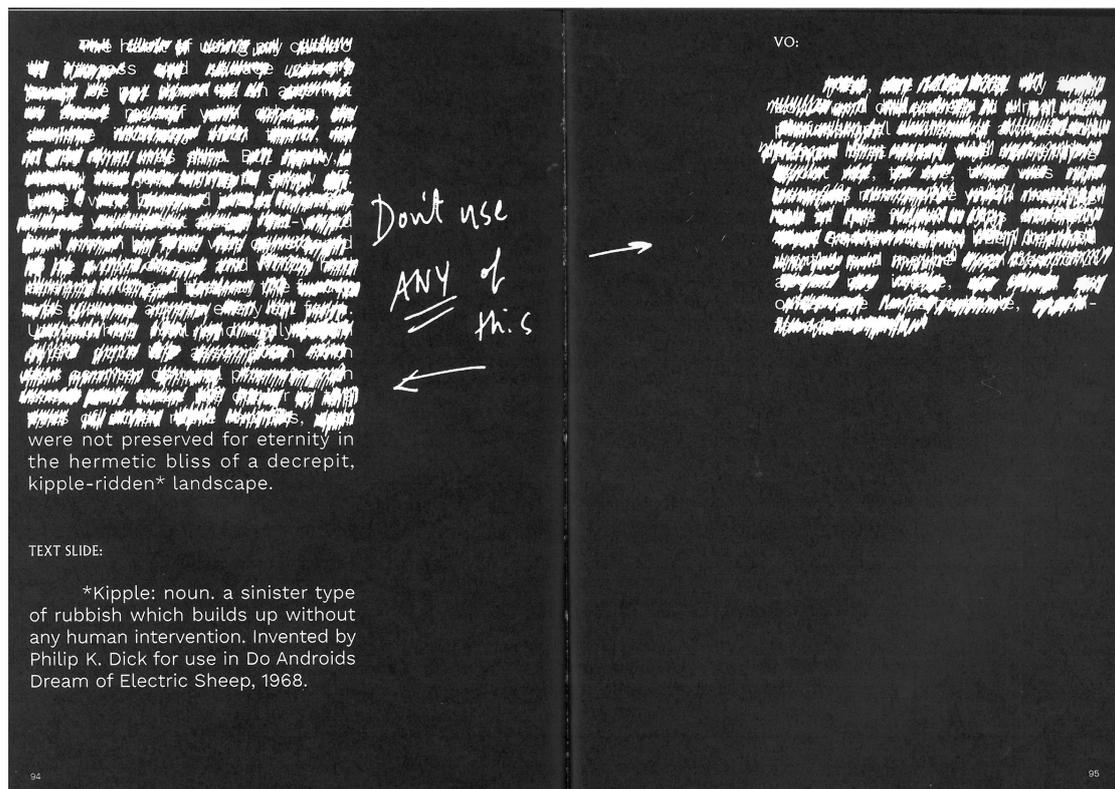


Fig. 106: Seemingly deliberate obstruction intensifies in *Peter* the book (2018) (Credit: the author)

The reader may then presume that this occluded text would have offered more information pertaining to the placement of the author's image in *Blade*

*Runner* and that the deliberate erasure of the text, an act of concealment, introduces doubt once more.

### *nou* the Book

While *Peter* the book appears to reveal the development of a text and augments the *Peter* narrative, *nou* the book is quite different. *nou* is a depiction of a specific moment in *nou*'s story - her journey from home planet<sup>196</sup> through the kaleidoscopic tunnel to a dentist's surgery.

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<sup>196</sup> Here *nou*'s home planet resembles the manicured garden of Carradale House, once occupied by Naomi Mitchison (Fig. 107) and made far more 'alien' for *nou* (2018). *nou* the book was made before I made *nou* the video and as a result *nou* in the book is less 'alien' than the video, for instance her home world is depicted in its natural colours and orientation. The similarity of this man-made, seemingly Earth-bound environment to the landscape scenes which begin and end Tarkovsky's *Solaris* (1972) (Fig.108) is no accident.



Fig. 107: The garden of Carradale house AKA nou's home planet in *nou* the book (Credit: the author).



Fig, 108: An early scene from *Solaris* (1972) (Credit: Mosfilm).



Fig. 109: Front cover of *nou* the book (2018) (Credit: Matthew Walkerdine)

The scope of the book is indicated by the cover of *nou*, the front of which depicts images of space, of fur<sup>197</sup> and a chalky-white surface (the inside of a tooth?) (Fig. 109). The back cover is an inversion of the front, with the addition of a circular image of a child's raised hand in a striped sleeve (Fig. 111).<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> In *nou* the book it is directly implied that *nou* is a rabbit, as an image of a rabbit, perhaps drifting off to sleep (perhaps under the spell of hypnosis), is seen as if through a lozenge-shaped window just before the 'jump' into the kaleidoscopic tunnel (Fig. 110). Later in *nou*, the lozenge-shaped window appears as *nou*'s 'view' inside the tooth, supporting this connection.

<sup>198</sup> Here the circular image speaks of a lens or a Petri dish - a window to be looked through and studied. This form is an integral part of the video *Untitled (For Ursula and Naomi)* (2018) (Fig. 112) - a video dedicated to 'all space women on Earth.' (Topping, 2018).



Fig. 110: *nou* the book lays its cards on the table with respect to *nou*'s form (Credit: the author).



Fig. 111: The circular image of the raising hand on the back cover of *nou* the book (Credit: the author).

Viewers of *nou* the video may recognise this hand as being that of the child in *The Horizon Object* and that it is raised because the child is under hypnosis. The covers of *nou* focus on the transition of body coverings of *nou*'s narrative, taking the reader from the fur of a non-human animal to the clothing of a human animal, across repeated textures of space.

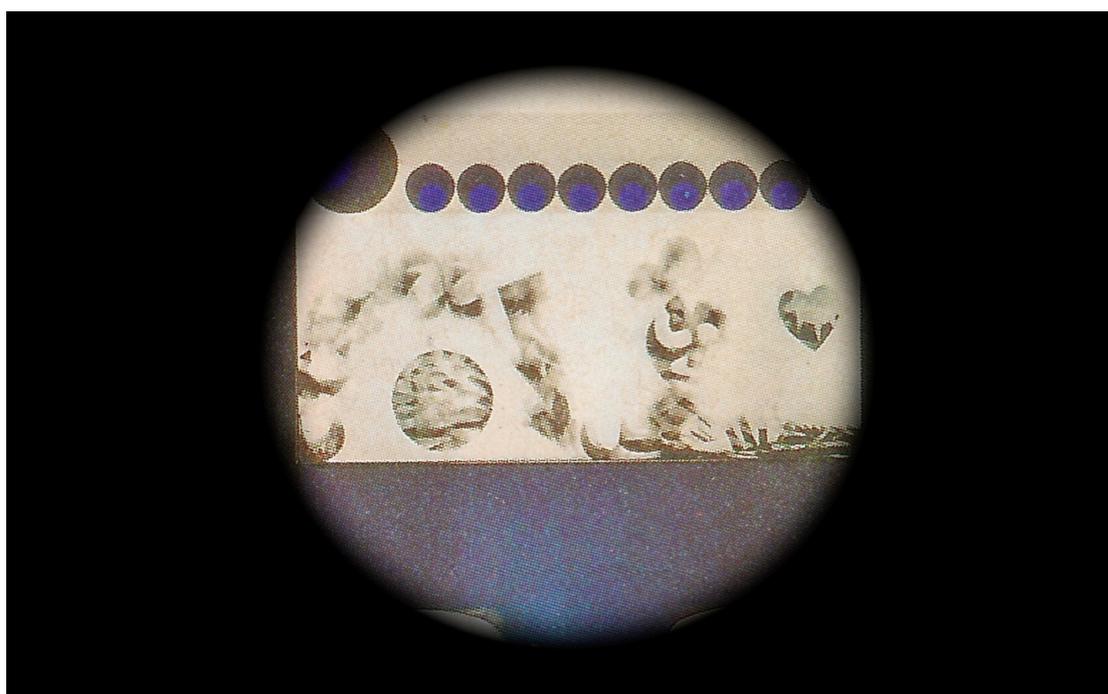


Fig. 112: Screen shot of *Untitled (For Ursula and Naomi)*, 2018. (Credit: the author).

The inside front and back covers of *nou* (Figs. 113 and 114) depict the places at the beginning and end of her journey through time and space – she has moved from a crisp, high resolution image of an 'egg' sitting in a manicured garden landscape into the clutter of books, tapes and machinery of the dental surgery. She has, as she does in *nou* the video, travelled from the future into the past and from outside to inside.

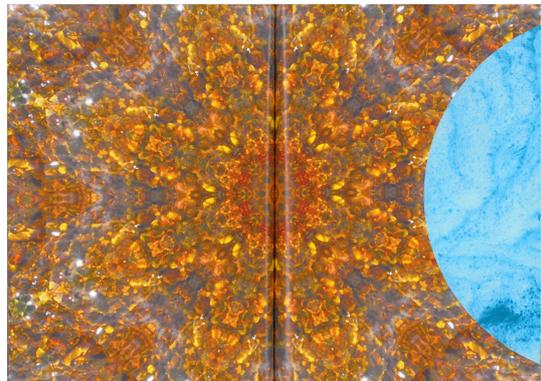
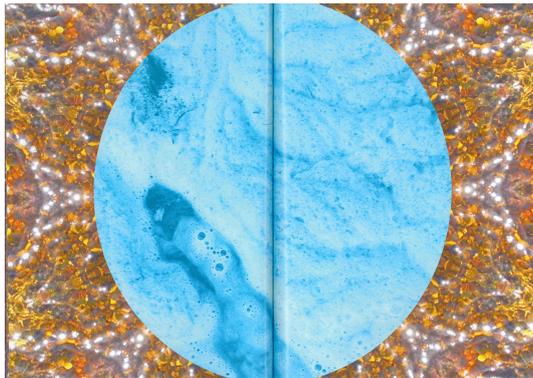
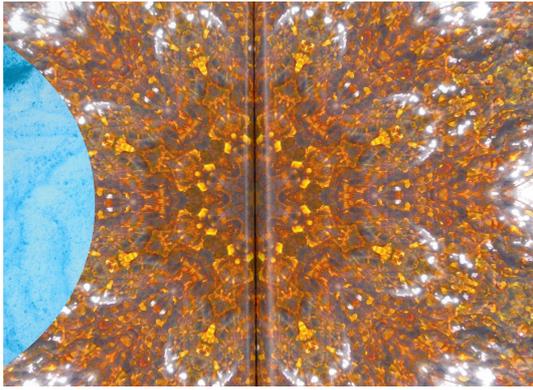


Fig.113: nou's spacecraft at the beginning of *nou* the book (2018) (Credit: the author)



Fig. 114: Inside the dental surgery at the end of *nou* the book (2018) (Credit: the author)

As a book without words, *nou's* narrative is particularly visually dizzying. The intense repetition of imagery is detailed and dense, and with each turn of the page *nou's* journey feels more laborious. The glossy images of the kaleidoscopic spacetime tunnel clearly reference the digital images of peat-tinted water and sand on which they were based, in a way that they cannot as a series of moving images, and this juxtaposition of the digital and the 'natural' offers the reader of *nou* an interestingly contradictorily tactile experience of *nou's* journey. Moments mentioned but not seen in *nou* the video are visualized in *nou* the book, including the transformation of three coloured 'cotton wool balls' (used by the dentist to induce hypnosis) into foamy bubbles which roll repeatedly across some kaleidoscopic double pages (Figs. 115 - 117). The result is that *nou* the book, through the repetition of images and the physical effort needed to 'read' the book, effectively places the reader in the position of *nou*, sharing with her the efforts of her journey.



Figs. 115 - 117: A 'cotton wool ball' rolls across the pages of *nou* the book (2018) (Credit:

the author)

## The Postcards in *nou*

Just as *nou* the video is framed by text screens, *nou* the book is framed by two postcards, slipped into the front and back pages. These are of dentist George Fairfull Smith and of writer Naomi Mitchison and are dense with image and text, including details of their lives and their obituaries (Figs. 118 - 121).<sup>199</sup> Fairfull Smith's postcard sits within the front cover of the book as the instigator of the circumstances of *nou*. Mitchison's postcard is tucked into the back cover - elements of *nou* (the fox and rabbit, the kaleidoscope and space travel) surround an image of the young writer.

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<sup>199</sup> On the reverse of Fairfull Smith's postcard image are two pieces of text. The first is taken from an academic journal describing the circumstances of a child being hypnotised by Fairfull Smith. The second is an obituary of Fairfull Smith which emphasises his wartime bravery, charity work and general good humour. On the reverse of Mitchison's postcard is a quote from *Memoirs* (Mitchison, 1962) and her obituary from the New York Times (January 6<sup>th</sup> 1999). On the front of Mitchison's postcard is a collage of images made while *nou* the video was being written and was originally part of a digital pamphlet made to mark the end of my 2017 Summer Residency at Hospitalfield House, Arbroath. (Figs. 122 and 123). Made nearly a year before I completed *nou*, it is interesting to see that many of *nou*'s themes and images are already in place. An event which happened during the residency also became part of *nou*'s narrative - *nou*'s dream of the end of the world emerged from real-world horror - a cat (named Cat) who lived on site was killed by dogs.



*In the days of the cord-driven slow hand piece, the late George Fairfull Smith used a beautiful technique in which he would attach pieces of cocoon wool to the drive cord and gently ask the child to concentrate on watching "the wee foosy-weasy chasing the little bunny rabbits." Lulled by Fairfull Smith's gentle Scottish burr (and the looping motion of the cocoon wool "rabbits"), the child would enter a trance state in which the dental work could be tenderly carried out.*

Simons, Porter and Temple, 2007

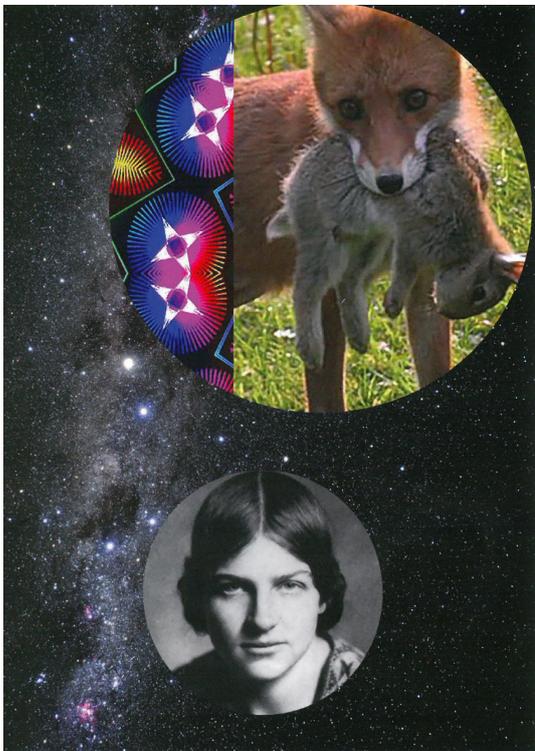
**George Watt Fairfull Smith, MBE, MC, LDS**, died at his home in Glasgow on August 6, 1964. During World War II, he served as a frontline soldier and became a Chinidit (an elite group of British soldiers). Subsequently, he was decorated with the Military Cross for bravery in action. After the war, he obtained his dental degree at the University of Glasgow and set up in private practice in that city. His love of people, sincerity and deep concern for his patients led him to study hypnosis, for which he gained international respect as both a teacher and leader. He was for many years a visiting dental surgeon at the Glasgow Dental Hospital and School where he held a weekly clinic using hypnosis. He received an MBE for his work with children at the Hansel Handicapped Village of which he was director.

He will be remembered with love, affection and respect by all who knew him as a warm, friendly and caring man, possessing a quiet sense of humor and ever willing to be helpful. For colleagues who did not know him, his ultimate epitaph is contained in the BBC documentary, *Hypnosis and Healing*; it conveys his unique blend of personal warmth and professional expertise, which so deeply impressed his colleagues at local and international events.

International Society of Hypnosis Newsletter, Vol. 8, No. 1, April 1984



Figs. 118 and 119: Front and reverse of postcard featuring dentist George Fairfull Smith  
(Credit: the author).



*There is something fascinating about the detail of one's first space journey. They get terribly boring after a time, and perhaps that's as well or one would have less opportunity for contemplation which, after all, needs conditions of slight discomfort. It always seems to me curious that there are some things in exploration that we simply cannot think will happen, in spite of all our warnings and examples.*

From *Memoirs of a Spacewoman*, Naomi Mitchison, 1962

**Naomi Mitchison**, author of more than 70 books, bohemian free thinker and feminist, died on Monday at her home on the Mull of Kintyre in Scotland. She was 101. The subjects and genres of her writing ranged over the successive enthusiasms of her life: ancient Greece, socialism, genetics, science fiction, space, fascism in Spain, home rule for Scotland and independence movements in Africa, where she became the honorary mother of a tribe in Botswana. Her personal life drew as much attention as her work, from shocking contemporary convention in the 1920's by declaring her marriage an open one to her championing of birth control in the 1930's to her continual fights with publishers who insisted on removing explicit references to sex from her books.

A rebel against social restrictions on women from her youth, she had a tendency to lash out physically at men to prove her point, once throwing a half-plucked partridge at the Labour Party leader Hugh Gaitskell. Married for 54 years and the mother of seven children, she was asked on her 90th birthday if she had any regrets. "Yes," she said, "all the men I never slept with. Imagine!"

Naomi Margaret Haldane was born in Edinburgh in 1897 and brought up in Oxford as a member of a privileged family that produced a number of patrician politicians and noted scientists. Taught alternately at the Dragon School and at home by a governess, she had a precocious interest from earliest youth in being an active participant in life. She assisted a brother and the young Aldous Huxley as they performed experiments on guinea pigs on the lawn.

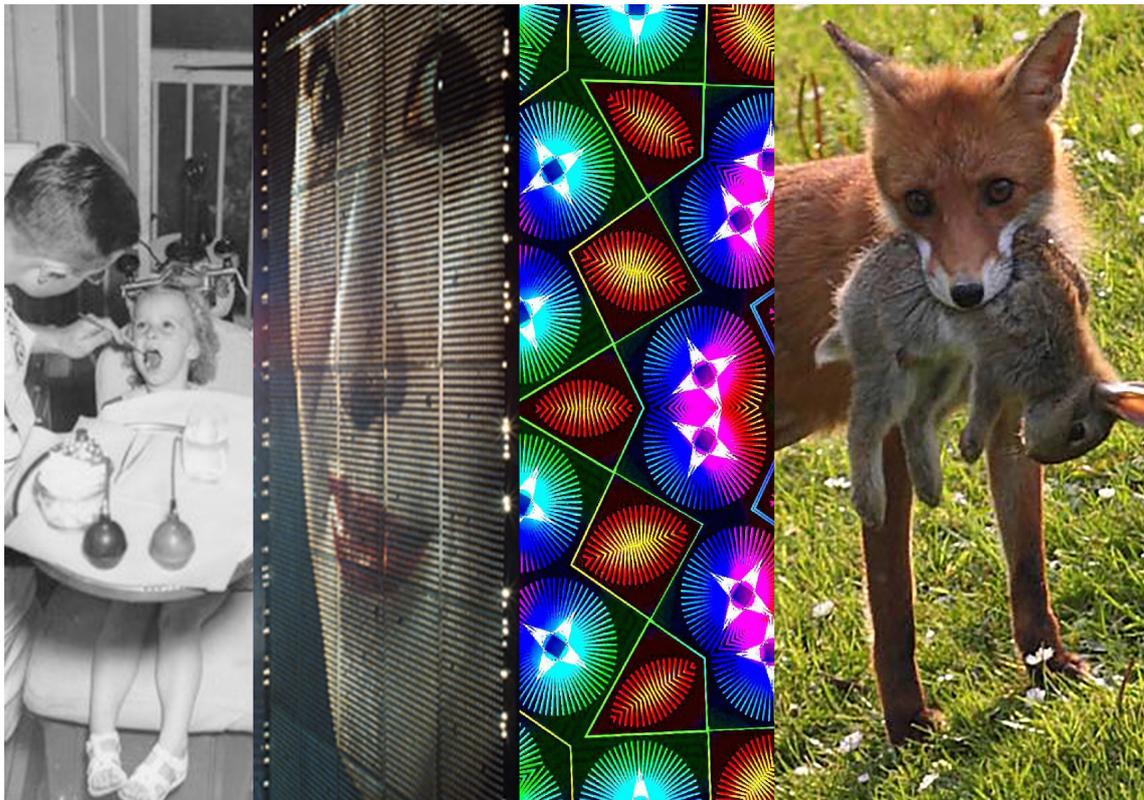
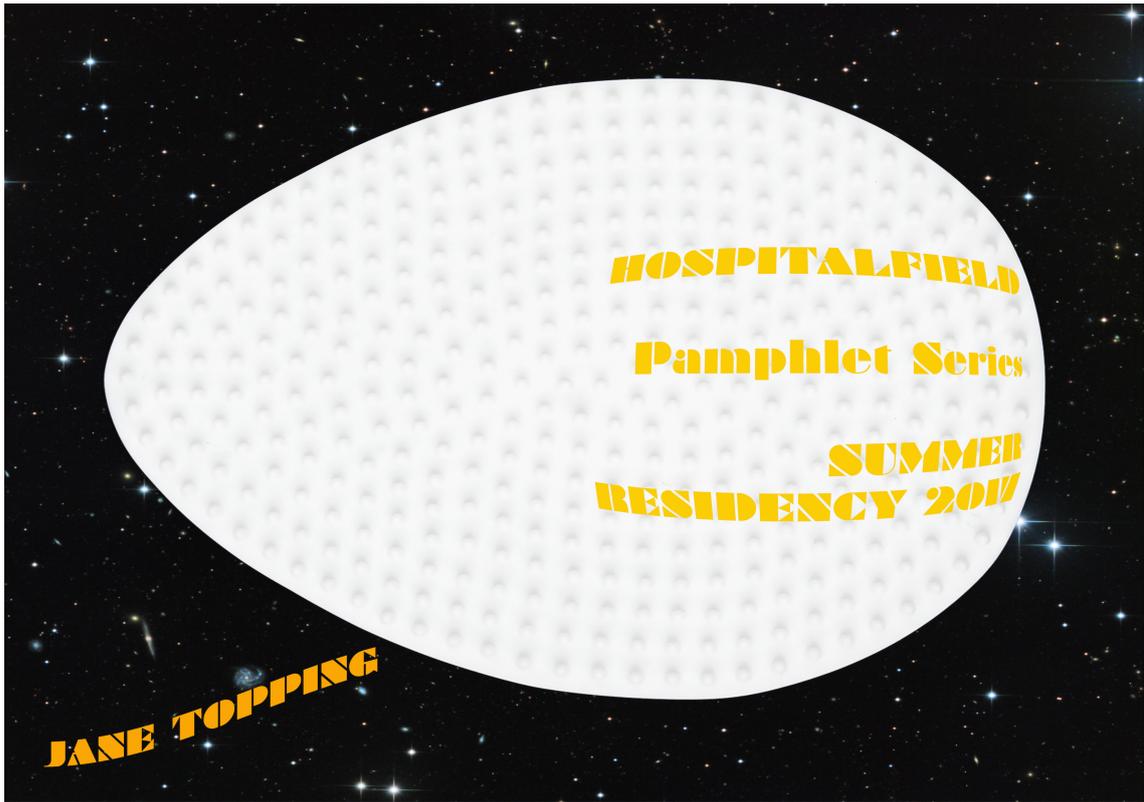
In 1916 she married Gilbert Richard (Dick) Mitchison, a lawyer who was a Labour member of Parliament from 1945 to 1964, when he joined the House of Lords. She never used the title she gained, Lady Mitchison, preferring to be known by her nickname, Nou.

She told friends that she was disappointed by her introduction to sex, complaining that it was "so unlike Swinburne." In 1925 she and her husband both subscribed to the idea of an open marriage, in keeping with her statement that marriage amounted to "domestic prostitution". She wrote her first book in 1923, and her early writing met with critical success while causing scandal with its emphasis on subjects like rape, infanticide, lesbianism and abortion. In 1931 she became a literary force in Britain with the publication of 'The Corn King and the Spring Queen.' She remained an activist throughout her life, running unsuccessfully for Parliament herself in 1935 and then serving on a number of boards and councils representing Highland and Island communities in Scotland until her 90's, when she was, in her words, "booted out on grounds of age."

From the late 1930's she held forth at Carradale, her 300-acre farm on the Mull of Kintyre in Argyll, riveting diffuse collections of writers, academics, scientists, local fishermen and hunters, children and grandchildren. She was not distracted from writing by all the people in her drawing room, and she once said she felt most creative when pregnant. She was a commanding presence in her own salon, speaking with a mystical authority that her fellow author and friend, Elizabeth Longford, likened to "what I imagine to be the kind of voice possessed by a Celtic prophetess reading the runes." Her keen pursuit of new subjects continued into her last years. "Dying is quite the most interesting thing that is going to happen to me now," she recently said. "I often wake up in the night and wonder if it's starting. I would really like to take notes."

New York Times, January 16, 1999

Figs. 120 and 121: Front and reverse of postcard featuring Naomi Mitchison (Credit: the author).



Figs. 122 and 123: Front and reverse of my Hospitalfield Pamphlet, 2017 (Credit: the author).

The decision to include these postcards within *nou* gives credit to Fairfull Smith and Mitchison, two key players in the publication *Peter & nou* and in the project as a whole who were unable to give their permission to become part of that project.<sup>200</sup> The positive insertion of the lives and deaths of Fairfull Smith and Mitchison make clear a crucial link between reality and the imaginary, merging the biographies of historical figures and the project's fictions, helping to make the project's more incredible SFs more believable.

#### *A 35mm 208-ish Frame Version of Blade Runner (2018)*

*A 35mm 208-ish Frame Version of Blade Runner (2018)* (Fig. 124) is a flick book,<sup>201</sup> made from 208 (or thereabouts) single frames of a 35mm celluloid film copy of an unknown version of *Blade Runner*. The book is double-sided, so to 'watch' the entire 'film', the reader must flick, rotate and flick again.

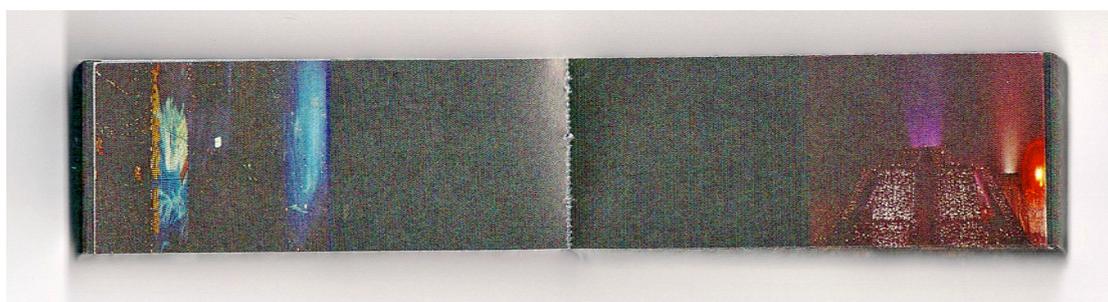


Fig. 124: Inside *A 35mm 208-ish Frame Version of Blade Runner (2018)* (Credit: the author).

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<sup>200</sup> In 2017 I shared *The Peter & nou Project* and my experience of hypnosis with Fairfull Smith's son, a Glasgow-based art historian also called George Fairfull Smith. Via email we exchanged memories of his father and the dental practice which was also his family home.

<sup>201</sup> In German flick book is *Daumenkino* – literally, thumbcinema!

Pieces of the film were bought on eBay from seller kay.weibs, in strips of five and ten frames (Fig. 125). These were digitally scanned and rearranged to form a new version of the film.

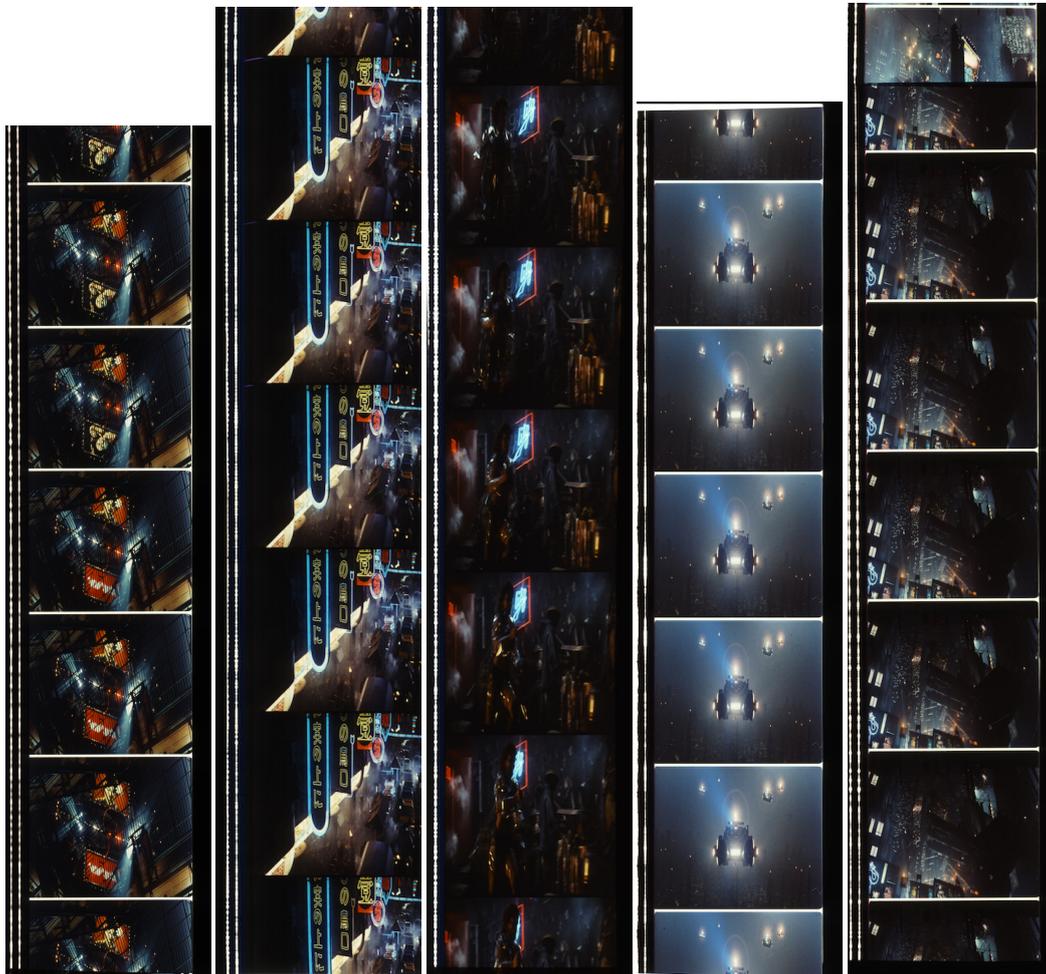


Fig. 125: Strips of *Blade Runner* on 35mm film (Credit: the author).

The first artwork made using this methodology was *A 35mm 208-ish Frame Version of Blade Runner for a Phone* (2017) – a silent video which lasts just 26 seconds (Fig. 126).<sup>202</sup>



Fig. 126: Still image of *A 35mm 208-ish Frame Version of Blade Runner for a Phone* (2017) playing on a shelf, video, 26 seconds (Credit: the author).

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<sup>202</sup> This was screened during the Summer Residency at Hospitalfield House (2017) by playing it on a loop on my phone and passing the phone around the audience. It also appeared in other locations around Hospitalfield, becoming new videos as it went... (Figs. 127 and 128).



Fig. 127: Screen shot of A 35mm 208-ish Frame Version of *Blade Runner on the Stairs* (2017), video, looped (Credit: the author).

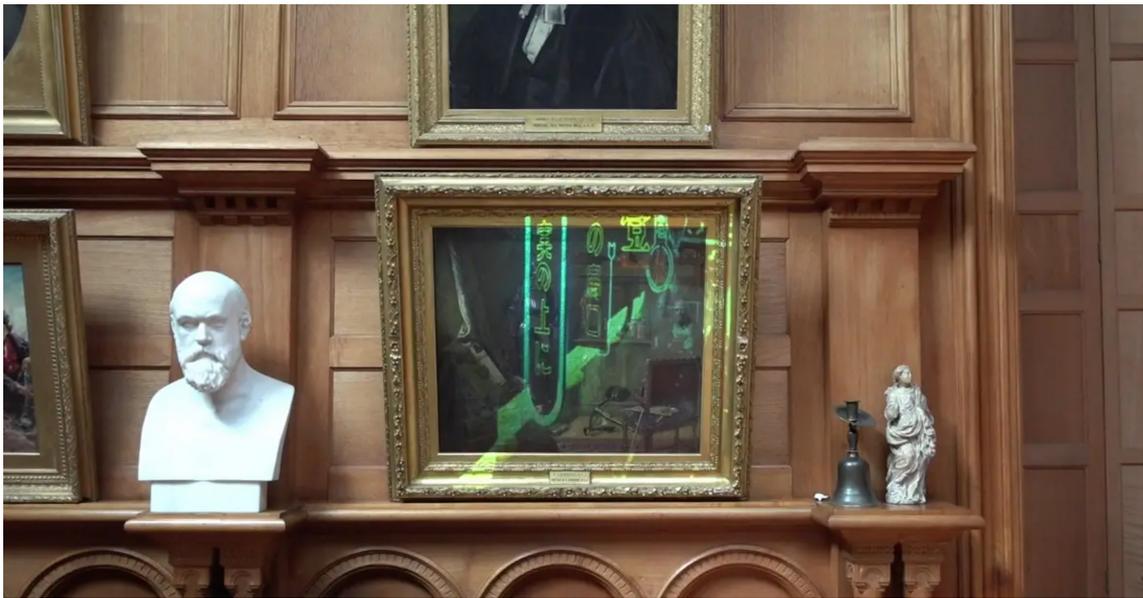


Fig. 128: Screen shot of A 35mm 208-ish Frame Version of *Blade Runner for the Harp Room* (2017), video, looped (Credit: the author).

It is from the 26 second video that the flick book *A 35mm 208-ish Frame Version of Blade Runner* (2018) is adapted. Since 2017, I have made approximately twenty versions of *Blade Runner* using this approach.<sup>203</sup> All take a materialist approach to the film *Blade Runner*, brutally editing it and presenting a truncated, usually digital, remix.<sup>204</sup>



Figs. 129 - 131: Screen shots of *A 35mm 208-ish Frame Version of Blade Runner (Negative)*, *A 35mm 208-ish Frame Version of Blade Runner (B&W)* and *A 35mm 208-ish Frame Version of Blade Runner (X-Ray)*, all 2018, video, 26 seconds (Credit: the author).

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<sup>203</sup> Around fourteen of these are 26 second-long, silent videos, many of which are made using filters in Final Cut Pro X which actually attempt to mimic the visual qualities of film (including filters named Negative, Black & White and X-Ray (Figs. 129 - 131). The original 35mm film has been destroyed – chopped into pieces and smoothed into digital form - only for it to be represented with the textures of a (faux) 35mm film. I'm no 35mm devotee, but I love the irony. I'm making these versions all the time and posting on [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) as I go. They are becoming increasingly ubiquitous and of ever-decreasing quality and effectiveness as versions of *Blade Runner* – for instance, some exist as still images of a video being screened on a phone. Basically, I've kind of lost count of how many versions of *Blade Runner* I've made from the original scraps.

<sup>204</sup> *A 35mm 208-ish Frame Version of Blade Runner* is a book that joins a huge number of paper versions of *Blade Runner*, really too many to count, across multiple media. Forgetting for a moment that *Blade Runner* itself is an adaptation of P.K. Dick's novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, book versions of *Blade Runner* include, in addition to the K.W. Jetter novels, a novelisation of the film *Blade Runner: A Story of the Future* (1982), *The Blade Runner Annual* (1982) and umpteen comic books and graphic novels.

Since the decline of 35mm film, pieces of celluloid have become fetishised objects, collected by the same fans who are interested in owning screen used props or wardrobe.<sup>205</sup>



Fig. 132: A screen shot from my video *Screen Used* (2016) showing off a chunk of the *Beljoxa's Eye* (Credit: the author).

Pieces of film are sold as souvenirs, as a way for a fan to become closely physically connected to a film. As the cinematic experience is ephemeral, fan desire may be to hold onto particular moments and the possession of pieces of film offers an opportunity to literally touch the primary material of the film

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<sup>205</sup> I admit to owning a rubbery chunk of the *Beljoxa's Eye*, a large, floating disembodied Oracle-like creature consisting of a big ball of eyes from the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* episode *Showtime* (2003). It's reminiscent of Douglas Gordon's film *Making Eyes* (2010) and I've used (or reused) this screen used prop in the video *Screen Used* (2016) (Fig. 132) and in a weird night of music and GIFs - FOMO#3 at The Rum Shack in Glasgow, 2016.

itself. Laura Mulvey (2006: 161) has noted that it was the desire to possess and hold the elusive image which led the studios to produce secondary material related to films and their stars, such as posters and production stills. Film-strips are particularly potent objects as they contain not only the image of a particular scene or a favourite actor, but they also recognise the cinematic experience itself as being of value, the translucent 35mm film strip referencing an increasingly rare and romanticised screening mechanism.

*A 35mm 208-ish Frame Version of Blade Runner (2018)* as a flick book plays with the sanctity of film as a medium, taking something of 'high quality' and reproducing it as a series of poor images which make up for their lack of quality with their accessibility - *A 35mm 208-ish Frame Version of Blade Runner (2018)* is ideal for keeping in a pocket, ready to be viewed without the need for any screen apparatus. However, its mode of distribution makes the flick book a paradoxical object. Unlike most poor images, *A 35mm 208-ish Frame Version of Blade Runner (2018)* is not easy to obtain. It was available only between April 2018 – April 2019 if a reader sent off for it using the request slip and envelope provided in *Peter & nou* (Fig. 133), only to receive it, often weeks later and posted by 'snail mail' in a [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) branded envelope (Fig. 134). This convoluted means to access and ownership means that *A 35mm 208-ish*

*Frame Version of Blade Runner* (2018) is valuable through rarity (rather than through quality), making it similar to both an edition artwork and 'limited edition film tie-in' and enabling it to confuse boundaries between high and low culture while troubling a reader's memory of *Blade Runner*.

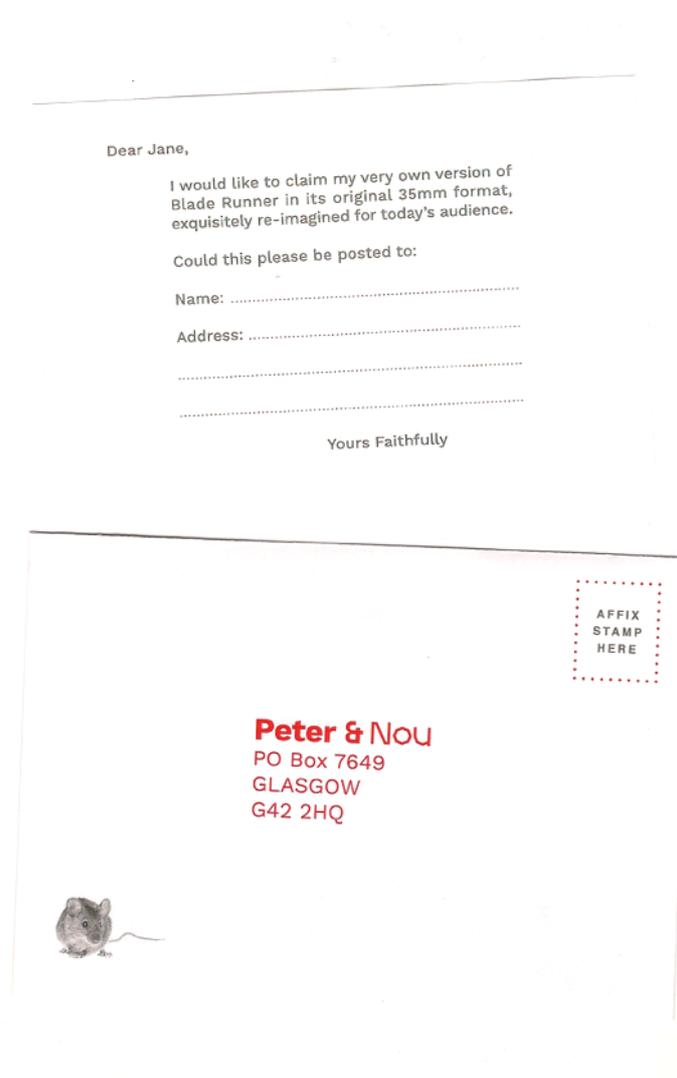


Fig. 133: The means of access to A 35mm 208-ish *Frame Version of Blade Runner* (2018)

(Credit: the author).



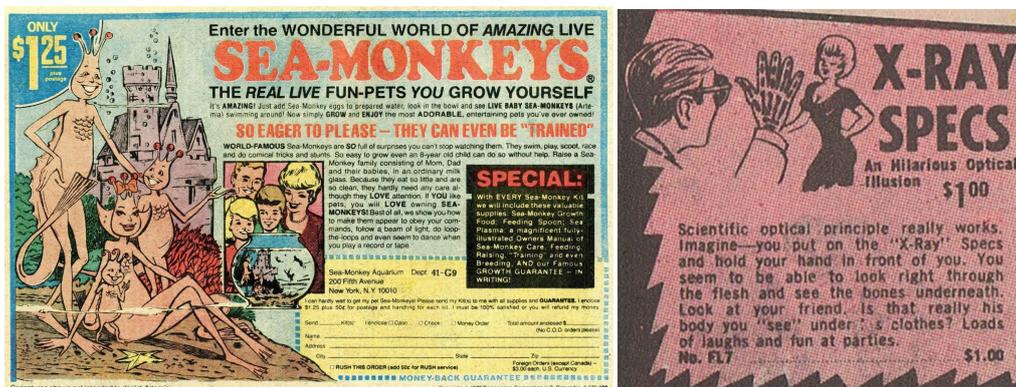
Fig. 134: The [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) branded return envelope containing  
*A 35mm 208-ish Frame Version of Blade Runner* (2018) (Credit: the author).

On the back cover of *Peter* the book, *A 35mm 208-ish Frame Version of Blade Runner* (2018) is introduced in a yellow, star-shaped graphic:

SPECIAL FEATURES Use the envelope included with this publication to claim your very own version of *Blade Runner* in its original 35mm format, exquisitely re-imagined for today's audience. (Topping, 2018)

Written in the language of the DVD cover and the commercial 'give-away', the text makes use of the reader's inherent distrust of advertising jargon – this object, seemingly available for the price of a stamp, cannot possibly

match its 'exquisite' description. And in many ways it does not.<sup>206</sup> A 35mm 208-ish Frame Version of *Blade Runner's* re-imagining of *Blade Runner* is strangely anachronistic and appears to miss out key elements of *Blade Runner* that are most loved by film buffs (the soundtrack and the male characters for instance). However A 35mm 208-ish Frame Version of *Blade Runner* is useful for a contemporary (and presumably future) audience, an audience which is increasingly interested in the defunct object (here, the book) as a piece of retro 'technology' and for which a 26 second version of a film could be just about all they have time for.



Figs. 135 & 136: A family of hybrid creatures and magical glasses (Credit: the author).

A 35mm 208-ish Frame Version of *Blade Runner* is an object which speaks to a moment in cinematic history. As a flick book, it embodies a technology

<sup>206</sup> A hark back to the thrilling adverts for Sea Monkeys and X-ray Specs that could once be found on the back covers of mainly American comics and which inevitably, upon receipt of the item purchased, ended with crushing disappointment. (Fig. 135 and Fig. 136).

which transforms the still image into the moving one.<sup>207</sup> *A 35mm 208-ish Frame Version of Blade Runner* also refers to the retrofitted postmodernist look of *Blade Runner* itself and there is an undeniably seductive quality to the tangible flick book which is similar to objects found within *Blade Runner* itself.<sup>208</sup>

In *A 35mm 208-ish Frame Version of Blade Runner*, *Blade Runner* has been edited to show only the cityscapes of 2019 Los Angeles and the images of two of the female protagonists of the film - the characters of Zhora (Joanna Cassidy) and Rachael (Sean Young) which are placed at the end of each 'half' of the flick book. In *Blade Runner* both women are replicants - synthetic humans made of DNA – and are designed as archetypal female stereotypes. In *A 35mm 208-ish Frame Version of Blade Runner*, these women are the only actors and so their status within the narrative of *Blade Runner* can be said to be elevated, from supporting cast to star. However, in *A 35mm 208-ish Frame Version of Blade Runner* the presentation of these women is problematic. They are both seen through screens as they are looked at by Deckard (Harrison Ford). Zhora is depicted as sleeping in a still photograph,

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<sup>207</sup> John Barnes Linnett patented a flick book in 1868, under the name *kineograph*.

<sup>208</sup> and which are analysed, discussed, remade and then shared on prop sites such as propsummit.com.

examined by Deckard through the screen of the Esper machine (Fig. 137).<sup>209</sup>

Rachael is seen via videophone screen, as she hangs up a call from Deckard (Fig.138).



Fig. 137: A sleeping Zhora as discovered by Deckard's Esper Machine and now the reader/viewer of in *A 35mm 208-ish Frame Version of Blade Runner* (2018) (Credit: the author).

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<sup>209</sup> Though in one of *Blade Runner's* production quirks, the woman in the Esper machine photograph is not actually the actress Joanna Cassidy, making this part of the plot weirdly and unnecessarily confusing in every version of *Blade Runner* – including my one.



Fig. 138: An uninterested Rachael viewed by Deckard on a videophone in *A 35mm 208-ish Frame Version of Blade Runner* (2018) (Credit: the author).

Neither women look directly at the reader/viewer and both are objectified by the male gaze and the screen frame. Surrounded by the rich cityscapes of Ridley Scott's 2019 Los Angeles, the women appear exhausted and unengaged, their presence acting as two moments of pause and respite within the explosions and neon lights of the narrative of *A 35mm 208-ish Frame Version of Blade Runner*.

However, there is another image of a woman present – that of the geisha, a woman again viewed by Deckard, this time on advertising screens. Unlike the replicants Zhora and Rachael, this unnamed woman<sup>210</sup> looks directly at the reader/viewer appearing poised, alert and happily integrated into the cityscape (Fig. 139).



Fig. 139: A geisha appears satisfied after popping a pill in A 35mm 208-ish Frame Version of *Blade Runner* (2018) (Credit: the author).

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<sup>210</sup>whom I have always assumed to be human in *Blade Runner*, though I have yet to come across confirmation of this. She is in reality the actress and violinist Alexis Rhee who goes uncredited in 1982 but is now known as Geisha #1. Her most recent role was in *Black Panther* (2018).

*A 35mm 208-ish Frame Version of Blade Runner* implies that, in order for a woman to survive in *Blade Runner's* proposed 2019 Los Angeles (now in our real-world past), she must either play her part in its capitalist realist future or admit defeat by succumbing to total inertia.

Reflecting my ambivalent relationship with film as a medium while admitting its hauntological fascination as a ghostly object, *A 35mm 208-ish Frame Version of Blade Runner* (2018) is, like *Blade Runner*, an imperfect bridge between analogue and digital and is precious and ordinary, expensive and cheap, real and fake. Simultaneously artwork and film memorabilia, *A 35mm 208-ish Frame Version of Blade Runner* (2018) is a new kind of artwork which contributes to current discourse around the nostalgia for 'dead' media and its link to contemporary consumerism while calling into question our memory of shared cultural objects.

## Chapter 5

[www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) (2018)

'Readers who find themselves daunted by the unfamiliar narrative structure of *The Atrocity Exhibition* – far simpler than it seems at first glance – might try a different approach. Rather than start at the beginning of each chapter, as in a conventional novel, simply turn the pages until a paragraph catches your eye. If the ideas or images seem interesting, scan the nearby paragraphs for anything that resonates in an intriguing way. Fairly soon, I hope, the fog will clear, and the underlying narrative will reveal itself.'

J. G. Ballard, 2001

[www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) is an artwork made using

WordPress website architecture.<sup>211</sup> The work develops and expands the

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<sup>211</sup> I am not entirely clear on how [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) works, so I am paraphrasing from an email conversation with web designer Patricia de Vries when I say that the site is populated with loads of content as posts, each 'post' being either text/image or audio clip or video clip. The site randomly shows a 'post' from any of the entered data (text/image/audio/video). It positions this data on the website display area by randomly choosing a number from 1-2000 for the x and the same again for the y co-ordinates. The page will also show a second randomly selected post item - chosen by what the first post is not, i.e. if the first post is text or image then the second will be either audio or video. If the first is either audio or video then the second will be text or image. This item is also positioned randomly on the display area by choosing a random number between 1-2000 for the x axis and again for the y axis. There are a series of assigned background images which randomly display in the background, independently of the post content. On a very few posts the background has been selected specifically for the content - only in these instances will

intertextuality of *The Peter & nou Project*, radically increasing the number and type of readings possible of the project as a whole.

[www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) uses works completed since January 2014, along with much of the research towards those works (and some unfinished or abandoned works) as material with which it creates randomised collages of moving and still images, audio and text. There is no way for a viewer to control what is seen and heard when they view the work and no visit to [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) is the same.<sup>212</sup> As the work is essentially a series of never repeated cut-ups of still and moving images, audio and text, it is not possible to describe the work effectively other than by description of its basic form<sup>213</sup> and by example screen grabs from the work (Figs. 140 - 143).

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the random background image be replaced by the specified background. The 'buttons' and words/links to the videos *Peter* and *nou* are also displayed randomly, again by choosing random number from 1-2000 for each the x and y axis. Patricia continues: 'I tried to find out for you the mechanism that WordPress uses for generating randomness but I didn't get anything coherent. I'll do a WordPress codex request for how WordPress creates randomness. Gregor says "it will just do a PHP shuffle from the available options and pick one"'. (de Vries, 2019)

<sup>212</sup> Though mathematically it could be, it's just very unlikely.

<sup>213</sup> See Appendix 0.1.



Fig. 140: A screen grab of [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) (Credit: the author).



Fig. 141: A screen grab of [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) (Credit: the author).

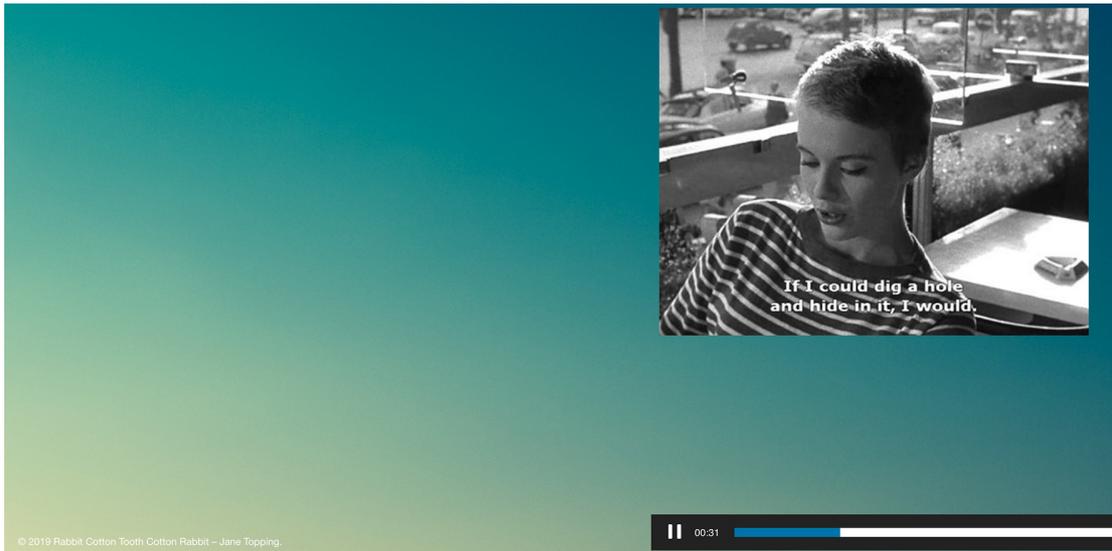


Fig. 142: A screen grab of [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) (Credit: the author).

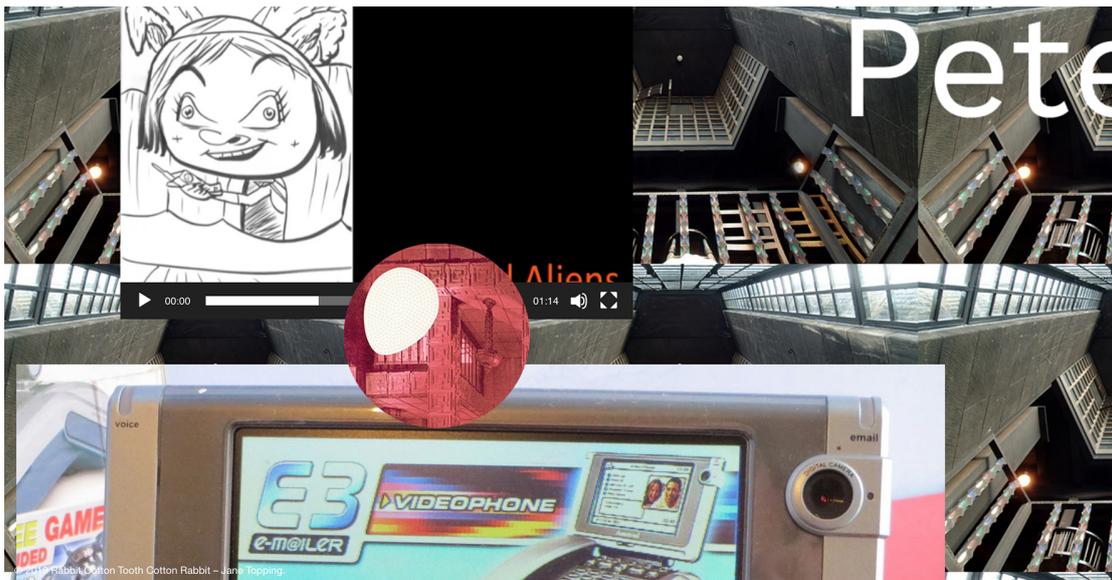


Fig. 143: A screen grab of [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) (Credit: the author).

Made with Trisha Donnelly's 2014 web-work that accompanied her exhibition at Serpentine Galleries, London,<sup>214</sup> Roger Hiorns' catalogue that

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<sup>214</sup> frustratingly, no longer available.

accompanied his 2016 exhibition at Ikon Gallery, Birmingham<sup>215</sup> and Douglas Gordon's *Pretty much every film and video work from about 1992 until now* (2014) in mind, [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) rabbit is a digital Wunderkammer - a randomised cabinet of curiosities filled with the material of *The Peter & nou Project*.<sup>216</sup> Art historian Barbara Stafford has reflected that:

from the perspective of the computer era, the artefacts in a Wunderkammer seem less physical phenomena and more material links permitting the beholder to retrieve complicated personal and cultural associations. (Stafford, 1998)

Similarly, one effect of [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) is its revelation of the complex nature of personal and cultural associations in the mind of the viewer – a circumstance at work throughout *The Peter & nou Project*.

[www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) is never complete. It is continually amended as new pieces of research and new works accrue, expanding the

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<sup>215</sup> which consisted of a single, strung-out essay by Ruth Noack, surrounded by hundreds of Hiron's photographs, allegedly unedited.

<sup>216</sup> Also a consideration when developing this work was Shu Lea Cheang's 1998 web project, *Brandon* which used the nonlinear and participatory nature of the early Net as a means to investigate of the rape and murder of transgender man Brandon Teena, in 1993.

narratives and developing the scope of the project.<sup>217</sup> Umberto Eco has

stated that:

...it is not true that works are created by their authors. Works are created by works, texts are created by texts, all together they speak to each other independently of the intention of their authors. (Eco, 1998: 201)

and that statement is embodied by [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com)

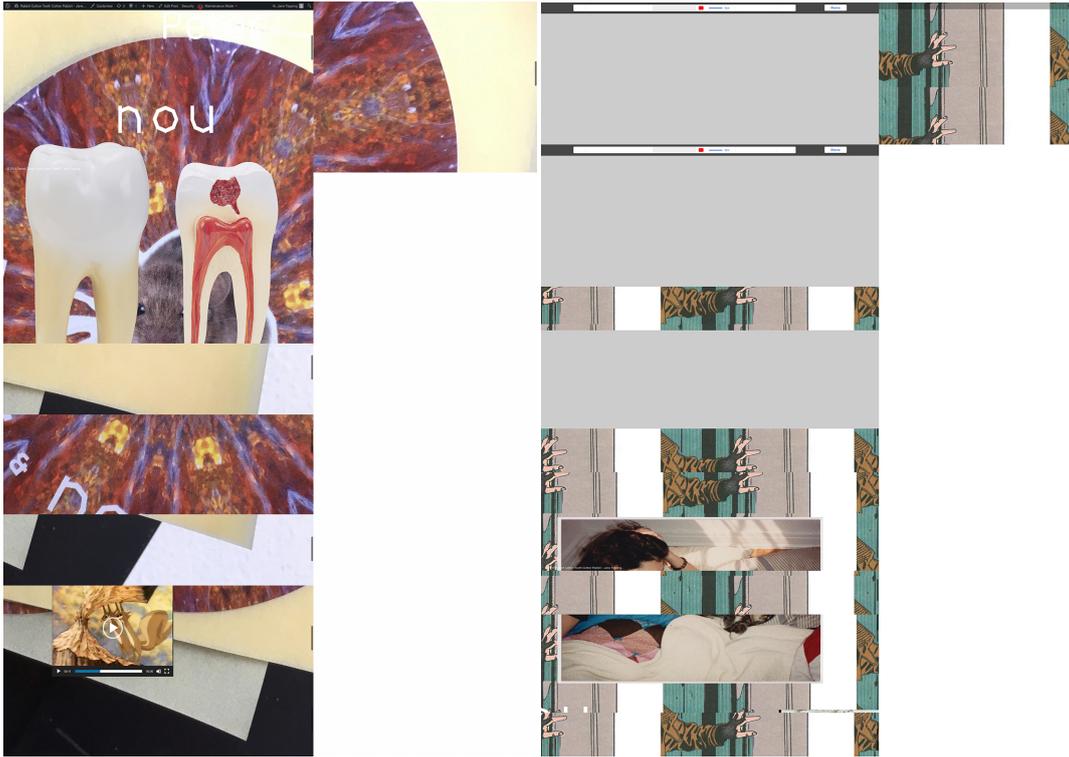
- it is not a text of which I am in control and it is not *exactly* authored by me.

It is an artwork in and of itself, and it is also an artwork generator.<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> An approach also taken by Wolfgang Tillmans when guest editor of *Jahresring 64*. His *What Is Different?* takes a collage approach to the composition of texts and images, in part to 'acknowledge its own incompleteness.' (Tillmans, 2019: 9).

<sup>218</sup> I have exhibited large c-type prints of screen grabs of [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) for instance (Figs. 144 and 145) and I've an idea that future artworks could be made by using [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) as a kind of screenwriter.



Figs. 144 & 145: *Untitled (Tooth)* (2018) and *Untitled (Deckard Hand)* (2018), digital prints, 1189 x 841 mm (Credit: the author).

[www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) is the piece of *The Peter & nou Project* (to date) which is most open to interpretation - in fact it largely resists any narrative interpretation.<sup>219</sup> Instead it reveals and repurposes the constituent fragments of my practice, behaving more like a manifestation of the world of *The Peter & nou Project* than a distinct element of it.

[www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) is contradictory in the sense that it offers access to the stories of *Peter* and *nou*, but does not align itself with their narratives in a specific way. Rather

[www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) acts as a support for those

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<sup>219</sup> And yet the work could be described as a digital self-portrait of sorts. As the work is generated from my research it could be interpreted as a curated self, an Internet of Me.

narratives, while also complicating them. Unlike those narratives, the story (such as it is) told by [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) does not feature a narrator, nor is it repeatable. It is the only 'voice' of the project which appears to be autonomous – a god-like entity perhaps, continually making and remaking itself.<sup>220</sup> The site is a further demonstration of how apparently key elements of the project are disconnected from their respective narratives and allowed to resonate and spark in a studiedly unorganised, essentially non-narrative way.

Perhaps the most conspicuous way in which [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) is connected to *The Peter & nou Project* is by its domain name. 'rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit' is a reference to the induction to hypnosis story in *The Horizon Object*. The domain name repeats key words of the story and mixes the imaginary (rabbit), the real (tooth) and the fake (cotton).<sup>221</sup> Looping back on itself, the domain name mimics the physical reality of the induction to hypnosis – the cotton wool 'rabbits' spinning round and around on a rotary dental drill. It could be argued that the domain name places the viewer in the dentist's chair, but instead of watching cotton wool rabbits being chased by a fox, they are met

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<sup>220</sup> I am reminded of Dick's *VALIS* (1981) here – a book about *Vast Active Living Intelligence System*, a kind of god-like figure which is narrated by a character called Phil (who authored *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*) and in which autobiographical facts are mixed with speculative fictions.

<sup>221</sup> A reference to the cotton wool balls which stood in for rabbits in the dental surgery.

with a digital collage which appears to endlessly reiterate the motifs of *The Peter & nou Project*.

### Behind the Curtain

The research process of art practice is challenging to represent and articulate in ways other than recordings of process (for instance as sketchbooks or blogs) which are often reductive or abbreviated forms of annotation rather than explanatory of the complexities, even the vagaries, of developing works.

[www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) presents pieces of research and finished works, foregrounding their connectedness and their disparate natures, in order to mirror the fragmentary nature of the development of works and the dynamic of ideas. [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com)

evolves using a huge range of material and the seemingly contradictory (and complimentary) logics of content and media are placed together appearing mutually dependent. As the work creates a new set of circumstances with every refresh of the site, the experience of

[www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) seems to add up to more than the sum of its parts. Fragments of works appear, disappear and reappear, spliced into still further fragments, so that the work is 'a palimpsest even when it looks relatively simple.' (O'Sullivan, 2015) The work is dynamic in its

development of *The Peter & nou Project*, encouraging the viewer to track equivalencies through the process of arranging and rearranging and rearranging pieces of practice. Though a resulting map of *The Peter & nou Project* may be impossible to draw, previously invisible forces at work in the project appear revealed by interaction with [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com).

As the works *Peter & nou* can be accessed from every page of [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com), these two videos are prioritised and bound together,<sup>222</sup> sitting on a slippery foundation of their constituent parts which can contradict or support their narratives. The screen of [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) acts as a kind of rhizomic underpinning to *The Peter & nou Project*, supporting it, augmenting it and situating it in the broader context of my practice as a whole. [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) subverts the viewer's desire for transparent immediacy, instead creating a density and an opacity which at times, and conversely, appears to offer clarity and explanation of both research territory and the fictions of *The Peter & nou Project*.

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<sup>222</sup> An action consistent with their combined presence in the publication *Peter & nou*.

[www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) retains the heterogeneous, multi-windowed screen design of most web pages and the desktop screen. This visual style privileges fragmentation and indeterminacy, emphasising content and process over a 'finished' artwork, indicating that the world of *The Peter & nou Project* is open-ended in nature, much like artistic practice. The site develops project-wide temporal complexities by appearing to be made from and be the origin of *The Peter & nou Project* – an undifferentiated cloud of matter which may be the fragments of a supernova or from which a new universe may be formed. The site can be described as a kind of 'hypermedia' in that it combines multiple media and random access to create an experiential work without beginning, middle or end – sitting outside time and space. In so doing [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) intensifies real-world interactions with our screens and the information which lies beyond, asking the viewer to rethink the veracity and integrity of such interactions and their potential impact on contemporary ways of researching and thinking. Thus [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) offers something significant to the field of arts research as an artwork which describes the nature of practice-based research which in turn has ramifications for our everyday encounters with information online.

## More Than A Labyrinth-Rhizome

In his discussion of *The Shining*,<sup>223</sup> Mark Fisher proposes to

treat the novel and the film as a labyrinth-rhizome, a set of interlocking correspondences and differences, a row of doors – (Fisher, 2014: 120)

[www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) exists as a more complex system.

Operating in the interstices of *The Peter & nou Project*, it reveals the particles that make up the works, sometimes in expanded or truncated form, and reconfigures them, broadening the scope of the project by demolishing boundaries between finished works, their source materials and incomplete and failed works. Additionally, [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com), like *The Peter & nou Project* as a whole, expands Fisher's labyrinth-rhizome by creating connections where none have previously existed while making every refreshed page a new and perhaps never to be repeated stand-alone artwork. [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) does not simply open doors but, by occupying the fissures of the project, weaving together narratives and presenting them for their 'completion' in the mind of the viewer, it is a generator of unique artworks, beyond my control yet firmly part of *The Peter & nou Project*.

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<sup>223</sup> Of course there are two physical labyrinths in Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980) – the real maze outside The Overlook Hotel and the model of the maze in the hotel lobby. When I visit [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) it sometimes feels to me like I'm Jack Torrance (Jack Nicholson) standing above a model of the world of *The Peter & nou Project*, gazing at it maniacally, foolishly thinking I am in control of it.

## The Clunky Click

Though [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) is post-digital and was made to exist on the web, it is not what James Bridle would describe as exemplary of his New Aesthetic - it does not concern itself with digital objects of the Net in the real world. It does however engage with and critique the aesthetic of the Net, as it reflects existing and creates new 'rabbit holes' that can be found there. The work does not allow for the usual broad range of gesture that the human hand has developed in order to engage with the digital 2D screen – the viewer may 'click' to refresh the screen but there is little else for the hand to do.<sup>224</sup> Also, as the vast majority of the content of [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) is both flat and rectangular - screen-shaped,<sup>225</sup> the work reveals the limited nature of our interactions with our screens.<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> There is no opportunity to swipe or pinch and the work is not haptic or tactile. In many ways the site feels like a development of artists' early experiments with the CD-Rom format, such as Laurie Anderson's *Puppet Motel* (1994) (Fig. 146) or Chris Marker's *Immemory* (1998) (Fig.147).

<sup>225</sup> The site's design principals recall the collage forms of the Dadaists or perhaps even Ballard's collages which he made out of old copies of *Chemistry and Industry* magazine. Ballard thought of these as 'sample pages of a new kind of novel' (Kunzru, 2002). Maybe I can think of [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) as a sample of a new kind of artwork?

<sup>226</sup> The site operates a bit like a repetitive and slightly boring TV channel, harking back to the pre-net and pre-streaming days of four television channels in, oh, I don't know, 1982 perhaps...



Figs. 146 and 147: Screen shots of Laurie Anderson's *Puppet Motel* (1994) and Chris Marker's *Immemory* (1998) (Credit: transmediale and K. Jones).

By engaging with digital technology in this way, the work emphasises layers over dimensions and the continual uploading of new content to the site means that:

layers can be added and removed like sheets to a stack of vellum pages. The desire to touch is thus transferred from the hand to the finger, where the age-old instinct to hold something in its entirety is refocused on an evolving instinct to poke at a particularity. (Kholeif, 2018: 133)

For the viewer of [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) this refocusing is onto one 'set' of objects at a time. In this way it is possible for [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) to seduce a viewer by a combination of limited control and the innate human desire to devise a narrative by making connections between the objects on screen. This desire encourages further interaction but because that interaction is ultimately disappointing and because of the unknowable depth of the work beyond the

screen surface, the viewer clicks to refresh the page again.<sup>227</sup> After a period of time, the initial degree of interactivity offered by the work turns out to be limited and [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) feels like a cul-de-sac - a highly circumscribed area of the net.<sup>228</sup> This is not a barrier to its effectiveness however. Rather the limitations of the work<sup>229</sup> encourage a change of speed in the viewer's interaction with the Net, prioritising contemplation and an almost aimless, languid manner over more commonplace snappy Net interactions in which a search has a defined purpose from the outset. In this sense [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) transposes an effect of the video *Peter*, in which the experience of searching for an image in *Blade Runner* is offered strategically as a critique of the documentary form, to the realm of the Net.

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<sup>227</sup> and again and again... it's not surprising that the architecture of website design has the notion of 'click-bait' knitted right into it.

<sup>228</sup> Patricia and I spent some time during development of the work, attempting to judge just how frustrating an experience [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) should be. For instance, how long should it take the viewer to understand that the screen is larger than it first appears and that there are elements placed in these 'hidden' areas of the screen to be found? How 'clickable' should the work be? The work was intended to feel a little clunky - a signal that it perhaps carries a good deal of unseen content (and is therefore slow) and as an admission of the ad hoc nature of much of its content. The intention was to use the limitations of web design to offer [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) a gritty physicality best able to convey the supposed 'honesty' associated with the divulgence of the uncurated contents of my hard drive.

<sup>229</sup> Since its inception, [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) has felt like an old fashioned part of the Net - a digital example of a thing that exhibits a kind of 'crackle'.

Like Ian Cheng's description of his work as a self-playing video game or a 'simulation' (from Cheng's website (2018), in Kholeif, 2018: 115), [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) functions as a self-authoring 'simulation' of the world of *The Peter & nou Project*. Like a model of a system it operates independently, requiring little significant human input, is dependent on its own laws and has no moral prejudice. Because of its seeming autonomy, interaction with the world system of [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) reveals an innate human desire to understand through building a cohesive narrative via connections of seemingly random but networked images and sounds.<sup>230</sup> This is what makes this particular Wunderkammer<sup>231</sup> fascinating and is something that the mechanisms of the Net play upon. [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) offers an escape from the furious speed and determinacy of more usual Net interactions and the viewer is encouraged to spend time sifting through world of *Peter and nou*.

As [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) offers no clear narrative and no 'final' page, the work has the potential to encourage return visits. The sheer number of possible iterations of the work complicates the narratives possible

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<sup>230</sup> For instance, on a recent visit the work appeared to reveal to me previously unnoticed architectural similarities between Brueghel's *The Tower of Babel* (1563) and East Kilbride shopping centre.

<sup>231</sup> In 1936, Joseph Cornell, better known for his boxed collages, made the film *Rose Hobart* – a neat connection between cabinets, appropriation and the moving image.

within *The Peter & nou Project*, which has the contradictory effect of both bolstering and undermining the narratives of *Peter* and *nou*. By creating a vast tangle of readings and interpretations, [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) has a temporal density created by the fact that every screen of the work could be said to be 'an extraction from a narrative that goes from the depths of the past of the work, towards a future that the work itself helps to bring about.' (O'Sullivan, 2014).

The use of individual pieces of research - of the cut-up - is important in this respect too. Ayesha Hameed has noted that more than an aesthetic gesture, the violence of the act of 'cutting-up' a text or film allows for new possibilities to arise. She describes the text as being

cut up like a corpse on an autopsy table with the same kind of sacrilegious intent. Thus the violence of the cut and the not knowing or understanding what that gesture produces it is constantly generative. (Hameed, 2017: 10)

In the context of a practice which is concerned with the speculation of alternative realities, [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) reveals that the cut-up, constituent parts of any world may be used to create any number of new ones.

In an email exchange (2018), Tahani Nadim<sup>232</sup> suggested that

[www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) 'offers an inventive

problematization of narration, speculative futures and digital cultures'. She

continued:

I think [[www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com)] makes a really important point about what the anthropologist Marilyn Strathern calls "partial connections" (she writes in relation to ethnography and its problematic claims to tell "total stories"). Conventional qualifications around what constitutes coherency, continuity and conclusiveness don't hold as much as they used to - immense data volumes, new types of connections across scales and natures, new kinds of powerful invisibilities, or the materialisation of control fantasies demand new kinds of sense-making tools. Stories and how we tell them are one important part in that. (Nadim, 2018)

Following this exchange, in 2018 [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com)

was invited to be shown as part of the group exhibition *The Influencing*

*Machine* at neue Gesellschaft für bildende Kunst (nGbK), Berlin (2018-2019).

The exhibition assembled a range of contemporary artistic positions with the

intention of

examining the automation and datafication of our life worlds and work environments. Here, bots are understood as socio-technical phenomena; their efficacies requiring and provoking novel and manifold relations and imaginations. (nGbK, 2018)

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<sup>232</sup> Junior Professor of Socio-Cultural Anthropology at the Department for European Ethnology in a joint appointment between the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin and the Museum für Naturkunde (Museum for Natural History), Berlin.

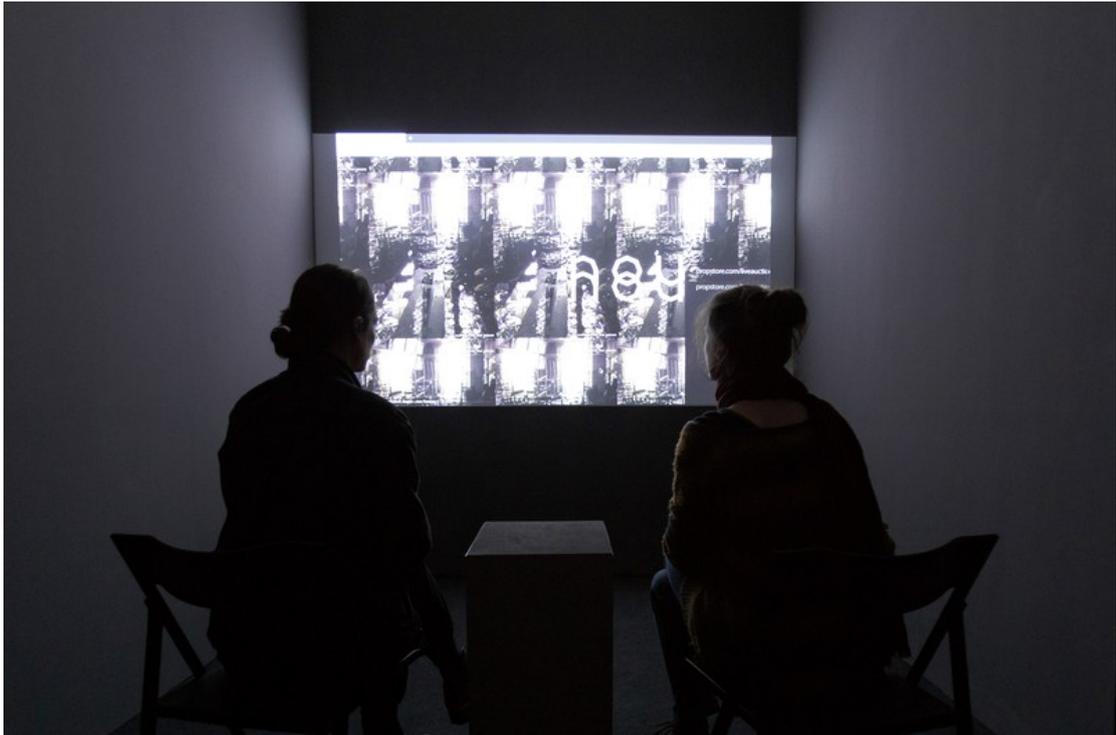


Fig. 148: Installation view of [www.rabbitcottoncottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottoncottonrabbit.com) in *The Influencing Machine*, nGbK, Berlin (2018) (Credit: nGbK).

[www.rabbitcottoncottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottoncottonrabbit.com) was shown in a cinema-style space with seating, placed at the end of the exhibition route (Fig. 148). The work was shown projected onto a wall and visitors could interact with the piece via a mouse. In this way the work transformed from a personal experience between the viewer and their screen to an interactive performance during which a group of viewers were able to control the speed of interaction via consensus.

In addition to my artist pages in the exhibition's accompanying publication *The Influencing Machine* (2018: 194 -197) (Figs.149 and 150), six different

screen grabs of [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) 'wrap' six different versions of the publication (Figs. 151 and 152) – a further development of the intertextuality of *The Peter & nou Project* and an act that is foregrounded by the random, bot-driven, self-generating nature of [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) itself.<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> The designer Sybille Neumeyer of formphase was able to generate her six choices of end paper images simply by interacting with [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com).

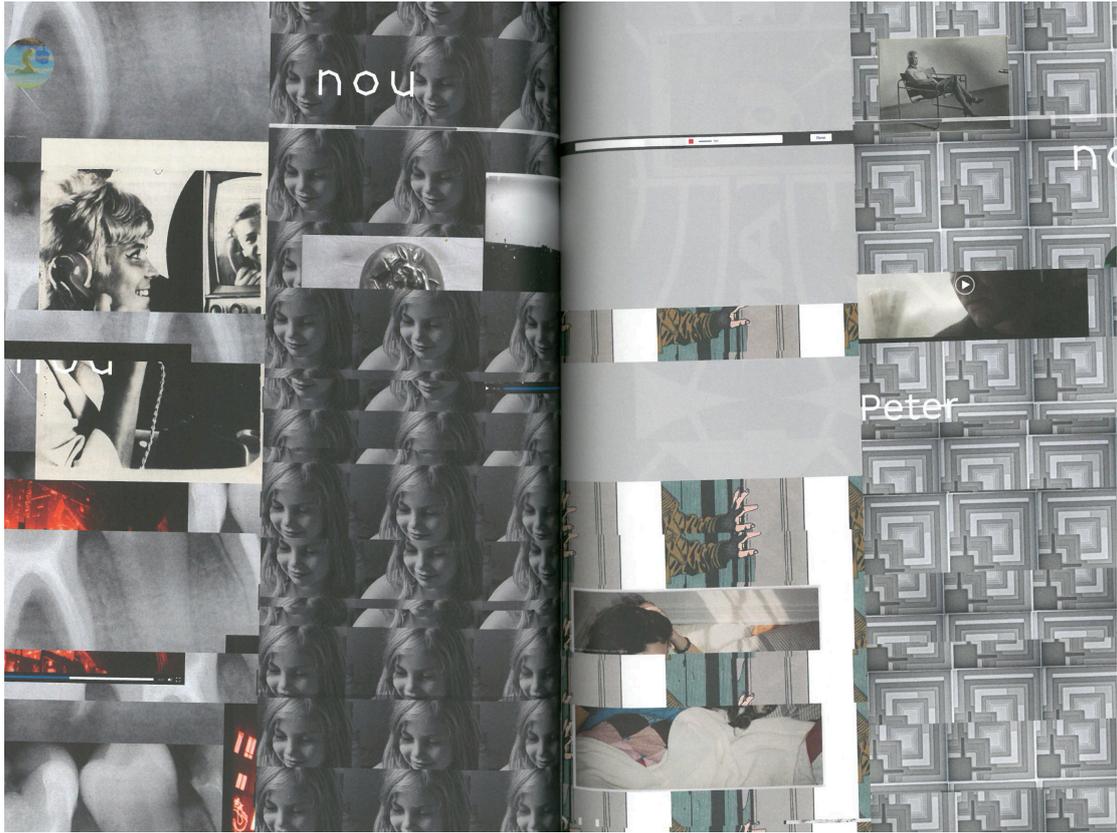
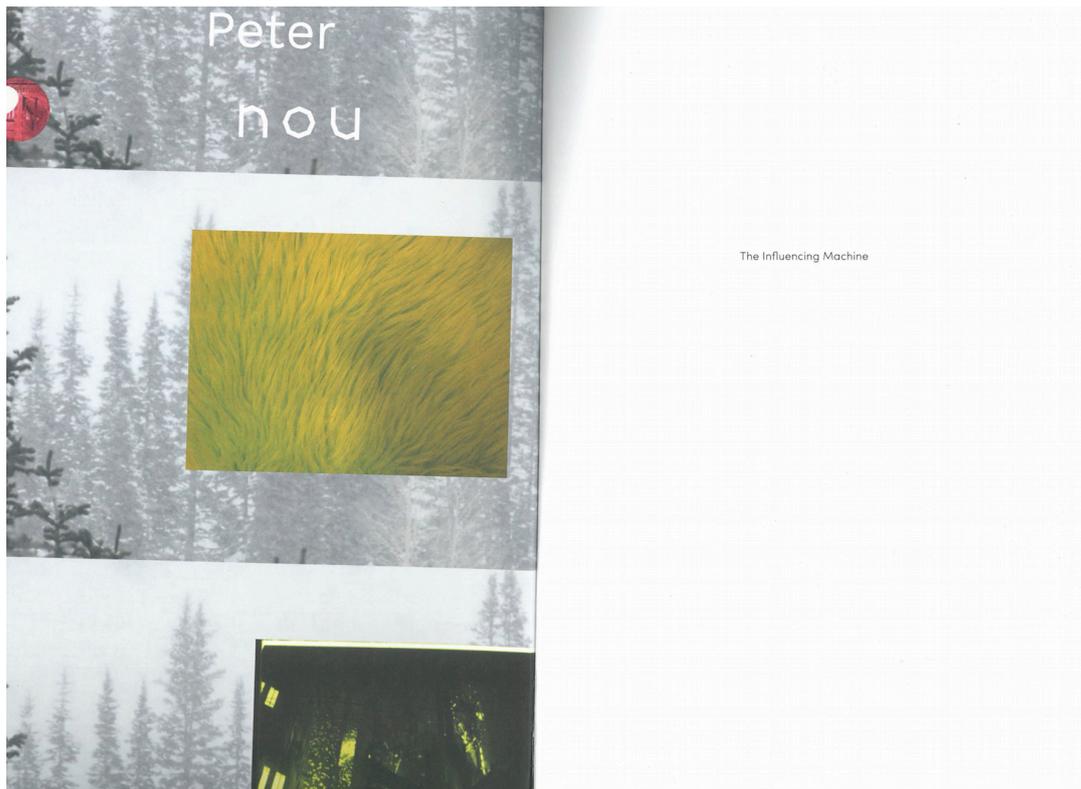


Fig. 149: *The Influencing Machine*, pp194 and 195 (2018) (Credit: the author)



Fig. 150: *The Influencing Machine*, pp196 and 197 (2018) (Credit: the author)



Figs. 151 and 152: One of six different end-paper designs made using images from [www.rabbitcottoncottoncottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottoncottoncottonrabbit.com) in *The Influencing Machine* (2018) (Credit: Sybille

Neumeyer and the author)

Like Chris Marker's *Level 5* (1996), [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) is

appropriately incomplete, selective in the elements it seeks to elaborate upon and aware of the fact that there is no such thing as full knowledge or closure in the way that memory and history are continually rewritten, remembered or forgotten. (Cooper, 2008: 165)

As an artwork which generates new artworks,

[www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) is by its very nature speculative,

able to develop the scope of *The Peter & nou Project* while simultaneously

revealing and underpinning the fragments of practice-based research, itself

something perpetually generative.

## Alternate Conclusion #1

### The Fictioning Ending

'Fiction is a kind of fact, although it takes some people centuries to get used to it.'

Raymond Williams, 1956

Throughout his life, cultural theorist Raymond Williams wrote on the subjects of science fiction, utopia and dystopia. In his 1978 essay *Utopia and Science Fiction*, Williams identifies a series of tropes shared by both genres: (a) the paradise (or hell); (b) the externally altered world; (c) the willed transformation; (d) the technological transformation. Williams, a Marxist, was most interested in the last two categories – the willed and the technological transformation – as they are both particularly concerned with human agency. This conclusion will consider *The Peter & nou Project* using Williams' framework, if only to identify that human agency in the works of the project is complicated, then going on to consider the project in the light of recent works by Stan Douglas and Jamie Crewe.

It may be tempting to declare the project as being specifically concerned with Williams' willed transformation, as the works of the project do not attempt to create a paradise or a hell and are not situated in a world which is altered by external influences such as a natural disaster. However, the extent to which the transformations evident in the project are 'willed' is debatable, as the use of hypnosis within the narratives problematises free will, not only for the fictions' protagonists, but also for the artist and the viewer.

William's technologically enabled transformations are evident in the project in so far as the work is made using technology and its' narratives are enabled with recourse to the technological. For instance, the transformation within the narrative of *Peter* - the route by which my image enters *Blade Runner* - is enabled by video technology. However other transformations of the project's narratives are more hybrid in nature. The transformation of nou and Jane into nouJane is achieved through a combination of pre-historical (the magical nature of the hypnosis induction) and science fictional (the alien travelling through time and space) stories. Less easily defined as William's technological transformation, such circumstances could be described as falling within the fictioning practice of myth-science which 'functions by producing alternate perspectives and models, revealing habits of thought concerning physical, historical and social realities as yet more myth.' (Burrows

and O'Sullivan, 2019: 1). In this way the project challenges the modern convention that myth and science are not compatible.

A second of Burrows and O'Sullivan's three key concepts of fictioning, mythopoesis is also of interest when considering *The Peter & nou Project*.

Mythopoesis 'broadly names the 'world-making' character of certain practices and presentations' but also describes:

a summoning - or calling forth – of a people who are appropriate and adequate to those new and different worlds presented in art, films, performances, writing and other practices (a future-orientation which, paradoxically, in certain instances, might also involve a turn to the past. (Burrows and O'Sullivan, 2019: 15)

Again, the creation of the being nouJane in *nou* is important in this respect, this time as an example of the project's ability to summon a new kind of people, or kin (Haraway, 2016). *nou* makes use of *The Horizon Object* – a piece of the past – using it as the setting for an alien invasion and the subsequent creation of a new being. As a result of this creation, the identity and status of the hypnotised child is changed. It follows that this change may have resulted in a new path or intention for this being in the 'real' world, although *The Peter & nou Project* has yet to reveal what this may be. In *nou* the act of hypnosis is a magical moment which entangles a technologically advanced alien and a child, creating a new being, one who may, in future works, act against perceived impasses of the present.

It is the vacillating, indecisive and ever-evolving narratives of the project which make it particularly significant in the context of a contemporary fictioning practice and is one way in which the project disrupts and resists contemporary notions of 'post-truth' and 'alternative fact' in a broad cultural context.

The project shares SF territory with such recent works as Stan Douglas' *Doppelgänger* (2019) (Fig. 153)<sup>234</sup> in which a looped narrative of a female astronaut and her double unfolds in side-by-side vignettes.



Fig. 153: *Doppelgänger*, 2019, © Stan Douglas, courtesy the artist, Victoria Miro, and David Zwirner

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<sup>234</sup> For me, by far the most enthralling work at 2019's La Biennale di Venezia, 58th International Art Exhibition.

In *Doppelgänger* the action takes place on two screens and proceeds alternately in tandem and in parallel, seamlessly moving between two oppositional scenarios of astronaut Alice's reception back on Earth. With this multi-channel installation, Douglas

extends his ongoing exploration of both nonlinear narratives and alternate histories: the omnipresent sense of doubling that is built into the structure of the work implicitly suggests the possibility of simultaneous, diverging experiences and realities. (David Zwirner, 2018)

*The Peter & nou Project* develops its own nonlinear narratives and alternate histories not through installation but via its active intertextuality. Yet the project does more than simply present multiple, overlapping narratives or vantage points. Instead, by virtue of the works' ability to effect its own readings, themselves amplified by the project's built-in interstices, *The Peter & nou Project* allows for imaginative leaps, reappraisals and novel developments in the viewer's understanding of the project's meta narrative, in a ceaseless creation and recreation of alternate realities and SF possibilities.

The project also shares some commonalities with elements and approaches evident in the recent work of Jamie Crewe. Johanna Hedva (2019: 100) has described Crewe's film *Ashley* (2019) (Fig. 154) as mining 'horror conventions to trouble the relationship between selves and bodies, subjects and objects.'

Substitute 'horror' for SF and Crewe's methodology is strikingly similar to that of *The Peter & nou Project*. Just as the project utilises SF tropes of film and literature, bound by an altered state of hypnosis and put to work intertextually in order to 'science fiction the real', develop alternate realities and create kin, so Hedva (2019: 100) describes Crewe's film as using an artery of horror to animate 'narratives from literature and film with the mythic, the mess of gender and the mutability of the body.'



Fig. 154: Jamie Crewe, *Ashley*, 2020, film still. Courtesy: the artist and Charlotte Percival.

Both *The Peter & nou Project* and Crewe's *Ashley* are concerned with foregrounding ambiguities of the body and both use the voice-over in order to say 'something that is not illustrated on the body.' (Crewe, 2019 in Hedva, 2019: 101). However, while *Ashley* 'asks us to consider the limits of the subject [...] as well as the potency of its inverse: in what febrile and

smouldering circumstances can a 'what' become a 'who'?' (Hedva, 2019: 101), *The Peter & nou Project* complicates subject/object distinctions beyond a single transformation, ensuring its narrative, authorial and kin-making potential remains open to multiple readings, inviting imaginative extrapolation in the mind of the viewer. While the use of horror tropes in a fictioning practice may not necessarily be Earth-bound, they are somewhat limited in their scope by their deep connection to the body and the abject. In comparison, the use of SF as a tool of fictioning enables the construction of entire worlds and entails

a conceptual reorganisation of semantic space and therefore of material and social relations, and makes for an expanded cognitive horizon, an epic vision of our present social reality. (de Lauretis, 1980: 170 in Wolmark, 1994: 10)

As an example of a speculative practice which situates SF as a means of fictioning at its heart, *The Peter & nou Project* allows for a creative theorising which thinks and feels 'into and through questions of what might be desirable feminist transformations' (Haran and King, 2013) enabling the presentation of alternate realities which, though they do not promise another world, help to 'set up further conditions – contours and coordination points – for the production of a different mode of being (and thus [...] a different world) from within already existing ones.' (Burrows and O'Sullivan, 2019: 8).

In so doing the project plays a crucial role in contemporary art's use of SF as a visual language of resistance and as an effective tool of fictioning alternative political positions.<sup>235</sup> *The Peter & nou Project* declares that its SF fictions will not be adversely affected by the historical past by reclaiming my image from the broadcast archive and putting it to work within a mode of fictioning which is unusual as it is enabled by both a 'magical' altered state of consciousness – of hypnosis – and by the 'technological' texture of the poor image. My ghostly image, cut free from the constraints of the past or the conformities of the present, thus becomes a creator new futures, previously unimagined. The project's use of familiar SF tropes enables resistance to historical domination or subjugation, while allowing the works to perform an alternative kind of reproduction in order to create an alternative kind of being. In so doing the works of the project – and its future works – are able to disrupt the status quo. *The Peter & nou Project* rewrites preconceived notions of the past, the future and the present using fragmented, feminist and SF fictioning strategies. By so doing, the project creates new knowledge, which actively contributes to the expansion of cognitive horizons across art, literature and filmmaking discourses in potentially groundbreaking ways.

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<sup>235</sup> Such as imagining a new cultural context for the film *Blade Runner* or proposing a novel means of reproduction which operates beyond the heteronormative.

## Alternate Conclusion #2

### The Found Image Ending

'Ultimately [*Blade Runner*] urges its spectators to question their own relationship to memory, demystifying the assumption that their memories are "authentic".'

Alison Landsberg, 2004

As previously argued, crucial to the success of *The Peter & nou Project* as a whole is uncertainty, and in particular uncertainty in the mind of the viewer which may prompt them to develop their own imaginative narratives. For example, the momentum of *Peter* is driven by the promise of an image of the artist as a child in *Blade Runner* and in *Peter* the narrator's search for this image is shared, inviting the viewer to call into question their own memory and experience of *Blade Runner*. This conclusion will examine one real-world development of *The Peter & nou Project* by a viewer.

Professor Mark Wilson wrote about *Peter* in the essay *Shooting the Messenger: no parallel, the impossible alien and an end to island life*.

(Snæbjornsdottir/Wilson, 2020). The essay examines:

what it means in the context of crisis, (e.g. mass and exponential extinction, environmental degradation, the Anthropocene), to consider the condition of the 'visitor' as both an abstract, psychological phenomenon, a threat, a catalyst of change and as an indicator of monumental change already in train. (Wilson, 2020: 118)

Under the title 'Sunday – space and time (and memory)', Wilson (2020: 130) considers the process of making of *Peter* as one in which I 'bit into and oddly, became one with' *Blade Runner*'. Wilson goes on to describe the route by which the video recording of my trip to the dentist ended up in *Blade Runner* as recounted in *Peter*, even going as far as to describe details including the length of the video clip, the image and its placement:

Jane's upturned face [...] projected, alongside one of the smoking geisha on the side of a towering building in the dystopian metropolis that was the backdrop to *Blade Runner*. (Wilson, 2020: 131)

Wilson (2020: 131) suggests that it is through this kind of interlacing of culture and memory that we may be reminded that 'ecologies are not only conjured through site, or habitat, but also through time' and that the 'porosity of our experience and its context, means that each is a continuing accretion of the other.'

Wilson's discussion of *Peter* is illustrated with an image (Fig. 155) which is titled '*Peter*, Topping, J. Video composite still, 2014 © Wilson, M, courtesy of Jane Topping'.



Fig. 155: Mark Wilson's 'Video composite still' of *Peter* (Credit: Mark Wilson, 2020).

This image is not a still from *Peter*, but a composite image made – and then with my permission, published – by the combination of two screen shots of *Peter*. As this text has previously mentioned, these two images – of the geisha and of the child at the dentist - sit one after the other towards the end of *Peter*, but are not, as Wilson has them, overlaid.

Wilson's treatment of the *Peter* narrative is fascinating and complicated as it does not simply mirror the contradictions of *Peter*, but extends them. While some parts of Wilson's text agree with the story told by *Peter* others do not.

The text reveals the clip of the child in *Blade Runner* to be '2-3 seconds' in length, a piece of information briefly mentioned in but never confirmed by *The Peter & nou Project*. The upturned face of the child is shown to be in *Blade Runner* by the evidence of Wilson's image. Here, the confusing and doubtful narrative of *Peter* is considered fact, supported by what appears to be new visual evidence.

Wilson's treatment of *Peter* is not evidence of the veracity or otherwise of *Peter's* narrative, but an example of the project's affect in action. With his text and image, Wilson has made an intervention into *The Peter & nou Project*, changing it as he sees fit. One might speculate that the frustrating act of searching and not finding my image in *Blade Runner* has resulted, for Wilson, in a desire to see that image - one which only Photoshop® could fulfil. Wilson's image creation is perhaps a somewhat vulgar 'cutting to the chase' initiative which reduces *Peter* to just one imaginary freeze frame. This gesture omits all the storytelling and delicious uncertainty engendered in the construction and the experience of *Peter*, but which is nonetheless compelling as another layer of the project. Wilson appears to resolve the question of my being in *Blade Runner* by acting to actually make it happen. However, there is a clue in Wilson's text that we should be should not believe

everything we see - or read. He concludes his discussion of *Peter* (and *nou*)

with the following:

By imagining, not worlds in parallel, but the worlds of myriad others, sliding across, crashing and enmeshed, we come to see how each complicates the rest and is made continuously more complicated, both by direct and indirect encounters and even perhaps, by near misses, sometimes by random thought and sometimes – in imagination or memory alone. (Wilson, 2020: 133)

Wilson's discussion of *The Peter & nou Project* is an example of how the project encourages a viewer to make connections when there may be none and act to fill the gaps within the constellation of works via a personal imaginative process. In Wilson's hands the project evolves with respect to its relationship to truth with the creation of an image which forever evades the viewer who watches *Peter* over and over again. This is an important and exciting effect of *The Peter & nou Project* – it encourages or even necessitates its development, outwith my control, in the minds and actions of its viewers, generating new knowledge as it does so. Thus the narrative fragments of the project seem to reach out with thread-like tentacles, weaving alternatives into reality. In one reality, Mark Wilson appears to have found my image in *Blade Runner*.

### Alternate Conclusion #3

#### The Mutant Starfish Ending

'It's hideous.

Nearly a meter across. Probably smaller when Clarke started working on it, but it's a real monster now. Scanlon thinks back to his v-school days, and remembers: starfish are supposed to be all in one plane.

Flat disks with arms. Not this one. Clarke has grafted bits and pieces together at all angles and produced a crawling Gordian knot, some pieces red, some purple, some white. Scanlon thinks the original body may have been orange, before.

"They regenerate," she buzzes at his shoulder.'

Peter Watts, 1999

This thesis has used tones of voice and hierarchies of image sympathetic to the form of *The Peter & nou Project* in order to examine the project and its effects. In order to develop still further the relationship between thesis and practice, this conclusion will discuss the concept of nesting with respect to SF and *The Peter & nou Project*, then going on to describe a model of practice

intended to help visualise the project as it relates to its particular SF research territory and source material in order to support its future potential.

As previously stated, within *The Peter & nou Project* narratives are self-supporting, self-sabotaging and self-perpetuating. The interconnectedness of the works of the project is crucial to its resistance to a linear narrative and single reading. The relationships between the works of the project are in part ensured by the significant way that the project 'nests' its fictions.

Burrows and O'Sullivan (2019: 94-95) have observed that Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker* (1980) is a novel which mixes magical and technical modes of thinking through a nesting of fictions (and times), at the centre of which is the Eusa show – a story within a story and a piece of 'residual culture' – a kind of proto-religious Punch and Judy show and a throwback to the novel's past.

Similar complexities are at work in *The Peter & nou Project* which can be said to nest its multiple fictions with an induction to hypnosis at its centre. The story told to the child by the dentist - of rabbits being chased by a fox - is a story within a story within a story (a fiction within *The Horizon Object* within *Peter* for instance), but more than that, it is a story which, due to its unusual combination of the magical and the technical, allows for a range of narratives to be written and put to work across a range of media and disciplines.

By adapting Burrows and O'Sullivan's diagram of fictions in *Riddley Walker* (2019: 96), Fig. 156 describes the alternative way that *The Peter & nou Project* nests its fictions, while offering the potential for multiple future fictions.

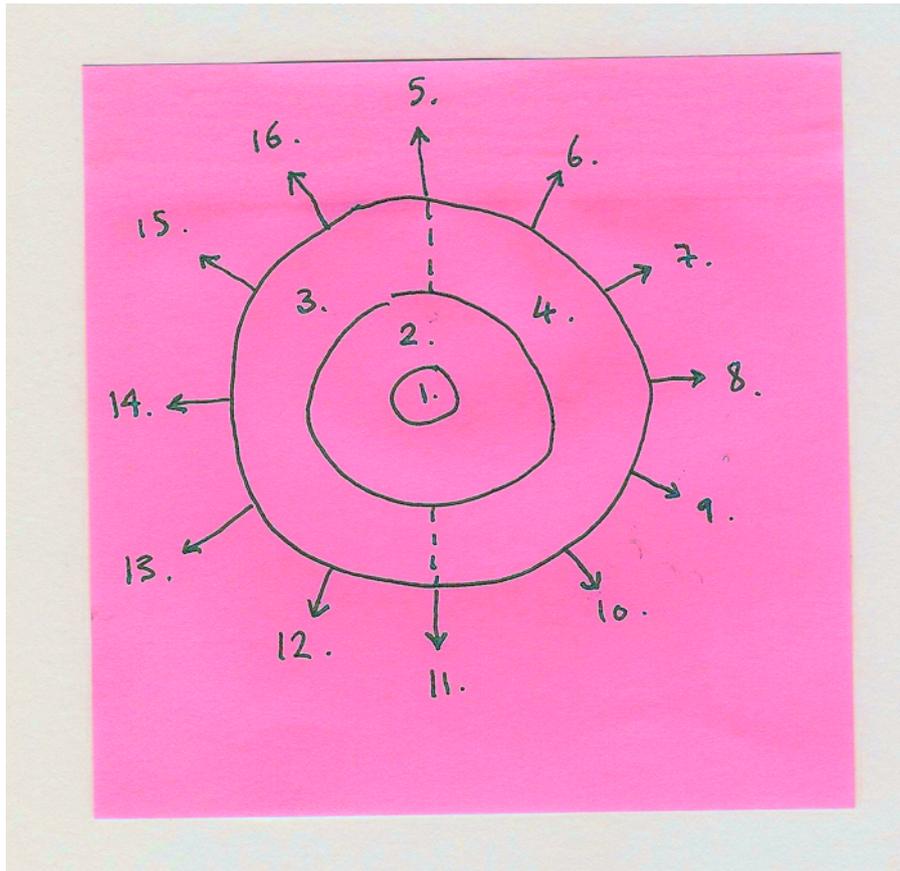


Fig. 156: Diagram showing *The Peter & nou Project's* complex nest of fictions and future fictions (credit: the author).

1. The story of the rabbits being chased by a fox.
2. *The Horizon Object* (a child is hypnotised by her dentist).
3. *Peter*
4. *nou*
5. – 16.(+) Future fictions told by future works...

*The Horizon Object* may be merely a fragment of a recording of a moment of time, but cut loose from its original context it becomes, like Hoban's *Eusa*

show, a piece of residual culture. Placed within the SF framework of *The Peter & nou Project* it operates as a powerful agent of change – a mutable force at the heart of a complex nest of fictions which offer seemingly infinite future possibilities of invention and reinvention.

However, as this thesis has stated, the complex temporality of the project and the ever-evolving narrative relationships between the works of *The Peter & nou Project* make the project seem less like a neat nest than a weave of enmeshed facts and fictions. The project's fictional threads effect each other and also reach beyond the threshold of the works and into the 'real' world, affecting readings of cultural objects of the past (such as *Blade Runner* and the BBC documentary *Hypnosis and Healing*<sup>236</sup>), the present (the identity of the artist and the authorship of her artistic products) and the future (the implications of and possibilities for the being nouJane).

One way of attempting to model such a dynamic practice is to recall the SF materials of the project itself and to imagine the project as if it were one of Mary the Spacewoman's five-pointed radial beings, the cause of Mary's inability to think scientifically or in dualities (Mitchison, 1962: 31). Yet this creature's wholeness does not take into account the project's continual use

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<sup>236</sup> including the IMDb entry for *Hypnosis and Healing* (no date).

of the cut-up. A more appropriate if less appealing creature which might embody the practice is Peter Watts' starfish as a work in progress – an animal capable of regeneration and evolution but which is violently sliced and spliced by the character Clarke in Watts' 1999 novel *Starfish*. The following illustration reimagines Watt's mutilated and mutating creature as a potential model of *The Peter & nou Project*, the world of which is cut up and collaged ad infinitum by the artist and by very the nature of the project itself (Fig.157).

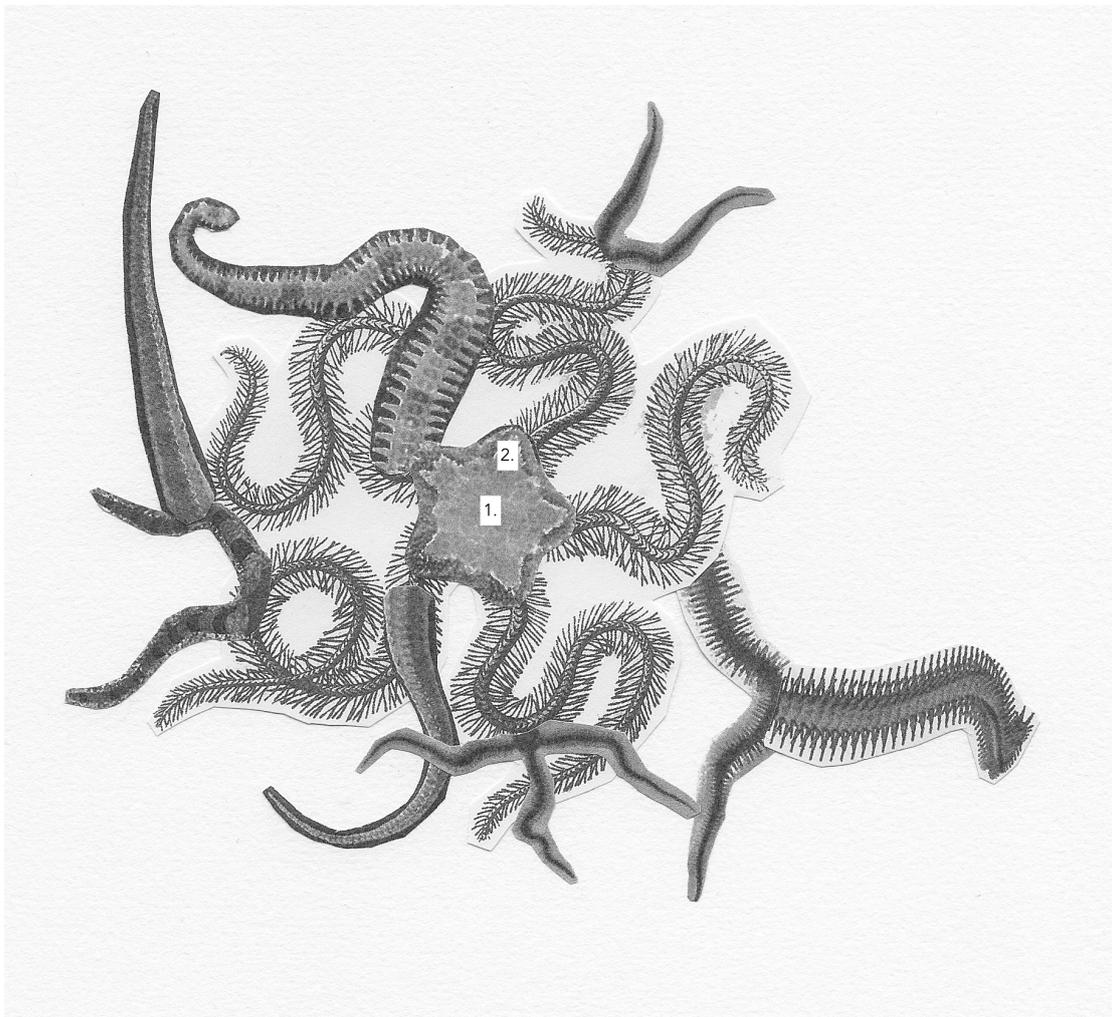


Fig. 157: A cut-up starfish model of practice for *The Peter & nou Project* (Credit: the author, adapted from *Art Forms in Nature* (Haeckel, 1904).

In this three-dimensional model, the induction to hypnosis (1.) sits within *The Horizon Object* (2.) as an anchoring point for a ball of legs of various lengths, radiating outward at odd angles. Accumulating and reforming endlessly, each leg of this mutilated creature is a representation of another product of the project. As it mutates, evolves and transforms, this tangled knot of networked artworks alters readings of its past, present and future fictions. As it reaches into the cultural landscape to drag more material into its body, it simultaneously develops and expands the real-world presents, pasts and futures that it touches. For *The Peter & nou Project*, SF now also stands for StarFish.

## Afterward

'Dreams must explain themselves'

Ursula K. Le Guin, 1973

This thesis has examined the many ways in which *The Peter & nou Project* intertwines the personal and the cultural as a fictioning strategy which enables the mapping of new territories and the promotion of new perspectives.

By its intertextual and continually evolving nature, *The Peter & nou Project* ensures that it operates and develops outwith the limiting frame of the gallery (where it may be easily compartmentalised) allowing for a highly integrated fictioning which in turn encourages a more enmeshed and therefore confusing relationship between the real and the imaginary. This effect is developed by the project's choice of media which encourage emersion – the moving image, the book and the web – and by the interstices of project's narratives which create a momentary or protracted space (an uncertainty gap) into which new thinking can flow or be engendered.

*The Peter & nou Project's* complex weave of works, spanning disciplines, media and modes of distribution, insist that one fiction is read through

another at all times, enabling the works to actively resist a single or static narrative and encouraging the development of the project's stories in the minds of its viewers. The project calls into question the viewers' personal and cultural memory, moving the work into the cognitive realm within which the viewer may recognise the hybridity of their psychological constitution and the surrounding objects of cultural production.

It is by its dense weave of methodological approaches - including use of the archive, science fiction tropes, the cut-up, altered states and intertextuality – that *The Peter & nou Project* is able to contribute significant new knowledge to a wide range of academic and non-academic areas, including filmmaking, literature and contemporary art. The importance of the project is further evidenced by its influence on the work of other artists.

At the beginning of this thesis I recalled a morning in 2014 in which

I awoke from a vivid dream and in those fuzzy moments between sleeping and waking, in that time of semi-consciousness, in this altered state, I began imagining what would become *The Peter & nou Project*... (Topping, 2020)

It seems to me that for a contemporary fictioning practice to work in the imagination of the viewer where it might engender, as means of political resistance, new ways of thinking beyond current ideologies, it must evolve

beyond its origins and surpass even the aims of its author. *The Peter & nou Project* does this and in so doing contributes a significant new approach to the challenging of presupposed truths. While it may be that, as Ursula K. Le Guin has suggested, truth is a matter of the imagination, some dreams – in order to be effective in their fictioning - should not explain themselves.

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## Appendix 0.1

### Some Operational Details Regarding [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com)

In order to help the reader of this thesis quickly engage with a work with which it is intentionally difficult to engage, here I highlight some things about [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) which are consistent.

- On every screen of [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) there is: a 'refresher button' (there are five different designs of these), the text 'Peter' (a link to the video *Peter*), the text 'nou' (a link to the video *nou*), a still image as a tiled background, a still image as foreground and either a piece of video, text or audio.
- What you see on your screen when you arrive at [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) is the top left corner of a larger screen. There will be a refresher 'button' in this general area of every screen. Click on it and the entire site will randomly refresh its visible content.
- *Peter* (2014) and *nou* (2018) can be accessed directly from every page of the artwork by clicking on the text that reads 'Peter' or 'nou'. To make the video full screen, click on the bottom right of the video bar. To exit that press 'esc' on your computer. You can refresh from a *Peter* or *nou* video page by clicking on the refresher button.
- For the best experience of [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com), use Chrome as your browser.

### Additionally

Though not part of *The Peter & nou Project*, my general website acts as an informal log of my activities and is available at: [www.janetopping.co.uk](http://www.janetopping.co.uk).

Jump to [www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com](http://www.rabbitcottontoothcottonrabbit.com) from [www.janetopping.co.uk](http://www.janetopping.co.uk) by clicking on .

## Appendix 0.2

### A Very Specific Glossary

This thesis broadly adheres to the following definitions:

**The Archive:** An object which is of the past or is considered no longer current and yet has been retained, perhaps resulting in a new significance or change of status for the object. In the context of *The Peter & nou Project* the archive is represented by *The Horizon Object*.

**Intertextuality:** In her 1966 essay *Word, Dialogue and Novel*, Julia Kristeva proposes the text as a dynamic site – an intersection of textual surfaces rather than a single point – which has a dynamic with other texts. Here Kristeva could be describing the forms and interactions of the works of *The Peter & nou Project*:

‘any text is a constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another. The notion of *intertextuality* replaces that of intersubjectivity, and poetic language is read as at least *double*’ (Kristeva, p85, cited in Moi (1986), p37, emphasis in original).

This text adheres to a definition of intertextuality as being the way in which texts (and objects) connect, reflect and influence each other’s readings.

**Fictioning:** A term developed by David Burrows and Simon O’Sullivan in their *Fictioning: The Myth-Functions of Contemporary Art and Philosophy*, ‘fictioning’ as

‘a concept – and mode of operation – common to mythopoesis, myth-science and mythotechnesis, each of which fiction reality in different ways.’ (Burrows, D. and O’Sullivan, S., 2019: 1).

This thesis adopts Burrows and O’Sullivan’s use of the verb fictioning as it refers to acts of making (by writing, performing, imaging and imagining) worlds which do not conform to contemporary organisations or understandings of life. *The Peter & nou Project* can be considered an act of interdisciplinary, intertextual, SF fictioning.

**Mythopoesis:** a fictioning practice which is 'productive of worlds, people and communities to come, often drawing upon residual and emergent cultures'. (Burrows and O'Sullivan, 2019: 1)

**Myth-Science:** a fictioning practice which 'functions by producing alternate perspectives and models, revealing habits of thought concerning physical, historical and social realities as yet more myth.' (Burrows and O'Sullivan, 2019: 1)

**Mythotechnesis** is a fictioning practice which 'concerns the ways in which technology enters into discourse and life, though projections of the existing and future influence of machines.'(Burrows and O'Sullivan, 2019: 1).

**Post-digital:** This text employs this term to describe the condition from which my practice emerges, in agreement with Omar Kholief. Post-digital refers to 'art made after the rise of the digital condition, i.e. a state that recognizes the whole realm of visual culture beyond the specificity of the Internet as a "tool"'. (Kholeif, 2018: 115)

**Post-human:** Taking a lead from thinkers including Rosi Braidotti, Cary Wolfe and Donna Haraway, this text uses the term post-human broadly, to refer to a way of thinking beyond the human-centric (rather than as a term which may be limited by specific grounding in certain areas of biological and/or technical discourses such as genetics or cybernetics).

**Video:** Caetlin Benson-Allott has noted that video has become an 'amorphous term for all nonfilmic means of motion picture distribution and exhibition; it has become a term of experience [...]'. (Benson-Allott, 2013:13), while Helen Westgeest has stated that, due to the wide spectrum of material which is included currently in the term 'video art':

'To an increasing extent, scholars and critics consider replacing "video art" with another, more appropriate term, but there is hardly any consensus about such an alternative name.' (Westgeest, 2016: 7).

Due to this lack of consensus of an all-encompassing term for the post-digital moving image, and in order to signal the importance of a single piece of video footage lying at the heart of *The Peter & nou Project*, this thesis uses the term video to describe the single channel moving image works *Peter* (2014) and *nou* (2018).

## Appendix 0.3

### Transcript of *The Horizon Object*

As it is much discussed in this thesis but is purposely not easy to watch in its entirety, here is a transcript of *The Horizon Object*.

**George Fairfull Smith (GFS)** Now, we're going to put a bib on first, ok? And what we are going to do today is we're going to do that little filling for you, and we're going to do it in a very nice, special way. You've never had this before, so I want you to enjoy it.

[Voice fades to low volume, **GFS** carries on talking]

**Male Voice Over** Jane is having her first filling, but without a pain killing injection. This film will show how patients, dentists and doctors are using hypnosis.

**GFS** I'm so pleased Jane, because this is all about imagination. Ok?

**Jane/Janey (J)** Uh hum.

**GFS** So what I want you to do is, I want you to imagine that this little bit of cotton wool is a baby bunny and this is a mummy bunny and when I turn on the engine they're going to go round and round and round. And you're going to see them going. Oh there they go, d'you see them going round and round? Isn't that lovely? Listen now, I want you to pop your wee head back and I want you to keep looking at these bunnies. And you're going to watch the bunnies going round and round and round. And very soon you're going to see a foxy. A foxy chasing them. You're going to see a foxy. Let me know the moment you see the foxy. And the moment you see the fox, your left hand will go very, very light and you'll lift it up for me, let me know. Let me know that the foxy's there. And now I see you hand is beginning to lift. So just let it lift, your little left hand, that's lovely. Your left hand. How lovely! And you can see that lovely little foxy. Now what I want you to do for me is I want you to help me. I want you to help me to save the bunnies. Because the bunnies there, they're hiding again you see? I want you to help me save the bunnies. Because you can see the fox is chasing them now. Can you see the foxy chasing them now?

**J** Yes.

**GFS** That's lovely. What colour is he?

**J** He's brown.

**GFS** Brown? A brown fox, oh the rascal. And he's chasing them? We won't let him catch them will we? We'll save those little bunnies shall we?

**J** Yes.

**GFS** What I'm going to do is I'm going to blow some air into that wee toothy of yours and I'm going to blow some lovely happy air because you know it makes a funny wee noise. And we're going to blow the air on the toothy and that will clean out the little hole in your tooth and we'll let the bunnies go into that little hole and hide. Shall we? Well shall we?

**J** Yes.

**GFS** Oh how wonderful. [Indistinct name] would you like to hold this for me please? Thank you very much. Um see this is the little thing that blows the air. And it's going to blow a little bit of air when I do that, you see? Can you see the air blowing, do you?

**J** [Nods]

**GFS** You see the air blowing? Now I'm going to blow that air in your wee toothy. Are you ready...

**J** Uh huh [while nodding].

**GFS** ...to help the bunnies? That's lovely. Ah the air [indistinct]. [Indistinct] that's lovely. And you are going to [indistinct] the little bunnies.

[Voice fades to low volume; **GFS** carries on talking during procedure]

**Male Voice Over** Although Jane appears to be fully awake, her imagination has been stimulated to produce a slight hypnotic state in which she does not feel pain.

**GFS** Let's have another wee looky now. Let's have a look. Oh you've done jolly well, you know that Janie? Now keep looking at those lovely little

bunnies now and we're going to clean out all the dirt and all the rubbish out of that little hole.

**Voice Over by GFS** In this case, the cavity is fairly deep. It involves two surfaces of the tooth, going from the biting surface right down to the level of the gum. Normally this is fairly painful and you are cutting through areas of, where there's thousands of nerve endings and it's not only painful but it's very uncomfortable.

**GFS** Right, that's lovely. Beautifully done and I'm just going to plonk this little bit of silver and I'm going to press it in on top of the bunnies, because the bunnies are in it now. Now that was beautiful. Did you enjoy that?

**J** Yeah.

**GFS** Did you?!

**J** Uh-huh.

**GFS** Was it fun?

**J** Uh-huh.

**GFS** Tell me more about the foxy.

**J** Well he had a bushy, a big bushy red tail.

**GFS** A bushy red tail?

**J** Mm-hum.

**GFS** And has he run away now?

**J** Uh huh [while nodding].

**GFS** That's lovely. Now that the bunnies are safe and sound?

**J** Uh-huh.

**GFS** And did you enjoy that little help you gave them?

**J** Yes.

**GFS** And you'll have it again?

**J** Yes.

**GFS** And save some more bunnies?

**J** Yes.

**GFS** That's lovely. Thank you darling girl. Just pop off the chair now. Thank you dear. And we'll just walk back...

[Voice fades to low volume, GFS carries on talking]

**Male Voice Over** The dentist is Mr George Fairful Smith, a clinical assistant at the Glasgow Dental Hospital.

**GFS** ...the bunnies, eh? There you are.

[Cuts to GFS speaking to camera]

**GFS** I use this regularly with children. I find it's very effective. It hardly ever fails. And, er, they're very responsive because at this particular age they have a tremendous ability to just imagine and this is the whole secret of this technique.

4.57 minutes in length.

## Appendix 0.4

### My memory of being hypnotised by my dentist

Included to emphasise the impossibility of a 'truthful' narrative with respect to my use of *The Horizon Object* by making plain inconsistencies between my memory and the recording of the events, here is my account of the day I was hypnotised by my dentist.

I can't remember the order of events of the day that I was hypnotized by my dentist and it was recorded by a BBC camera crew, but I think that Dr George W. Fairfull Smith asked me if I wanted to be on television on a day weeks before the event itself.

I always liked Dr Fairfull Smith and enjoyed going to the dentist. He had an accent which I found exotic (he had lived in the Hebrides and was originally from Bolivia) and the waiting room had posters that I liked looking at in it, including one of The Muppets, advocating teeth brushing. There was also a poster I was not so keen on. It said that if you sucked your thumb you would end up having teeth that stuck out like a rabbit's. I remember my mum assuring me that I would be all right, as I sucked two fingers on my right hand, and not either thumb. When you were finished having your teeth checked, Dr Fairfull Smith used to give you Dolly Mixtures to eat as you left. I remember these as being special very small versions of Dolly Mixtures, but I can't be sure of that.

The dental surgery was only a couple of minutes walk from our house, in an extension of a very similar suburban terrace house. You entered the surgery through the back garden of the house, and I remember that after I had been hypnotized and filmed, the camera crew filmed us, my mum and me, walking along the pavement towards the gate to the surgery as if we were arriving, which I thought was cheating a bit. They may have had to film us twice, as I remember looking at the camera. Though this footage did not appear in the final version of *Hypnosis and Healing*, I remember this part as if I was watching it on TV. I can see my mum and me, walking towards the camera crew, as if I were filming it from across the road. I was wearing a blue and red striped long sleeved top. In my memory of this part, my mum was wearing a tan raincoat, but I don't remember her having one in real life.

There were two other children being hypnotized at the dentist that day too, for the same programme. One was a small boy and the other a girl of about

14, with long black hair. I was told that even if the hypnosis went well, there was no guarantee that I would make it into the final programme.

I remember sitting in the dental chair and hearing the story about the rabbits and the fox. I knew that there were no rabbits and no fox, and I didn't feel as if I was hypnotized at all. But I wanted to be on television, and so when Dr Fairfull Smith said that my left hand was feeling light and was going to drift up into the air, I lifted my left hand a little bit into the air, giving it a bit of a help along the way, pretending to be hypnotized. I remember turning to look at my arm and being shocked to see that my hand was right above my head, and I had to assume that I was hypnotized after all.

(On the video footage of this moment, my hand barely lifts off the arm of the dentist's chair). I also remember being embarrassed as I had to make up some stuff about what the fox looked like, knowing that I hadn't seen a fox, not even in my mind's eye. When Dr Fairfull Smith asked what colour it was, I said brown – that's the colour of all foxes I thought, what a stupid question.

I don't remember much else about the day and I don't remember watching the programme when it was broadcast. Although Uncle Peter gave us the Betamax tape of the programme it wasn't until 2010 or maybe 2013 when I asked my dad to look it out and I had the programme transferred onto DVD (and .avi). It annoys me that the video footage starts at the moment that the programme starts, without a BBC ident. or introduction. It feels as if a possibly crucial part of the footage has been lost.

## Appendix 0.5

### Transcript of an Interview with Senga Topping

In July 2018 I was on a caravanning holiday with my mum, so I asked her if she would share her memories of the day I was hypnotised by my dentist. As you can read below, our discussion was by no means revelatory.

**Jane Topping (JT)** Apparently that's recording.

**Senga Topping (ST)** Ok.

**JT** So just ignore it [laughs]. So, em, what do you remember about that day, or do you remember the run up to it, because maybe there's lots of stuff that I don't know about?

**ST** I don't remember *anything* about the run up to it.

**JT** Right, ok.

**ST** I remember you had on a wee red and navy striped top. And your hair was in bunches.

**JT** Uh huh.

**ST** I remember we were inside and things were happening round about. And the film people wanted us to go back out because there was another wee girl there, as well, and we had to come back in, but not to look at the cameras, and we went out up the stairs and turned to go in the door and you looked at the cameras.

[Both Laugh]

Which was a natural thing to do, I mean if you're going one way then you look the other way. Eh, so we all had to back out again, climb up the stairs and go in without looking at the camera.

**JT** Uh huh.

**ST** And that's really *all* I remember about it. I know that Uncle Peter was recording it for us because we didn't have a recorder. But I can't remember anything...

**JT** No. Do you remember if there was, eh, so the dentist must have asked permission and all that, of you guys?

**ST** Yes. He would do. Ah huh. I don't remember that.

**JT** And I remember that there was an older girl, who I thought was about fourteen but she could have been younger. And there was a younger boy and all three of us were being hypnotized.

**ST** I couldn't have told you all three were being hypnotized, and I thought there was just two of you, I don't remember.

**JT** Maybe there was just two. And I remember that I thought at the end once it was all finished and they asked us to do some shots of us arriving and because it was at the end of the day I thought that was cheating.

**ST:** Mm hum. Mm hum

**JT** Yeah, I do... I don't remember going up the steps. I thought I remembered walking along the street, you know like towards the Spar, because you go in the back door of that dentist's don't you?

**ST** Which I think was, yes, it was the back door. There's a garden at the side.

**JT** So, you weren't in the room?

**ST** No. No. I was just in the Waiting Room. I was just there to escort you there and back home again.

[Both laugh]

**JT** And do you remember anything I said about it?

**ST** Not a thing.

**JT** Or do you think, was I different when I came out? Was I hypnotized did you think?

**ST** I can't remember anything different. I can't remember being upset or anything, or wondering how you were doing, or... Did you get sweeties after it? You normally did.

**JT** I know. I don't remember getting sweeties.

## Appendix 0.6

### Mentions of My Hypnosis in Academic Dental Texts

You might think that academic texts which describe the day I was hypnotised by my dentist would be faithful descriptions of the events, but as you can read below this is not exactly the case. Instead they seem to muddy the waters still further, yet with an implied authority that is missing from the participants' accounts and *The Horizon Object*.

'Further Details of Fairfull Smith's methods are given by Hilgard and LeBaron (1985, pp. 180-181): "Describing how he goes about filling a tooth in a school-age child using hypnosis as the sole anaesthetic, Dr Smith told us about his patient Jane, who had a deeply decayed tooth to be drilled and filled. In front of Jane is a long cord belt...that rolls around and around on small pulleys to activate the drill. After he has established a lighthearted mood, Dr Smith places two bits of white cotton on the belt as it moves in its course, and then introduces an imaginative story: "Watch the two bunnies going round and round. Do you see them?" Jane's eyes fixate on the rabbits. "Pretty soon you will see a naughty fox chasing them (this is entirely hallucinated, with no cotton as a prop)... When you see a naughty fox chasing them, your hand and arm will get very light like a feather and your mouth will open." After a few complete runs of the belt, the hand and the arm rise, the mouth opens. " Now I'm going to use the vacuum on the tooth. It's a tickly machine. I'm going to tickle your tooth... It will make your nose very itchy and you'll laugh." By this time, Dr Smith is drilling and he says the children never notice, even though a nerve has been touched. Once the tooth was sufficiently drilled, the hole in the tooth was incorporated in the story as the hiding place for the bunnies after they had escaped from the fox – a hiding place whose entrance Dr Smith then closed with the filling. The procedure ended, Jane hopped out of the chair still smiling.

Some readers, familiar to some extent with the formal inductions of hypnosis that are described in many books, may not recognize the above description as being hypnotism, although of a kind that would only be effective with a child at an age when the borderline between fantast and reality is not very firmly established. Because of this possible misunderstanding, Hilgard and LeBaron (1984, pp 181) comment on Fairfull Smith's account very insightfully:

The hypnotic procedures are introduced so subtly and informally that the reader may miss the extent to which some of the familiar features of hypnosis have been used. First, a compatible relationship with the hypnotist was

established as a shared jovial mood. The attentive focus on bits of cotton moving with the belt serves to accomplish eye fixation which is followed by suggestions of arm levitation and mouth opening. The bunnies are hallucinated by using cotton as a prop, and the fox is hallucinated without props. Jane's eyes fixated but never closed, a familiar feature of hypnosis in young children. With mood always pleasant and attention focused outward, any pain Jane might have felt was dissociated or converted by suggestion to tickling in the tooth or itching in the nose. '

Gibson, H.B. and Heap, M., *Hypnosis in Therapy*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Ltd. Publishers, Hove and London, UK, 1991, p162.

## Appendix 0.7

### Eggs and Aliens – A Transcript of a Performance

This PowerPoint performance was one third of *The Curios Society* event (Fig. 158) with Professor Robert Williams and Dr Kate Briggs, part of *Mark Dion: Theatre of the Natural World* (The Whitechapel, London. 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2018).

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## Alchemy

### The Curios Society



Robert Williams, *The Chymical Wedding – The King & Queen*, 2012, courtesy Robert Williams

**Past Event**

This event was on Sat 3 Mar, 3pm

*Assembling on the first three Saturdays of Mark Dion: Theatre of the Natural World, **The Curios Society** meets to investigate the weird and wonderful, the unlikely and impossible.*

Alchemy can describe a philosophical tradition, an esoteric practice, a way of thinking and at times, an artistic methodology.

We meet artists **Robert Williams**, **Kate Briggs** and **Jane Topping** to explore ideas of the alchemical in art. From transmutation in translation to the figure of the alchemist in popular film cultures, this talk charts a course through the mysteries and cultural intersections of alchemy.

Ticket price does not include entry to the exhibition.

Fig. 158: *The Curios Society* at the Whitechapel (Credit: Whitechapel Gallery)

I have included it here as evidence of how research that underpins *The Peter & nou Project* has evolved to have agency beyond the concerns of the project itself. Specifically that my interest in woman, in film and literature, as 'questers' or who communicate with aliens is contributing to current discourses in contemporary practice, in this case relating to (at least at first) alchemy. The voice over here is 'spoken' by Fiona – the Scottish synthetic voice within Microsoft Word. All weird spelling and punctuation is deliberate, to help Fiona pronounce my words as I would like.

**Fiona:** I'm very sorry to be unable to join you this afternoon, but I hope my digital voice and these images will suffice.

**Fiona:** SLIDE PLEASE

**Fiona:** This is an entirely subjective look at alchemy, from the first alchemist to alien abduction, via a mad scientist, two spacewomen and a picnic – using some key tools of the alchemist...

**Fiona:** SLIDE PLEASE

**Fiona:** Tool Number One – Symbolism – for instance, here is the Orphic Egg - the cosmic egg from which hatched the primordial hermaphrodite.

**Fiona:** SLIDE PLEASE

**Fiona:** Or here, the ouroboros - an ancient symbol depicting a serpent eating its own tail. It is often taken to symbolize introspection, the eternal return or a cycle, in the sense of something constantly re-creating itself. Creation and birth. - death and re-birth.

**Fiona:** SLIDE PLEASE

**Fiona:** Tool Number two, Codes – the language of alchemical texts was written to deliberately cause obstruction and confusion - necessitating translation. And where there is translation there are opportunities, gaps to be filled by the translator.

**Fiona:** SLIDE PLEASE

**Fiona:** And tool number three, the Magnum opus – the search, via experimentation, for the philosopher's stone. This process involves the

transformation of lead into gold – a supposed purification process which, may be used to bring about, the purification of the soul - offering eternal life. The Magnum Opus is often described as a series of three stages, each represented by a colour: a blackening, a whitening, And finally, *rubedo*, a reddening.

**Fiona:** SLIDE PLEASE

**Fiona:** Mary the Prophetess - the first alchemist. She lived between the first and third centuries A.D and is credited as having invented key bits of alchemical kit, some of which are still used in laboratories, such as a three-armed beaker, an extractor and, bearing her name still, the bain-marie – the water bath. Of course, Mary is not the alchemist typically represented in popular culture.

**Fiona:** SLIDE PLEASE

**Fiona:** More familiar is Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's Dr Victor Frankenstein – A character who trained in both alchemy and modern science, he represents a bridge between the two disciplines.

**Fiona:** SLIDE PLEASE

**Fiona:** Of course, Wollstonecraft Shelley's Frankenstein, though a relatively sympathetic character, kicked off a now familiar fictional trope, that of the mad scientist, for whom often reanimation or rebirth are goals.

**Fiona:** SLIDE PLEASE

**Fiona:** Driven by ego and the desire to play god, the mad scientist, even when played for laughs, warns of the dangers of messing with nature.

**Fiona:** SLIDE PLEASE

**Fiona:** In Lang's Metropolis, 'mad' scientist Rotwang succeeds in making the *Maschinenmensch*, a female automaton, who is both alive and dead.

**Fiona:** SLIDE PLEASE

**Fiona:** In Denis Villeneuve's Blade Runner twenty forty nine, the character of Niander Wallace can create new life both digitally and biologically, and is hardly less theatrical in his performance than previous depictions of mad-

scientists. Wallace, like others before him, is thwarted in his ambitions by his inability to crack biological reproduction – his products are, supposedly, sterile.

Reanimation, birth and rebirth are obsessions for male mad-scientists and are reminiscent of alchemists search for the elixir of life, the philosopher's stone. But what of the female mad scientist?

**Fiona:** SLIDE PLEASE

**Fiona:** An early scientist, certainly considered mad by her contemporaries, was Margaret Cavendish. Margaret mocked the empirical approach of the ROYAL SOCIETY and attacked the practice of vivisection. She questioned the Baconian notion of relentless mechanical progress, in favour of gentler Stoic doctrines. She defined poetry as "mental spinning", extremely useful to the scientific mind....

**Fiona:** SLIDE PLEASE

**Fiona:** She also produced arguably the first-ever science-fiction story, *The Blazing World*, which considered the alternative futures of science. And for her trouble, she was given the nickname "Mad Madge".  
In *The Blazing World*, Cavendish uses another world to allow for imaginative development of scientific thinking. Three hundred years later, Scottish writer and socialist Naomi Mitchison, published *Memoirs of a Spacewoman*, in which a female astronaut, an expert in communication and linguistics, visits other worlds and communicates with beings, so that Mitchison might foreground scientific, societal & philosophical problems of the sixties.

**Fiona:** SLIDE PLEASE

**Fiona:** My favourite female 'mad' scientist is Elsa, in Vincenzo Natali's *Splice*. *Splice* focuses on a couple of super-cool geek scientists - Elsa and Clive, who, kind of-accidentally, create a human/non-human animal hybrid which they raise as if their own child.

**Fiona:** SLIDE PLEASE

**Fiona:** The language of the film is the language of the biological laboratory - the genetic code - barely translated for the viewer and delivered as fast-paced jargon reminiscent of screw ball comedies made in the forty's, such as *Bringing Up Baby*.

**Fiona:** SLIDE PLEASE

**Fiona:** Emphasising the 'madness' and ego of Elsa is a scene in which she appears ambivalent towards having a 'real' child, as pregnancy would interrupt her already stellar career and because she appears squeamish at the thought of her own biological pregnancy.

In an attempt to procreate outside of her body, Elsa merges *her* genetic material with the genetic material of various animals and creates her own monster/child.

A hermaphroditic homunculus, straight from a mechanical Orphic Egg.

**Fiona:** SLIDE PLEASE

**Fiona:** The appearance of twelve 'eggs' on Earth, heralds a new age of universal communication in Denis Villeneuve's twenty sixteen first contact film Arrival.

These eggs appear to be spaceships, but are maybe more akin to holes in space and time. Within these structures there is a membrane or screen, upon which radial aliens (beings with seven points, named heptapods) attempt to communicate with communication expert and linguist Louise, using a series of complex circular symbols, apparently made of inky black smoke.

**Fiona:** SLIDE PLEASE

**Fiona:** Early attempts at spoken and written communication between Louise and the aliens are somewhat ludicrous, but once the spacesuit is off...

**Fiona:** SLIDE PLEASE

**Fiona:** ...the squid-like beings begin to make circular shapes, like coffee stains, or the ouroboros, on the membrane. Theirs is a non linear autography, and the humans wonder if the beings might also think in this circular way.

**Fiona:** SLIDE PLEASE

**Fiona:** Each circle must be decoded, as every curl and splat are part of a nuanced and detailed language. A little like logograms, or the mechanism of gene expression, these circular patterns can be interpreted in multiple ways, like the mutable meanings of alchemical language.

**Fiona:** SLIDE PLEASE

**Fiona:** Eventually, Louise is able to communicate with the aliens in their own language, but this starts to effect the way that Louise thinks. The circular communications, based on the seven-pointed radial shape, which influence their experience of their environment, and also, as it turns out, their experience of time, has a similar effect on Louise, who starts to experience her life in a non-linear way. She sees the future, the past and the present in the wrong order, or perhaps simultaneously.

**Fiona:** SLIDE PLEASE

**Fiona:** It's acknowledged that *Arrival* is based on Ted Chiang's two thousand and two first-person short story, *Story of Your Life*. In it, Chiang uses different tenses, mixing future, past and present to weave the complex non-linear knot of Louise's life.

But no one has yet made clear the debt that Chiang's premise appears to owe to Naomi Mitchison's nineteen sixty two novel *Memoirs of a Spacewoman*.

**Fiona:** SLIDE PLEASE

**Fiona:** In it, Mitchison's astronaut is, like Louise, an expert in communication, travelling on quests to make contact with other conscious life-forms. On her first mission she observes, lives amongst and communicates with a group of five-pointed radial creatures, and discovers that their body shape influences the way they think.

**Fiona:** SLIDE PLEASE

**Fiona:** Over time, the spacewoman becomes less able to think in binaries or make distinctions or decisions. She feels herself merging in an all-sided relationship with the alien beings. This new way of thinking starts to erode what she understood as her personality, and her ability to think, 'rationally'. By the time she returns to her spaceship, she is unable to say yes or no. She is unable to speak.

**Fiona:** SLIDE PLEASE

**Fiona:** The egg-like craft in *Arrival* are reminiscent of other fictional monolithic structures which appear to alter conventions of space and time...

**Fiona:** SLIDE PLEASE

**Fiona:** The landscape of Joan Lindsay's *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, for instance. The novel focuses on a group of female students at an Australian girls' boarding school who inexplicably vanish at Hanging Rock while on a picnic. The events depicted in the novel are entirely fictional, but it is framed as though it is a true story, corroborated by ambiguous pseudo-historical references.

Published in sixty seven, and translated into Peter Weir's film version in seventy five, there is something fundamentally alchemical about Lindsay's and Weir's narrative and imagery.

**Fiona:** SLIDE PLEASE

**Fiona:** Here, Hanging Rock is the alchemist's ancient base metal which may be transformed or purified. Or perhaps Hanging Rock acts as the universal solvent - a catalyst for a change of state for itself and those who climb it. It is also the Orphic Egg - having witnessed the birth of civilization, of the Aboriginal people. And it is the ouroboros, as on the rock, time appears to eat its own tail:

"It is happening now. As it has been happening ever since Edith Horton ran stumbling and screaming towards the plain. As it will go on happening until the end of time. The scene is never varied by so much as the falling of a leaf or the flight of a bird. To the four people on the Rock it is always acted out in the tepid twilight of a present without a past. Their joys and agonies are forever new.'

The rock is the site of alchemical process, and the arrival of the picnickers marks the red phase, the final phase of the magnum opus, resulting in the philosopher's stone and eternal life.

**Fiona:** SLIDE PLEASE

**Fiona:** The egg-shape is used throughout the novel and Weir's film, here framing and reflecting Miranda, who will never return from Hanging Rock.

**Fiona:** SLIDE PLEASE

**Fiona:** And seen later, as she is remembered by her adoring friend, placed in an egg-shaped frame – as if still forming, ready to be re-birtherd...

**Fiona:** SLIDE PLEASE

**Fiona:** The narrative is littered with symbolic colours and animals, particularly when set on the rock.. As they climb, the rock itself becomes changeable and labyrinthine, as if regressing into its former liquid state. Like the Overlook Hotel in Kubrick's *The Shining*, it is repetitious and impossible to map.,

"On the steep southern façade the play of golden light and deep violet shade revealed the intricate construction of long vertical slabs; some smooth as giant tombstones, others grooved and fluted by prehistoric architecture of wind and water, ice and fire. Huge boulders, originally spewed red hot from the boiling bowels of the earth, now come to rest, cooled and rounded in forest shade."

"Miranda was the first to see the monolith rising up ahead, a single monstrous egg perched above a precipitous drop to the plain."

**Fiona:** SLIDE PLEASE

**Fiona:** Animals associate with the girls – an eagle, bronze beetles and a snake – indicating that they are becoming closer to nature as they climb, transforming.

On the rock, the novel's text evokes the equipment of the laboratory – the copper coil and the stereoscopic clarity of a powerful telescope - as if the schoolgirls have unknowingly become part of an experiment...

**Fiona:** SLIDE PLEASE

**Fiona:** As they climb, Marion looks down at the rest of the picnic party below, and wonders, as if speaking as an observer of something she no longer recognises:

'A surprising number of human beings are without purpose. Although it's possible, of course, that they performing some necessary function unknown to themselves.'

A little earlier, 'Peering down between the boulders, Irma could see the glint of water and tiny figures, coming and going, **through drifts of rosy smoke or mist**'.

**Fiona:** SLIDE PLEASE

**Fiona:** Back at Appleyard College, headmistress Miss Appleyard is driven to drink, as the scandal of the missing students destroys her school's reputation. She reminisces of seaside holidays in Bournemouth, a place she loves because 'it never changed, not in 40 years'. Miss Appleyard is coloured in black, white and red, signalling the stages of the magnum opus, and yet she is the antithesis of the alchemist's desire for transformation. Unable to adapt to the changing landscape, in every sense, she has to die.

**Fiona:** SLIDE PLEASE

**Fiona:** The observation made through *the rosy smoke, or mist*, has been interpreted by some as indicative of the presence of aliens. In addition to the rosy smoke, the shape of the monolith is similar to that of a spaceship or UFO, described in accounts of alien abduction. Accounts of alien abduction often involve gaps in the abductee's experience of time, and time is played around with throughout both the novel and Weir's film version of Picnic at Hanging Rock.

**Fiona:** SLIDE PLEASE

**Fiona:** Alchemical-like codes and symbols are frequently interpreted as evidence of alien contact by new age pseudo-scientists, and are often proposed in conjunction with the merest wisps of scientific fact.

**Fiona:** SLIDE PLEASE

**Fiona:** The internet is littered with conspiracy theories and documentary-like videos, like this one, which attempts to link accounts of extraterrestrial abduction, 'experiments' on human DNA (which reveal the code to be a human/alien hybrid) and visual signs, many alchemical in origin. By conflating the symbols of alchemy and the signs of alien contact, evidence of extra terrestrials can be found everywhere. The utilization of pseudo-scientific language, reminiscent of the proto-scientific codes of the alchemist, is evidence of no more than the continued ubiquity and mutability of the alchemist's language and the very human desires to find evidence, to seek order and in so doing, to be understood and to understand.

Thank you.

## Appendix 0.8

### A Curriculum Vitae for *The Peter & nou Project 2014-2020*

#### SOLO EXHIBITIONS

**She Was a Visitor**, a No. 35 Project, curated by Alex Hetherington, Stirling, 2018

**Screen Used**, Patricia Fleming Projects, Glasgow 2016

#### GROUP EXHIBITIONS & FESTIVAL SCREENINGS

**8 x 6: 8 Artists Selecting 6 Artists**, Anderson Gallery, Carpenters' Wharf Studios, London, 2020 (postponed).

**The Influencing Machine**, nGbK, Berlin, 2018

**Matter Matters**, Moving Mountains Festival, The Millom Palladium, Millom, Cumbria, 2018

**The 16th International Festival Signes de Nuit**, Maison du Japon, Paris, 2018

**The Psychedelic Film and Music Festival**, New York, USA, 2018

**Old Hair**, Glasgow International 2018, The Old Hairdresser's, Glasgow, 2018

**Wanderers and other Nomads: Ecologies of Place brought to Mind**, The Vallum Gallery, University of Cumbria Institute of the Arts, Carlisle, 2018

**Experiments in Cinema v13.6**, Guild Cinema, Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA, 2018

**The Fifth Annual Philip K. Dick Science Fiction Film Festival**, New York, 2017

**ANTIPHON, Kochi-Muziris Biennale**, Kerala, India (curated by Lux Scotland), 2017

**Video Festival**, Transmission, Glasgow, 2016

**Glasgow Short Film Festival**, Glasgow, 2016

**TRANSIT #3: and everything crooked will become straight**, Locations around Glasgow, 2016

**FILM OPEN**, ICA London, 2015

**FILM OPEN**, S1 Artspace, Sheffield, 2015

**FILM OPEN**, Castlefield Gallery, Manchester, 2015

**White Watch**, The Old Fire Station, Carlisle, 2015

**LUX Scotland's Artists Moving Image Festival Prologues**, Tramway, Glasgow 2015

**Caldewgate**, Caldewgate Building, University of Cumbria Institute of the Arts, Carlisle 2015

**FILM OPEN**, Eastside Projects, Birmingham 2015  
**FILM OPEN**, Spike Open, Spike Island, Bristol 2015  
**The 31st Hamburg International Short Film Festival**, Hamburg, Germany, 2015  
**The 12th International Festival Signes de Nuit**, September 15 – 21, Studio des Ursulines & Institut Finlandais, Paris 2014

#### CONFERENCES, SCREENINGS & EVENTS

*nou*: *A Discussion of Language in a Speculative Fiction*, Northeast Modern Language Association 52<sup>nd</sup> Annual Convention (virtual), Buffalo, USA, 2021

**Matter Matters**, Moving Mountains Festival, The Millom Palladium, Millom, Cumbria, 2018

**Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?/Blade Runner**, An Introduction and discussion, Borderlines Book Festival, Carlisle, 2018

**Peter & nou**, Cumbria Research and Innovation Conference, University of Cumbria, Lancaster, 2018

Eye Eye screening, **FOMO#3**, The Dancehall at The Rum Shack, Glasgow, 2016

**The Permeable Screen**, Performance/Paper, Research Practice Practice Research, NAFAE Conference, University of Cumbria, 2016.

On the jury: No Budget Competition, 32nd Hamburg International Short Film Festival, 2016

**Peter**, Q&A sessions, Festivalzentrum Halle 5, Kolbenhof & Lichtmeß, Gaußstraße 25, Hamburg, Germany, 2015

**Peter**, Screening, Mildred's Lane, Narrowsburg, New York, USA. June 5 2014

**'It's Not All About Me': My Performance in Blade Runner**, Paper & Screening, Doctoral Colloquium, University of Cumbria, Lancaster 2014

**'It's Not All About Me': My Performance in Blade Runner**, Paper & Screening, Arts Research Initiative 2, University of Cumbria, Carlisle 2014

#### AWARDS, FUNDING & RESIDENCIES

*nou*: Semi Finalist: The Australian Independent Film Festival 2018  
Early Career Researcher Grant, University of Cumbria Institute of the Arts, 2017

Hospitalfield Summer Residency, 2017

*Peter* wins Best PKD Short at The Fifth Annual Philip K. Dick Science Fiction Film Festival, New York, 2017.

British Council Film Fund Travel Grant 2015

Creative Scotland Film Fund Award 2015

University of Cumbria Research & Development Grant 2015

## PRESS

Matt Lloyd (Director Glasgow Short Film Festival): *'The best Blade Runner sequel is Peter by Jane Topping'*, [Facebook](#), 11 Oct. 2017.

**Outer Places: The Top Indie Sci-Fi Films From the 2017 Philip K. Dick Film Festival** The Portalist, no date.

Dan Abella (Director Philip K. Dick Film Festival), [Facebook](#), [For Fans of Blade Runner Peter is a Film to Watch](#), 22 May 2017

[Cumbria Professor Shines at New York Film Festival](#), [ITV.com](#), 2 June 2017

Matt Lloyd: Cineuropa Shorts Top 5 European Shorts 2015

## PUBLICATIONS

**The Influencing Machine**, DE/EN, November 2018, ISBN: 978-3-938515-74-7

**Newspaper or (Memoirs of a Spacewoman)**, Alex Hetherington a No. 35 Project, Stirling, 2018

**Peter & nou**, Jane Topping, designed and published by [Good Press](#), Glasgow, 2018 ISBN: 978-1-9995858-0-8, Launched at [Glasgow International 2018](#)

**Transit#3 and everything crooked will become straight**, Marcus Jack ed., Transit pp 26-33, 2016

