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Exit Through the Crisis
Essayistic Futurisms and the Expanded Essay Film

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Abstract

My research contribution considers alternative artistic essayistic practices as a step towards widening the dominant research focus on the single channel essay film. I address this gap through a practice-led inquiry with two starting points: 1. Why expand the essay film and why now? Or what is the contemporary personal-social aesthetic-political significance of the expanded essay film form? And 2. To what extent do expanded essay forms operate critically on the inter-relation of the human condition with instances of crisis under Capitalist Realism? With these starting points in mind, this project is not an investigation to try to re-define the essay as a form, rather, how should we produce essays in our current personal-techno-aesthetic-political climate, and where might creative criticality and radical essayistic praxis for alternative futures exist? I have structured my thesis in three 'zones' with opening and closing discussions that support a body of creative practice produced over six years. My thesis focuses on five works created during this period: *The Golden Record*, *The De-realisation Effect*, *Lorraine*, *Capteur*, and *The Black Prince*, and is an episodic critique, respecting the central inquiry of the research: the essay form. My theoretical framework is built on Nora Alter's concept of crisis in relation to the essay film, Walter Benjamin's theory of translation, Theodor Adorno's theory on the essay form, and Ludwig Wittgenstein's theory of family resemblance. Mark Fisher's concept of capitalist realism is central to my discussion, and I draw on Jacques Derrida's concept of hauntology. In Zone 1, *Locating the Meta-morph*, I use *The Golden Record* and *The Derealisation effect* as starting points to discuss the essay as a shape shifting form, a meta-morph, and consider the meta-essayistic praxis I developed for my practice-led research. In Zone 2, *Essayistic Futurisms*, I use *Lorraine* to think through the essay form as an open cinematic architecture and consider spatial temporal relations in the essay interstice and essayistic zone for essayistic futurisms. In Zone 3, *Encountering Capitalist 'sur' Realism*, I use *Capteur* to discuss the entanglement of hauntology, trauma, and memory as crisis in essayistic practices and consider how the essay form can encounter Capitalist Realism through play. My conclusion, *Exit through the Crisis*, uses *The Black Prince*, to discuss working with the expanded essay form as a post-hauntological structure to open essayistic futurisms.

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Portfolio for Examination

I have focused my thesis on five of my practical works:

- I. *The Golden Record,*
- II. *The De-realisation Effect,*
- III. *Lorraine,*
- IV. *Capteur*
- V. *The Black Prince.*

These five practical works form my portfolio for consideration and examination, and you can access the works at the following link:

jezcoram.com/exit-through-the-crisis

My fifth work *The Black Prince* was exhibited in the XL Gallery at Newcastle University between the 22nd August and 2nd September 2022 and was considered as part of my final submission.

In addition to the five works, my webpage also contains a PDF document that presents my studio practice spanning my practice-led research period.

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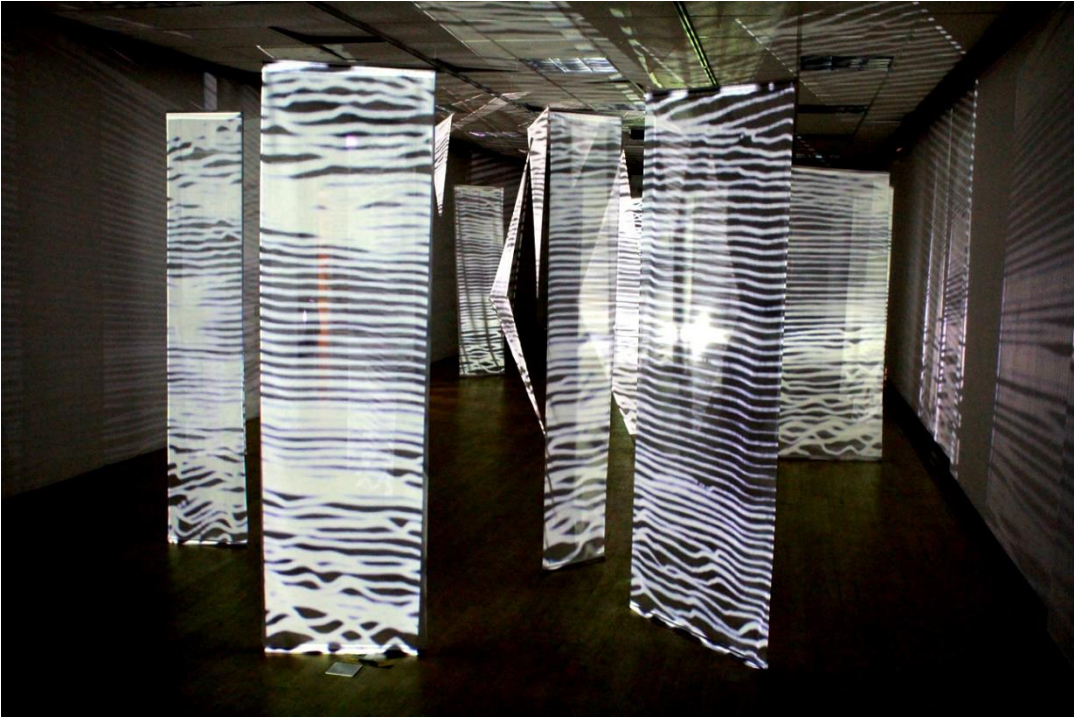
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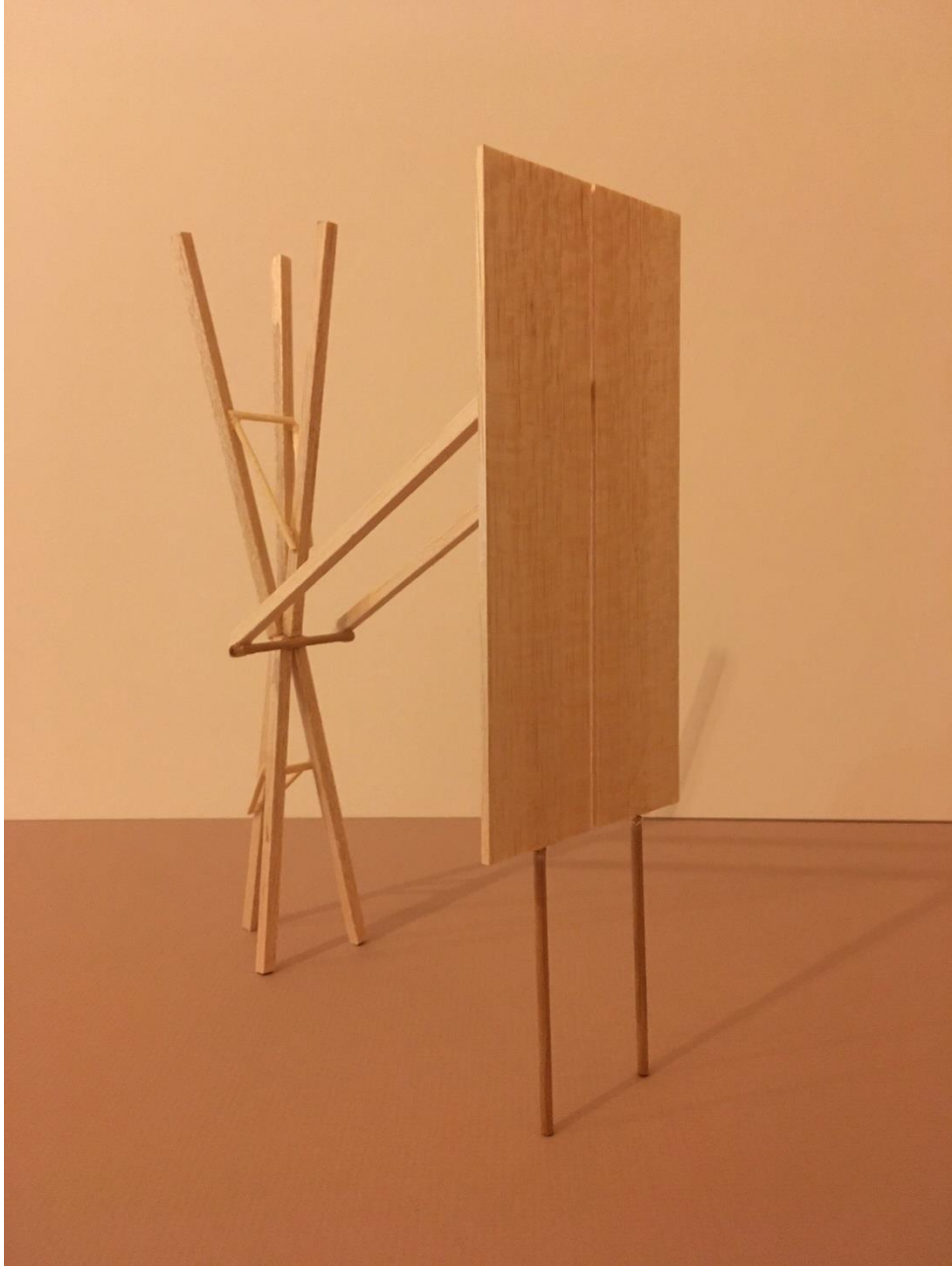


Opening: This Space is under Construction

The essay form, notable for its tendency towards complication (digression, fragmentation, repetition, and dispersion) rather than composition, has, in its four-hundred-years history, continued to resist the efforts of literary taxonomists, confounding the laws of genre and classification, challenging the very notion of text and textual economy.¹

Michael Renov

¹ Michael Renov, *The subject of documentary*, Vol. 16 (U of Minnesota Press, 2004), 70.



In an increasingly troubled time of emergencies, war and disinformation, moving images in a gallery context could represent an alternative view – one in which artistic images can play a critical role in shaping our understanding of the world, rather than merely being used as a tool for propaganda or for the art market. This is not simply a question of the number of screens – but about breaking away from the normative habits we have in exhibiting and in looking at moving images.²

Isaac Julien

² Isaac Julien, "26. From Ten Thousand Waves to Lina Bo Bardi, via Kapital (2016)," in *Essays on the Essay Film*, eds. Nora Alter and Timothy Corrigan (Columbia University Press, 2017), 236.

This Space is under Construction

Age eleven, I stepped into the small office of our family home and thumbed through the VHS tapes on the bookshelf. Dad had recorded various films from TV to tape and stored them in a neat row with the sticky white labels facing outwards. The titles written in black biro in his angular handwriting: *Jaws*, *A Fist Full of Dollars*, *Escape from Alcatraz*, *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*. This is where Terry Gilliam made his first appearance to me, on a small portable TV in the corner of the room. Several years later I watched the movie *Twelve Monkeys*, which Terry Gilliam directed, at a Vue cinema in a retail park on the outskirts of York. I did not know at this point that *Twelve Monkeys* was adapted from the short film *La Jetée* by the filmmaker, Chris Marker, and I was also completely unaware of who Chris Marker was. Whilst researching some video design work in 2007 I came across *La Jetée* and here started a curious interest, firstly in the photographic and audio form of the film, made up of still black-and-white images, which are panned and tracked to a narration, and secondly, in the thematic of the film, a spatial and temporal disjunction of the past, present and future, an imprint of memory. A man is sent from the future to the present whilst being haunted by a memory from his childhood, finding out later that he witnessed his own death.

Later in 2014 I was filming at a university in London, I finished early and went to see the Chris Marker retrospective exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery. This was a threshold moment in which several ideas I had been thinking about, and a drive to write my PhD research proposal, solidified whilst I sat in a dark box gazing at the black-and-white stills which make up Marker's short film.

At least that is one way to remember it.

Another way to remember this sequence of events is as a realisation. After reading numerous research papers, looking for an innovative angle for this PhD project, it struck me that the types of experimental films I had been making could be located in an arena of filmmaking called the essay film, also known as the film essay, or the cinematic essay. For example, *Sequin* (2012), one of my earlier short films, mixed archive footage of the east coast of Yorkshire, with newly shot footage of the same landscape, in a meditation on the passing of time and loss of childhood innocence, set on the beaches and dunes of Flamborough. The essay film, I began to understand, operates in a hybrid filmic space, drawing from documentary, fiction, avant-

garde filmmaking, art cinema and the moving image, but also from the literary essay form, as well as encompassing certain features of forms of fragmented or episodic writing, including the diary, journals, notebooks, and travel writing. My visit to Chris Marker's exhibition happened almost by chance, a visit based solely on seeing *La Jetée* in full on a large screen. The Marker exhibition sought to trace a line from his early travel writing through his prolific political and essay filmmaking from the 1950s through to the 1980s, to his later experimental essayistic installation and multimedia works, including *Zapping Zone* (1990), *Silent Movie* (1995), and *Immemory One* (1997). I knew the research proposal I was writing in 2014 had its foundations in spatial-temporal moving image practice, stemming from projection mapping installations I had created in previous projects, including *Blur I and II* (2010), *Corners* (2012), *Our Memories of the Future* (2015), but it was the discovery of the essay film as a form and the potential for translation of the essay into new forms that brought the proposal together. The essay form is inherently translatable as the professor of film and media at Temple University, Nora Alter argues in 'Translating the Essay into Film and Installation'.³ As Alter points out, when Walter Benjamin's study of translation and the fragment as part of a greater language whole, is compared with Theodor Adorno's observations on the fragment as a central feature of the essay form, both Benjamin's and Adorno's theories underpin how essayistic features can be translated via the fragment into new essayistic languages and modes.⁴ Nora Alter's theoretical conceptualisation of the essay as a crisis in form is central to my practice, and the philosophy of translation from Walter Benjamin, alongside Theodor Adorno's critical theory on the essay as a form set the foundation of my thesis. I discovered at the exhibition, for example, that Chris Marker had made early technological essay translations in the 1990s, namely TV and video sculpture and installation, and then moved to working with the CD Rom, as an essayistic translation of the essay film.

I was able to locate my filmmaking and installation work in an exciting arena of art and filmmaking practice, essay filmmaking and the essay form, and this realisation helped me engage with two important questions: how can we expand the essay form beyond video and photographic technologies of the twentieth century and why should we? Later, I clarified my key questions: why expand the essay film and why now? What is the contemporary personal-

³ Nora M Alter, "Translating the essay into film and installation," *Journal of Visual Culture* 6.1 (2007): 44-57.

⁴ Theodor W Adorno, "1. The Essay as Form," in *Notes to Literature* (Columbia University Press, 2019), 29-47. And Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969a 69), 82.

social aesthetic-political significance of the expanded essay film form? These questions became the starting point for my practice-led PhD research.

The essay film at the turn of the twenty-first century

The 1990s saw increased research interest in the creative and critical potential of translated essay forms, such as the photographic, video, and film essay. At the start of my research project in 2015 there were three books about the essay film.⁵ Over the course of the project (2015 – 2022), six more books on the essay film were published, plus the establishment of the Essay Film Festival at Birkbeck University in London, the inaugural festival taking place in 2015. There are several factors that prompted this examination of the essay film as a translated essay form, starting in the decade of the 1990s. The first reason is the proliferation of new audio-visual essays produced on digital video in the 1990s by artists like Chris Marker and Agnes Varda.⁶ Artists were attracted to using digital video cameras and tapes because they were a cheaper alternative to film, more easily accessible, and the medium had a new aesthetic to experiment with. As both the American film critic Philip Lopate, and professor of critical studies, Michael Renov observed, writing in 1992 and 1995 respectively, there was recognition of the critical potentiality of new video essay forms to offer alternative views to established film documentary forms, through the new medium, aesthetic, and distribution of video. But there was crisis for makers and critics in the classification of these forms. The longstanding difficulty in defining the essay form and now its translated forms had not become any easier.⁷

The second reason is that essay film makers were using the new medium of digital video to critique the new aesthetic-political world order. For example, the German filmmaker and author, Harun Farocki moved to working with video from film across works such as: *How to live in the Federal Republic of Germany* (1990), *What's Up?* (1993), and *Workers Leaving the Factory* (1995). The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the fragmentation of the former Soviet

⁵ Laura Rascaroli, *The personal camera: subjective cinema and the essay film* (Wallflower Press, 2009). And Timothy Corrigan, *The essay film: from Montaigne, after Marker* (Oxford University Press, 2011). And David Montero, *Thinking images: the essay film as a dialogic form in European cinema* (Peter Lang AG, Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften, 2012).

⁶ Harun Farocki and Chantel Ackerman were also key figures in using video in the essay film form.

⁷ Phillip Lopate, "In search of the centaur: The essay-film," *The Threepenny Review* 48 (1992): 19-22. And Michael Renov, "12. The Electronic Essay (1995)," in *Essays on the Essay Film*, ed. Nora M Alter and Timothy Corrigan (Columbia University Press, 2017), 172-182.

Union shifted the geopolitical world order. This shift combined with the advent and commercial availability of digital video technologies created a state of political-technological crisis for filmmakers that invited critical reflection and social commentary in new audio-visual essay forms. As Nora Alter argues, crisis is the catalyst to explain the translation of the essay form, specifically a 'historical and formal' provocation for the maker and a combination of past, present, and future geopolitical and technological crises.⁸

A third reason for critics and researchers burgeoning interest in the essay film form, that started in the 1990s, was due to the crisis in essay film classification, that Renov notes in his article in 1995 and articulated again in 2004.⁹ The binary of fiction and documentary film modes was too simplistic a division and not nuanced enough to accommodate the varied sophisticated cinematic essay film and video experiments that were taking place in the 1990s. A gap in research and understanding had developed. Starting in 1992 with Philip Lopate's *In Search of the Centaur*, Renov's *The Electronic Essay* in 1995 then Nora Alter's treatment of Harun Farockis work, *Images of the World and the Inscription of War* in 1996, critical interest developed in looking again at the forming of the previously well-established and accepted disciplines of documentary and fiction filmmaking, and how the essay film did not fit neatly.¹⁰ This crisis in classification later prompted researchers, such as the American film critic and theorist, Bill Nichols, writing in 2001 to understand the origins of the avant-garde documentary, to re-examine the history of documentary practices, going as far back as the birth of photographic and filmic practices in the 1890s. What Bill Nichols showed was that documentary practices had relied too heavily on John Grierson's observational theory of documentary and his strict delineation of the documentary film form from fiction and avant-garde developments in moving images during the 1920s.¹¹ The Scottish documentary maker Grierson is considered one of the pioneers of the documentary form in cinema. Nichols suggests that Grierson had separated off experimental documentary forms, specifically the radical political cinema from filmmakers in the Soviet Union during the 1920s such as Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) and early essayistic film works such as Walter

⁸ Nora M Alter, "Translating the essay into film and installation," *Journal of Visual Culture* 6.1 (2007): 55.

⁹ Michael Renov, "12. The Electronic Essay (1995)," in *Essays on the Essay Film*, ed. Nora M Alter and Timothy Corrigan (Columbia University Press, 2017), 172-182. And Michael Renov, *The subject of documentary*, Vol. 16 (U of Minnesota Press, 2004), 70.

¹⁰ Phillip Lopate, "In search of the centaur: The essay-film," *The Threepenny Review* 48 (1992): 19-22. And Michael Renov, "12. The Electronic Essay (1995)," in *Essays on the Essay Film*, ed. Nora M Alter and Timothy Corrigan (Columbia University Press, 2017), 172-182. And Nora M Alter, "The Political Im/perceptible in the Essay Film: Farocki's *Images of the World and the Inscription of War*," *New German Critique* 68 (1996): 165-192.

¹¹ Bill Nichols, "Documentary film and the modernist avant-garde," *Critical Inquiry* 27.4 (2001): 580-610.

Ruttman's *Berlin: Symphony of Great City* (1927) and Dzigo Vertov's, *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929). As Nichols explains, Grierson compartmentalised the 'Modernist Fragmentation' and 'Textual difficulty' of the Soviet works from the 1920s and eschewed the avant-garde documentary-essay hybrid moving image forms for a simpler mode and classification of documentary. What Grierson helped develop was a history of documentary and avant-garde filmmaking practices with a 'false-division.'¹² The space of this 'false division', as Nichols calls it, is the space of the essay film and translated audio-visual essay forms, and when inverted, the false division becomes, as the essay film theorist and professor of film and screen media, Laura Rascaroli notes, a 'crossroads of documentary, art film and experimental practices.'¹³ The textual difficulty of the Soviet film works in the 1920s that Grierson worked to exclude is the textual difficulty that Rascaroli includes and observes is born from the essay film's open, hybrid and fragmentary nature, at the centre-point of this crossroad.

A fourth reason for the interest of researchers and critics in the essay film and its developing audio-visual essay forms, was curatorial interest and an institutional shift in the 1990s in thinking about and commissioning artworks in the context of the gallery. The 'false division' of fiction, documentary and avant-garde cinematic practices was again inverted with the steady emergence of the essayistic moving image work in contemporary art from the 1990s onwards.¹⁴ Much in the same way that the fall of the Berlin Wall marked a shift in the geopolitical world order, new digital video technologies combined with curatorial and commissioning trends, sparked an engagement with and the migration of documentary moving image and related experimental practices into the gallery context. As the critic and author Erika Balsom highlights in an article on networked realities:

Established filmmakers such as Chantal Ackerman, Harun Farocki and Chris Marker all produced installations commissioned by art institutions late in their careers, while younger figures such as Amar Kanwar and Kutlug Ataman began by making work for theatrical context in the 1990s before quickly turning to the multiple projection formats possible in art spaces, where they received considerably greater exposure and acclaim.¹⁵

¹² Ibid. Pg582.

¹³ Laura Rascaroli, "The essay film: Problems, definitions, textual commitments," *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 49.2 (2008): 24-47.

¹⁴ Bill Nichols, "Documentary film and the modernist avant-garde," *Critical Inquiry* 27.4 (2001): 580-610.

¹⁵ Erika Balsom, "Networked Realities," *Sight and Sound*, Volume 26 Issue 7, 2016, 50.

Curatorial interest and commissioning power shifted the spaces that essay forms could be located, providing opportunity and cause for a critical rethinking of the essay form. For example, Nora Alter's article *Translating the essay into film and installation* in 2007. Established artists were supported by Institutions to develop their work in installation contexts, including the Whitechapel Gallery retrospective of Chris Marker's work in 2015, in which I saw *La Jetée*.

The dominant mode of essayistic filmic production through the twentieth century was the single channel feature or short length essay film, for view in the cinema. Critics and researchers accompanied these productions with infrequent theoretical writings on the essay film. It is only since the 1990s that there has been, firstly, the emergence of significant scholarly work devoted to the single-channel essay film as a distinct form, and, secondly, consideration of the artistic expansion of this single screen form into expanded film forms using new locations, innovative formal considerations, geopolitical conditions, and emerging technologies. Artists and filmmakers such as Marker, Farocki, Ackerman, and Varda, have developed essayistic filmmaking practices that defy classification and are situated in a creative-critical space between fiction, documentary, and the avant-Garde. Writers, such as Alter, Renov, Corrigan, Lopate, Rascaroli, and Nichols, have treated this development with a body of research on the emergence in the twentieth century of distinct essayistic filmmaking practices, translated from the written essay.

The expanded essay, radical technologies, and image production

The present-day aesthetic and politics of the moving image are changing rapidly due to 'radical technologies.'¹⁶ A term that the American writer and urbanist Adam Greenfield used to describe the technologies inhabiting the multiplicity of spaces we encounter on a day-to-day basis. These technologies include Global Positioning Systems, satellite and militarised drone imagery, geographical information systems, spatial data science, bioengineering and biomedical imaging, augmented and virtual reality, algorithmic surveillance and facial recognition, machine learning and artificial intelligence, cryptocurrencies and blockchain, projection mapping, opensource software, networked gaming, smartphones, the internet of things, and social media. Whether educational, social, financial, militarised, or political, these

¹⁶ Adam Greenfield, *Radical technologies: The design of everyday life* (Verso Books, 2017).

new image and spatial networked technologies are redefining our everyday virtual and physical spatial conditions and what it is to be human.

The viewer's traditional position of the image frame is becoming increasingly displaced. For instance, the Lytro Camera technology, now owned by Google under its Project Starline, produces a living picture and magic window for near perfect face to face simulation, and wearable tech offers augmented and virtual realities.¹⁷ Remote sensing has enabled the development of unmanned aerial vehicles such as the Global Hawk reconnaissance drone and advances in hyperspectral imaging mean that a wider spectrum of light is used for imaging and the collection of data.¹⁸ Global imaging shifts our perspective into a floating observant state, while our temporality is consumed by the virtual world of our third screen and our mobile handheld devices. Holographic and projection mapping removes the projector from its honoured projection room position, subverting the theatrical context of viewer, projector, and screen. The image is treated and renewed as sculptural material ready for display on any surface, in any space, and in any form. Our perception of the physicality and materiality of the object, the formal elements of the moving image, and our subject relationship to it is altered.

What is clear is that we live in an arena of accelerating image production. The rapid advent of new imaging apparatus and display is altering our position of what an image is. Our location and position to multiple interconnected social, private, and public spaces, suggests new geopolitical and social spatial complexities. For example, an individual with limited technological knowledge can use Deepfake Video technology to produce a fake video of a person speaking the words they want them to speak, using only a photograph.¹⁹ The current globalised neoliberal economic conditions governing most image production is under a global capitalist framework. A condition conceptualised by the political and cultural theorist, Mark Fisher as 'Capitalist Realism'²⁰, where an alternative image of the future is increasingly hard to visualise, let alone develop.

¹⁷ Jason Lawrence, Dan B. Goldman, Supreeth Achar, Gregory Major Blascovich, Joseph G. Desloge, Tommy Fortes, Eric M. Gomez et al, "Project Starline: A high-fidelity telepresence system," *ACM Transactions on Graphics* (Proc. SIGGRAPH Asia), vol. 40(6) (2021).

¹⁸ Greg Loegering, and David Evans, "The evolution of the global hawk and MALD avionics systems," in *Gateway to the New Millennium*, 18th Digital Avionics Systems Conference, Proceedings (Cat. No. 99CH37033), vol. 2, pp. 6-A. IEEE, 1999. And Juha Suomalainen, Raquel A. Oliveira, Teemu Hakala, Niko Koivumäki, Lauri Markelin, Roope Näsi, and Eija Honkavaara, "Direct reflectance transformation methodology for drone-based hyperspectral imaging," *Remote Sensing of Environment* 266 (2021): 112691.

¹⁹ Mika Westerlund, "The emergence of deepfake technology: A review," *Technology Innovation Management Review* 9, no. 11 (2019).

²⁰ Mark Fisher, *Capitalist realism: Is there no alternative?* (John Hunt Publishing, 2009), 2.

Watching *Children of Men* (2006), we are inevitably reminded of the phrase attributed to Frederic Jameson and Slavoj Žižek, that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of Capitalism. That slogan captures precisely what I mean by 'Capitalist Realism': the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible to imagine a coherent alternative to it.

In fact, the quote appropriated to the philosopher and political theorist, Frederic Jameson, and philosopher and cultural theorist, Slavoj Žižek, is misremembered. Jameson originally claimed in *The Seeds of Time*:

It seems to be easier for us today to imagine the thorough going deterioration of the earth and of nature than the breakdown of late capitalism.²¹

Entangled in accelerated, high, or late capitalism is a commodification and consumption of culture, creativity and image exemplified by high spec architectural museums, an asset driven art industry, and a high finance art market in a paradigm of productivity driving new forms of artistic production and labour, including many current moving image practices. Yet, within this paradigm, as theorist, author and innovator of the essay form, Hito Steyerl argues, is the circulation of 'poor images.'²² Images that have been replicated, reproduced, and copied so as to lose their perfect high spec resolution. Or images that are old, produced on equipment that no longer meets the aspect ratio and resolution of the present-day perfect image. What is created by people circulating these images via online networks through file sharing, rips and torrents is a class system of image. However, as Steyerl observes, this 'imperfect cinema' includes the circulation of experimental film works and moving image from the essayistic avant-garde, once hidden but now shared in an alternative economy of cinema: 'The imperfect cinema is one that strives to overcome the divisions of labour within class society.'²³ Like a video tape, contemporary western society and its cultural production has been observed as stuck in a state of pause and rewind, replaying the same scenes, whilst the fast forward button has been forgotten, or worse the tape has been chewed. I have chosen Capitalist Realism as a framing device and provocation to discuss the extent to which a viewer's interaction with an expanded essay form can break the visible ideology and enable an alternative image of the

²¹ Frederic Jameson, *The seeds of time* (Columbia University Press, 1994).

²² Hito Steyerl and Franco Berardi, *The wretched of the screen* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012), 31-45.

²³ *Ibid*, 39.

future. Both Mark Fisher and Frederic Jameson took the view that cultural production due to the effects of post-modernism was 'dominated by pastiche and revivalism', and 'monotonous repetition', respectively.²⁴ However, I prefer the view that we can use the fast forward button, but also place several video players networked in the same space, employing a collapsed reading of the politics of space and time. As Steyerl states, 'The poor image is no longer about the real thing – the originary original. Instead, it is about its own real conditions of existence: about swarm circulation, digital dispersion, fractured and flexible temporalities.'²⁵ For example, Harun Farocki's video installation, *Workers Leaving the Factory in 11 Decades* (2006), developed from his single channel video work in 1995, places twelve video monitors side by side showing a series of videos of workers leaving factories. The artist and the viewer are no longer bound by the buttons on the VCR and can be in more than one place, space, and history at the same time, made possible by the advent of spatially networked digital technology and an image that is materially data. This state of the image is a retention of futurity in opposition to Jameson's quote in *The Seeds of Time* as a 'loss in the faith in the possibility of revolution - the evacuation of futurity'.²⁶ Or as Fisher calls it, 'the slow cancellation of the future.'²⁷ Farocki shows in his twelve-screen video installation, the essay maker can critically address the spatiality of time, and the temporality of the postmodern can be collapsed. However repetitious the subject of the twelve videos, Farocki places the screens with a soft montage, allowing for a liminal space to exist in-between the videos. This interstice is the space for creative critical potential, the viewer becomes an active collaborator in the retention of futurity. Jameson re-evaluates this critical point in his later work, *Future City*: 'The problem is then how to locate radical difference; how to jumpstart the sense of history so that it begins again to transmit feeble signals of time, of otherness, of change, of Utopia.'²⁸ The artist and

²⁴ Mark Fisher, *Capitalist realism: Is there no alternative?* (John Hunt Publishing, 2009), 7. And Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke UP 1991), 1-54. And Frederic Jameson, "Future city," *New Left Review* 21 (2003): 76. Francis Fukuyama went further to make the sensationalised claim 'the end of history as such' in, Francis Fukuyama, "The end of history?," *The national interest* 16 (1989): 3-18.

²⁵ Hito Steyerl and Franco Berardi, *The wretched of the screen* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012), 44.

²⁶ Gerry Canavan, "Hope, But Not for Us: Ecological Science Fiction and the End of the World in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*," *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory* 23.2 (2012): 138.

²⁷ Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of my life: Writings on depression, hauntology and lost futures* (John Hunt Publishing, 2014), 6. And Franco Berardi, *After the future* (AK press, 2011), 18-19.

²⁸ Frederic Jameson, "Future city," *New Left Review* 21 (2003): 76.

the viewer may locate the radical difference in the essay form. In the essay film the artistic intervention is at the crossroads of fiction, documentary, and the avant-garde.²⁹

Yet, there is resistance. Reflecting global capitalist movement, the artist's essay film may function as mirror to a mobilised global image economy and the migration of people through economic or geopolitical instability. This notion is drawn from a familiarity of the disparate local and global materials brought together in the essay film, in comparison to editing and montage techniques used in video mashups, music videos, and abstract video advertising. Image making strategies that reflect the practice of dislocating and joining materials from across thematic borders with 'compulsory manufacturing of difference under flexible modular forms of production', as Hito Steyerl outlines.³⁰ A critique of the current state of the essay film's ability or inability to displace representation of the governing global capitalist ideological state and forms of creative labour. And by ideology I refer to the established 'economic and social order' under capitalism.³¹

Filmmakers like Isaac Julien have not only experimented with new essay forms in film but with the essayistic features of the form to explore the critical relationships of capital, time, history and our present ideological states and human condition.³² Isaac Julien's *Ten Thousand Waves* (2010), a nine screen moving image installation, focuses on China and the migration of people and the global migration of the image, across history, countries, continents, and memories, or as professor of modern Chinese literature, Yingjin Zhang observes 'evocative translocality and mobile spectatorship'.³³ What I find interesting about Zhang's reading of *Ten Thousand Waves* is the hauntological lens and the 'spectre of orientalism' that is evoked by the difficult reception of Julien's work by Chinese viewers. Despite Julien's controlled displaced

²⁹ T. J. Demos, *The Migrant Image: The Art and Politics of Documentary During the Global Crisis* (Duke University Press, 2013), XVII. And Nora M Alter, *The essay film after fact and fiction* (Columbia University Press, 2019), 293.

³⁰ Ursula Biemann also refers to these forms as 'transnational labour practices' in, Ursula Biemann "17. Performing Borders: Transnational Video (2003)," in *Essays on the Essay Film*, ed. Nora M Alter and Timothy Corrigan (Columbia University Press, 2017), 259-268. And Hito Steyerl, "19. The Essay as Conformism? Some Notes on Global Image Economies (2011)," in *Essays on the essay film*, ed. Nora M Alter and Timothy Corrigan (Columbia University Press, 2017), 276-286.

³¹ John Milios, and Dimitri Dimoulis, *Karl Marx and the classics: An essay on value, crises and the capitalist mode of production* (Routledge) vii.

³² This includes artist-collectives, such as the Black Audio Collective and the Otolith Group, and filmmakers like John Akomfrah and Julien. Isaac Julien, "26. From *Ten Thousand Waves* to Lina Bo Bardi, via *Kapital* (2016)," in *Essays on the Essay Film*, ed. Nora M Alter and Timothy Corrigan (Columbia University Press, 2017), 335-344.

³³ Yingjin Zhang, "Ways of Seeing China through Isaac Julien's *Ten Thousand Waves*: Evocative Translocality, Fantastic Orientalism, Nameless Labor," *Prism: Theory and Modern Chinese Literature* 16, no. 1 (2019): 174-196.

representation and poeticised politics, the Chinese viewer as evidenced by Zhang, revokes Julien's diasporic motivation in what Zhang calls 'fantastic orientalism'.³⁴ If the artist's mobilisation of images through displacement, dislocation, joining, and abstraction becomes the norm of the essay film form, then the single channel essay film and the installed essay film form, enter what the French philosopher Jacques Ranciere calls the 'distribution of the sensible'.³⁵ A state where the moving image thinking procedures, assemblage of material, and intended displacement of representation enter a field of commodity and become an accepted aesthetic of the political global image economy. Therefore, a crisis for the artist, making it difficult for the form to make an intervention in any displacement of image representation, political or not. Throughout my thesis I use the term assemblage, especially in relation to essayistic assemblage. I refer here to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's use of the term assemblage to mean multiplicity rather than unity, in that parts that are brought together can be both fragment and whole, what they call a 'paradoxically fragmentary whole'.³⁶ In his conversation with Alexi Kukuljevic, on the displacement of representation in fictional Lebanese archives created by the Atlas Group, Ranciere answered: 'displace the displacement itself'.³⁷

Artists like Harun Farocki and Hito Steyerl have made works for theatrical release as well as art exhibition.³⁸ Yet, other artists resist the gallery exhibition due to the commercialisation of product and exclusivity held in a gallery context.³⁹ In addition, Emily Hurdeman's 2017 performance-based enquiry into tangential essay practices, explores the artistic methodology and expansion of the essay form using 'performative essay' as the practice.⁴⁰ Hurdeman's piece utilised gestural repetition and video in a performative installation that searched for the relationship of performance to the essayistic. Hurdeman concludes that there is an innate connection between performance and the essay, but instead of focusing on the materialisation of the essay, perhaps what is more important is attention to the essayists and the potential hybrid forms, 'the essayistic performance as form with content, conceptually

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Jacques Rancière, *The politics of aesthetics* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013).

³⁶ Thomas Nail, "What is an Assemblage?." *SubStance* 46, no. 1 (2017): 21-22.

³⁷ Jacques Rancière, *The politics of aesthetics* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), 79.

³⁸ Hito Steyerl, *Lovely Andrea* (2007) and *Factory of the Sun*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2016)

³⁹ Alter discusses Ulrike Ottinger and Hartmut Bitomsky in Nora M Alter, *The essay film after fact and fiction* (Columbia University Press, 2019), 293.

⁴⁰ Emily Hurdeman, 'PER-FORM - the performative essay and the essayistic performance', *Research Catalogue* (2017).

bound.⁴¹ While some critical writing acknowledges the essay film as an installed form, located in alternative sites to the cinema, and has noted a shift from single screen essay works to expanded essayistic moving image works, including multi-screen installations such as Julien's, exhibited in galleries. What has been written about less so is further shift in the expansion of artistic essayistic moving image practice. The artist and researcher may investigate the politics of time through the experimental hybridity of the essay, addressing the creative critical potential for expanded essay film forms to locate thinking on radical alternative futures. And, although, at times we might be unaware or switch off from the multiplicity of images and spaces we inhabit on a day-to-day basis, the question of how we negotiate these developing personal and public relationships to the changing politics of the moving image under accelerated capitalism is under debate.

Furthermore, little critical writing and research has thoroughly examined the creative critical potential in expanding the essay as a form beyond photographic and film essay forms, to accommodate varied and radical critical making strategies and practices, in areas such as sound, performance, architecture, sculpture, new media, and at the intersections of these modes with other disciplines, mediums, processes, and materials. As a result, in scholarship the photographic and film essay have become the dominant and most written about translations of the written essay form.⁴² Without thorough practical and theoretical analysis of expanded essay forms, we run the risk of undervaluing their critical potential, ultimately leading to a one-sided view of how the essay can exist formally and operate critically.

My research project is a step towards widening the dominant research focus on the single channel essay film, in order to consider alternative artistic essayistic practices. My research addresses this gap through a practice-led inquiry with two starting points: 1. Why expand the essay film and why now? Or what is the contemporary personal-social aesthetic-political significance of the expanded essay film form? And 2. To what extent do expanded essay forms operate critically on the inter-relation of the human condition with instances of crisis under

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Scholars like Timothy Corrigan, Laura Rascaroli, Rick Warner, Elizabeth A. Papazian and Caroline Eades, despite their development of essay form theory, have contributed to a narrative of the photographic and film essay as dominant translations of the essay form. Laura Rascaroli, *The personal camera: subjective cinema and the essay film* (Wallflower Press, 2009). And Timothy Corrigan, *The essay film: from Montaigne, after Marker* (Oxford University Press, 2011). And Nora M Alter and Timothy Corrigan, eds. *Essays on the Essay Film* (Columbia University Press, 2017). Elizabeth Papazian and Caroline Eades, eds. *The essay film: Dialogue, politics, Utopia* (Columbia University Press, 2016). And Laura Rascaroli, *How the essay film thinks* (Oxford University Press, 2017).

Capitalist Realism? With these starting points in mind, the aim of this project is not to try to re-define the essay as a form - much work has already been done in outlining a variety of features of the essay form with no reconciled definition - but rather to facilitate a practice-led inquiry examining the essayistic features of the essay in order to ask how we might fast-forward what Mark Fisher called the 'slow cancellation of the future'?⁴³ Where might radical praxis for alternative futures exist and how should we produce essays in our current personal-techno-aesthetic-political climate?

A note on structure and strategy

My thesis is structured in three 'zones' with opening and closing discussions that support and contextualise a body of creative practice produced over the six years of PhD study. I have chosen to focus the thesis on five works created during this period: *The Golden Record*, *The De-realisation Effect*, *Lorraine*, *Capteur*, and *The Black Prince*. I have structured my thesis as an episodic critique, responding to the central inquiry of the research: the essay form. The essayistic operates at the interrelationship of the personal, political, critical, and abstract, and can be seen in many episodic forms, including the notebook, journal, diary, photo collection, and film. I have chosen to use the terms opening and closing as they fit better with the iterative act of essaying across a body of work. My intention for my thesis is that will become a document that I will re-open and re-close over the coming years as I iterate the thinking and findings into new essay forms.

In part, my decision to work in an episodic mode is due to the nature of my part-time research spanning six years and the nature of this period and my activities. My weekly working pattern involved working on my PhD research on set days, usually two days a week, with the research process fragmented by other responsibilities. I have also worked between Leeds and Newcastle, which has meant occupying transitional and liminal spaces whilst journeying from one to the other. The stop-start nature of this weekly routine has meant moving on and off my research in cyclical pattern. Many of the choices I have made relate to and have been constrained by time. The time I had in a day to perform an activity, whether reading an article, writing, or the creation of an element of one of the works. The fact of journeying as part of the research process has also meant I have often been reflecting, thinking, reading, and noting

⁴³ Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of my life: Writings on depression, hauntology and lost futures* (John Hunt Publishing, 2014), 6. And Franco Berardi, *After the future* (AK press, 2011), 18-19.

while travelling, with the blurred view from the train window a space to hold thoughts during the ninety-minute passage from Leeds to Newcastle. I occupied fragments or episodes of time and space which paralleled the process of creating in and with fragments and episodes of time and space. My research includes works created in this fragmented episodic way, for example, reconstructed notebook films, notebooks, maps, journals, and short video essays. I continue to work within and with the joining and disruption of moments of fragmented episodes of time and space to see what is revealed.

I used five stages in my practice-led research methodology and often these stages ran concurrently. The processes of making and writing during these stages were an essayistic-led strategy for developing the research. The stages included: 1. *Map and Review* – for example, practice based essayistic work, practical and theoretical perspectives of the essay as a form, and the materiality of the enquiry; 2. *Speculative Practice* – for example, collecting of materials and tools, bring materials and tools together in poetic combinations, and observation on maps, notebooks and journals; 3. *Self-reflexive dialogue* – development of short self-reflexive meta-essayistic documents; 4. *Practical Synthesis* – synthesis of the speculative practice and self-reflexive dialogue; and 5. *Thesis* – my written contextualisation of the practice. In addition to the five stages my practice changed over the period of my research, and through the cyclical praxis of making and critically reflecting emergent practices became central to my making strategy. For example, walking emerged as a primary exercise used to consider the spatial and temporal characteristics and place, geography, and site of certain significant locations central to my enquiry. Writing also emerged as a primary practice alongside using constraints in developing the concepts and forms of the works. Due to the emergence of these making strategies and practices over the six year period my theoretical framing in the thesis is introduced in relation to the chronology of my practice and making. For example, I introduced psychogeography into my discussion at the point that walking became a key strategy for my practice.

Furthermore, the structure of my thesis emerged through the handling of my written material created during my making processes, my reading, writing and subsequent reflections. My writing during the research period took the form of aphorisms, short and longer form episodic creative passages, creative mapping, and critical notebook and journal entries. My decision to take this approach was inspired by the work of Mathelinda Nabugodi, her PhD thesis, *Life after Life: A Reading of Percy Bysshe Shelley and Walter Benjamin*, the first PhD in creative critical

writing at University College London, was structured in ninety-nine sections of a thousand words, arranged in nineteen chapters.⁴⁴ Similarly, for Mathelinda, the structure emerged as she was revising her notes and writing up her thesis, not from a preformed plan.⁴⁵ Mathelinda's inspiration taken from the fragment and holism of Theodor Adorno's *Minima Moralia* written in 1951.⁴⁶

One of my key findings is the idea of essayistic resemblance, whereby the features of the essayistic operate in a series of resemblances to each other rather than in a prescriptive definition, reflecting more accurately the shape shifting nature and thinking operations present in the essay form. The essay film has a resemblance of features that can potentially be brought into play by the author in the creation of the form. Rick Warner, assistant professor of film at the University of North Carolina, offers a helpful list of some of the distinctive attributes that have been used by filmmakers and artists over the span of the essay film's history and analysed critically. The essay film may include but is not limited to:

A hybrid combination of fiction and non-fiction; the prominent display of the film essayist's subjectivity through voice-over and/or physical self-portrayal; an open ended structure and manner of expression that often relies on an eclectic montage of both found and newly shot material; a self-reflexive disposition regarding the techniques used and goals pursued; a leftist political stance that may range in tone from activism to more tentative rumination; and a rhetoric of direct address that looks to build a collaborative bond with an especially alert spectator.⁴⁷

The interstices and space between essayistic features, along with the spaces in between the material and theoretical elements of an essayistic work (whether written or filmic), are key to understanding the distance and proximity of fragments in the work, how ideas are weighed by maker and viewer, and where creative and critical potential and thinking may be located. The viewer is invited to engage in the thinking process of the work through the relationships of the interstice and the fragment, and this relationship becomes significant in terms of the fluid tension of interactivity and passivity for the viewer. What is expected of the viewer in terms of work in the interstice relates to the viewer's potential critique of the visible and

⁴⁴ MA Nabugodi, "Life after Life: A Reading of Percy Bysshe Shelley and Walter Benjamin" (PhD diss., UCL (University College London), 2016).

⁴⁵ Ibid, 32.

⁴⁶ Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from damaged life* (Verso, 2005).

⁴⁷ Rick Warner, *Godard and the Essay Film: A Form that Thinks* (Northwestern University Press, 2018), 3-4.

invisible in the essayistic conditions of the form. The spatial and temporal potential of the interstice as a mechanism for a radical 'new image of thought' is a key consideration for the analysis of expanded forms of the essay, specifically the works I created during the PhD research period.⁴⁸ The viewer's work in the interstice may then act as a way of seeing past the current ideological veil. As Laura Rascaroli observes, the interstice is: 'a void...a difference, of potential between two incommensurable elements, which produces something new'.⁴⁹ Therefore, the incommensurable elements are not a holism of traditional montaged images, as conceived by Eisenstein.⁵⁰ Rascaroli is building on the philosopher Gilles Deleuze's theory of the time-image, in that thought is put into critical relationship with the unthought:

The unsummonable, the inexplicable, the undecidable, the incommensurable. The outside or obverse of the images has replaced the whole, at the same time as the interstice or the cut has replaced association.⁵¹

Writing in shorter sections in the chapters has allowed me, in turn, to reflect this idea of resemblance across both the practical and written submissions. The structure allows interstices and spaces to appear in between the passages of written critical reflection. I include short photo essays in the spaces in between the major sections for the reader's photographic reflection and transition before returning to the critical commentary. The form of these short photo essays was inspired by Allan Sekula's, *Fish Story*.⁵² In the main body of text, I include writings from my notebooks and journals to support the passages analysing the works.

The three zones, therefore, do not lead the reader through the thesis in a linear fashion. Aspects of a literature review, methodology, analysis, discussion, conclusion, and recommendations can be found in each zone of writing. Nonetheless, to offer a non-linear guide: In Zone 1, *Locating the Meta-morph*, I use *The Golden Record* and *The Derealisation effect* as starting points to examine the essay as a shape shifting form, a meta-morph, and considers the meta-essayistic praxis I developed for my practice-led research. In Zone 2, *Essayistic Futurisms*, I use *Lorraine* to think through the essay form as an open cinematic architecture and considers the essay's creative critical potential for radical essayistic futurisms. In Zone 3, *Encountering Capitalist Realism*, I use *Capteur* to explore the

⁴⁸ Laura Rascaroli, *How the essay film thinks* (Oxford University Press, 2017), 47-48.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ David Bordwell, "The idea of montage in Soviet art and film," *Cinema Journal* 11, no. 2 (1972): 9-17.

⁵¹ Gilles Deleuze, Robert Galeta and Hugh Tomlinson, *Cinema 2: The time-image*, trans. Robert Galeta and Hugh Tomlinson (University of Minnesota, 1989), 180 & 206.

⁵² Allan Sekula and Benjamin HD Buchloh, *Fish Story*, Vol. 202 (Düsseldorf: Richter Verlag, 1995).

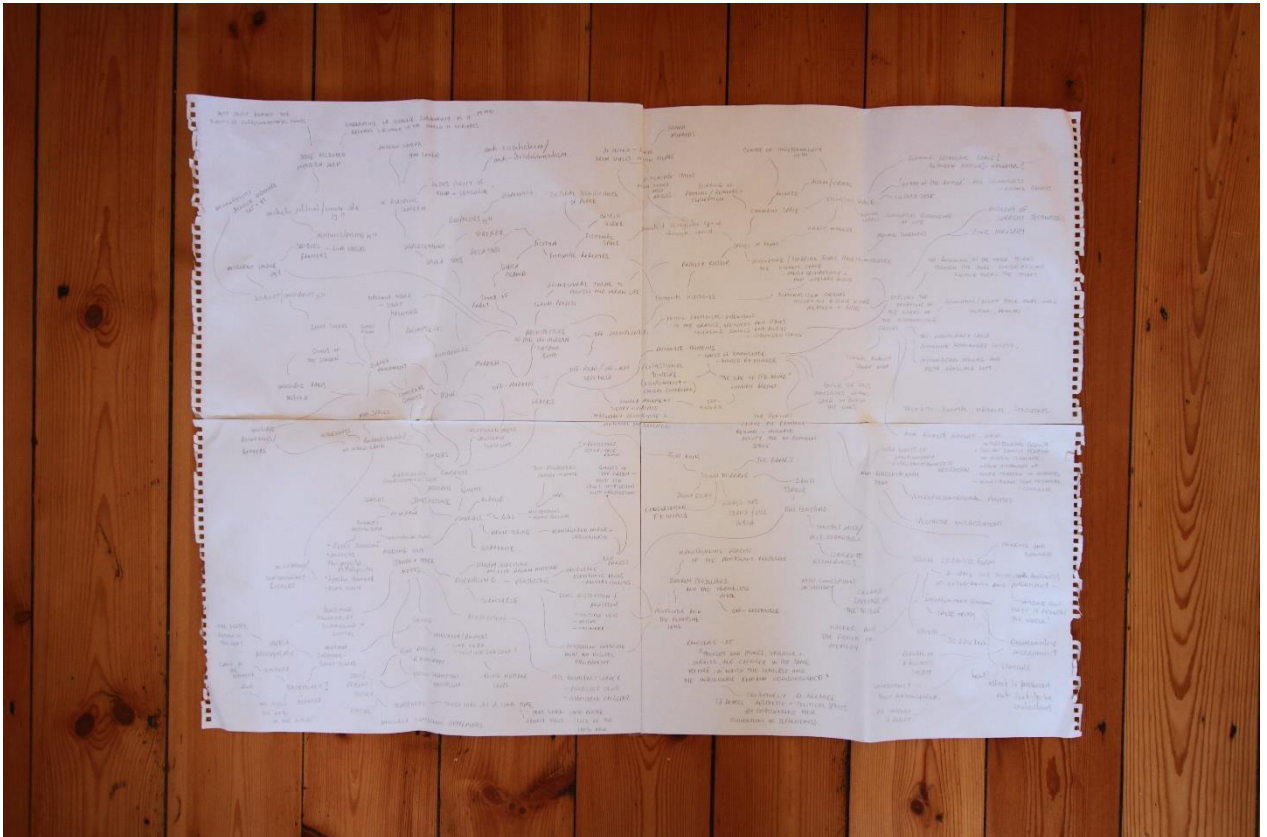
entanglement of hauntology and trauma as crisis in essayistic practices and considers how the essay form can critique Capitalist Realism. My conclusion, *Exit through the Crisis*, uses the creation of my most recent work, *The Black Prince*, to propose working with the essay form as a post-hauntological structure to open essayistic futurisms.

How do we make essays in our current climate?

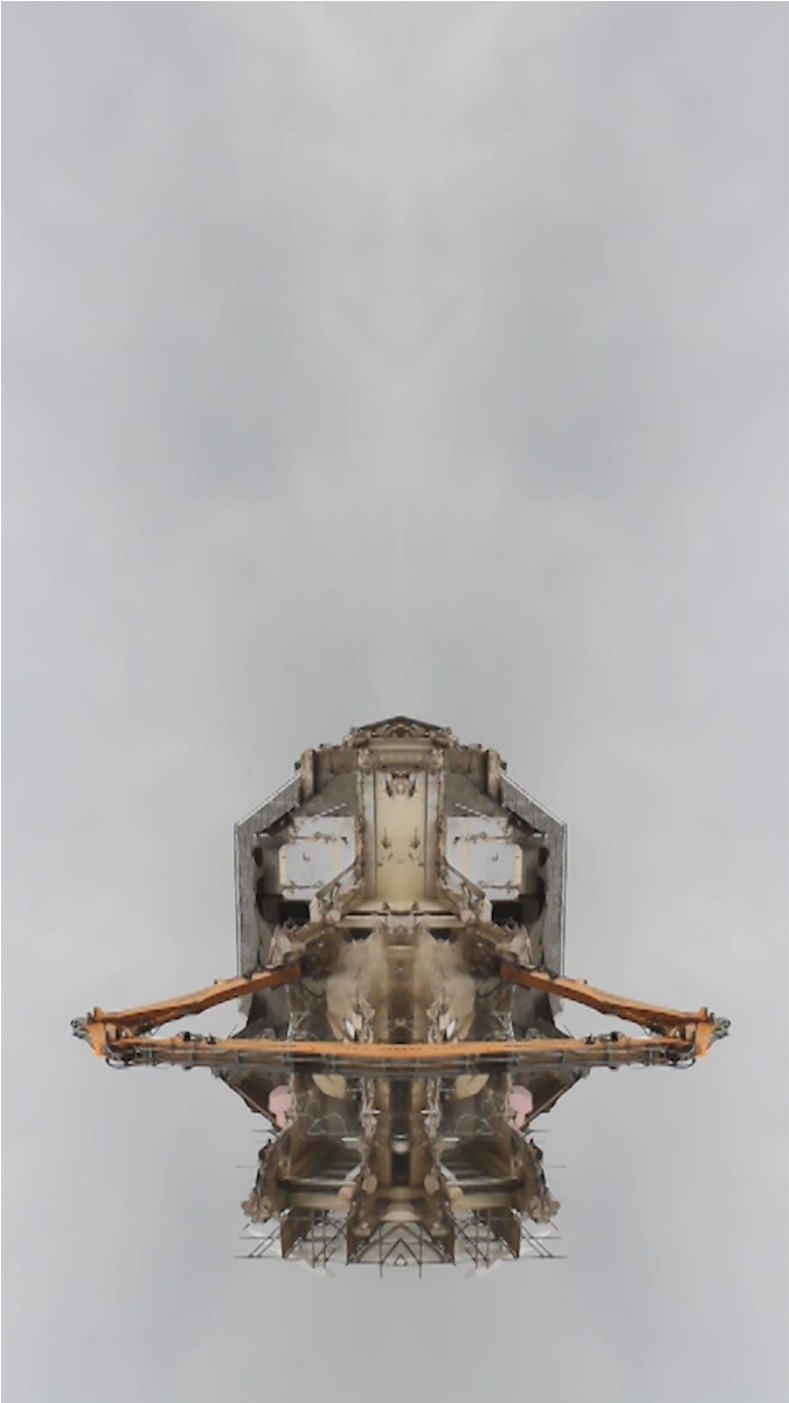
Aged forty-one, I step into the office of my family home, my dad now battling cancer. As I sit here writing, amidst a global viral pandemic, restrictions in place, isolated from society, with multiple mentions of the word crisis - climate, political, social, racial, identity - a daily occurrence in the media, and with post-truth, post-human, post-political rhetoric taking hold amongst rapid smart technological developments at personal, local and global level, it feels appropriate and significant that there is critical development in a hard to classify form like the essay. These conditions provide further cause and a distinct opportunity to re-evaluate the essay as a form. The essay allows for a free form testing of ideas using the dominant media of our time, and enables a philosophical probing, prodding, and revealing of our personal, public, social, political, abstract relationship to the world around us. How do we produce essays in our current personal-aesthetic-techno-political climate? This space is under construction.



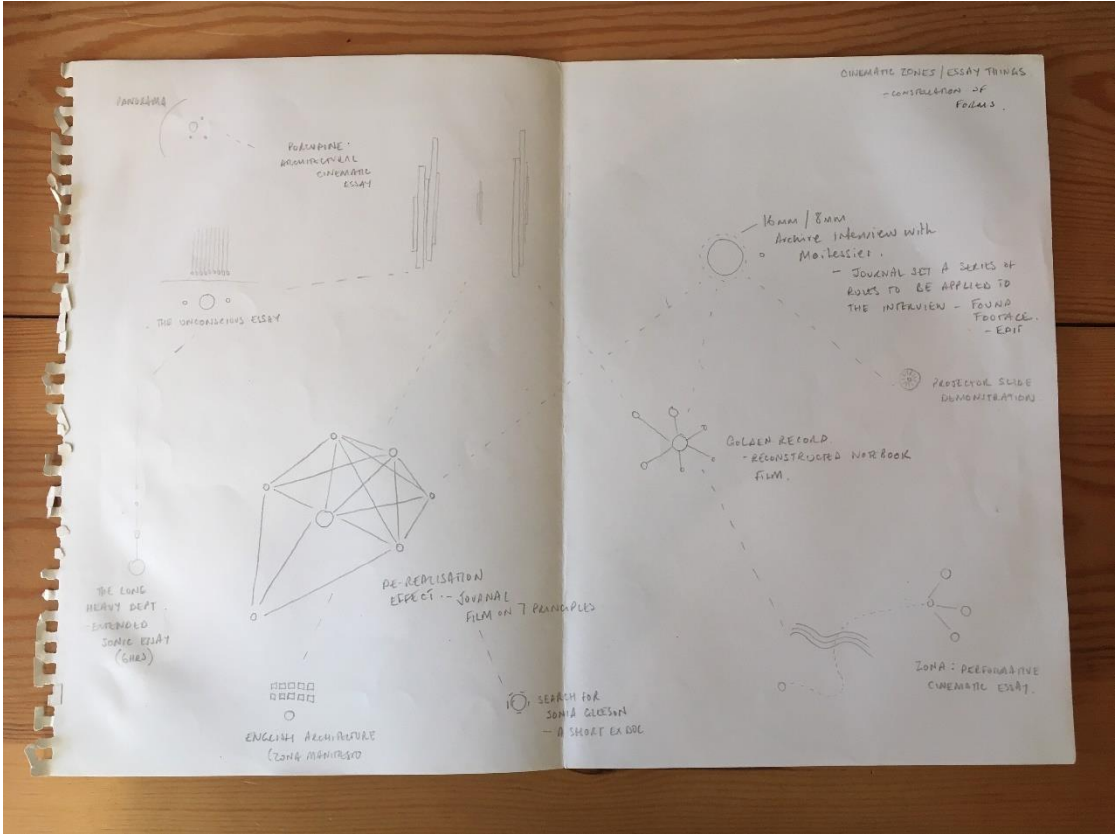
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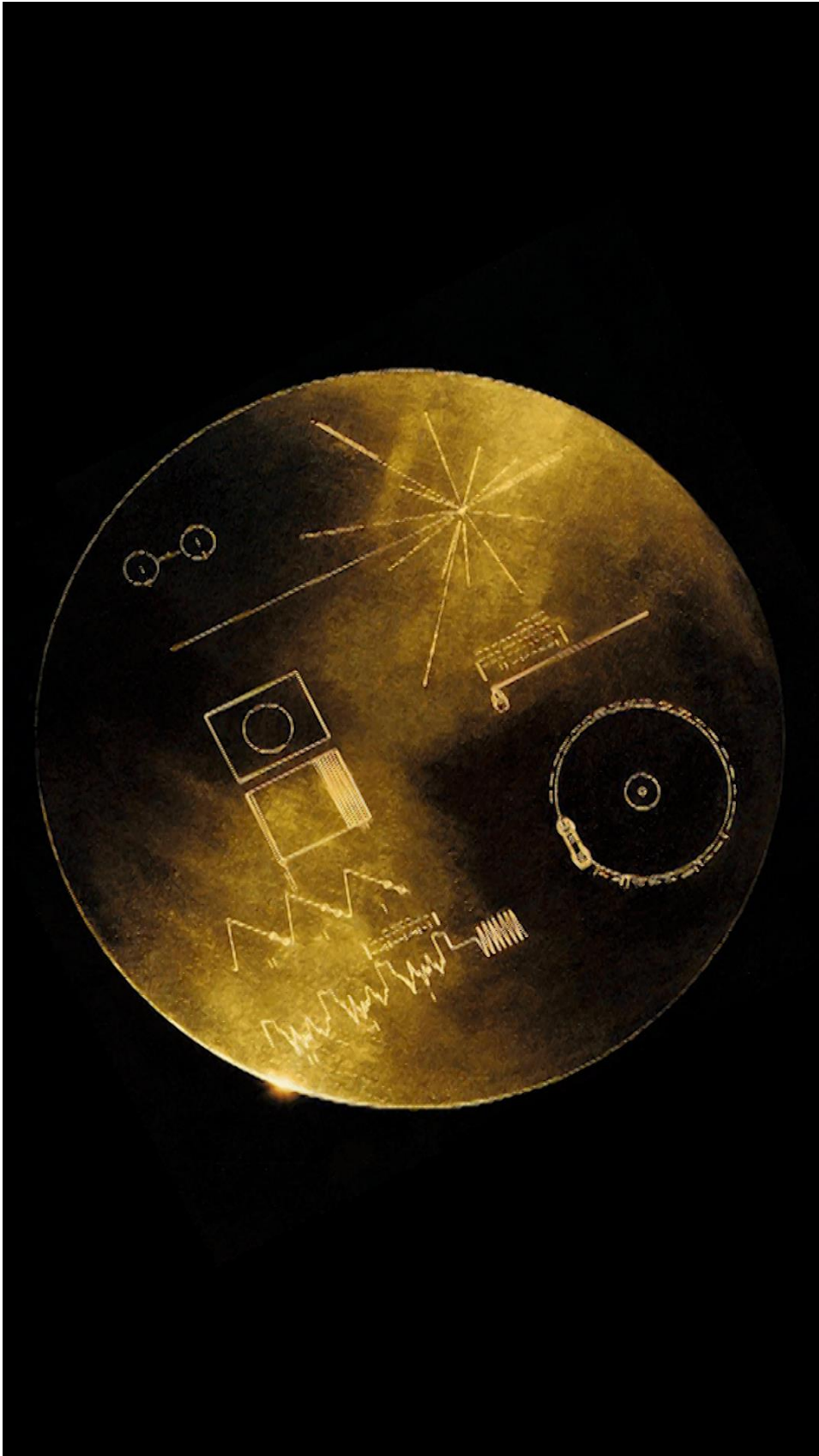




10

Images

1. Close up of concrete, photographed at the Holocaust Memorial, Berlin
2. The Map of Truth
3. Still from *Concrete Ghosts* (2015)
4. The Map of Forms
5. A bombed street in a Syrian town
6. The Image of the bombed street has been pasted on to the Berlin Wall
7. The demolition of the West Yorkshire Police HQ in the centre of Leeds, with the image of the weight of a family overlaid
8. A weathered tree in California
9. Silhouettes at the Berlin Wall
10. The crane that demolished the Police HQ in Leeds



Zone 1: Locating the Meta-morph

In this section I introduce the *meta-essayistic praxis* that I developed as part of my practice-led research methodology, drawing upon close analysis of two of my notebook films, *The Golden Record* and *The Derealisation Effect*, as well as essayistic objects and processes, my notebook, and maps. I link this praxis to expanded practical developments in the essay film at the latter end of the twentieth century, and theory on the essay form.

This zone brings together various critical and practical features of essay form theory with Ludwig Wittgenstein's theory of 'family resemblance', to conceptualise the terms *essayistic resemblance* and *essayistic assemblage*, using *The Derealisation Effect* as a starting point. These concepts enable the arrangement of key features of the essay in a flexible, constellated form. I then apply this constellated form as a critical strategy of making to my creative research practice.

I finish the chapter by discussing the *act of essaying* as a continued practice over a corpus or body of work, revisiting Montaigne's essays through this lens, and develop an idea of the essay as a shape shifting form to test meta-crises. I develop the aesthetic political concerns revealed through this meta-essayistic praxis in my research practice and conclude with how, in my practice, the act of essaying has become an integral way of thinking about the creative critical potential of the essayistic as a practice-led art and film research methodology.

A Meta-Essayistic Praxis

My memory becomes a wilderness of elsewheres. How in such a condition can I write about film? I don't know. I could know. But I would rather not know. Instead, I will allow the elsewheres to reconstruct themselves as a tangled mess.⁵³

Robert Smithson

The task of the translator consists in finding that intended effect [intention] upon the language into which he is translating which produces in it the echo of the original . . . Unlike a work of literature, translation does not find itself in the center of the language forest but on the outside facing the wooded ridge; it calls into it without entering, aiming at the single spot where the echo is able to give, in its own language, the reverberation of the work in the alien one.⁵⁴

Walter Benjamin

⁵³ Robert Smithson, "A Cinematic Atopia (1971)," in *Robert Smithson: the collected writings* (University of California Press, 1996), 138.

⁵⁴ Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969a 69), 70 & 76. And Nora M Alter, "Translating the essay into film and installation," *Journal of Visual Culture* 6.1 (2007): 54.

Concrete Ghosts

I was moving sideways and off disciplinary, off-truth, off-value, and off-theory, for a while. Before I knew it the grass and thistles were at my knees. I was in the wilderness, I was lost.

On my well-established route from my hometown to Whitby, the modernist white globes of RAF Fylingdales sit in the bleak heather of the North York Moors, emblems of geopolitical surveillance. I watched the white orbs from my car window, moving slowly past patches of systematically burnt heather enclosed by flourishes of purple plants. On screen, black and white archive footage of the construction of RAF Fylingdales cuts to a soldier as he launches his surveillance drone amidst military conflict in Ukraine. Donald Crowhurst's still black and white image holds the screen for a few seconds, then he is released to the past to circumnavigate the earth's seas aboard his ship. The National Socialist German Workers' Party create black concrete for their sea defences. Cut. Goths invade the tourist location of Whitby, both the setting for Dracula and for the Goth weekend in the month of October each year.

There is a moment in the opening sequence in my notebook film, *Concrete Ghosts*, where a palimpsest of crises begins, where the images and sounds from the text above are sequenced. Each image in turn notes a moment of crisis, either a personal, social, political, or abstract conflict, while a female narrator reads the following text, taken from a journal:

His first mention of the de-realisation effect was after an appointment and conversation with his friend, a psychiatrist, who had told him that what he had witnessed was an increasing number of people and patients exhibiting the symptoms and effects. Moitessier had found it difficult to believe that what his friend had explained was real but agreed to keep a journal of thoughts, feelings and observations.⁵⁵

Concrete Ghosts is a notebook film, the first short film of my PhD research, a translation of thoughts and text from my notebook to images and audio, constructed in essayistic moving image form. Moitessier is experiencing a crisis and the text in the opening sequence of the film first appeared on a page in my notebook, in between descriptions of two very distinct

⁵⁵ Text taken from a journal entry of Moitessier's journal, part of the script for iterations of *The Golden Record*, 2015 – 2017.

childhood memories. In the first, I recalled being caught up in the Poll Tax riots in London in the spring of 1990. In the second, I describe a memory of watching images of the fighter jets from the Gulf War on TV the following year, while away on a religious weekend camp. Both moments in my life link personal and political crises.

Aged ten, I became trapped in the Community Charge demonstrations in Trafalgar Square, more commonly known as the Poll Tax Riots. On a school trip to London on the 31st March 1990, we were innocently caught up in the riots after heading to Trafalgar Square to catch the coach home. I have a distinct memory of parents circling around us in a shield and, as I looked out across the Square as protestors and police clashed, a man climbed a statue of a horse and threw a brick, someone put a metal dustbin through a McDonald's window, and the streets were full of smoke and chaos. For several hours our anxious parents and teachers tried to protect us and move us to safety while the conflict carried on around us. The Community Charge demonstrations were a series of protests across the UK in opposition to Margaret Thatcher's new Community Charge, first applied in Scotland in 1989 and intended to replace Domestic Rates in England. The Charge was largely opposed in the UK because it promoted economic inequality due to a tax per person regardless of financial or housing situation. As Paul Hoggett and Danny Burns, and Paul Bagguley wrote between 1991 and 1995, in the years following the demonstrations, the removal of the poll tax eleven months after its introduction was down to mass collective action across the nation, supported locally by Anti Poll Tax Unions, and fourteen million people who refused to pay the tax.⁵⁶ Or in relation to the community and collective consciousness of the 'poor people's movement' or 'revenge of the poor', Jon Tonge notes the collective action as a pressure movement.⁵⁷ The Poll Tax demonstration in London was the largest of the demonstrations and the aftermath and social fallout began the end of Thatcher's period of power. John Major who was elected as successor to Thatcher replaced the Community Charge with the Council Tax in 1993.

Under a year later, aged eleven, I attended a retreat, organised by the local church. I sat watching the jets fly from the left to the right of the screen during a TV news feature. The jets were F15s and F16s and marked the aerial conflict to expel Iraqi troops after they had invaded Kuwait. A coalition of forces convened by Margaret Thatcher and George Bush deployed

⁵⁶ Paul Hoggett and Danny Burns, "The revenge of the poor: the anti-poll tax campaign in Britain," *Critical Social Policy* 11, no. 33 (1991): 95-110. And Paul Bagguley, "Protest, poverty and power: a case study of the anti-poll tax movement," *The Sociological Review* 43, no. 4 (1995): 693-719.

⁵⁷ Jon Tonge, "The Anti-Poll Tax Movement: a Pressure Movement?," *Politics* 14, no. 3 (1994): 93-99.

troops into the area. After aerial and ground combat Kuwait was eventually liberated from Iraqi forces in February 1991. I remember the jets vividly as I really had not wanted to go on the weekend camp. I sat on an old 3-seater couch in a red bricked youth hostel while the images flickered in front of me. The jets were deployed on January 17th, 1991, my eleventh birthday. The socio-political conflict of the poll tax riots, and the geo-political conflict of the Gulf War happened at a time of personal transformation. I was questioning the religious doctrine I had been immersed in during my childhood. My experience of that day in March 1990 formed part of a loss of innocence that extended into my teens. These big political moments matched my own questioning, understanding and expansion of the world. In my notebook, I recorded these memories, in-between notes on the practical and theoretical re-evaluation of the essay film form that started in the early years of the 1990s, as I discussed in the opening to my thesis, *This Space is Under Construction*.

Authorial Crises and Surrogacy

There is a rhetorical narrative conflict at play in my layering of my text onto the sequence of images in the work. Moitessier is a dichotomy; he is a realisation of both my subjective and objective positions. Moitessier is an invention, a character to function as a spectre or cipher to hang or test out ideas through a narrative rhetorical strategy. He is author and non-author. Moitessier is a figurative mechanism, a way to experiment with a blur of fictional and factual writing. The essayistic wanderings of his journals bring together a mix of creative passages and theory, applied and tested as narration to image and sound. Moitessier is a surrogate and the female voice over that recounts Moitessier's experiences is a surrogacy of the surrogate. These levels of surrogacy provided critical distance on the form and content of the notebook films. He, she, or I, interweave and bring to life a self-reflexive process. He, she, or I, is creative and critical.

The invention of a character like Moitessier is a practice that has been used by many essay film makers. For example, the disembodied narrator and spectre of a character emblematised by Chris Marker in *Sans Soleil* (1983). Marker's rhetorical strategy is to use a nameless female narrator to read letters from a traveling cameraman, Sandor Krasna, while the images he has recorded on his travels are shown on screen. The meta-images from Krasna's video archive, and in fact, from Marker's own video archive, jump temporally and spatially across the globe.

The images come from disparate places such as Japan, Guinea-Bissau, Paris, Iceland, the Cape Verde Islands, while Krasna's letters move the space and time of the text across past, present, and future locations. As David Montero observes, Krasna's remembrance of his journey is centred on the intersection of the axes of time and space.⁵⁸ Marker structures *Sans Soleil* using the interstice between the combination of the letters read over the images, a space that draws the viewer into a critical relationship of memory, political history and time in the filmic image.⁵⁹ In Patrick Keiller's films *London* (1994), *Robinson in Space* (1997) and *Robinson in Ruins* (2010) the character of Robinson is used, in part, to encounter Keiller's and Robinson's 'problem of London'.⁶⁰ A problem of the politics of capitalism and architectural space in relation to filmic space and time in the city. In the first of these films, *London*, Keiller takes inspiration from Daniel Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year* (1722)⁶¹ to introduce Robinson, 'a disenfranchised, would be intellectual, petty bourgeois part-time lecturer at the fictional University of Barking'.⁶²

Marker's and Keiller's authorial crises play out through the spectres of Krasna and Robinson and like their authors, both characters are way finders. Krasna's drift is one of memory, charting the unreliable narration of the self through memory and critiquing the representation of the past in the cinematic image. As Montero notes, 'the Proustian pleasure of remembering coexists with the necessity to understand the functioning of time and memory, as well as their relationship with the film image'.⁶³ While Robinson's journeying, presented by Keiller in *London* and *Robinson in Space* in a series of locked off stationary camera shots of architectural landscapes with textual readings layered over the top of the image sequences, is one of exploration and political critique. The realisation for Keiller that the decline both Robinson and he were observing was systemic, not down to inevitable economic failure, but to an economy controlled by an elite political class: 'the 'problem' that the film had set out to examine was revealed as the result of political decisions that could be challenged.'⁶⁴ Not only is Robinson

⁵⁸ David Montero, "Film also ages: time and images in Chris Marker's *Sans soleil*," *Studies in French Cinema* 6.2 (2006): 108.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Patrick Keiller, "London in the Early 1990s," in *The view from the train: Cities and other landscapes* (Verso Books, 2013), 86.

⁶¹ Daniel Defoe, *Journal of the Plague Year* (Penguin Classics, 2003).

⁶² Patrick Keiller, "London in the Early 1990s," in *The view from the train: Cities and other landscapes* (Verso Books, 2013), 86.

⁶³ David Montero, "Film also ages: time and images in Chris Marker's *Sans soleil*," *Studies in French Cinema* 6.2 (2006): 110.

⁶⁴ Patrick Keiller, "Introduction," *The view from the train: Cities and other landscapes* (Verso Books, 2013), 6.

adrift in the film but Keiller's character's namesake Robinson drifts across literary antecedents, from Daniel Defoe's novel *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), to a Robinson that appears in *Amerika* by Franz Kafka (1927): 'His name was borrowed from one of two itinerants in Kafka's *Amerika*, though at the time I wrote that he had been born in Shropshire'.⁶⁵

As a spectre, Moitessier is not there to deconstruct authorial position in a post-modern or post-structuralist sense. I was using Moitessier for a sincere research narrative, to move between modernist ideals of futurity, utopia and historical narrative, and postmodern tendencies of fragmentation, to try out this oscillation in my notebook film. My 'problem' at this stage was two-fold, one of form and one of information. Moitessier's agency problematises the occupation of a meta-narrative position in the essay form. I was testing Moitessier; I was testing myself through Moitessier. The character enacts a metaphysical critique of the characters that have been used in previous essay films, and how the disembodied narrator and spectre, translated as a literary device, can exist as praxis in the rhetorical strategy of the essay film form. I was testing this common strategy of the essay film to reveal the possibilities of expanded notions of the essay form. I was putting Moitessier into a state of crisis to test his figurative creation as part of an essayistic or essay-led research praxis in relation to my subjective position in the research. I tested what Moitessier could reveal to me and the viewer, as he drifted in space and time.

Later in the process, after producing the installation *Lorraine*, my use of Moitessier and the female narrator shifted. In *Capteur*, based on my autobiographic experiences of the Poll Tax Riot, I chose to use the manipulated voice to conceal the identity of the testimony, as I worked through an archaeology of crisis in the form and subject of the work. I discuss this relationship to crisis later in the thesis. And finally, in *The Black Prince*, which I discuss in the closing section, I chose to use my own voice. At this point in the process and after constructing the final installation which crystallised many of the processes, concepts and practices used in the research, I thought it was now appropriate to bring my own voice to the fore. This was a moment of vulnerability and realisation for me, a chance to play out the autobiography of the research but also the autobiography of my memories of the riot.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 7. Robinson also appears in Louis Ferdinand Celine's, *Journey to the End of the Night* (1932), and again in the character of Robinson (1993) by Chris Petit, written a year before London.

The Map of Truth

Prior to the writing of Moitessier's text in my notebook, I was in an overwhelming state of information overload. In this state I joined four tatty pieces of paper together and assembled a paper surface, a plane to chart points of interest that developed very quickly in the first months of my inquiry. It was my first essayistic assemblage. What emerged over the course of a day is a map I called *The Map of Truth*. I was drifting and I was in a zone of speculation. I knew truth was not what I was looking for. Rather, I was trying to reveal what was hidden, what was invisible in the constellated form on the paper. I was trying to enact the 'heresy' of the essayistic, as Theodor Adorno calls it. In his 1958 text, 'The Essay as Form', Adorno develops the argument for the written essay's ability to make visible the invisible through 'violations of the orthodoxy of thought', after Hans Richter's earlier treatment of visibility in the written essay and film essay.⁶⁶ In 1940, Hans Richter observed the emergence of 'a new type of documentary film', and on the problem of representation and visibility, and specifically using the example of how to show the function of the stock exchange as a market: 'One cannot rely on simply photographing the object...to reproduce the idea of the object...Even that which cannot be seen has to be made visible'.⁶⁷ Adorno, Richter and Lukacs encounter in the written essay what Deleuze encounters in the time-image, the critical relationship of the object and the idea, and the thought and the unthought. Essay forms have the potential to test the dichotomy of the visible and invisible, while the author is inhabiting moments of crisis on the critical relationship of representation and visibility.

My *Map of Truth* is both an essayistic tool and an object: a loose cartographic assemblage of ideas, theories, books, artists, quotes and works. I chartered fragmentary locations of thought on the four pages, with pathways, spaces, avenues, and relationships to explore. I created a landscape, zones were identified, and spaces noted. The map is an essay form. I was sense-making. I tested ideas. I explored my relationship to crises through an essayistic process. Down my pathway of crises, the form of the map realised itself. In my research I used the speculative development of this essayistic object, and the dichotomy of the visible / invisible and the

⁶⁶ Theodor W. Adorno, "The Essay as Form," in *Notes to Literature*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholson, vol. 1 (New York: Columbia UP), 19. And Hans Richter, "The Film Essay: A New Type of Documentary Film," in *Essays on the Essay Film*, ed. Nora M Alter and Timothy Corrigan (Columbia University Press, 2017), 90. Georg Lukács also considers the essay's treatment of visibility and invisibility in, "1. On The Nature and Form of The Essay," in *Essays on the Essay Film*, ed. Nora M Alter and Timothy Corrigan (Columbia University Press, 2017), 21-40.

⁶⁷ Hans Richter, "The Film Essay: A New Type of Documentary Film," in *Essays on the Essay Film*, ed. Nora M Alter and Timothy Corrigan (Columbia University Press, 2017), 90.

precondition of the form to crisis, manifested itself materially and metaphysically. The feature of crisis is a catalyst in the appearance and translation of essay forms, from written, to photo, to film, to installation.⁶⁸ As discussed in the opening section, *This Space is Under Construction*, the essay is inherently translatable. At the route of the dichotomy of visibility and invisibility in the essay form is the essence of the creation of language. As Nora Alter observes, Hans Richter's, thinking on the emergence of the film essay as a new type of documentary is linked with Walter Benjamin's theory of 'pure language' and the task of the translator: 'In all language and linguistic creations, there remains in addition to what can be conveyed something that cannot be communicated'.⁶⁹ What is hidden under water from what is visible on the surface, is ready to emerge, and this translation is there for both author and for the reader. What is hidden in the wilderness of my map of truth is ready to be explored.

Crisis as Form

Historically then, crisis has been a catalyst for essayistic translation.⁷⁰ A series of social, political, and economic crises and accompanying theoretical essayistic thinking are treated by authors in foundational texts on the written essay form. Timothy Corrigan and Nora Alter package these texts up helpfully in the book, *Essays on the Essay Film*.⁷¹ In 1910, the rise in criticism of the literary essay form is related by Georg Lukacs to the aesthetic crisis of the modernist art forms.⁷² Later, between 1930 and 1943, Robert Musil's writing explores how far the essay form can test the contemporary condition, prefiguring Adorno's text in 1958. Yet, following the atrocities of World War II, Max Bense accounts for the creative critical potential of the essay form: 'The essay serves the crisis and its conquest by provoking the mind to experiment, to configure things differently, but it is not simply an accent, a mere expression

⁶⁸ Nora Alter, "Crisis," in *The Essay Film After Fact and Fiction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 15.

⁶⁹ Hans Richter, "The Film Essay: A New Type of Documentary Film," in *Essays on the Essay Film*, ed. Nora M Alter and Timothy Corrigan (Columbia University Press, 2017). And Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969a) 69. And Nora M Alter, "Translating the essay into film and installation," *Journal of Visual Culture* 6.1 (2007): 50.

⁷⁰ Nora Alter, "Crisis," in *The Essay Film After Fact and Fiction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 15.

⁷¹ Nora M Alter and Timothy Corrigan, eds. *Essays on the Essay Film* (Columbia University Press, 2017), 8.

Including, Robert Musil, "2. From The Man without Qualities (1930-1943)," in *Essays on the Essay Film*, ed. Nora M Alter and Timothy Corrigan (Columbia University Press, 2017), 41-48.

⁷² Georg Lukács, "1. On The Nature and Form of The Essay," in *Essays on the Essay Film*, ed. Nora M Alter and Timothy Corrigan (Columbia University Press, 2017), 22.

of the crisis.⁷³ It is then Adorno in 1958 who develops further the theory on the creative critical potential of the written essay form as a 'critique of ideology'.⁷⁴

The essay does not try to seek the eternal in the transient and distil it out; it tries to render the transient eternal. Its weakness bears witness to the very non-identity it had to express. It also testifies to an excess of intention over object and thereby to the utopia which is blocked by the partition of the world into the eternal and the transient. In the emphatic essay thought divests itself of the traditional idea of truth.⁷⁵

The apparent through line in these texts is the opportunity in the essayistic work for experiment and critique at points of political, aesthetic, and ideological crises. There is thematic multilayering of crises in essayistic practices, substantiated by how technology shifts the essay form. For example, as Brenda Hollweg explores in her collection of articles on *World Cinema and the Essay Film: Transnational Perspectives on a Global Practice*, and as Nora Alter lays out in her chapter on the relation of the essay film's history to Third Cinema, the essay film developed across geographical contexts, and the form acted as mode of resistance in postcolonial contexts.⁷⁶ Third Cinema, as Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino viewed it, was the weaponization of the camera for revolution against colonialism, capitalist structures and Western, specifically Hollywood hegemonised cinematic practices, delivered as entertainment: 'The camera then becomes a gun, and the cinema must be a guerrilla cinema.'⁷⁷ Artists, working in this essayistic Third Cinema arena across geographical boundaries made films such as *Araya* (1959) by Margot Benacerraf, about workers extracting the salt from the sea off the Araya peninsula of Venezuela. Nora Alter draws attention to lesser-known works such as this and *Perfumed Nightmare* (1997) by Kidlat Tahimik, about the twice colonised ideology of the Philippines.⁷⁸ What Alter highlights is artist and essay

⁷³ Max Bense, "3. On The Essay and Its Prose (1948)," In *Essays on the Essay Film*, ed. Nora M Alter and Timothy Corrigan (Columbia University Press, 2017), 59.

⁷⁴ T.W. Adorno, "The Essay as Form," in *Notes To Literature*, Vol. 1. (New York: Columbia University Press (1993[1954–8])), 20.

⁷⁵ Theodor W Adorno, "4. The Essay as Form (1958)," in *Essays on the Essay Film*, ed. Nora M Alter and Timothy Corrigan (Columbia University Press, 2017), 68.

⁷⁶ Brenda Hollweg, ed. *World Cinema and the Essay Film: Transnational Perspectives on a Global Practice* (Edinburgh University Press, 2019). And. Nora M Alter, "New Migrations", in *The Essay Film After Fact and Fiction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 239-287.

⁷⁷ Fernando Solanas, and Octavio Getino, "Toward a third cinema," *Cinéaste* 4, no. 3 (1970): 1-10.

⁷⁸ In addition to artists working in this Third Cinematic way outside the West, such as Frantz Fanon's seminal work *Black Skin White Mask* (1952), artists in America such as Camille Billops and Larry Clark, working with others as the LA Rebellion in the 1990s, and Sankofa and Black Audio Film Collective in the 1980s and 1990s in the UK, challenged racism and the hegemony of Hollywood cinema from inside the West, in essayistic works

filmmaking practice that evidences the borderless capacity and cinematic diaspora of the essay film form.⁷⁹ The essay form, as evidenced further by Hollweg, is boundaryless and diasporic and has the creative critical potential for ideological critique.⁸⁰ Yet, in contrast to an authorial search and realisation of the truth, the form offers a fleeting semblance of 'utopia', a further rendering of the invisible and the visible.⁸¹

The Golden Record

The concrete steps below me were worn and steep. I took care as I descended to the platform. The usual symmetrical cavern of the underground train system with tracks on either side was replaced with a tiled floor. An empty space. A dull vibrating hum ached at me from the world above. Six door sized openings led off from the tiled floor. I looked at the map on the wall and traced my finger from door to door.

There is an image in the third iteration of my short notebook film, *The Golden Record*, in which the spinning Russian avant-garde architecture of Tatlin's Tower is shadowed on a drone flight above the ruined architecture of Chernobyl. I returned to a book I had brought a couple of years prior to starting my research, *Architecture of the Off-Modern* by Svetlana Boym, and read: 'What is at stake in dreaming of a conjectural history of modern architecture that never came to be?'⁸² I was moving sideways, through the 'side alleys and lateral potentialities of the project of critical modernity'⁸³, occupying the 'off', the in between spaces, moving through these passages and zones. I revisited *The Map of Truth*, I imagined a hidden map, an underground map, linking the sites and spaces of interest. A fictional reality subway map. I thought of Robert Smithson on his tour of the monuments of Passaic: 'that unimaginative

such as *The KKK Boutique Ain't Just Rednecks* (1995), *Who Killed Colin Roach* (1983) and *Handsworth Songs* (1986).

⁷⁹ Nora M Alter, "New Migrations", in *The Essay Film After Fact and Fiction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 239-287.

⁸⁰ Brenda Hollweg, ed. *World Cinema and the Essay Film: Transnational Perspectives on a Global Practice* (Edinburgh University Press, 2019).

⁸¹ Nora M Alter, "Translating the essay into film and installation," *Journal of Visual Culture* 6.1 (2007): 48. And T.W. Adorno, "The Essay as Form," in *Notes To Literature*, Vol. 1. (New York: Columbia University Press (1993[1954-8])), 20 & 68.

⁸² Svetlana Boym, *Architecture of the Off-modern*, Vol. 2 (Princeton Architectural Press, 2008), 4.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

suburb could have been a clumsy eternity, a cheap copy of *The City of Immortals*.⁸⁴ I allowed myself to drift, through the notes in my notebook, and across the early edit of *Concrete Ghosts*. I inhabited a hinterland. The 'cinematic borderland' and 'rejected film clips' of Smithson's *Atopia*.⁸⁵ I read an article about *The Golden Record*.

The *Golden Record* is at once deeply profound and absurd. The *Golden Record* is a twelve-inch copper disc put on board the twin *Voyager* Spacecrafts 1 and 2 and sent into space in 1977 by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). The disc contains a series of images, sounds, audio recordings, and greetings in fifty-five languages, selected for NASA by a committee chaired by the astronomer Carl Sagan. The disc was designed by Linda Salzman and there are instructions on the front of the disc with the intention it be translated by extra-terrestrial life. On September 12, 2013, The *Voyager 1* Space craft that holds the *Golden Record* travelled into interstellar space, the probe was recorded as the first human made object to travel into this zone. The craft is the most distant human made object in the Universe.

The *Golden Record* is a time capsule and a method of communication that now speaks to a known past and an unknown future. The idea of the disc was ambitious and reflected the cultural and technological ambition of NASA's space travel during this period. The material on the disc is an archive and the fragmentary makeup of the selection when joined together can be read as an essayistic mode, an experiment, and a test of communication. The archive is a representation of a civilisation, but how do we read the images and sounds now, as post-decolonial panic? One-hundred and fifteen Images and sounds, and fifty-five greetings selected by a committee, part of the government of the most powerful nation on Earth and pressed to a record to be sent into space for communication with unknown life. The *Golden Record* drifts through space and time.

My first iteration and translation of *The Golden Record* from *Concrete Ghosts* asks the viewer to drift through and encounter the images and audio in the edited sequence. The images in the film are made up from archive material including the Poll Tax Riot, the concrete

⁸⁴ Robert Smithson, "A tour of the monuments of Passaic, New Jersey," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings* (University of California Press, 1996), 73.

⁸⁵ Robert Smithson, "A Cinematic *Atopia*," in *Robert Smithson: the collected writings* (University of California Press, 1996), 139.

interchange Spaghetti Junction in Birmingham, an abandoned airport in Spain, the construction of RAF Fylingdales, the ruin of Chernobyl, the construction of a model of Tatlin's Tower, and some of the images from *The Golden Record*. The sound design is made up from a reading of Moitessier's journals, the sound effects and music taken from *The Golden Record*, a drone flight above Chernobyl, and background noise from an editing session at Leeds Animation Workshop in 2014. Terry Wragg from Leeds Animation Workshop voices the reading of Moitessier's journals. The film is edited in five approximate parts with black sections of video of differing lengths punctuating and creating pausing states between the audio-visual sequences. In the opening section of the film black video plays out as the sound effect, simply titled *Life* from *The Golden Record*, occupies the sonic space. There is a low-level hum, interference and a faint heartbeat or tapping, and what sounds like walking in gravel or breathing closely and faintly through a microphone. Your senses are attuned to the textual layering of the sonic space. As the black section of the film is left on screen, in one moment you could be stood late at night in the middle of the city as someone approaches, or aboard a train with your face and ear pressed against the carriage wall, or maybe the sounds are from the womb. Your mind constructs its own zone.

Pausing States and Soft Montage

As the maker I drifted through my assemblage of the material in the sequence. I re-edited, reconstructed and wrote new audio-visual layers on to the palimpsest of crises that began in *Concrete Ghosts*. I acted with free association, speculation, and play. At times, my process of drift was much like a destination-less walk in a new city, uncovering architecture, landmarks, and points of interest, happened upon by chance. My strategy was to use non-linear editing in the same way as a sculptor may use clay, to apply and to remove, to work and to shape, until I arrived at a form I was emotionally satisfied with. I occupied a zone for a while, an intimate personal relationship with the material. In the same way as moving from fragment to fragment of text in a notebook, or points on a map, the viewer reads the visual and sonic syntax and grammar of *The Golden Record's* audio-visual language in both a fragmentary and adjoined movement. I included black video in between the images with the intention that the black space will offer the viewer a moment to pause: a moment to think and a moment of becoming. I brought the interstice into play. The black space and the fade between images encourage the viewer to actively participate in the shifting spatial temporal zones of the film.

The black space creates a pausing state for the viewer's construction.⁸⁶ Chris Marker uses this technique in *La Jetee* (1962) and *Sans Soleil* (1982). For example, in the opening sequence of *San Soleil*, the viewer is shown three girls walking across a field, then black space, then a fighter jet being lowered into an aircraft carrier, then black space. The voiceover reads: 'One day I'll have to put it all alone at the beginning of a film, with a long piece of black leader, if they don't see happiness in the picture, at least they'll see the black'.⁸⁷ Inspired by Jean Luc Godard's *Numero Deux* (1975), and in opposition to Sergei Eisenstein's theory of montage, Harun Farocki developed an associative idea to Marker's, in his installation practice, starting with his double projection, *Schnittstelle (Interface) in* (1995). Farocki's concept of 'Soft montage' eschews the stricter paired image syntax of Eisenstein for a looser assemblage of collective images. As Farocki formalises the images in the double projection of *Interface*, this arrangement allows for a steady layering of meaning, enacted by the cut or the interstice.⁸⁸ The images in a 'soft montage' approach may be arranged, edited or installed in groups, constellations or assemblages to allow a slower build of meaning across multiple associations. This slow build of meaning creates a textural layering or palimpsestic application of form, content. Farocki's 'soft montage' was an approach I became very attached to during my practice and across all of my works in the research I applied this technique for building meaning through the layering of images, sounds and fragments, whether single channel notebook film, or installed multi modal and medium form. In between the soft montage I punctuated the works with the black space.

A Meta-Essayistic Praxis

The Golden Record spins slowly on screen as the low-level sound effect titled *Spheres* provides the sonic accompaniment to the turning of the disc. The greetings from Earth start to play out, language after language. The narrator reads about when she first met Moitessier:

I first met Moitessier at a conference in Sheffield in 1989. He told me 'Modernist utopian ruins live on in the mediated images of the world, increasingly more perfect and unreal...From the first click of the switch that exposed that negative material to light, film was a medium in Ruin.'⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Timothy Corrigan, *The essay film: from Montaigne, after Marker* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 49.

⁸⁷ *Sans Soleil: Sunless*, directed by Chris Marker (Argos Films, 1982).

⁸⁸ Nora M Alter, "Two or Three Things I Know about Harun Farocki," *October* 151 (2015): 151.

⁸⁹ Text from *The Golden Record – First Iteration* (2016).

I prefixed the term *meta* to my essayistic praxis. My praxis is a cyclical process of practice and critical reflection brought about through my engagement with the conditions and characteristics of the essayistic. The *meta* refers to oscillation. There is a meta-narrative at play in the notebook films. Moitessier's journal entry is a fictional account that also reveals the essayistic praxis at the heart of my essaying, at the heart of my research. There is the metaphor of Moitessier and a formal metamorphosis of crises: starting with the text on the map, then in the fragmentary relationship of notes on adjoining pages in the notebook, and then in the reconstructed palimpsest of crises in the iterated moving image and sound sequences of *The Golden Record*. And then there is oscillation, between the essayistic objects and forms I am working with, and between the locations, spaces, and times of the ideas I and the viewer are working with in *The Golden Record*. I/he writes in his journal and the text is read in *The Golden Record*:

He was adamant there is no definition for off-disciplinary, to try to define or categorise or surmise, he said, is to put one foot on the path towards discipline. Remain off-map, off-path, with two feet in no-man's land. Feel the terrain and feel at home here, he touched my shoulder, uncertain and explore. You can always return. He then showed me some pictures of the Atlantic wall.⁹⁰

In the last version of *The Golden Record* both the passages of text noted above have been removed and near the end of the film all that remains is the phrase, 'he touched my shoulder.' The ghost of Moitessier stands behind me with his hand on my shoulder. I decided to remove the passages as they provided a reflective point in the first iterations of the notebook films, but as the cycle of work entered a new translation, *The De-realisation Effect*, I felt that the final film should remain open, more ambiguous than previous versions. This would aid the process of returning to this final version of the work later to use the film as a starting point for a new creative process, much as the text states. I wanted to open the notebook film afresh. Through Moitessier, I synthesised processes of speculative practice and self-reflexive dialogue, mapping and reviewing, reflecting, revising, and iterating, to develop a series of emergent configurations. These essay forms and objects, including *Lorraine* and *Capteur*, which I discuss later in my thesis, emerged from the iterated notebook film *The Golden Record*.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

The meta-narrative performed a self-reflexive dialogue between practice and theory, and opened new essayistic and discursive documents to me, encountered in the essay zones of maps, journals and creative writing, and notebook films.

On the drums of Stravinsky's *Rites of Spring Sacrificial Dance* (1913), the space and time for the viewer is shifted again. A passage about the reading of Moitessier's will in Whitby is read as an unusual machine deconstructs itself. The drumbeat splices another audio sound effect from The Golden Record, Stravinsky has gone, and the sound of rain pouring down, alters our location and state of mind. The machine disappears and photos from The Golden Record start to appear systematically and structurally as the passage continues to be read and the rain falls.

After Moitessier's death, he had been twenty years my senior, I received an official looking letter in the post inviting me to the reading of his will in North Yorkshire. It was the Goth weekend in Whitby when I visited, I had not driven the route across the moors since 1991 and the golf balls at Fylingdales had been decommissioned and replaced with a monolithic concrete structure, the motto "Vigilamus", we are watching. At the reading, in which there were three people present, myself, the solicitor and Moitessier's daughter, I was informed that Moitessier had passed on to me his journals and one box of projector slides.⁹¹

I was compelled to reconstruct the carefully conceived catalogue of the Voyager Spacecraft's Golden Record. A catalogue of images, sound effects, and greetings to experiment with, to appropriate and to interweave into the edit of *Concrete Ghosts*. The images and audio exist as part of the disc, drifting in ruin through space and time aboard the Voyager Spacecraft. The images and audio also exist as data, abandoned in the archive of the global networked data servers, accessed via a browser, and then simultaneously this information occupies space in my personal archive, hard drive data, to be realised in the edit of my notebook film. The distance between the sets of data is vast, as far as is currently humanly possible, and paradoxically the proximity of the realised images is close. The images and audio I used in the film are ripped from YouTube and I interweaved a foundation of low res, rough, blurred and at times pixelated images. I was working with the alternative image economy and imperfect cinema of Hito Steyerl's 'poor images.'⁹² Steyerl is referring to the low res, copied, ripped, streamed images, video and films that are transferred as data around our information

⁹¹ Text from The Golden Record – First Iteration (2016).

⁹² Hito Steyerl and Franco Berardi, *The wretched of the screen* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012), 31-44.

networks; an alternative marginalised and resisted class of 'poor images' that exists at the peripheries of the common commercialised and marketed means of image production. Across my practice and the works created during my research I brought together fragmented spatial and temporal 'poor images' and sounds with narrated text entangled in an edited moving image sequence of soft montage. As Robert Smithson said in his short text, 'A Cinematic Atopia', 'I will allow the elsewheres to reconstruct themselves as a tangled mess'.⁹³ Smithson was problematising the possibility of a revolutionary utopia with, as Zachary Rottman calls them, 'an entropic nether-place of razed boundaries, ruined hierarchies, and obliterated categories'.⁹⁴ Yet, the tangled mess of Smithson's wilderness, 'the cinematic borderland', the 'landscape of rejected film clips', the 'neglected place'⁹⁵ is also the language forest of Walter Benjamin's translator:

Translation does not find itself in the center of the language forest but on the outside facing the wooded ridge; it calls into it without entering, aiming at the single spot where the echo is able to give, in its own language, the reverberation of the work in the alien one.⁹⁶

What is interesting is the liminal space of critical potentiality that exists both in the borderland and place of Smithson's Atopia, but also at the edge of Benjamin's language forest.

My film takes a dramatic turn in the interstice between an abstract image of neon lights and the next section, which starts the close of the film. The narrator reads a passage about Tatlin's ornithological interests. An unusual machine in the foreground of the lower half of the frame hovers in space with a backdrop of clouds. The machine has two mechanical arms and is slowly demolishing itself. Clouds of smoke and rubble spew from the internal deconstruction. The spinning disc of the Golden Record slowly fades in as Igor Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring Sacrificial Dance* (1913) plays out. The music dramatises the workings of the unknown machine. The viewer's spatial temporal recognition in the work is disrupted due to the shift to an unknown space, with the alien image of the machine contrasted with the familiarity of the music. The image and audio when played together provide a dichotomy of discord and harmony. There

⁹³ Robert Smithson, "A Cinematic Atopia," in *Robert Smithson: the collected writings* (University of California Press, 1996), 138.

⁹⁴ Zachary Rottman, *A Cinematic Atopia: Robert Smithson and the Filmic Afterlife of the Soviet Avant-Garde* (University of California, Los Angeles, 2020).

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969a 69), 70 & 76.

is meta-fiction at play in this sequence as it draws the viewer to the self-reflexive construction of the film. This piece of music has been used in films since the 1940s, when it was used in *Fantasia* (1940), and could be considered a cliché, but the piece was chosen for *The Golden Record* and retains equality with any other material stored on the disc, as well as haunting the images with the sonic history of film. There is a metamorphosis enacted as the machine deconstructs itself and the viewer is presented with a spatial-temporal other, an alternative landscape, and a science fictional machine. There is self-reflexivity in the essayistic practice itself and an autobiographical reconstruction asked of the viewer in the essayistic object. The question of the essay film's critical role, as stated by Hito Steyerl in her essay, *The Essay as Conformism*, is asked, 'Is its discontinuous and heterogenous form still capable of providing alternative forms of vision, knowledge, and grounds for discussion?'⁹⁷

The answer is yes. In *The Golden Record* there is a meta-essayistic praxis: an oscillation between the personal and the political; between the grand narrative and the problematising of this narrative in the rhetorical strategy of the notebook film; between distance and proximity; between the objective and subjective; between the fragmentary and the whole; between information and the image; between crisis and progress; between the post-modern and the modern; and beyond. There is metaxy, there is meta-modernism, there is oscillation between any number of poles. There is a prefix. There are meta-essayistic and meta-discursive documents. There is a meta essayistic praxis. The assertion that the essence of the essayistic work lies in the creation and translation of language, for author and reader, whether it be verbal, written, filmic, aesthetic or beyond, provides the opportunity to probe the dichotomy of the visible and the invisible, ideological critique, and to construct alternative visions of human-social-economic-political relations, however fleeting.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Hito Steyerl, "19. The Essay as Conformism? Some Notes on Global Image Economies (2011)," in *Essays on the essay film*, ed. Nora M Alter and Timothy Corrigan (Columbia University Press, 2017), 278.

⁹⁸ Ibid. And A. Michelson, *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, trans. K. O'Brien (University of California Press, 1995), 52.

Essayistic Resemblance and Assemblage

I'm an eye. A mechanical eye. I, the machine, show you a world the way only I can see it. I free myself for today and forever from human immobility...Freed from the boundaries of time and space, I co-ordinate any all points of the universe, wherever I want them to be. My way leads towards the creation of a fresh perception of the world. Thus, I explain in a new way the world unknown to you.⁹⁹

Dzigo Vertov (1923)

In the essay film the filmmaker is not bound by the depiction of external phenomena and the constraints of chronological sequences, but, on the contrary, has to enlist material from everywhere, the filmmaker can bounce around freely in space and time.¹⁰⁰

Hans Richter (1940)

The production of essays creates different links of people, images and sounds. They represent different constellations of technology, spectators and various audio-visual materials, disruptive movements of thought and affect which possibly undermine the status of images and sounds as mere commodities.¹⁰¹

Hito Steyerl (2011)

⁹⁹ Dzigo Vertov, "article, 1923," in *Ways of Seeing* by John Berger (Penguin UK, 2008).

¹⁰⁰ Hans Richter, "The Film Essay: A New Type of Documentary Film," in *Essays on the Essay Film*, ed. Nora M Alter and Timothy Corrigan (Columbia University Press, 2017), 90.

¹⁰¹ Hito Steyerl, "19. The Essay as Conformism? Some Notes on Global Image Economies (2011)," in *Essays on the essay film*, ed. Nora M Alter and Timothy Corrigan (Columbia University Press, 2017), 278.

The Derealisation Effect

In one temporal filmic movement in the opening sequence of *The De-realisation Effect*, the viewer is confronted with a slow zoom out and then in again, with a black pausing state in between. A large poster shows the destruction of a Syrian town, after it has been bombed, a ruinous landscape glued to a ruined section of the wall in east Berlin. Part of the essay's slippery formal logic is that it is innately transmutable and can transform space and time. I pulled and pushed the subjective and objective position of the image to transmute the perspective of the viewer. I intentionally disrupted the spatial-temporal locations of thought as they are layered and uncovered. The palimpsest of crises is revisited and produced, spatially, temporally, and metaphysically, in the movement of the image. The palimpsest has its own materiality; it is in the poster and the image, plastered on the wall. The fall of the Berlin wall marked geopolitical movement in the reconstituted governance of nations formerly under Soviet rule. Syria became a site of civil war and international geopolitical conflict, with the desire for power coming from both internal groups and other nations. In my film, the images of Syrian geo-politicised ruinous architecture are shown to have been used as a façade for the earlier geo-politicised ruined architecture of the Berlin Wall. The combination of the politics of the geography of both ruinous architectures, and the geographical and political spaces and times, converge in photographic eye upon photographic eye, on an art-politics-tourist monument in Berlin. But also, in the transmutable filmic movement testing de-realisation in my notebook film. The unreal position of the viewer is displaced as the geo-politicised space and time of the images morph.

Black Video. A building with a fake façade, a plastic covering displaying the exterior of a fictional building while the exterior of the real building is renovated behind the display. An electromagnetic hum fills the sonic space of the film. A misty island. A skull with red flashing eyes. The misty island appears again, the ruined architecture on the island is visible. The misty island is Alcatraz, and the flashing skull sits on a table in a house where the walls are collaged with newspaper articles, pictures, and photographs. The electromagnetic hum continues, and a song fades in: *Azerbaijan S.S.R., bagpipes*, recorded by Radio Moscow, chosen for The Golden Record. The viewer is left to drift in between the montage of photographic stills, taken on Alcatraz at night and the interior of the collaged room. On the map I created before the film was made, this section of the film is titled fictional space, and there is a note next to the

title of the section, *open architectures – spatial / cinematic experience*. The images of Alcatraz show the architecture inside the prison walls, but they also indicate how the space has been transformed for the films that have been shot on location there and the props and decoration that have been left behind.

There is an illusory performance to these images as a version of the real is applied to the real, in an architectural construction that was designed for containment, discipline, power and control and not for public show. The props and decoration in the prison mask the original decoration and furniture. I present another version of this kind of illusory performance in the film, in the collaged walls of the domestic space belonging to a friend of mine. He collaged his walls for fourteen years in an essayistic act that is vulnerable and confessional. The layering of images on his walls is deep and shows his relationship to the media images he is presented with, and his own artistic response. My description of this sequence in the film cannot convey the audio-visual sensory experience of viewing the images and hearing the sounds in conjunction with the flow of time and juxtaposition of different spaces. Although fragmentary in its material the film holds an invisible zone that is only enacted and entered whilst viewing.

Essayistic Resemblance and Assemblage

While the image movement is sequenced in the opening of *The De-realisation Effect*, the female narrator reads the following text from a journal:

His first mention of the de-realisation effect was after an appointment and conversation with his friend, a psychiatrist, who had told him that he had witnessed an increasing number of people and patients exhibiting the symptoms and effects. Moitessier had found it difficult to believe that what his friend had explained was real but agreed to keep a journal of thoughts, feelings, and observations.

After subsequent research in the pre-eminent journal *Psychiatry* colon *Psychiatry*, Moitessier had found the paper: *Retreat to the Make Believe* by Dr Sonia Gleeson, detailing a marked 10% increase in patients exhibiting de-realising symptoms attached to conditions such as anxiety and de-personalised disorders. Dr Gleeson had conducted a small survey of the public to ascertain whether people with stable mental

health were affected and to begin to understand potential attributing factors. Moitessier tracked Gleeson's findings.¹⁰²

The Derealisation Effect is an essayistic notebook film translated from *The Golden Record*. *The Derealisation Effect* becomes a work of its own, but like Walter Benjamin's description of the 'derivative' and contextual practice of translation, it 'calls into' *The Golden Record* 'without entering, aiming at the single spot where the echo is able to give, in its own language, the reverberation of the work in the alien one.'¹⁰³ The film is organised into seven parts combining archive material, newly shot footage in Las Vegas, San Francisco, Berlin and the UK, and more material taken from *The Golden Record*. The film's unfolding philosophy covers Bernard Moitessier's seven principles of *The Derealisation Effect*, seven assembled theory fictions from his journals: *Architecture of Post-reality*, *Fictional Space*, *The Cinematic Shadow*, *Moving Sideways*, *Concrete Ghosts*, *The Video Synthesizer*, *Decommissioned Reality*, and an Epilogue. Each section is titled with a word, phrase or aphorism drawn from the meta-essayistic praxis of my earlier investigations. The formal arrangement of audio-visual and textual material in the notebook film in each of the seven zones is speculative and worked up in free association, based on a map of the seven cinematic zones in the film.

In addition, I developed *The Map of Truth* into *The Map of Half Truth*, as well as creating a third map of potential essay forms. The works are plotted on this map with dotted lines as paths joining the forms and include: *The Golden Record*, a reconstructed notebook film; *The De-realisation Effect*; a journal or extended notebook film; *The Long Heavy Department*, an extended sonic essay; *Zona*, a performative cinematic essay; and *Porcupine*, an architectural cinematic essay. I later developed *Porcupine* into *Capteur*, which I discuss later in my thesis, and *The Long Heavy Department* and *Zona*, functioned as smaller scale works as part of my praxis. Next to each title on the map is a sketch of the work and the works are arranged in a constellated form. I was working with a resemblance of ideas across all the maps. I moved my thinking between the spatial temporal thematic organisation of these works, but also moved in between essayistic objects and processes.

¹⁰² Text from Moitessier's journal entry – *The Derealisation Effect*, 2017

¹⁰³ Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969a 69), 70 & 76. And Nora M Alter, "Translating the essay into film and installation," *Journal of Visual Culture* 6.1 (2007): 54.

The in between spaces, the speculative interstices (and this includes spatial movements in between sections where the viewer is immersed or drifts over image flows, like in the sequence in *The Derealisation Effect*) hold the spatial blueprint for creative critical intuition and thought. The open architectures of *The Derealisation Effect* lay the foundation for the open cinematic architectures discussed in the next section, *Essayistic Futurisms*. On making this work, I considered the map of forms and the map with seven zones. I considered the difficulty in definition of the essay form and key features of the form. I drafted two passages:

Essayistic Resemblance - Essayistic Resemblance repositions the essay in a constellation of art forms, a marker of creative critical practice, not privileging any one medium such as written text, photo, or film. Instead, and with a creative critical methodology that comprises features drawn from the historical canon of essay works, such as the critique of ideology, playfulness, irrationality, confession, amongst many others, the essay comprises a family of essayistic modes, be it sonic, moving image, installed, print, text based, all offer kinship to new spatial-temporal forms waiting to be revealed, that in turn have the potential to become philosophical, political, technological, and critical vehicles to weigh and assay ideas.

Essayistic Assemblage - The essayistic may be present in the assemblage of artefacts, a cinematic ecology, an arrangement of apparatus, the technological characteristics, and gestures that determine the form. The personal, public, abstract essay relationship unfolds through the politics, collection and show of architecture, apparatus, thematic and assemblage – a composition of thinking, reconstructed, re-encountered, unlikely, uncertain, problematised in the zone.

Varied essay forms can exist in a 'family of resemblances'¹⁰⁴ and in relation to one another. This essayistic family resemblance or essayistic resemblance releases the need for all features to be present in each essayistic work, and therefore the need for a strict definition or classification. In the article *Ur-Fascism*, Umberto Eco outlines fourteen features that, he argues, allow fascism to coagulate, in groups, communities or societies. Yet, Eco observes that not all fourteen features are needed to be present for fascism to organise itself.¹⁰⁵ Eco was drawing upon Ludwig Wittgenstein's idea of 'family resemblance', the notion that in games,

¹⁰⁴ Ludwig Wittgenstein and G. E. M. Anacombe, *Philosophical Investigations: The German Text*, trans. GEM Anscombe (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 27c.

¹⁰⁵ Umberto Eco, "Ur-fascism," *The New York review of books* 42.11 (1995): 12-15.

similar features may co-exist in certain games but not all games contain all the same features: 'we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail.'¹⁰⁶

The innate freedom of the essay form means it has the critical potential to work across a spectrum of materials, mediums, technologies, spaces, times, and assemblages. In the same way that I have a constellated set of essayistic objects and processes around me that can be brought into play when required, I have a set of essayistic features that can also be brought into play. The role of different features, their quality, their assertion, or substance that contribute to the make-up of the essayistic form, assembles an 'inner singularity', as Raymond Bellour calls it, that is a more pertinent consideration of the creative criticality of the work.¹⁰⁷ The essay film is like ethnographic film in that it has varied theoretical and practical perspectives and modes, and 'family resemblance' is a way of treating this group collectively. The question asked by P. Kerim Friedman, 'do we even need to define ethnographic (insert essayistic) film?'¹⁰⁸ What appears is a constellated set of features of the essay film, with core attributes that occur more frequently in works clustered centrally, and with features appearing less regularly in works, acting as peripheral points in the constellation, sometimes visible and sometimes not. This diagram is helpful for understanding this constellated form:

'1 2 3 4
abc bcd cde def

Suppose there is a series of political groups in which group one is characterized by the features abc, group two by the features bcd, and so on. Group two is similar to group one since they have two features in common; for the same reasons three is similar to two and four is similar to three. Notice that three is also similar to one (they have in common the feature c). The most curious case is presented by four, obviously similar to three and two, but with no feature in common with one. However, owing to the

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. And Ludwig Wittgenstein and G. E. M. Anacombe, *Philosophical Investigations: The German Text*, trans. GEM Anscombe (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 27c.

¹⁰⁷ Raymond Bellour, "15. The Cinema and The Essay as a Way of Thinking (2011)," in *Essays on the Essay Film*, ed. Nora M Alter and Timothy Corrigan (Columbia University Press, 2017), 237.

¹⁰⁸ P. Kerim Friedman, "Defining ethnographic film," in *The Routledge International Handbook of Ethnographic Film and Video* (Routledge, 2020), 15-29. And Kerim Friedman, "Do we even need to define ethnographic film?," *Savage Minds: Notes and Queries in Anthropology*, July 20, 2017, <https://savage minds.org/2017/07/20/do-we-even-need-to-define-ethnographic-film/>.

uninterrupted series of decreasing similarities between one and four, there remains, by a sort of illusory transitivity, a family resemblance between four and one.¹⁰⁹

Group four becomes a 'translation'¹¹⁰ of group one, showing the translatable nature of the essay form is akin to the 'illusory transitivity' mentioned. While I don't see a limit to the number of potential features of essayistic film, like Eco's fourteen features of fascism. In the same way, all the essayistic features are there to be brought into play, or not, depending on the direction of the author. Each essay comes with its set of critical features that offer resemblance to features in other essay modes. Essayistic resemblance dissuades and frees us from entering an entrapment of definition and allows the maker freedom to look more openly at the essay as a translatable ever-expanding form. Essayistic resemblance leaves open an equal potentiality and emancipatory space for new forms and draws on these interstices to provoke the inhabitation of new forms created in the spaces in between the formal resemblances. Essayistic resemblance and assemblage offer a loose and fluid critical making framework for future shape shifting forms.

Essaying the meta-morph

The essay expands. The line of text from Moitessier's journal that opened this section appears again in the final iteration of *The Golden Record*. This time the sequence has been reedited and includes new images, adding new meaning to the palimpsest of crises in the opening sequence. Images of a gnarled tree I photographed weathering in California appear next to images of a deserted Spanish airport, ruined infrastructure in the aftermath of an economic boom and bust, post 2008 financial crisis. The data for these images sit in disparate locations, on a memory card in my camera bag, on a hard drive on my computer, and again in the data archive of servers networked across the globe. The data exists in perfect stasis, waiting to be reinstated pixel by pixel, in the moving image. The real locations of the tree and the airport are sites of entropic ruin, exposed and in decay. For a moment, as part of an oscillating

¹⁰⁹ Umberto Eco, "Ur-fascism," *The New York review of books* 42.11 (1995): 12-15.

¹¹⁰ Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969a 69), 70 & 76. And Nora M Alter, "Translating the essay into film and installation," *Journal of Visual Culture* 6.1 (2007): 54.

essayistic holism, pixel by pixel, the images are reinstated, relived, encountered again in my notebook film. The images, and real spaces are both fragmentary, distant, and adjoined.

Iterative Essaying

The essay in a broad sense is fundamentally a freedom of movement in thought, an assemblage of locations of thought realised through a specific medium or media, in relation to the subject matter of the author's choosing. The interstice in the essay is not only found in the work itself but in the space in between works and extended bodies of work that can be thought of as 'acts of essaying', as Rick Warner calls them.¹¹¹ The key form of essaying up to the twentieth century was the written text. Michel de Montaigne's early conception and experiments with the literary essay in his published works, titled 'Essais'¹¹², in the sixteenth century, is often noted in Western literature as the beginning of the form. As Warner argues, 'Montaigne's volume is less a collection of discrete articles than an overlapping seemingly infinite series of trials, targets, exercises and meditations – a network of essaying.'¹¹³

There is no historical survey of essayistic features from indigenous knowledge sources, and this may well offer alternative versions of essaying and broaden the debate on the beginnings of the essayistic form. There is potential for a resemblance or a network of origins that is less concrete? Montaigne's practical process and method of detailed revisions and additions to his literary texts, over the course of writing and publishing his essays, often re-evaluating his earlier thoughts, is akin to artists' essayistic processes across forms right up to the present day. The reconstruction of the text by Montaigne is relatable to the work of essayistic filmmakers such as Jean-Luc Godard, Agnes Varda, Farocki, Alexander Kluge, and Peter Greenaway.¹¹⁴

Montaigne wrestled with the expansive nature of the essay form. Through a combination of idiosyncratic and introspective reflection, combined with philosophical exploration and rhetorical strategy, as Ann Hartle notes, Montaigne aimed not to educate or lecture but to journey through daily life and move from subject to subject, in a self-reflexive and expansive

¹¹¹ Rick Warner, "Montaigne and the Act of Essaying," in *Godard and the Essay Film: A Form That Thinks* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2018), 7.

¹¹² Michel de Montaigne, *The Completed Essays*, trans. M.A. Screech (London: Penguin Classics, 1995).

¹¹³ Rick Warner, "Montaigne and the Act of Essaying," in *Godard and the Essay Film: A Form That Thinks* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2018), 7.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, 8.

exploratory fashion.¹¹⁵ For example, the run of his subject titles in Book III, are 'On coaches, On high rank as a disadvantage, On the art of conversation, On Vanity, On restraining your will, On the lame, On physiognomy, On experience.'¹¹⁶ Montaigne's rhetorical strategy in his literary works was based on the French word 'essai', or 'attempt', a non-literary term, and drew inspiration from the apprentice at work, mastering his craft through repeated practice.¹¹⁷ The kinship with the artisan is self-proclaimed and the freedom of Montaigne's literary strategy can be seen in his refusal to attach himself to any specific philosophical system. As Antonia Szabari observes, Montaigne used his writing not to claim to advance knowledge but to test his mental and physical position in the everyday.¹¹⁸ Or as Dudley M Marchi, prefers to view the situation, Montaigne finds himself in a state of 'post-modern crisis', amidst new printing technologies, before public libraries, but with a saturation and abundance of scientific and philosophical knowledge, now at his fingertips via overwhelming volumes of printed documents. Montaigne attempted to make sense of this infinite amount of knowledge through his writing, as Marchi notes: 'a piecing together of his personality through a collage-like appropriation of texts and events ("ce fagotage de tant de diverses pieces") as the only way to organize the chaos of his experience.'¹¹⁹

Montaigne's fragmentary, open natured and freeform linking of observations through the essay mode exposes a vulnerability linked to his human condition. In some cases, this vulnerability borders arrogance, in 'On Vanity', Montaigne writes:

I change subject violently and chaotically. My pen and my mind go aroaming. If you do not want more dullness you must accept a touch of madness, so say the precepts of our past masters and, even more so, their example. There are hundreds of poets who drag and droop prosaically, but the best of ancient prose? and I scatter prose here no

¹¹⁵ Ann Hartle, "The Invisibility of Philosophy in the "Essays of Michel De Montaigne," *The Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. 65, No. 4 (June 2012): 795.

¹¹⁶ Michel de Montaigne, *The Completed Essays*, trans. M.A. Screech (London: Penguin Classics, 1995), 1017 – 1207.

¹¹⁷ Rick Warner, "Montaigne and the Act of Essaying," in *Godard and the Essay Film: A Form That Thinks* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2018), 7.

¹¹⁸ Antonia Szabari, "parler seulement de moy: The Disposition of the Subject in Montaigne's Essay, De l'art de conferer," *MLN Comparative Literature Issue*, Vol. 116, No. 5, (December 2001): 1001.

¹¹⁹ Dudley M. Marchi, "Montaigne among the postmoderns: Chaillou and Sollers reading the Essais," *French Review* (1995): 581.

differently from verse? sparkles throughout with poetic power and daring and presents the characteristics of its frenzy.¹²⁰

Montaigne worked through his own personal crisis, the problem of the unreformed soul, a contentedness that philosophy alone cannot heal.¹²¹ This is then confirmed and presented in the continued detailed re-evaluation of his own thoughts. Montaigne added to the essayistic assemblage of his writing over a period of twenty-five years. Montaigne's process of publishing repeated volumes with additions and revisions creates a practice of essaying that is greater than the sum of its parts. These layers of revision are evident in the following passage. The periods in which Montaigne rewrote or added to the texts are helpfully highlighted by Thomas Newkirk. The original elements of the text were published in 1580, with [B] added in 1588 and [C] in 1590-1592:

'[B] I change subjects violently and chaotically. [C] My pen and my mind both go a-roaming. [B] If you do not want more dullness you must accept a touch of madness, [C] so say the precepts of our past masters and, even more so, their example. [B] There are hundreds of poets who drag and droop prosaically, but the best of ancient prose? [C] and I scatter prose here no differently from verse? [B] sparkles throughout with poetic power and daring, and presents the characteristics of its frenzy.'¹²²

In the third iteration of *The Golden Record* the text is also performed or tested again. This time it accompanies moving image footage I filmed of the demolition of the West Yorkshire Police Headquarters in the centre of Leeds (2014-2015). I overlaid the moving image with a still of a diagram of family ages, taken from NASA's Golden Record. The Police HQ, which covered investigations such as the high-profile case of the Yorkshire Ripper (1975–1980), was demolished in 2014, to make way for a John Lewis flagship store. In *The Golden Record*, the silhouettes of the family ages ride atop the crumbling building as it is flattened by the mechanical yellow arm of a crane. I reopened and re-evaluated the material and adopted an act of essaying across my essayistic objects and forms: the maps, notebooks, and notebooks

¹²⁰ Michel de Montaigne, *The Completed Essays*, trans. M.A. Screech (London: Penguin Classics, 1995), 1125.

¹²¹ See the notes in the introduction to Montaigne, "On Vanity," in *The Completed Essays*, trans. M.A. Screech (London: Penguin Classics, 1995), 1070. And. Dudley M. Marchi, "Montaigne among the postmoderns: Chaillou and Sollers reading the Essais," *French Review* (1995): 581.

¹²² Thomas Newkirk, "Montaigne's Revisions," *Rhetoric Review*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (2005): 298.

films. My act of reworking, reediting and repeating images and audio from film to film can be read by the viewer as an iterative response to the layers of crisis in the form and content of my notebook films. This iterative response of alterations and amendments is in direct link to Montaigne's edits of his text. I then developed this act of essaying across all the works during my research. All works can be conceived as live, ready to be reconstructed, and were provisional tools, and processes, acts of expanded essay making to reveal the creative critical potentiality as part of my meta essayistic praxis, and my art and film research methodology.

The Essay Expands

The relationship of the author to the subject matter to the viewer, in the open movements of the essay, between locations of thought, is further complicated through the dichotomy of the objective and subjective position of the essayistic, in relation to the spectre of the author.¹²³ The essay's innate freedom of movement in thought encourages a slippery formal logic. As Aldous Huxley described the essay: 'a literary device for saying almost everything about almost anything.'¹²⁴ The word 'essay', as Nora Alter notes, is routed via the Latin *ex-agere* to agents to human agency.¹²⁵ Human agency, its subjective and objective tensions and crisis are all at play; and in this relationship is the act of play itself.¹²⁶ Montaigne's additions and re-evaluations of his previous writings imply: 'the abundance of joyous energy that never exhausts itself in the game.'¹²⁷ Building on this view from Jean Starobinski, Warner uses Montaigne's writings as evidence for his act of essaying: 'essaying is thus a diachronic affair that spins a web of reflections across the essayist's expanding oeuvre over time.'¹²⁸ The essay is an open and self-reflexive form, one that is exploratory and self-aware, knowing and contradictory, and readily available to be turned in on itself at the drop of a word, or image.

¹²³ Joram Ten Brink, "The Essay Film," (PhD diss., Middlesex University, 1999), 16. And. Nora M Alter, "Translating the essay into film and installation," *Journal of Visual Culture* 6.1 (2007): 45. And Erich Auerbach, "Mimesis," trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, NJ 1968), 310.

¹²⁴ Aldous Huxley, "5. Preface to The Collected Essays of Aldous Huxley (1960)," in *Essays on the Essay Film*, ed. Nora M Alter and Timothy Corrigan (Columbia University Press, 2017), 83.

¹²⁵ Nora M Alter, "Translating the essay into film and installation," *Journal of Visual Culture* 6.1 (2007): 45.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, and reference to Adorno's characterisation of play in the essay form, 47.

¹²⁷ Jean Starobinski, "Can One Define the Essay?," in *Essayists on the Essay: Montaigne to Our Time*, ed. Carl H. Klaus and Ned Stuckey-French, trans. Lindsey Scott (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2012), 112-113.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.* And Rick Warner, "Montaigne and the Act of Essaying," in *Godard and the Essay Film: A Form That Thinks* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2018), 7.

The image of Syria pasted onto the Berlin Wall offered me the opportunity to turn the image in on itself in one filmic movement. I encountered the site and the image on the wall on a walk in September 2016, a chance encounter. Prior to this I had decided to stop using expensive cameras and work with the smart technologies of the everyday. I was capturing still and moving images with my smartphone, using the camera and phone as a notebook and pen. I was working with 'affordable' personal technology. My smartphone had become my image diary, my video notebook. I haunted the physical sites; I reencountered them in the data and information of my images. In 1948, Alexander Astruc offered us a vision of the future not so far removed from my essayistic smartphone notebook films, where 'cinema replaces the pen': 'Little by little, film replaces paper or canvas as the privileged medium on which is inscribed or projected the film of personal obsessions.'¹²⁹ In the present, through the availability of smartphones, the democratisation of technology enables this morphing of the essay form. Anyone with accessible consumer technology, for example a smartphone can create an essayistic work, therefore an essayistic resemblance of form takes place in relation to the essay films created on traditional cinematic film cameras. Astruc's prophetic rendering of the amateur writing his confessions with a 16mm Pollard, 'le camera-stylo',¹³⁰ the cinema pen, at his or her parents dining room table was salient.

However, technological innovation accelerated, and additions were made, the 16mm camera found new siblings in the 1980s and 90s with the video camera and subsequently the advent of video tape gave birth to digital video, and this medium, a stop in line to the mobile phone, mass data and information networks, a 9:16 aspect ratio, effects and content driven aesthetic for the 2010 and 20s. New forms of essaying exist at our technological disposal. For example, Hito Steyerl's essayistic installation *Factory of the Sun* (2015) takes the form of a computer game, with the character Yulia, a computer programmer and the author for the work. Steyerl uses the game to set up a motion capture studio and virtual reality as the basis for slave labour production, where individuals' motion is transformed into light and artificial sunshine.¹³¹ Steyerl is engaging critically with the financial capitalisation of data through human use of digital networks as the digital transfer of the individual's movement to the medium of light is economised. In contrast to Steyerl's complex and multi layered approach to the paradigm of

¹²⁹ Alexandre Astruc, "7. The Future of Cinema (1948)," in *Essays on the Essay Film*, ed. Nora M Alter and Timothy Corrigan (Columbia University Press, 2017), 96.

¹³⁰ Alexandre Astruc, "The birth of a new avant-garde: La caméra-stylo," *The New Wave* (1968): 17.

¹³¹ Hito Steyerl, "Factory of the Sun, 2015," retrieved from *The National Gallery of Victoria*: https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/media_release/hito-steyerl-factory-of-thesun.

capitalism and post-human digital production, Leo Berkley uses the smartphone in his essayistic short film *The 57* (2013) to capture the everyday journey of the number 57 tram in Melbourne.¹³² What I find interesting about Berkley's work is the use of smartphone technology as a tool to diarise the everyday moments of our society and due to the proliferation of the smartphone globally that this tool offers the creative critical potential for developing alternative image economies outside formal routes of image production. The smart phone used to present data on social media, revealed through the amateur upload, is Astruc's: 'camera in the right pants pocket.'¹³³

While essayistic film has its place in cinema and film studies, essaying also exists in everyday life, through individual mobile phone data uploads and the myriad of subjective showings of personal visible and invisible tensions on social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. The essay does not privilege a medium. Essaying may exist in the intellectual offerings of the filmmaker or the artist, but essaying also exists in the amateur test, in the home movie, the video diary, the online archive, the data store, the vlog, YouTube. Essaying exists in the uploaded information, or the present digital state of writing our confessions on social media. As Thomas Elsaesser concludes: 'the social is now understood not in terms of social units such as the family, the tribe, the religious community, the nation, but is figured in terms of globally mediated social networks.'¹³⁴ Collective essaying of information as data across spatial networks, be it conscious or inversely revealing, the essayistic has a plasticity and flexibility that operates in the hybrid spaces of our social technological times and encompasses the many states of our human condition, however contradictory. As Nora Alter states: 'the essay film produces complex thought that at times is not grounded in reality but can be contradictory, irrational, and fantastic.'¹³⁵ The contemporary influencer is a type of essayist, in capital and commodity driven, veiled self-reflexivity, and subjective personal states of expression. Data is capital, and content is sovereign, spectacle is swiped. Yet, essaying exists

¹³² Leo Berkeley, "Tram travels: Smartphone video production and the essay film," in *Mobile media making in an age of smartphones* (Palgrave Pivot, New York, 2014), 25-34.

¹³³ Alexandre Astruc, "7. The Future of Cinema (1948)," in *Essays on the Essay Film*, ed. Nora M Alter and Timothy Corrigan (Columbia University Press, 2017), 98.

¹³⁴ Thomas Elsaesser, "16. The Essay Film: From Film Festival Favorite to Flexible Commodity Form? (2015)," in *Essays on the Essay Film*, ed. Nora M Alter and Timothy Corrigan (Columbia University Press, 2017), 256.

¹³⁵ Nora M Alter, *Projecting history: German nonfiction cinema, 1967-2000* (University of Michigan Press, 2009), 7-8. And Laura Rascaroli, "The essay film: Problems, definitions, textual commitments," *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 49.2 (2008): 27. And Thomas Elsaesser, "16. The Essay Film: From Film Festival Favorite to Flexible Commodity Form? (2015)," in *Essays on the Essay Film*, ed. Nora M Alter and Timothy Corrigan (Columbia University Press, 2017), 256.

in the alternative smartphone image economy of Berkley's film *The 57*. The essay is not loyal, there are no allegiances. As Hito Steyerl points out, 'essays... are no longer the exotic 'other' of a drab and repetitive social reality. They now look uncannily similar...to a zapping spree with a voice over, or maybe just to a Sunday afternoon remix context on YouTube.'¹³⁶ Commodity driven essaying across social media and data networks is just one form. The essay expands.

Essaying is greater than the sum of its individual parts. What was revealed to me through my research practice are thematic aesthetic political concerns that are reopened and reencountered in iterations, revisions, reconstructions of the developing essay forms. While I locate these developing aesthetic political concerns in a working resemblance of zones and essayistic features and objects, like the locations of thoughts in an essay, I realised that a collective 'act of essaying'¹³⁷ is enacted by scholars and artists on and in the essay form itself, expanding our understanding of it. What has been important for my research project is the distance and proximity of the features and the proportions of qualities enacted by the author(s) in the creation of an essayistic form, and the creative critical potential for expansion that is held in their spatial-temporal interrelationship and disruption of the material. The essay form 'does not obey rules', as Jean Starobinski is quoted as saying; and as Laura Rascaroli notes, the essay form has sparked much consternation and is treated as problematic to define, but within this is the pleasure of the puzzle.¹³⁸ The essay is linked by a 'Joyous energy' as Starobinski calls it, Wittgenstein's language game, and Montaigne's philosophical search.¹³⁹ The author may embark on joyfulness of the problem, the puzzle, the game, the play and then criticality is what is at stake in the process of discovery.

The essayistic is a meta-morph, a shape-shifting form, enacting thinking operations in locations of meta-critical thought, or in states of meta-crises. Essayistic forms are shapeshifters, anamorphs, meta-morphs, whatever the authors, want them to be. The act of

¹³⁶ Hito Steyerl, "19. The Essay as Conformism? Some Notes on Global Image Economies (2011)," in *Essays on the essay film*, ed. Nora M Alter and Timothy Corrigan (Columbia University Press, 2017), 276-77.

¹³⁷ Rick Warner, *Godard and the Essay Film: A Form that Thinks* (Northwestern University Press, 2018), 7.

¹³⁸ Jean Starobinski, quoted in Suzanne Liandrat-Guigues, "Un Art de l'équilibre," in *L'Essai et le cinema*, ed. Suzanne Liandrat-Guigues and Murielle Gagnebin (Seysse: Champ Vallon, 2004), 8. And Laura Rascaroli, "The essay film: Problems, definitions, textual commitments," *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 49.2 (2008): 24-47

¹³⁹ Jean Starobinski, "Can One Define the Essay?," in *Essayists on the Essay: Montaigne to Our Time*, ed. Carl H. Klaus and Ned Stuckey-French, trans. Lindsey Scott (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2012), 112-113. And Ludwig Wittgenstein and G. E. M. Anacombe, *Philosophical Investigations: The German Text*, trans. GEM Anscombe (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 27c. And. Michel de Montaigne, "On Vanity," in *The Completed Essays*, trans. M.A. Screech (London: Penguin Classics, 1995), 1070.

essaying and the expansiveness of the form is revealed in the distance and proximity and the creative potentiality of the in between state, in the essayistic resemblance of features brought into play through (In)visibility and Crisis, and in the objective and subjective relation of human agency to the social, the technological, and the political. If expansion was not a permanent and vital characteristic of the practice of essaying, there would not be so many essayistic works across disciplines, histories, and places. The author's act of testing locates thoughts and ideas in a formal relationship with each other, however intentional or unintentional, however purposeful or subversive. In the location of these points of thought by the author, the creative critical potential of new states is enacted in their interstices. The invisible zone is there to be rendered visible: the essay expands.



1



1



3



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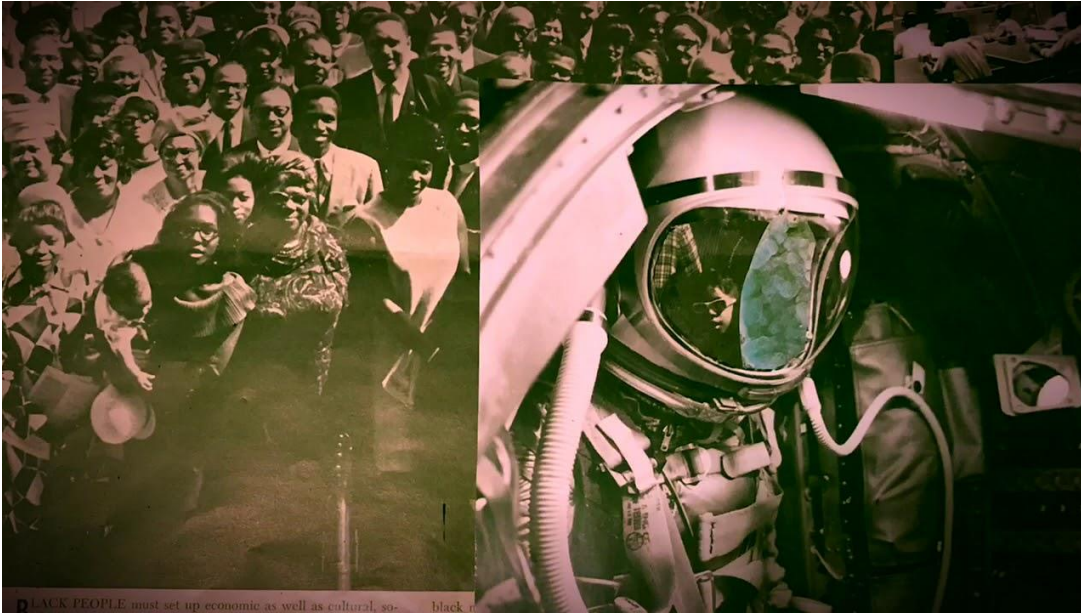
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8



9



10

Images

1. Fishing huts and ruined industry at the South Gare, Teesside. (Obsolete AGFA camera)
2. Kirkstall Electricity Substation (Obsolete AGFA camera)
3. Looking out from a derelict fishing boat to distance industry at the South Gare (Infrared DSLR)
4. *Lorraine* installation view (2017)
5. The Lorraine Motel, West Memphis
6. Postcard and photograph collage with cut out and lifted image, *Lorraine* (2017)
7. Postcard and photograph collage, *Lorraine* (2017)
8. Promenade Funfair, Redcar (Infrared DSLR)
9. Still from *Black Space Agency Training Video* (2018), Black Quantum Futurism
10. The end of the South Gare (Infrared DSLR)



Zone 2: Essayistic Futurisms

In this chapter I will use my essayistic installation, *Lorraine*, to introduce the idea of *Essayistic Futurisms*. I will begin by considering walking as an essential part of my practice and meta-essayistic praxis, and link this to ideas of wayfinding and absence in the essay form.

I will then use the essayistic installation *Lorraine* to consider the act of spatial essaying and show that movements through space and time, either via walks or as part of installed essayistic works, suggest that the essayistic form might be considered an open cinematic architecture. I discuss the significance of the interstice in the open cinematic architecture of spatial essaying.

I will then develop the idea of the essay zone and that in the essay zone are the creative critical conditions to render the invisible visible. I will argue that to do this the interstice acts as a temporal disruption and a crack in the spatial condition of the expanded essayistic film form. The essay zone becomes a flexible critical structure where we can see through the spatial temporal cracks.

I then argue we can use these interstices in the open cinematic architecture to open the internal logic of the expanded essay form and move in sideways and lateral directions to stumble upon alternative aesthetic-personal-political horizons. Therefore, testing these invisibilities offers glimmers of alternative futures or essayistic futurisms.

Open Cinematic Architectures

At any moment my feet were apt to fall through the cardboard ground. I am convinced that the future is lost somewhere in the dumps of the non-historical past; it is in yesterday's newspapers, in the jejune advertisements of science fiction movies, in the false mirror of our rejected dreams.¹⁴⁰

Robert Smithson

The composed work itself exists to be encountered. Its obliqueness and multiplicity to be probed. Yet there is still the inescapable paradox of telling, to convey the experience. Essaying it, giving it a go. Theorisations, interpretations, and codifications come retrospectively, even if immediately after something is made. Or perhaps before, in anticipation of something that will be made, yet never synchronously. To quote from *Begin Again, Begin Again*: 'That is the theory, but our theories are untested.' Accuracy could never be ensured. But essaying is about something else.¹⁴¹

Renee Green

¹⁴⁰ Robert Smithson, "A tour of the monuments of Passaic, New Jersey," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings* (University of California Press, 1996), 74.

¹⁴¹ Renée Green, "24. Certain Obliqueness (2016)," in *Essays on the Essay Film*, ed. Nora M Alter and Timothy Corrigan (Columbia University Press, 2017), 330.

Ghost Walking

The pathway branched through the dunes. The more stable of the paths, the walkway we had been following this far, took a more level route through the remaining sand and bush, underfoot was a mix of sand, hardcore and dirt. The precarious path descended sharply out of view. This path was narrow, disappearing in places where the grass of the dunes had grown in humps. Precarity was decided upon, and we moved carefully down the slope. As the path turned the first corner our former route vanished and the atmosphere changed, the sky was touching rain and the weight of the air around us settled, tightening once again.

There had been an unusual weight to the journey since I had arrived in Darlington from Leeds at 7:50am and found the connecting train to Middlesbrough. An intangible feeling potentially brought on by the fact that we were journeying to the isolated edge of a fabricated landscape called the South Gare at the mouth of the River Tees, a few miles north of Redcar in North Yorkshire, but also because of the potential discovery to be made in the peculiarity of features along the route of the walk. The tip of the South Gare peninsula was constructed from furnace slag and waste material created by the steel industry sited there. The pathway stepped down onto a beach and as I moved further into the open space across the wet sand the arc of the bay curved out from me, and I became grounded with the vista with which I was presented. In front of me the blackened, wet, rotting remains of the hull of a wooden ship lay ruined, cast on the sand of the bay. Further up the shoreline lay an abandoned fishing boat, more intact than the hull of the ship, but similarly left to take its ruined course in the weather and waters of the South Gare. I crouched down and looked out across the small fishing boat and could see the nature reserve of Seal Sands in the foreground on the opposite shore of the River Tees and the heavy nuclear and chemical industry that dominate the landscape. Two objects were collected from the sands, a white disposable plastic glove and one halve of a fishing rod that had been snapped in two. I realised then that my vista and my walk had been littered with ghosts.

This walk from the seaside town of Redcar to the tip of the South Gare took place in August 2016 and was ten miles in length. The route took us from the train station in Redcar, via the town and its promenade and outskirts, through Warrenby, and onto the hinterland of the South Gare. The walk took in, amongst other things, the ruined architecture of the decommissioned SSI Steelworks, a community of green fishing huts, the unknown identity of

the shipwreck and the fishing boat on the sand, a display of offshore wind turbines, the heavy industry and nature reserve of Seal Sands, the remnants of a car crash on the road leading out of Warrenby, discarded white plastic gloves, the 'oldest lifeboat in the world' at the Zetland museum in Redcar, and the ruined South Gare battery. At the end of the path was the South Gare lighthouse, and lifeboat station, offering light to those journeying to shore, and saviour to those in maritime distress. My most haunting and melancholy encounter was at the very tip of the South Gare, flowers cabled tied to the railings flapping against the metal in the wind, decaying memorials to those that had taken their lives.

The South Gare is a fabricated zone of industrial history, the landscape formed from the waste of this industry, with a distinct hinterland and boundary after the hamlet of Warrenby. On my walk on that Friday in August 2016 I entered that zone in an exploratory and speculative fashion. In real time, I was wayfinding through the physical features of the natural and architectural landscape, through the sand and grasses of the dunes, shaped in contrast with the blast furnace slag and material dredged from the river to construct the new fabricated landscape. The now ruined architecture of the Steel works stood, set in its own entropic wasteland of discarded outputs from the manufacturing that took place there up to 2015. In not so real time, the past presented itself in a linkage of historical fragments, experienced in the absence of the ruined spatial-temporal locations of the walk. Absence I encountered at the varied sites, in the empty fishing huts, the wreck on the sand, the empty light house, the aftermath of the crash, and the flowers at the tip of the Gare. Along that ten-mile passage my physical movement through the spaces adjoined these historical fragments, connected these absences with an embodiment of my own past, present, and future thoughts, and memories.

I had walked the museum of the South Gare, my movements had been through the monuments of the fractured factories and ruins of the industries located on the landscape: steel, power, railway, fishing, trade, and seaside tourism. I was looking at the zone through this lens, but I was also seeing what was presented to me through the technologies and eyes that I carried with me. On the walk I collected a series of Infra-Red photographic stills and video taken with a DSLR hacked to record a greater breadth of waves on the colour spectrum. The camera had a new filter attached allowing waves up to 720nm to enter the sensor. When the camera was white balanced to green foliage the picture represents the non-visible parts of the electromagnetic spectrum as a false-colour image. The waves were represented in the

final realised image in blue and yellow colours. For example, view of the distance industrial landscape from my crouched position behind the ruined fishing boat.

I carried with me what would be considered an obsolete digital camera due to the low resolution of the images and inferior quality of the image sensor, an AGFA easy pix SX. Pictures are ratioed at 1280 x 960 and the Camera Spec: Agfa Easy Pix SX (2003) Lens: 1:2.8 / 10.8mm (1.3 Mp). The camera also takes video at a resolution of 320 x 240. I found this camera while looking for a lead to make a sniffer, a basic audio device for capturing electromagnetic waves, used to detect surveillance bugs. On a walk prior to the South Gare walk in 2016 I took the sniffer and the Agfa to Kirkstall electricity substation in Leeds to experiment with electromagnetic field recordings. This involved walking around the substation listening to what interference and hidden sounds I could pick up with the sniffer. I was curious how the low-res ruined video of the inferior Agfa camera would sit alongside the electromagnetic recordings. The sniffer picked up the internal mechanics and hidden operating sounds of the camera which opened another hidden layer to the audio recording, and I tested the images and audio in an edited sequence called, *The Zone*. These audio recordings became part of the sound design for the works *The Golden Record* and *The Derealisation Effect*. I was reminded again of Robert Smithson's *Tour of the Monuments of Passaic*, and his line 'At any moment my feet were apt to fall through the cardboard ground. I am convinced that the future is lost somewhere in the dumps of the non-historical past.'¹⁴² In a comparable way to Smithson I treated the unobserved and overlooked at the hinterland of the city of Leeds as forgotten monuments to the legacy of the social and industrial infrastructure of the city. For example, at the electricity substation I used the technologies to collect material for essayistic forms, working with data captures and representations from beyond the normal spectrum of what the human ear and eye can process. What was important to me was testing the visible and invisible and working up assemblages that play with the shifting transmutable space of what is absent and present.

¹⁴² Robert Smithson, "A tour of the monuments of Passaic, New Jersey," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings* (University of California Press, 1996), 74.

Wayfinding and Seafaring through the Absent and Present

There is a wayfinding and seafaring connection between my spectral character Bernard Moitessier, Patrick Keiller's character Robinson, and the work of the photo essayist, filmmaker, and critical theorist Allan Sekula, all of whom employ a critical approach to absent and present, or the invisible and the visible. The character name of Moitessier in my essayistic notebook films and later works is taken from the real-life sailor and adventurer, Bernard Moitessier. I chose the name for my character, Moitessier, after a conversation with my supervisor about the real-life Moitessier. After hearing the story of Moitessier, I thought the philosophical, wayfinding and spectral associations were good attachments to my character. The real-life story of Moitessier is one of courage, spirituality, abandonment, and mythology. Moitessier took part in the first single handed non-stop circumnavigation of the globe yacht race in 1968. Although Moitessier was set to win he abandoned the race in the final stages, his journey had been hard and wrought with crisis, he turned to Yoga on board the yacht to ease his depression and stabilise his mood. Moitessier had no communication to let him know he was leading but abandoned the race sending a message to say 'parce que je suis heureux en mer et peut-être pour sauver mon âme' ("because I am happy at sea and perhaps to save my soul"). His voyage has built its own mythology and Moitessier wrote an account of the adventure, *The Long Way* (1971), in which he described the spirituality he found through the crises he endured.¹⁴³ Moitessier was absent during the race, isolated from society on board his yacht, and then absent from the race itself, entering an impermanent non-place. Yet this absence was sanctuary, as he described it, although the spatiality of his conditions on the yacht, during the race and after he abandoned the race, were much the same.

Patrick Keiller describes the backstory of his character Robinson in his essay *London in the Early 1990s* as that of 'a returning seaman (albeit only a photographer on a cruise liner)'.¹⁴⁴ It is no coincidence that Robinson's namesake is Robinson Crusoe, as this offers Keiller the structural device to target locations in his film, *London* (1994), that build his rhetorical strategy on the problem of London, part of which is a survey of absence and colonialism in the population and architectural spaces of the capital city. Robinson is traced to Daniel Defoe's Robinson and therefore firmly placed in a colonial context. As Brett McInelly's notes, the

¹⁴³ Bernard Moitessier, *The Long Way: Sheridan House Maritime Classic* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2019).

¹⁴⁴ Patrick Keiller, "London in the Early 1990s," in *The view from the train: Cities and other landscapes* (Verso Books, 2013), 89.

rhetorical strategy of Robinson Crusoe bears the spatial, economic, religious, and psychological characteristics of the colonial context.¹⁴⁵ In one observation in the film *London*, Robinson notices: 'a ship depicted on the sign of The Atlantic, the famous public house, which enabled him to mention the arrival of post-war emigrants from Jamaica on the SS Empire Windrush, and the fact that they were initially housed in the deep (air raid) shelters under Clapham Common.'¹⁴⁶ Robinson then moves to Stoke Newington and chances upon Daniel Defoe's house, where he wrote Robinson Crusoe, before covering a sequence on the Notting Hill Carnival, and the float of the Colombian Carnival Association. Robinson reflects a suggestion that the absence of an identity for London provides the space for new cultures but in contrast, experiential separation: 'The true identity of London is in its absence. As a city, it no longer exists. In this alone it is truly modern: London was the first metropolis to disappear.'¹⁴⁷ For Keiller, this is a city of London with an absence of identity, heterogeneous financial architecture replacing the core history of the centre, and the absence of a 'topographical logic' of the city for the people who live there.¹⁴⁸ The spectre of colonialism, maritime shipping trade and the link to commodification and capital growth defines the absence in Robinson's London.¹⁴⁹

A deft touch has displaced a spanner in a disused welder's booth in a bankrupt Todd shipyard in Los Angeles Harbour, San Pedro, California, two years after closing, in 1991. The spanner has been moved by only two centimetres and the imprint of its place of rest is outlined on the table. The spanner held a precarious position on the table with around a third of the spanner hanging off the edge of the table. It looks to have been placed without thought in a down tools and leave motion. The dirt, grime, grease, and dust of the booth that has built up around the innocuous spanner in the two years since it was last used by a welder working in the harbour has been shifted by Allan Sekula. What remains is a trace of absence, an outline, a negative space. The spanner is absent from the hand of its former owner, absent from its now former position on the table when tools were downed, and the two-year period of human absence in

¹⁴⁵ Brett C McInnelly, "Expanding Empires, Expanding Selves: Colonialism, the Novel, and Robinson Crusoe," *Studies in the Novel* 35.1 (2003): 1.

¹⁴⁶ Patrick Keiller, "London in the Early 1990s," in *The view from the train: Cities and other landscapes* (Verso Books, 2013), 89.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 91.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*.

¹⁴⁹ Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The pristine culture of capitalism: A historical essay on old regimes and modern states* (Verso, 1991), 18 & 108-9. And Patrick Keiller, *The view from the train: Cities and other landscapes* (Verso Books, 2013), 4.

the booth is marked by Sekula's slight and fleeting intervention. The absence is then photographed and catalogued. This photograph appears on page six of Allan Sekula's photo essay *Fish Story*, conceived in 1989 and produced between 1990 and 1995.¹⁵⁰

Robinson's landlocked spatial absences of the social and architectural infrastructure of England's capital city, London, are transmuted by Sekula to the forgotten spaces of global seas, oceans, and ports. Sekula's body of work over his lifetime was significant in using the photographic image and essay form in critical theory and practice to ground, or make visible, the complexity of global capitalist means of production. The photos and texts in his *Fish Story* publication are an account of his photographic practice, a series of exhibitions and critical exploration of the inextricable link of maritime trade routes to the development of global capitalism. Sekula focuses on the architectural, technological, and spatial contexts of shipping containers, as a mechanism for the movement of goods. *Fish Story* reveals a hidden, absent, often not seen, distant, but most of all forgotten mass physical presence on the seas, combined with global ruinous ports, and lost maritime industry, all set in contrast to the computer based financial markets orchestrating the networked system from the desktop, and a forgotten space of the sea. As Sekula writes: 'The metropolitan gaze no longer falls upon the waterfront, and a cognitive blankness follows.'¹⁵¹ Later Noel Burch and Alan Sekula rendered the invisible visible using the cameras and photographic technologies aboard mass container ships to create the film essay *The Forgotten Space* (2010).¹⁵²

The shipping container represents a cognitive absence in the mass global networked trade of goods, but the absent space of the container takes on another sinister and exploitative level, in the trading and trafficking of people, some hidden in containers with the goods, migrating in transit in diasporic routes across the globe, and some imprisoned in conditions of slave labour, using the empty container as a dwelling.¹⁵³ The people trapped in containers in the geopolitical crisis of this dehumanising, violent and abusive trade, are often very difficult to detect. Even with new methods of detection being researched the images of the people inside

¹⁵⁰ Allan Sekula and Benjamin HD Buchloh, *Fish Story*, Vol. 202 (Düsseldorf: Richter Verlag, 1995), 6.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*, 48-49.

¹⁵² *Ibid*, 49&54.

¹⁵³ See travel transit stage of human trafficking in, Cathy Zimmerman, Mazedra Hossain, and Charlotte Watts, "Human trafficking and health: A conceptual model to inform policy, intervention and research," *Social science & medicine* 73.2 (2011): 329. And Maggy Lee, "1 Introduction: Understanding human trafficking," in *Human trafficking* (Willan, 2013), 13-37.

the containers are absent from the surveillance cameras aboard the ships and at ports.¹⁵⁴ What interests me about Keiller, Sekula and Burch and what connects their approach to mine, is how they use their essayistic filmmaking as a tool to look in the absent spaces of our social, architectural, and economic infrastructure for a presence that reveals and renders visible the governing invisible ideology. For Keiller this is through a filmmaking strategy that interweaves fictional characters with factual locations and architectures on the problem of the capital city of London. For Sekula and Burch this is in the direct representation of the forgotten spaces and industry of Capitalist trade. What they are doing in revealing this ideology is challenging Fisher's idea of 'Capitalist Realism: is there no alternative'¹⁵⁵, and providing critical strategy for ways of seeing and breaking down the governing capitalist framework.

In reference to the final monument of Robert Smithson's tour of Passaic, he invokes a melancholic feeling in his description of the sand box:

Every grain of sand was a dead metaphor that equalled timelessness, and to decipher such metaphors would take one through the false mirror of eternity. This sandbox somehow doubled as an open grave – a grave that children cheerfully play in.

...all sense of reality was gone. In its place had come deep-seated illusions, absence of pupillary reaction to light, absence of knee reaction-symptoms all of progressive cerebral meningitis: the blanketing of the brain...

Louis Sullivan, 'one of the greatest of all architects,' quoted in Michel Butor's *Mobile*¹⁵⁶

My walk to the tip of the South Gare was littered with ghosts and it had been easy for me to slip into a Capitalist Realist state, or Louis Sullivans' 'blanketing of the brain', referenced by Smithson, or the 'cognitive blankness' as Sekula calls it. I had been determined to see past the ghosts that were haunting me. The two objects that were collected on the sands, the white plastic glove, and the broken fishing rod, were lost to the past of their respective owners and delivered to the present and future grasp of my hand. The broken rod detached from its other

¹⁵⁴ Sidharth Samanta, et al, "A WiVi Based IoT Framework for Detection of Human Trafficking Victims Kept in Hideouts," in *International Conference on Internet of Things* (Springer, Cham, 2020). And Felicity Gerry QC, Julia Muraszkiwicz, and Niovi Vavoula, "The role of technology in the fight against human trafficking: Reflections on privacy and data protection concerns," *Computer Law & Security Review* 32.2 (2016): 205-217.

¹⁵⁵ Mark Fisher, *Capitalist realism: Is there no alternative?* (John Hunt Publishing, 2009).

¹⁵⁶ Robert Smithson, "A tour of the monuments of Passaic, New Jersey," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings* (University of California Press, 1996), 74.

half sits on the shelf above my head as I write this passage. The ruined industries of the walk framed the ghosts of the absent employees no longer traveling by train to the zone of the Gare for their daily work routine. The spectre of loss haunts the melancholy flowers as I stood on the concrete walkway and looked out to sea.

Lorraine

In 1982 he had been on his road trip. His journal noted. The Motel is the great Utopian ideal; he had exclaimed. The identical room. The egalitarian nature of its organisation. We are all beset by the formality of its architecture, rooms equal in size and stature, all with the intended desire for freedom and liberation to move on to a new horizon. The American Road. The Motel is both no place and good place. A limbo, a pausing state, a moment's rest before an imagined utopia. The Motel holds the blueprint for an assembled Utopia. A place of equality to move off from.

In a later note he wasn't so sure. The motel is decline. The motel is paradox. Both freedom and prison. The illusory freedom of the open road saddled with the notion of the never place. Mobilised and static characters. The modernist image of the motel is commodity. Fantasised displacement. A parking lot of abandonment. And where do these figures stand, at once victims of liberation, prisoners of freedom, standing tall, removed from there landscape, mobilised once again, but fixed, attached to their static memory.¹⁵⁷

Room 237

In 2017 I applied for a commission to be a part of a group exhibition, *Where do we go from here?*, one event in a series to mark the fiftieth anniversary of Dr Martin Luther King receiving a honorary doctorate from Newcastle University. The series of events was called *Freedom City*. I proposed a work called *Lorraine* which I later installed in the Ex-Libris Gallery at Newcastle

¹⁵⁷ Text taken from channel 1, titled Room 237, of my video triptych essayistic installation, *Lorraine* (2017).

University. *Lorraine* is a three-screen audio visual essayistic film installation. A triptych of screens presents three meditations on ideas relating to social justice: 1. action vs thinking, 2. inclusive thinking as social justice, and 3. utopian thoughts. The three separate but interrelated video works play out on the three screens with three sets of headphones placed in front of the screens. Each of the headphones provides audio for one of the works although it is not possible to tell which of the headphones connects to which screen. This was achieved using a simple technique of bringing all the cables of the headphones together behind the middle screen, and then using the middle screen as a central point for the cables to run from (See Image 4, page 76). Therefore, it is possible to view and listen to the work in several ways. The three-video works that make up *Lorraine* are titled *Room 237*, *Model Society*, and *No Place / Good Place*. Each of the video works interweaves fact and fiction, including, archive film, found footage, ripped video, autobiographical accounts, newly shot footage, and field recordings.

Room 237

In the video *Room 237* an image appears. A polaroid photograph, a statue, the tip of a camper van, a motel, and a boat with a man peeking over the top of the cabin. He looks back at the camera. Devil's hole, Jersey, the black and white landscape of the photograph draws the viewer in to the craggy jagged rocks. The images cut slowly and steadily, close ups of photographs and postcards of motels are laid one after the other, systematically, structurally while the low meditative hum of the electronic sound scape plays out rhythmically to fill the sonic space. A woman reads passages of text. The first moving shot, the camera zooms in to a street in West Memphis, the movement stops and cut to a postcard. The tangerine sun of an early morning sky fills the image of the architecture of a motel, an agricultural fire at the side of the road, smoke, the woman reads about what is happening in adjacent rooms of the motel.

At five minutes there is the second moving image section of the video, a postcard moves vertically, and the viewer crosses the threshold. The postcard images are displaced, changed, reconstructed, and reanimated. A woman reads a description of Room 237. Some of the postcards have been cut, elements of the image then folded upwards away from their original frame, the three-dimensional space of the photographic image has been grounded as two dimensional. The element of the image that has been cut and folded upwards takes presence

in a new three-dimensional form, space has been transformed. The folded image escapes the frame. Other images show absent elements, cut entirely from their frame. There is a pausing state. The electronic hum stops. The frame holds on the image of a motel, faint clicks can be heard. Three-dimensional collages of the motel stand tall. A woman reads the following words:

I paced the floor of the bedroom and imagined him pacing the same steps repeating his speech. He traced his words. I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the promised land. It would not be a motel for much longer. You'll be one of the last guests, the girl at reception had told me. The motel is closing. No-one stays here anymore.¹⁵⁸

An image of the sign of the Lorraine Motel. The third and final moving image shot, a pan from right to left of a collaged cut-out, a black and white woman stands in front of a coloured postcard, both lifted from their frames by the blade of a knife. They have been cut from their spatial-temporal freeze frame, from their moments in history, from their memory, re animated in their new diorama, a re-representation of space and time. There is a feeling of the uncanny, and an estrangement of reality. For a moment, space is transformed. The video ends on a photo from the walk I took through West Memphis to the Lorraine Motel, an empty street. Signs from motels, cut from their postcard frames, stand isolated from their architectural homes.

Room 237 is situated in the Lorraine Motel in West Memphis, the site of Martin Luther King's assassination on the 4th April, 1968. Martin Luther King stayed at the motel on numerous visits to Memphis and was staying in room 306 when he was assassinated on the balcony. Mr King's room 306 is preserved from that night in 1968. In 2014 I visited the site in West Memphis. In the video work Bernard Moitessier stayed in Room 237 of the Lorraine Motel in 1982 while the motel was in decline, before the building was sold and renovated into the National Civil Rights Museum. A point of political contention, as the exact spot where Dr. King was

¹⁵⁸ Text taken from channel 1, titled Room 237, of my video triptych essayistic installation, Lorraine (2017). With part of the text taken from the final paragraph of Martin Luther Kings' final speech, delivered on April 3, 1968, at the Mason Temple (Church of God in Christ Headquarters) in Memphis, Tennessee: 'Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the promised land.'

assassinated became a site of Dark Tourism,¹⁵⁹ and as Sean Wang writes in his article about his interview with Jacqueline Smith, and her twenty seven year street protest against the profiteering of the state run property, the museum became a 'vehicle for gentrification', displacing residents of the motel and their surrounding buildings.¹⁶⁰ Moitessier's journals describe in detail the interior of room 237 at the Motel in 1982, imagining fictionalised details of Mr King staying in room 237 prior to his visit in 1968. I included in the audio-visual sequences of the video work passages of text from Moitessier's journals, images from his boxes of projector slides, and notes and images on a deep array of subjects including action vs thinking as movement towards creating an egalitarian society.

My embodiment of wayfinding on the pathway through the South Gare joined the absence in the ruined industries and the physical landscape. In *Lorraine* I treated the unexpectedly politicised architecture of the motel room, after the assassination of Dr King on the balcony, aesthetically in my reanimation of the photograph and postcard of the American Motel using the technique of cutting and folding the static image. I constructed alternative spaces, and I considered the balcony and the motel as a starting point for an alternative spatial temporal path. Or as TJ Demos notes, in transit: 'the creative rearrangement of aesthetic and political spaces, by challenging their conventions of separateness.'¹⁶¹ My adjoining and disruption of space in the audio-visual thinking operations of the three works was the primary making strategy for *Lorraine*, treating the construction of space and representation of the image as significant in alternative treatments of our present condition, or as Isaac Julien writes, 'breaking away from the normative habits we have in exhibiting and in looking at moving images'.¹⁶²

In the work *Lorraine* I tested a spatial essayistic form and the essayistic installation as an open cinematic architecture. Each of the three screens in *Lorraine* enacts a spatial and temporal thinking operation, in dialogue with the other screens and the audio compositions. As Alexandre Astruc termed it from the 1940s onwards: 'Filmed Philosophy'.¹⁶³ Due to the technical setup of the work, and the possibility of viewing the work in several ways, authorship

¹⁵⁹ Philip Stone, "Dark tourism scholarship: A critical review." *International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research* (2013).

¹⁶⁰ Sean H Wang, "Walking in Memphis: revisiting the street politics of Ms Jacqueline Smith," *Cultural geographies* 24, no. 4 (2017): 611-616.

¹⁶¹ T. J. Demos, "Transit: Politicizing Aesthetics," in *The Migrant Image* (Duke University Press, 2013), 91.

¹⁶² Isaac Julien, "From Ten Thousand Waves to Lina Bo Bardi, via Kapital," in *Essays on the Essay Film*, ed. Nora M Alter and Timothy Corrigan (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 236.

¹⁶³ Nora M Alter, "Translating the essay into film and installation," *Journal of Visual Culture* 6.1 (2007): 51.

of the work as complete is challenged and problematised. The agency of the viewer is brought into play to enact the completeness of the visual and audio sequences. The work remains open, and a reflection of the question asked to Stanley Cavell, how can films think? As Cavell answered:

Intending something is a function of wanting something. My formulation employing the work's thinking or intending or wanting something, is meant to emphasise the sense that the work wants something of us to behold or hear or read it. This is a function of our determining what we want of it, why or how we are present at it – what our relation to it is.¹⁶⁴

The viewer adjoins the cinematic elements in the essayistic openness of the spatially constructed installation. The viewer is called upon to intervene and discover. This intervention and authorial displacement are noted by Elvan Zabunyan as present in the essayistic work of the artist Renee Green, *Import/Export Funk Office* (1992-1993), *Partially Buried in Three Parts* (1996-1997), *Between and Including* (Secession, 1999).¹⁶⁵

Renee Green's exhibition *Begin Again, Begin Again* (2015), at the MAK museum Vienna, and film work of the same name, uses the house of the modernist architect RM Schindler as the starting point to bring together her essaying and affinity with space to explore our many relationships to the spaces of modernity and beyond. *Begin Again, Begin Again* is a forty-minute video essay on the architectural manifesto of RM Schindler, presented as a critical meditation on the spaces of racial and colonial modernity. The film combines footage from Schindler's modernist home in Hollywood, with landscapes, flora, and historical markers from the birth of Schindler through to the present day exhibited work.¹⁶⁶ The film is scripted, has a voice over and sounds are layered in addition the voice over. As Green describes, locating the beginning to the process of making the work is difficult but the script and voice were the 'spine' to build the images and audio around.¹⁶⁷ Green uses the architecture of Schindler's building as an example and to open up themes of repression, preservation, and decay: 'the

¹⁶⁴ Rupert Read and Jerry Goodenough, eds. "What becomes of thinking on film?," in *Film as philosophy: essays in cinema after Wittgenstein and Cavell* (Springer, 2005), 186.

¹⁶⁵ Elvan Zabunyan, "Stratum and Resonance: Displacement in the work of Renée Green," in *Text & Image* (Routledge, 2017), 85-100.

¹⁶⁶ Kareem Estefan, "Inhabiting Modernism: Renee Green at the Carpenter Centre for the Visual Arts," *Art News*, Art in America, March 26th, 2018, <https://www.artnews.com/art-in-america/features/inhabiting-modernism-renee-green-carpenter-center-visual-arts-60098/>.

¹⁶⁷ Renée Green, "24. Certain Obliqueness (2016)," in *Essays on the Essay Film*, ed. Nora M Alter and Timothy Corrigan (Columbia University Press, 2017), 328.

work probes to find buried aspects, what hasn't been wanted, and to discover what else can be felt, thought, imagined – beyond what we think now.¹⁶⁸ Green is working as an essayist, revisiting Schindler's architecture to see what can be revealed through its re-evaluation. Yet, also revisiting and re-evaluating her earlier works and staging these in the exhibition alongside a sound installation of the same name *Begin Again Begin Again* (circulatory sound) 2015.¹⁶⁹ Other works in the exhibition include, *Imagine This Wherever and Whoever You Are* (2008), the film *Climates and Paradoxes* (2005), and *Code: Survey* (2006), which explore what Sherry Turkle calls the 'evocative object', the idea of everyday 'objects as emotional and intellectual companions that anchor memory, sustain relationships, and provoke new ideas.'¹⁷⁰ Both the exhibition staged in Vienna and the later exhibition *Within Living Memory* (2018) at the Carpenter Centre for Visual Arts at Harvard University perform an act of spatial essaying for Green. The recurrent themes of space, modernity, race, migration, ruins, utopia, and history are revisited and reperformed in Green's body of essayistic work across film, sculpture, photograph, architecture, textiles, and text, all brought together in films and installation in the one space. Themes explored over Green's lifetime of practice, as the collective assemblage of the works in both exhibitions perform a network of spatial essaying.¹⁷¹ The significance of this spatial essaying, as Green notes, is the tension held in the interstice, and it is this space that Green likes to probe.¹⁷²

Four Dichotomies of Spatial Essaying

My making of *Lorraine* and my study of, Renee Green's text, *A Certain Obliqueness* (2016), in which Green reflects on her essaying as a body of work, and Patrick Kieller's, *The City of the Future* (2003), brought into focus and attuned me to four dichotomies of spatial essaying. Four dichotomies with interstices to probe. In the first dichotomy of the spatial essayistic form, the architectural or assembled elements and objects that are static in the space are present and in contrast to the virtual images that present and represent existent and non-existent spaces.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, 326.

¹⁶⁹ Elvan Zabunyan, "Did You Hear What They Said? Historicity and the present in the works by Adrian Piper and Renée Green," *Perspective. Actualité en histoire de l'art 2* (2015).

¹⁷⁰ Kimberli Meyer, "Renée Green. Begin Again, Begin Again," *MAK*, Center for Art and Architecture, Los Angeles, USA, https://www.mak.at/en/program/exhibitions/renee_green_begin_again_begin_again. And Sherry Turkle, ed. *Evocative objects: Things we think with* (MIT press, 2011).

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Renée Green, "24. Certain Obliqueness (2016)," in *Essays on the Essay Film*, ed. Nora M Alter and Timothy Corrigan (Columbia University Press, 2017), 325.

In the case of *Lorraine* there was a constructed frame housing three screens, with three pairs or headphones laid in front of the screens. The screens acted as a virtual set of windows, a traditional triptych with each moving image panel offering a different outlook. As Keiller observes: 'What distinguishes film space more than anything else is the extent to which it is very unlike actual space as we experience it.'¹⁷³ Here lies a dichotomy of the virtual and the physical, or the absent and the present space, and the problem of representational space. In addition, there is the consideration of what is present in the in-between spaces; both in the virtual images and sounds, the cuts, the pauses, and the black video of the moving images; and the physical objects of the installation, set in the architecture of the gallery and the fabric of the encasement of the space.

A second dichotomy of the virtual and the physical lies in the author's intention for the thematic of the virtual images and physical objects of the work, with the embodied thinking of the viewer in the space. In *Lorraine*, the thematic of each video work responded to the call out about social justice, each work a meditative essayistic audio-visual work edited by me, the author. The physical form and technical setup of the work separated each of the three audio-visual works and asked the viewer to make an intervention. The viewer's choice in the physical space determined the construction of the virtual spaces. In *Lorraine*, this meant the viewer decided whether to sit or stand, what position to take in the space, how long to watch each screen, whether to watch each screen individually or all at the same time, what order to listen to the audio works, and whether to combine the images and audio or watch with no sound or listen with no image. Renee Green is attracted to the installed essay form because of this formal play.¹⁷⁴

The movement of the viewer through the physical space opens a movement through in-between spaces of the physical assemblage and architectural fabric of the installation, with added virtual reconstruction layered in both spaces. Both sets of spaces, virtual and physical, are experienced concurrently by the viewer. The actual space is experienced and as Aikaterini Gegisian theorises, how the viewer moves through filmic space is now complicit in the thinking operation of the spatial essaying.¹⁷⁵ Looking for ways to express her practice and this dual

¹⁷³ Patrick Keiller, "The City of the Future," in *The view from the train: Cities and other landscapes* (Verso Books, 2014), 142.

¹⁷⁴ Renée Green, "24. Certain Obliqueness (2016)," in *Essays on the Essay Film*, ed. Nora M Alter and Timothy Corrigan (Columbia University Press, 2017), 324.

¹⁷⁵ Aikaterini Gegisian, "The Essay Film and Space: The Essayistic Filmic Space as a Location of Thought." (PhD Diss., University of Westminster, 2014).

movement through physical and filmic essayed space, in one passage Green suggests the term 'integrated essaying'.¹⁷⁶ As the frame of the image has been opened to the architecture and assemblage of the installation the enclosed architectural frame of the building's space is also complicit. This same thinking is true for the images in *Lorraine* that have been cut and folded. The viewer is an agent in the work,¹⁷⁷ durationally set in the timeframe they are there. Their consciousness is relational to the work's consciousness – both are in play.

The third dichotomy of the virtual and physical lies in a paradoxical separation and combining of viewer and essay. The filmic space of the virtual image is now present in the viewer's memory but added to these memories are montaged images and the viewer's movements through the physical space. Again, Green, analysing her work, questions this paradox as 'Visceral Combinatory Essaying?'.¹⁷⁸ The images from inside the work are inverted and become reconstructed with the physical space as memory. Deep in the viewer's physical memory is the route and passage through the work and the actual space of the experience. The memories and experience of the viewer are separated from the original site of the work.

The fourth dichotomy is the problem of representational space: a significant factor in the construction of new and alternative spaces in the spatially essayed form and open cinematic architecture. As Henri Lefebvre identifies, cinematic spaces act as representational spaces, yet the time-period from now to the new space that is offered may be distant or even impossible to get to. The representational space of the image takes away what it also gives: 'the space which contains the realised preconditions of another life is the same one as prohibits what those preconditions make possible.'¹⁷⁹ Or as Keiller notes, the image, has the power to render the invisible visible, and perform a lasting act, that in the everyday may only be fleeting.¹⁸⁰ Yet, what I find significant about Lefebvre's reading of representational space is the critical potential of the spatial essayistic form: 'To change life, however, we must first change space.'

¹⁷⁶ Renée Green, "24. Certain Obliqueness (2016)," in *Essays on the Essay Film*, ed. Nora M Alter and Timothy Corrigan (Columbia University Press, 2017), 325.

¹⁷⁷ The 'viewer as an agent' plays well into discourses on the 'death of the author', and the issue of subjectivity and translation in the work. Roland Barthes, *The death of the author*, 1968. na, 1992.

¹⁷⁸ Renée Green, "24. Certain Obliqueness (2016)," in *Essays on the Essay Film*, ed. Nora M Alter and Timothy Corrigan (Columbia University Press, 2017), 328-9.

¹⁷⁹ Henri Lefebvre and Donald Nicholson-Smith, *The production of space*, Vol. 142 (Blackwell: Oxford, 1991), 189-190.

¹⁸⁰ Patrick Keiller, "The City of the Future," In *The view from the train: Cities and other landscapes* (Verso Books, 2014), 142.

Absolute revolution is our self-image and our mirage – as seen through the mirror of absolute (political) space.¹⁸¹

Spatial reconstruction of power and the complex systems needed to bring about socio-economic revolution seems overwhelming. If change of this nature is this hard to envisage then the ‘slow cancellation of the future’, as Franco ‘Bifo’ Berardi and Mark Fisher call it, becomes a paradigmatic contemporary condition, supporting Fisher’s theory of ‘Capitalist Realism.’¹⁸² However, I find Fisher’s state of Capitalist Realism too concrete an affirmation, and I agree with Lefebvre and TJ Demos, when both of their positions are brought together, to change space we must first creatively rearrange and reconstruct the spaces of the aesthetic and the political, interweaving the social and the personal.¹⁸³ Challenging the construction of aesthetic political spaces through the probing of its interstices holds a prism up to what Lefebvre calls ‘absolute (political) space.’¹⁸⁴ The four dichotomies of spatial essaying are just four in-between spaces, interstices ready to be probed and tested. In constructing alternative moving image spaces, and as Issac Julien saw it, ‘breaking away from the normative habits we have in exhibiting and in looking at moving images’, the spatially essayed form offers the viewer occupation of open cinematic architectures.¹⁸⁵ There is potential in spatial essaying for alternative spaces of not-so-distant glimmers of not-so-distant futures. However illusory, as Green said, ‘essaying it, giving it a go’: the essayistic is there to test this futurity.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸¹ Henri Lefebvre and Donald Nicholson-Smith, *The production of space*, Vol. 142 (Blackwell: Oxford, 1991), 190.

¹⁸² Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of my life: Writings on depression, hauntology and lost futures* (John Hunt Publishing, 2014), 6. And Franco Berardi, *After the future* (AK press, 2011), 18-19. And Mark Fisher, *Capitalist realism: Is there no alternative?* (John Hunt Publishing, 2009).

¹⁸³ T. J. Demos, "Transit: Politicizing Aesthetics," in *The Migrant Image* (Duke University Press, 2013), 91.

¹⁸⁴ Renée Green, "24. Certain Obliqueness (2016)," in *Essays on the Essay Film*, ed. Nora M Alter and Timothy Corrigan (Columbia University Press, 2017), 325. And Henri Lefebvre and Donald Nicholson-Smith, *The production of space*, Vol. 142 (Blackwell: Oxford, 1991), 189-190.

¹⁸⁵ Isaac Julien, "From Ten Thousand Waves to Lina Bo Bardi, via Kapital," in *Essays on the Essay Film*, ed. Nora M Alter and Timothy Corrigan (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 236.

¹⁸⁶ Renée Green, "24. Certain Obliqueness (2016)," in *Essays on the Essay Film*, ed. Nora M Alter and Timothy Corrigan (Columbia University Press, 2017), 330.

Essayistic Futurisms

Black Quantum Futurism: ‘A new approach to living and experiencing reality by way of the manipulation of space-time in order to see into possible futures, and/or collapse space-time into a desired future in order to bring about that future’s reality. This vision and practice derives its facets, tenets, and qualities from quantum physics and Black/African cultural traditions of consciousness, time, and space. Under a BQF intersectional time orientation, the past and future are not cut off from the present - both dimensions have influence over the whole of our lives, who we are and who we become at any particular point in space-time.¹⁸⁷

Cameae Ayema and Rasheedah Philips – Black Quantum Futurism

¹⁸⁷ Cameae Ayema and Rasheedah Philips, “Black Quantum Futurism,” 2020, <https://www.blackquantumfuturism.com>.

Essayistic Zones and Invisibility

And here is the place to insert the film. There is a fence in the city where someone has painted a picture across all the panels, a mural of characters, some fictional, some factual, maybe some of them are autobiographical. On first glance you think to yourself, yes, this is great, what a magnificent image, a brilliant, collaged graffiti, how radical. And then you look closer, and closer, and the image does not quite fit together properly, the cracks in the fence are causing a disjoin in the panelled image.

He decides where we go every time. Tony. Fifty. He never tells us where he is from. I am fifty. My baby was taken from me in the hospital. He is eighteen now.

The world-famous cherry trees planted along the tidal basin in West Potomac Park were given as a gift by the City of Tokyo in 1912. They provide a strikingly beautiful background for the Jefferson Memorial – erected in memory of Thomas Jefferson – President and founder of the Democratic Party.

And then you look closer, and the artist hasn't taken into account the cracks. The artist hasn't allowed for the cracks. He/she has overlooked them. And now all you can see are the cracks. The work has inverted itself, subverted itself and all you can see are the cracks. The image projected through the cracks. The scanned vertical bars of the cracked image. And if you step closer you can look through the cracks. Beyond the vertical bars of the cracked image. What lies on the other side? What can you see from this peep hole?¹⁸⁸

Model Society

The 9:16 aspect ratio of Model Society and of the other video channels in *Lorraine* reflects the aspect ratio of the mobile phone when held in one hand and pointed at the world to capture images. The images in Model Society are all set in slow motion, an inbuilt function of the camera records the images at a higher frame per second rate, slowing the playback of the images down. The images in the film enter an alternative spatial-temporal zone. The film

¹⁸⁸ Text taken from channel 2, titled Model Society, of my video triptych essayistic installation, *Lorraine* (2017).

opens on a modern city centre with gleaming high spec architecture and the sonic space of the film is filled with a time stretched repetitive meditative electronically produced audio sequence. A crowded beach, a woman moves towards the camera slowly. Machinery from Harworth Colliery. A bag piper stands in front of a doorway in Edinburgh and the sound of the pipes is stretched. An empty gallery space, absent of exhibition. A red sports car. The Red Arrows form an arrow and the formation of jets arcs through the sky. An organist practices in an empty church. The monument of Harworth Colliery presents the names of the workers who died whilst working there between 1925 and 2004, a monument to the lost lives of the coal industry and to the coal industry itself. A woman reads the following passage:

I sit there watching. Spectating. Surveying. A voyeur. Forensically inspecting.

People pass and stare.

What do you see first? She had asked me.

My name is Lorraine.

A person, or a chair.

I couldn't sit next to my friend as we couldn't fit into the theatre next to each other.

We sat on our own...

I cannot read the signs. I cannot read the writing on the drugs. I cannot read the information they send me in the post.¹⁸⁹

Model society is the second video channel in the installation *Lorraine*. In moving image and sound, is an example of a specific marginalised community seeking equality and social justice. Autobiographical moments from members of the learning disability community, whose voice and independence in society is often marginalised and, worse, institutionalised, represent their exclusion and discrimination, inversely showing how inclusion can bring about social justice. Spoken through the voice and vision of *Lorraine* these moments, taken from first-hand accounts of people I have worked with in a past role as a research and development manager at an equal rights charity, are interweaved with broader representations of inclusive thinking in social justice. Drawing on my work for the charity since 2010 this video work is more direct in its address and highlights the conflict between the social model of disability and medical

¹⁸⁹ Text taken from channel 2, titled *Model Society*, of my video triptych essayistic installation, *Lorraine* (2017).

model of disability, and the argument that it is not the learning disability that is holding the individual back, but society's perception of learning disability that creates structures that prevent true independence through access to inclusive healthcare, employment and fair pay, and active roles in the community.¹⁹⁰ My video pays particular attention to the aesthetic and political quality of *Lorraine's* marginalised voice and vision.

Model society is made up of a multiplicity of essayistic zones. There is each individual image or moving image that acts as a spatial temporal zone; there is the zone of the technology, a smartphone, used to capture the images for the video work; the zone inhabited to write the text for the video work; and the zone of material assemblage, including the time period used to edit the video. These zones are part of a larger zone, the meta-essayistic praxis used to create the whole piece, *Lorraine*, each video work holding its own set of zones, and there is the construction of the installation, which acts as a spatial temporal zone for the viewer to move through. The installation is a zone inside the zone of the site, as Fredric Jameson notes on the form of the art installation, 'a strategy (or a recipe) – a strategy for producing an event, a recipe for events.'¹⁹¹ In the case of *Lorraine*, the site is the Ex-Libris Gallery at Newcastle University. *Lorraine*, as a zone, was constructed with the meta-essayistic praxis of the research process, itself a zone of inquiry. The multiplicity of essayistic zones is the blueprint for networked critical potential, or as Renee Green describes, a form, 'containing worlds, with kaleidoscopic potential.'¹⁹²

The mind is not in the film. The mind is the film. The mind is another essayistic zone. The work's thinking is constructed in the spatial-temporal essayistic resemblance and assemblage of the zone. The zone in *Model society* is one of the uncanny, the everyday locations, architectures, and people in the images. When slowed down the images take on an otherworldliness. There is a dislocation between the viewer and the world of the zone of the images, an estrangement. For example, halfway through the video a group of people have collected on rocks all looking at something out of frame. There is no indication of what they are looking at but with the slower frame rate, the moment in time is stretched, elongated, and

¹⁹⁰ Dan Goodley, "'Learning difficulties', the social model of disability and impairment: challenging epistemologies," *Disability & Society* 16.2 (2001): 207-231. And Mike Oliver, "The social model of disability: Thirty years on," *Disability & Society* 28.7 (2013): 1024-1026. And Lorella Terzi, "The social model of disability: A philosophical critique," *Journal of applied philosophy* 21.2 (2004): 141-157.

¹⁹¹ Fredric Jameson, "The aesthetics of singularity," *New Left Review* 92 (2015): 111.

¹⁹² Renée Green, "24. Certain Obliqueness (2016)," in *Essays on the Essay Film*, ed. Nora M Alter and Timothy Corrigan (Columbia University Press, 2017), 324.

with more emphasis placed on the act of looking. The images take on a ruinous state in that they tie the viewer to a past of what took place in that zone, a present disruption of the viewer's subject object relation, and a future potential of what is to come. For the viewer, the act of looking is disrupted. Although the viewer becomes active in the thinking they are distanced from the familiar. In the artist Vera Lutter's large scale photographic images Jonathan Crary observes the viewer's distance from the familiar, as an intentional displacement by Lutter to mirror alienation from modern day life.¹⁹³ The realms or zones of Vera Lutter's photographic images are achieved with a camera obscura, a machine and mechanism for inverting the images of the world into black and white negative images, such as in her works, *Battersea Power Station* (2004), *RHEINBRAUN*, (2006), and *333 West 39th Street* (2010-2012).¹⁹⁴ Lutter works with installation and her photographs are displayed in different ways and on different scales. The ghostly and haunting nature of the ephemeral black and white images play with the viewer's relationship to absence in the image and rendering visible what usually may be invisible in normative ways of seeing.¹⁹⁵

If the photographic image is a location of thought, the spatial essayistic work's thinking is also present in the sound design, either a complementary or disruptive essayistic zone and spatial construct in relation to the image. In *Model Society* the sound design is straightforward. There is the electronically producing meditative sequenced sounds that play under the images, with some time stretched sync sound from the images, and a woman's voice reading the passages of text. This plays as complementary to the image sequence. The disruption and performative reconstruction of the audio and image spaces or zones comes through the decision of the viewer to choose which audio, if any, to listen to, and in which order, while viewing the images. The works' thinking is present in the assemblage and construct of the spatiality and zone of the audio-visual installation. What is asked of the viewer, while in this zone, is the relation to the representation of spaces from the walks that took place that uncovered the locations and audio-visual material for the film. The works' thinking is present in the technology assembled to capture the image: the smart phone and other lens-based machines.

¹⁹³ Jonathan Crary, "Vera Lutter: Spectres of Negation," in *Ruins*, ed. Brian Dillon (MIT Press/Whitechapel Gallery, 2011), 170.

¹⁹⁴ Vera Lutter, "A ghost still is like a place," Aspen: Baldwin Gallery, 2011.

¹⁹⁵ Jonathan Crary, "Vera Lutter: Spectres of Negation," in *Ruins*, ed. Brian Dillon (MIT Press/Whitechapel Gallery, 2011), 171.

Essayistic Zones and Architectures of Injustice

The artist's or filmmaker's apparatus or technology is an essayistic zone for the reconstructions of the image. Yamaneko is a fictionalised video artist in the essay film *Sans Soleil* (1983) by Chris Marker. The machine for Yamaneko is the video synthesiser, named *The Zone* after the off-limits area of land in Andrei Tarkovsky's film *Stalker* (1973). The zone in *Stalker* has at its heart *The Room* and the guide in the film, the stalker, takes a writer and a scientist through the abandoned landscape, to the room, where it is reported that a person's innermost desire will be made real. The zone for Yamaneko, as Catherine Lupton observes, is a technological tool to reconstruct mediated images as memories. Importantly, these images are produced with an aesthetic that places them outside familiar representations of the image.¹⁹⁶ The images synthesised by Yamaneko come from a variety of historical archival sources and imaginary compositions. The treatment of images by the video synthesiser transforms the image into a granular saturated representation of its former composition, usually involving two or three bold primary or secondary colours. Nora Alter helpfully sets the images in five zones. 1. Documentary footage of past events. 2. The manufacture of video games, including cats and owls, and the 'Burakumin'¹⁹⁷, a community of Japanese people whose existence continues to be socially denied. 3. Signs that function in memory. 4. Recreated images of kamikaze pilots from World War II. And 5. Key images that have composed *Sunless*.¹⁹⁸ The key here for Marker is the use of 'non-images', as Lupton notes the images created by Marker in the zone reconstruct the nostalgic images of the archive, collapsing the past, present and future and making visible what is usually absent.¹⁹⁹

The production of images is intertwined with architectures of injustice in that we cannot fully detach imagery from economies supporting social inequalities and power despite determined use (or indeterminate use) of the cinematic, documentary and moving image as aesthetic political vehicles. The socially denied in Marker's film, the Burakumin, or the often hidden or invisible population of people with learning disabilities in the UK, are examples of people living with inequality. If cultural representation and image economies supporting social inequalities

¹⁹⁶ Catherine Lupton, *Chris Marker: memories of the future* (Reaktion Books, 2005), 149.

¹⁹⁷ George Hicks, *Japan's hidden apartheid: The Korean minority and the Japanese* (Routledge, 2021). And Ian J. Neary, "Burakumin in contemporary Japan," in *Japan's minorities: The illusion of homogeneity*, ed. Michael Weiner (Routledge, 2008), 50-78.

¹⁹⁸ See Nora Alter's more detailed breakdown of the 5 zones in Nora M Alter, *Chris Marker* (University of Illinois Press, 2006), 106.

¹⁹⁹ Catherine Lupton, *Chris Marker: memories of the future* (Reaktion Books, 2005), 150. And Birgit Kämper, Thomas Tode, and Chris Marker, Chris Marker, *Filmessayist*, (*Revue CICIM* 45/46/47, 1997), 287-8.

are to be altered, the invisible 'non-images' should be rendered visible, and this can happen through the very nature of the image reconstructed by the work's thinking, in the zone.²⁰⁰ This approach requires the artist or filmmaker to critically treat the absent or invisible elements of our governing ideologies in the spatial and temporal aesthetic and political make-up of their work. For example, the power of *The Forgotten Space* (2010) by Allan Sekula and Noel Burch, is in the unveiling of the ideology of global capitalism through making visible the usually invisible and forgotten spaces of the containerisation of goods travelling globally across the sea trade routes. The dual machinic zones of the floating factories of ships carrying containers and the director's camera that captured these images makes present the spectre of global capitalism. Or, as Talia Shabtay refers to it: 'Bringing neoliberalism down to earth.'²⁰¹ Sekula and Burch achieved this by contrasting personal interviews with the homeless, one a former mechanic on the shipyards with shots of the massive industry of the machinic floating factories in ports and on the seas. The inaccessible spaces and the hidden people from this industry are made accessible for the viewer. In contrast to Marker and Lutter, the reconstruction of the images from the complex system of global trade and capitalism are brought down from the spectral realm and grounded, or floated, as direct images, brought into focus for everyone to see.²⁰²

Exactly halfway through *Model Society* there is a short section of black video. The images preceding this black video are the people standing on the rocks looking out of frame. Then an empty gallery, with some installation scaffolding and equipment lying abandoned on the floor space. The woman reads the line, 'And here is the place to insert the film.'²⁰³ The audio sequences pause, the images pause. Black video and silence are left to fill the image and sonic space. The viewer is left with a pausing state, an interstice, the spatial temporal zone of the film is opened to a disruptive crack.

At nine minutes another disruptive crack appears, this time vertically through the middle of the image. The image is split in two. On the left a man runs past a police van and on the right a car speeds away on a motorway. The work's thinking is also present in the interstices of the frame and cut, this time the cut is visible. The interstice acts as a temporal disruption and the essay zone becomes a flexible critical structure where the work asks the viewer to engage in

²⁰⁰ Ibid, 92.

²⁰¹ Talia Shabtay, "The Art and the Politics of The Forgotten Space," *Oxford Art Journal* 38.2 (2015): 265.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Text taken from channel 2, titled *Model Society*, of my video triptych essayistic installation, Lorraine (2017).

the disruptive significance of the spatial temporal crack. The work's thinking asks the viewer to engage in something that isn't there, something absent, something deprived, something invisible. As Jonathan Crary relates, the haunting black and white photographic images of Vera Lutter are similar to the written and photographic texts of WG Sebald,²⁰⁴ in that the viewer, or reader, is presented with a dissonance, deprivation and estrangement to the present contemporary state, including technology and culture.²⁰⁵ For example in Sebald's *Rings of Saturn* (1999), the spectres from global events of death, destruction, atrocity and trauma, are brought to life in his intertextual narrative on a walk through the local geographical places and sites of East Anglia, including the spectre of colonialism through Sebald's engagement with Joseph Conrad's text, *Heart of Darkness* (1899). Sebald presents the journey through a mix of history, dream, memory and at times disorientating textual and visual forms.²⁰⁶ What Crary is showing in both Lutter's and Sebald's work is that what lies in the inaccessible, is the estrangement and de-realising effects of modernity. This estrangement for Crary is a melancholy of modernism, rather than an emotional state of sadness.²⁰⁷ Through the technological act of looking there is the ability for the individual to view what is immediate but what is also absent.

The pixelated video synthesised images of Yamaneko's machinic zone conjure an incorporeal presence and the black and white negative camera obscura images of Lutter's machinic zone conjure an uncanny and ghostly view of the world around us. Both sets of images ask the viewer to look again as the processes used to treat the images enact a spectral quality. The spectral quality of Yamaneko's essay zone is in the conflict of memory and the technological mediated images of modernity that forge these memories. The conflict in Lutter's machinic zone is in the individual experience of the everyday and the spectral power of the photographic image to offer the inaccessible. As Crary notes images treated in this way invite the viewer to remove the ideological veil of global capitalism.²⁰⁸ Underneath the veil is an alternative world order.

²⁰⁴ Winfried Georg Sebald, *The rings of Saturn*, Vol. 881 (New Directions Publishing, 1999). And Winfried Georg Sebald, *Vertigo*, Vol. 12, no. 3 (New Directions Publishing, 2000).

²⁰⁵ Jonathan Crary, "Vera Lutter: Spectres of Negation," in *Ruins*, ed. Brian Dillon (MIT Press/Whitechapel Gallery, 2011), 172.

²⁰⁶ Simon Cooke, "Sebald's ghosts: Traveling among the dead in The Rings of Saturn," *Journeys* 11, no. 1 (2010): 50-68.

²⁰⁷ Jonathan Crary, "Vera Lutter: Spectres of Negation," in *Ruins*, ed. Brian Dillon (MIT Press/Whitechapel Gallery, 2011), 172.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

In the essayistic zone are the creative critical conditions to render the invisible visible. By expanding our understanding of the work's thinking to the full construction and assemblage of the praxis of the essayistic zone there is potential to begin to deconstruct these assemblages and reconstruct and rearrange them to offer alternative ways of cinematic thinking, or alternative aesthetic political filmic philosophies. Re-forming or de-forming the cinematic set, space and frame offers alternative personal aesthetic political collective negotiation of space and time. Filmmaking is subverted and disrupted. The process is stripped back, and emphasis is given to overlooked often hidden processes of constructing space and time. The work's thinking is not only located in the image but in the multiplicity of spaces in the form. The essayistic zone asks of us to treat it as a mind and asks the viewer to enter a thinking operation, a dialogue with the act of spatial essaying, a dialogue with the zone.

Glimmers of Alternative Futures

Distracted. Outside, people moving past in slow motion, serene, calm, prescient, and then they moved past, calm, silent. Branding, graphics almost completely lost. Images abandoned. Calm, that word, it had become superior to all and in the same breadth lost any significance it once had as we all flow one after the other into the stream of other and off aside, removed, detached, and gone from the think and thought of before. My interior mirrored the exterior, I was lost in a whitewash of white upon white upon, on the occasional light grey and my only solace, solaris, was the light reflection which opened a, the occasional hue from mirrored glass that reflected the green. Green, not tree, no grass, just the green, as opposed to the white. Inside the calm.²⁰⁹

No Place / Good Place

Lorri is one of the last in her society to have the power of speech. She is left with a few words as her society becomes increasingly more perfect and the need for stories, narratives and

²⁰⁹ Text taken from channel 3, titled No Place / Good Place, of my video triptych essayistic installation, Lorraine (2017).

thoughts happen less and less as people become more content. As Lorri's language and thought break down she struggles to write down her remaining thoughts as she settles into *the calm*. She begins to take photos of this new society, and this leads to gathering items, creating images, and recreating sounds as she tries to build a picture of her identity before 'society sorted itself out' and 'the calm.'²¹⁰ Through this process recollections appear in her memory including her grandfather's account of being trapped in the Poll Tax riot of 1990. In *No Place/Good Place* Lorri's utopian/eutopian thoughts play out in this audio-visual sequence.

The audio-visual structure of *No Place / Good Place*, the third video channel in the installation, *Lorraine*, is one of fragments. Small constellations of images revolve and then move on, like the early images in the sequence of infra-red images of a fairground ride at a seafront, which adjoins a still image of stationary horse at a different abandoned fairground. There is a black section of video, an abstract image of a metal grill, then an illustration of fighter jets on a TV, and then the sequence returns to an abandoned table at a seaside pier, the infra-red fairground, then moves to a reflection in a granite floor. As these small constellations of images rotate a woman reads passages of text and faintly in the background of the sonic space a rhythmical clicking can be heard. The images appear like lost memories, reinstated for a short while as the woman reads lines like, 'All I have are his stories, abandoned' and 'The extrication of the saturation of the image. And now we must rely on broken imaginations and memories, degrading ever more frequently. Nothing to see other than the real. Our lobotomised fictional spaces cut off. I search for the cracks. To slip inside once more.'²¹¹ The structure of the images in the sequence seems abstract and fragmentary yet in this flow of images, in situating two images side by side there is an interstice, a small space, a passageway from one spatial temporal zone to the next. The cut and splice of the images in the sequence continually moves the viewer somewhere else. The viewer is moved on and on, from one time and space to another and as the images unfold during the sequence, these fragmentary passages travel further in distance from the Earth. In the final image of the sequence, a woman eating a grape in a supermarket, the viewer is left looking at a photographic still of the everyday, yet the still is on The Golden Record, travelling through space on the Voyager Spacecraft.

²¹⁰ Samples of text taken from channel 3, titled *No Place / Good Place*, of my video triptych essayistic installation, *Lorraine* (2017).

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

Interstices and Open Essayistic Architectures

The interstice in an open cinematic architecture offers a way of seeing the internal spatial and temporal logic of the expanded essay form. The essayistic work's thinking, or as Stanley Cavell emphasised, 'the sense that the work wants something of us to behold or hear or read it',²¹² asks the viewer to inhabit the interstice and move in sideways and lateral directions to stumble upon alternative aesthetic-personal-political horizons in the imaginary of the essayistic zone. The task asked of the viewer, as Hans Richter observed, is to visualise notions of the imaginary not represented in the direct images or sounds of the work.²¹³ Or as Patrick Keiller notes, the work's thinking asks the viewer to see and hear across time and space through the fragmentary adjoinment of images and sounds from distant places.²¹⁴ In the relationship of time, image and memory in Chris Marker's *Sans Soleil*, David Montero argues the internal structure of Marker's work is designed to enact a drift through the memories of the viewer, yet the memories enact a networked linkage of broader, past, present, and future memories, sometimes irreconcilable to the audio-visual sequences from the film.²¹⁵ The space and time of the essayistic work is continually under construction and the interstice when positioned in this evolving construction of time and space provides a crack and a passageway for alternative and lateral essayistic zones.

The essayistic interstice is therefore a crack for a utopian beginning, a failed eutopia, and everything in between: an inverse blueprint of past, present, and future imaginings. If the drift of the viewer through time, image, and memory in an essayistic work like *Sans Soleil* is, as Montero argues, 'branched',²¹⁶ the spatial temporal construction or assemblage of an essayistic work is a layering or palimpsest of architectural cinematic blueprints. In my work, *Lorraine*, the small constellations of images are layered around the motif of the motel symbolising both no place and good place, both utopia eutopia, an architectural construction designed for pausing on a journey from one place to the next. I use the motel as a representation of the idealistic passage to freedom, but also a representation of social

²¹² Rupert Read and Jerry Goodenough, eds. "What becomes of thinking on film?," in *Film as philosophy: essays in cinema after Wittgenstein and Cavell* (Springer, 2005), 186.

²¹³ Hans Richter, "6. The Film Essay: A New Type of Documentary Film," in *Essays on the Essay Film*, ed. Nora M Alter and Timothy Corrigan (Columbia University Press, 2017), 90.

²¹⁴ Patrick Keiller, "The Robinson Institute," in *The view from the train: Cities and other landscapes* (Verso Books, 2014), 122.

²¹⁵ David Montero, "Film also ages: time and images in Chris Marker's *Sans soleil*," *Studies in French Cinema* 6.2 (2006): 110.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*

inequality, poverty, and ideological entrapment. The motel acts as a metaphorical interstice, offering a site of to move off from, an image of what could be, but also reinforcing the distance from reaching that place.

Black Quantum Futurism (BQF) is an artist collective made up of Cameae Ayewa and Rasheedah Phillips and based in Philadelphia. Black Quantum Futurism create works that, as TJ Demos terms 'radical futurism', meet radical imagination with radical praxis to mine the future for speculative visions of times to come, works that model radical futurisms that refuse to surrender to racial Capitalist Realism.²¹⁷ In their 2017 work *Project: Time Capsule*, BQF perform readings from fictional time capsules unearthed after being buried for several decades under housing projects and estates in the US and Europe. Through the performative readings the work focuses on temporal technologies that can deconstruct and disrupt the entrapment of digitally mediated linear time for marginalised communities. In the performed documentation of the fictional content from the time capsules, interstices are created that provide openings for a collapse of past, present, and future time. As the artists state: 'Temporal technologies are available for the oppressed Black and Brown people isolated in local, progressive linear fatalistic time ghettos that deny access to temporal dimensions outside of the narrow time band of the digitally-mediated present.'²¹⁸ Interstices created through quantum entanglement mixing science fiction with African diasporic temporalities, rituals, images, and sounds. *Project: Time Capsule* is an example of the emergence of Afrofuturism 2.0 and the Black Speculative Arts Movement.²¹⁹ As Ytasha L. Womack states, an Afrofuturism that is located at the interrelationship of imagination, technology, future, and liberation.²²⁰

In Black Quantum Futurism's essayistic video work *Black Space Agency Training Video* (2018), part of their multiform work *Black Space Agency*, the glitchy aesthetic of the moving images suggests a message that is beamed in from across space and time, with documentation from

²¹⁷ TJ Demos, "Radical Futurisms: Insurgent Universality, Solidarity, and Worlds-to-Come," Shifts – Photography, Environment, Action, June 24-25, 2021, Online Event. And Ayema, Cameae, and Philips, Rasheedah, 'Black Quantum Futurism', 2020, <https://www.blackquantumfuturism.com>.

²¹⁸ Cameae Ayema and Rasheedah Philips, "Black Quantum Futurism," 2020, <https://www.blackquantumfuturism.com/project-time-capsule>.

²¹⁹ Tobias C. Van Veen and Reynaldo Anderson, "Future movements: black lives, black politics, black futures— an introduction," *TOPIA: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies* (2018): 12. And Reynaldo Anderson, "Afrofuturism 2.0 & the black speculative arts movement: Notes on a Manifesto," *Obsidian* 42.1/2 (2016): 228-236.

²²⁰ Ytasha L. Womack, *Afrofuturism: The world of black sci-fi and fantasy culture* (Chicago Review Press, 2013), 9.

past newspaper articles from the space race, mixed with collaged images of Black astronauts. The sonic scape is an electronic Afrofuturist mix of sounds and readings. The video highlights the Rev. Leon. H. Sullivan, a civil rights leader and founder of the Progress Aerospace Enterprises (PAE), created shortly after the death of Martin Luther King and one of the first Black owned aerospace companies.²²¹ The multiple artistic outputs of Ayema and Philips reverse past documentary practices, disrupt the reified focus on past and present, and use a performative imagination that mixes factual futurity and fiction, utilising essayistic hybridity. The works offer an approach to a resistance of formal closure of Capitalist Realism and colonised, racialised and economised time. Black Quantum Futurism practice the future as disruption, bring open potentiality, and displace the singular narrative of time. This disruption open potentiality, and displacement of time in relation to political space, is what TJ Demos calls, an emancipatory 'chrono-politics', or for Kodwo Eshun, an Afrofuturist politics of temporality.²²²

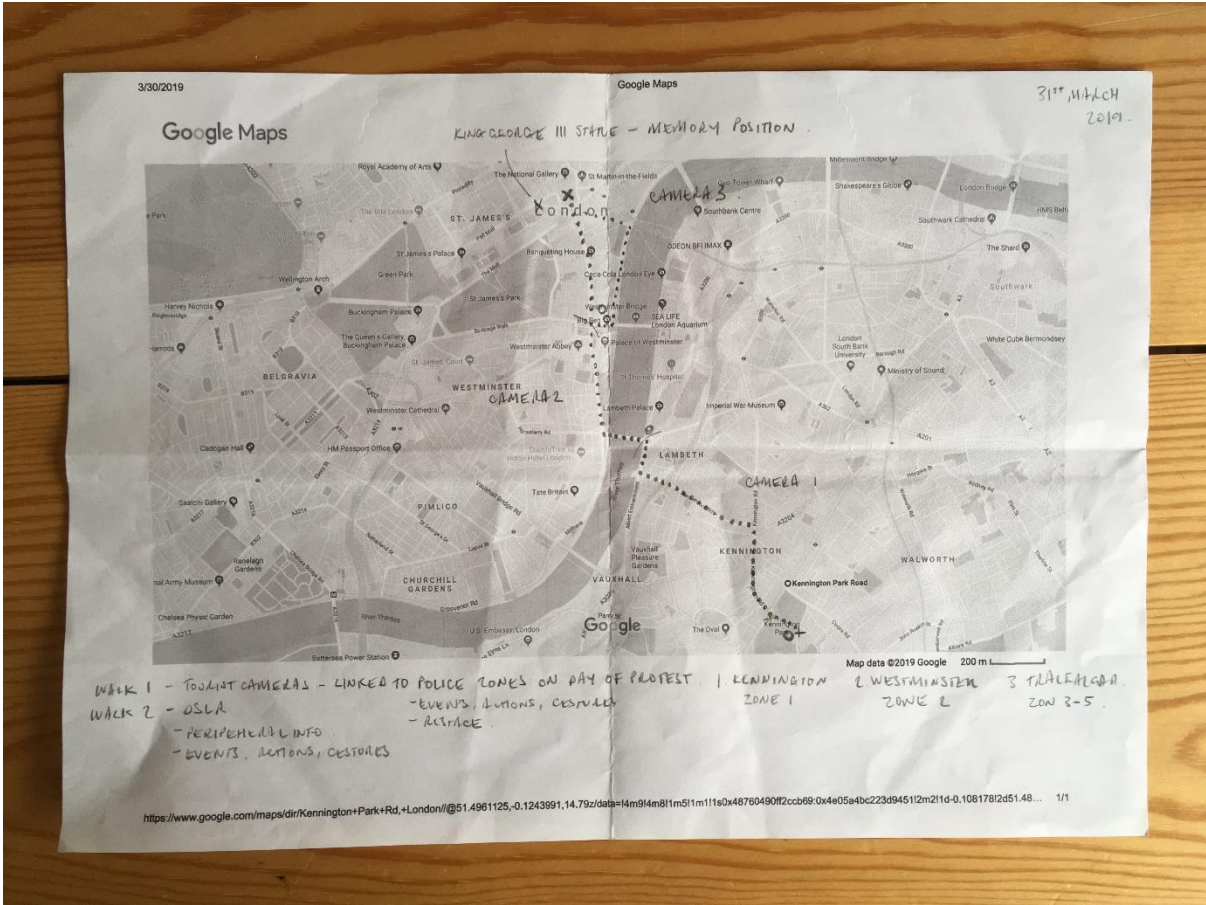
In the intended cracks, interstices, cuts and montages, an essayistic work holds an inverse or mirrored shape shifting blueprint for an assembled (e)utopia. Instances of ideological invisibility usually masked, hidden, or forgotten are offered spaces of acknowledgement for the viewer through the interstices and cracks and disruptions and interventions in time and space constructed in the work. Notably BQF use their work *Black Space Agency Training Video* to critique NASA's space race and a reengagement with the meeting of this ambitious scientific programme and the Civil Rights Movement. The work renders the forgotten memories of the Poor Peoples' March at Cape Canaveral, the Black community's resistance to the Moon landing and Space Race, the lack of diversity in recruitment by NASA during the programme, and the demolition and displacement of black communities and housing to make way for subsidised housing for NASA employees. The work makes visible the invisible but, in this critique, collapses the past racial discrimination and marginalisation of Black communities in grand narrative scientific progress, with future spatial transformation and in the context of

²²¹ Cameae Ayema and Rasheedah Philips, "Black Quantum Futurism," 2020, <https://www.blackquantumfuturism.com/black-space-agency>. And Nathaniel Bracey, "The Progress Movement and community development: the Zion Non-Profit Charitable Trust," *Journal of African American History* 96.1 (2011): 90-95.

²²² TJ Demos, "Radical Futurisms: Insurgent Universality, Solidarity, and Worlds-to-Come," *Shifts – Photography, Environment, Action*, June 24-25, 2021, Online Event. And Kodwo Eshun, "Further Considerations on Afrofuturism," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 2 (2003): 287-302.

the *Black Space Agency*, 'Black Spatial-Temporal Autonomy.'²²³ BQF's inverse essayistic architectural blueprint is a shifting diagrammatic puzzle for both maker and viewer: an invisible meta morph. This invisible puzzle is a language game. In the inverse blueprint are the coded instructions for spatial transformation and alternative aesthetic-political horizons. The test is that the instructions are in a language only part known, and part shown to the maker and viewer. The essayistic zone acts as a creative critical code for cracking and the interstice or crack tests ideological invisibilities as glimmers of alternative futures, or essayistic futurisms on a spectrum of dystopia to utopia. The essayistic zone holds the inverse blueprint for an alternative world order.

²²³ Cameae Ayema and Rasheedah Philips, "Black Quantum Futurism," 2020, <https://www.blackquantumfuturism.com>





2



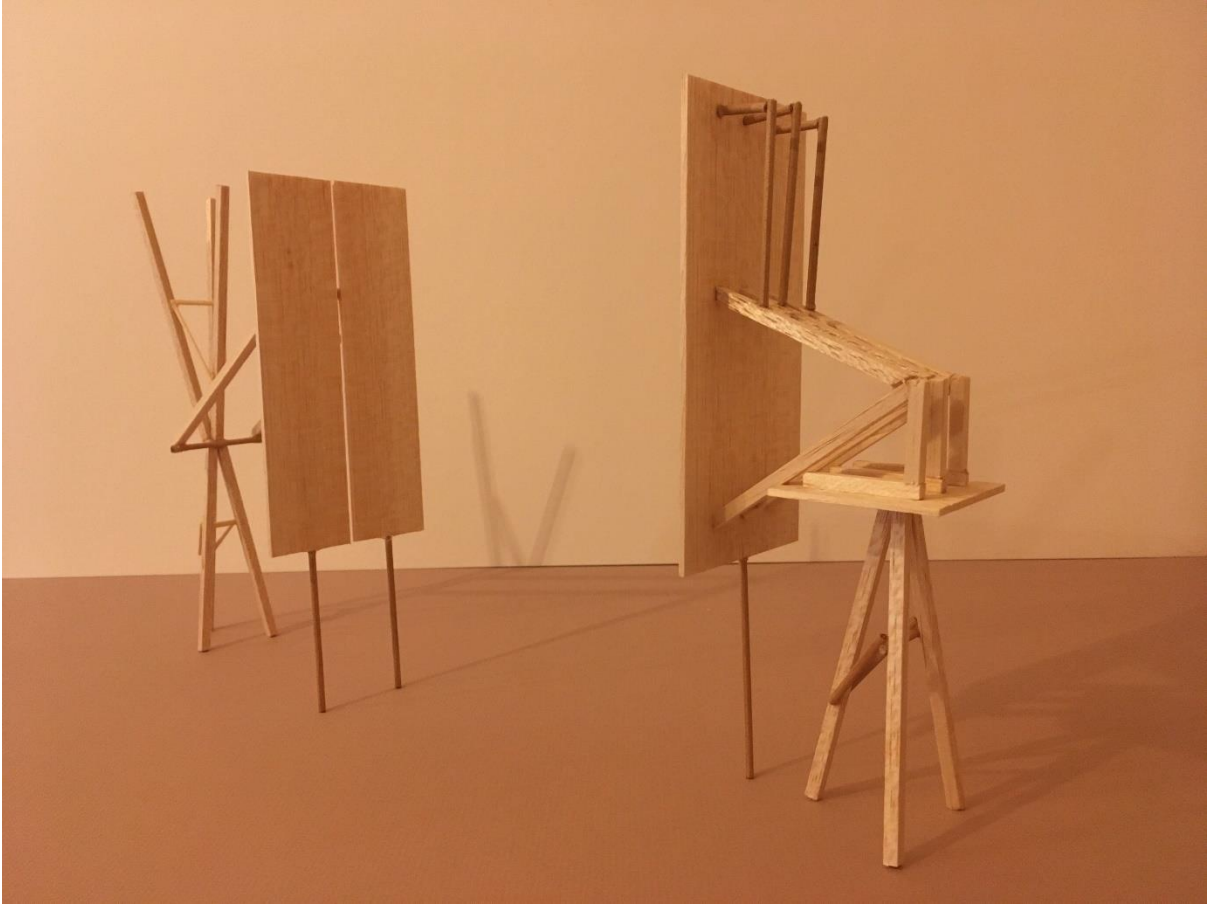
3



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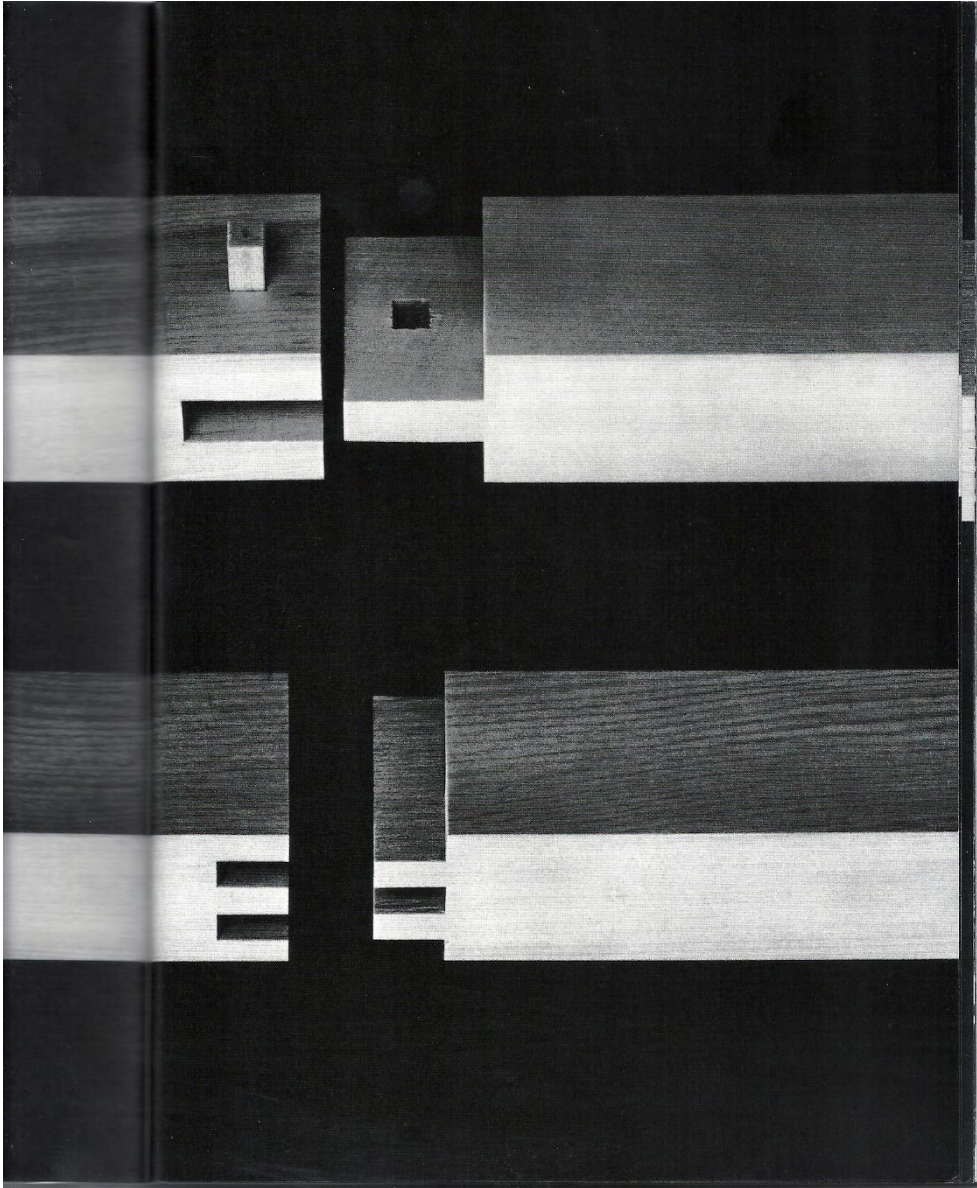
6



7



8



KEEPING THE PEACE

Images

1. The map of my walk retracing the route of the poll tax demonstration, 29 years to the day
2. A police officer in Whitehall
3. Ten archive photos, the sites rephotographed on the walk
4. Searching for the monument of my memory
5. Performing and photographing gestures from the archive photos
6. Architectural assemblages from *Capteur* (2019-2020)
7. Illustration from police cordon instruction in ACPO Public Order Tactics and Training guide
8. Support structures and cut out photographs, *Capteur* (2019-2020)
9. Japanese Joinery
10. Still from *Capteur* (2019-2020)



Zone 3: Capitalist 'Sur' Realism

In this chapter I use the body of work titled *Capteur* to discuss the entanglement of hauntology, trauma, and memory as crisis in expanded essayistic practices and consider how the essay form can encounter Capitalist Realism through irrationality and play.

I start by discussing how the multiple essayistic modes of *Capteur* functioned as an archaeology of crisis in political history and personal memory.

I will then analyse how play in the meta essayistic process used in the creation of *Capteur* can be adopted as a creative critical process to test alternative textures of personal-political trauma and crises. I discuss how the hauntological condition present in an essayistic work can be restaged as a reflexive meta-hauntological critique.

I then consider the idea of fictional concrete that developed as part of the meta-essayistic praxis in *Capteur*, and how by essaying with irrationality and play, using architectural assemblages, support structures, cut out images and essayistic folds, we can see through cracks in the hauntological condition of the essay film and enter speculative post-hauntological zones.

I will finish the chapter by discussing a variation on the Oulipon writing constraints I used to create the base text for *Capteur*, followed by analysis of the collages, cut out images, and essayistic folds in the modes of *Capteur*. Then, by entering a speculative post-hauntological zone, I explore how creative critical encounters, such as Capitalist 'Sur' Realism, may function as essayistic futurism.

An Archaeology of Crises

You are able to create a decomposition of time and space and step right into a dimension of transformation and everlasting change.²²⁴

Dennis Busch

Beliefs about the shape of the future can be invoked, leveraged, even weaponised, to drive change in the present.²²⁵

Adam Greenfield

²²⁴ Dennis Busch and Francesca Gavin, Eds., *The Age of Collage III: Contemporary Collage in Modern Art* (Gestalten, 2020), 232.

²²⁵ Adam Greenfield, "Machine Learning," in *Radical technologies: The design of everyday life* (Verso Books, 2017), 257.

Capteur

Age ten, I became trapped in the Community Charge demonstrations in Trafalgar Square, more commonly known as the Poll Tax Riots. My work *Capteur* (2019-2020) is multi-form and a work of essayistic resemblances that recounts my personal passage and memories of the conflict, violence, and trauma of the Poll Tax Riot on March 31st, 1990. *Capteur* is made up of personal, autobiographical accounts of the day, archive documents and documentary footage, public accounts of the riot, and restaged encounters with the event. I used a testimonial approach in the textual passages of the work that is deliberate, accidental, enforced, and abstract, and I constructed a speculative installed environment with several inter-related essayistic modes that drew together human, architectural, political, and technological players. The multiple essayistic modes of *Capteur* functioned as an archaeology of crisis for me. In a series of alternative reconstructions of political history in critical relationship with my personal memory I brought together a multiplicity of temporal and spatial aesthetic political relations.

My early intention was for the work to be an essayistic moving image installation and an environment assembled with three distinct parts:

1. A single 9:16 moving image work made from one hundred and thirteen (the number of people injured on the day) sections and edits is projected onto a concrete screen. A small speaker suspended from the ceiling next to the screen offers an embodied rhythm and wave of sonic testimony made up from one hundred and thirteen transcripts.
2. A slide projector automatically plays through three hundred and thirty-nine (number of people arrested) images of collaged and assembled archive documents / images. A tape player with headphones plays the academic Bernard Moitessier talking through political consequence of the community charge, spliced with my personal account of the day.
3. A second concrete screen mirrors the first projecting a future ruined image created by an algorithm picking images of transnational conflict and reconstructing, reconfiguring the image by suturing to architectural coordinates and movements from the day.

I liken *Capteur* to an archaeological excavation, a careful scraping in the dirt of memory, uncovering lost artefacts in the historical context of the event. Dieter Roelstraete uses Walter Benjamin's line: 'He who seeks to approach his own buried past must conduct himself like a man digging', to frame discussion on artists' relationship of their practice to history.²²⁶ Yet, in his closing line Roelstraete is careful to note there is a flaw in the bodily connection of scraping away in the dirt of history: 'inability to grasp or even look at the present, much less to excavate the future.'²²⁷ Whilst following a process of making the three distinct parts of *Capteur* I outlined above, tangential creative avenues developed, and I decided to take a series of speculative and theoretical pathways in my meta-essayistic praxis. The work became less of a concrete installation as outlined above and instead a series of inter-related and networked works. *Capteur* is an act of essaying. I scraped the layers of my memory to inform iterative creative critical processes and created a body of work over two years. The process was deep and long, pushing my memory to its limits. I tested a range of ideas creating fragment after fragment, linked to my memory aged ten. Along the various pathways I created theoretical texts, factual autobiographical texts and fictionalised texts written under a series of textual writing constraints, maps, images, models, collages, moving images, algorithms and coded works, sound works, audio recordings, performative collages and gestures, and re-walked the route of the demonstration. In the following section I detail four of the processes used in making the film, and the resemblance of essayistic forms produced, to analyse the creative critical relationship of play and crises in essaying moments of trauma. Layer after layer, I reconstructed a collection of materials and fragments in assemblages. The essayistic assemblages allowed me to work with forgotten ruined memories but always with an eye on excavating the conflict of personal memory and political history, and the significance of futurity in the work. *Capteur* is a never-ending test, a passageway through past, present, and future memories, through history and back.

One distinct memory I have from that day in 1990 is being shielded by the adults that took us on the trip. The adults formed a human shield around us as the riot moved down the street in front of us. I looked through an adult's legs in front of me to see a person climb the monument in the street with a placard. Another person threw a brick down the street and a metal dustbin

²²⁶ Walter Benjamin, "Excavation and memory," *Selected writings 2*, no. Part 2 (2005): 1931-1934. 576.

²²⁷ Dieter Roelstraete, "The Way of the Shovel: On the Archeological Imaginary in Art," *e-flux Journal*, n. 4, march (2009).

was hurled through a McDonald's window shattering the glass. The scene in front of me was chaotic, dynamic, and violent.

The name of the piece, *Capteur*, invites the viewer into a location of potential entrapment and restriction, a tension in the opportunity for escape. Yet in contrast the name of the piece suggests there is an unanswered agency. The word *capteur* resembles the English word capture but the French translation is sensor. A sensor, as Adam Greenfield writes, captures information in the form of data whilst our bodily senses retain information in the form of human perception.²²⁸ The word *capteur* is the starting point for a series of critical relationships in art and image that my body of work addresses: 1) Personal memory (+) political history; 2) Data (+) human perception; 3) Image (+) information; 4) Truth and knowledge (+) authorship, editing and curation; 5) Past, present (+) future. The role of the sensor can be applied in several ways. Firstly, in the cameras belonging to the photographers, both from the press and independent, that captured the images on the day that form part of the photographic archive. Secondly, to the Home Office and Police that captured the data that went into the reporting of the event. Thirdly, in the audio recorders capturing the testimonies of the demonstrators. Fourthly, to me, observing the demonstration as a ten-year-old boy and now restaging that perception. Fifthly, to the viewer of the work, and their operation or movement through it: their biological adjustments or measurements of the audio visual spatial temporal information. Yet, the notion of the capture of data is left unresolved, as what is retained by technological sensor, or bodily sense is taken from a much wider and intricate selection of potential sources: 'perception itself is always already a process of editing and curation'.²²⁹ This unresolved notion of data capture can be developed further as a technological sensor is programmed to detect, record and hold data, but the viewer, whether the operator of the camera, the police officer, the demonstrator, or viewer of the work, is not solely reducible to the role of a sensor whilst engaged with the relationship of knowledge, truth, and testimony in the work. The human *capteur* / sensor captures, but what is captured is beyond data, and more so, beyond information and image. Tacit knowledge, as Harry M Collins states, is gleaned as a precarity of emotional reactions and experiences.²³⁰ *Capteur* is a series of essayistic

²²⁸ Adam Greenfield, "Machine Learning," in *Radical technologies: The design of everyday life* (Verso Books, 2017), 210.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Harry M Collins, "What is tacit knowledge?," *The practice turn in contemporary theory* (Routledge, 2005), 115-128. And Neil Gascoigne and Tim Thornton, *Tacit knowledge* (Routledge, 2014).

constructions that leaves unsettled the latent aesthetic and political contradictions of human perception and technological capture.

The title of Volume One of the Atlas Group's works (1999-2005), *The Truth Will be known When the Last Witness is Dead*, proposes a subversive and absurd philosophical conclusion on cultural and collective memory, specifically the political history of Lebanon and the civil wars that ran from 1975 to 1990.²³¹ For Elisa Adami, the Atlas group's mix of fact and fiction through documentary archive fragment and personal testimony offers the potential of 'speculative post-identarian collectivity', following the state managed forgotten memories of the civil wars, in conflict with the discordant political memory of the opposition.²³² The Atlas Group's subversive response, as Peter Osborne notes, is that the truth will only be uncovered when the last witness delivers their final testimony, yet at this point the structure of truth created will become unstable and collapse due to the death of the final witness.²³³ The perception of truth through testimony is proposed as myth by The Atlas Group and unable to be disentangled from the historical present. The Atlas Group itself is a fictionalised foundation, the collective being the work of one Lebanese artist, Walid Raad. In the critical relationship of history to past, present and memory there is a question of where speculative futurity is located? As Osborne notes: 'history is not just a relationship between the present and the past – it is equally about the future'.²³⁴ The essayistic work, such as the archival form of the Atlas Group, is not purist in its search for documentary truth and provides the critical self-reflexivity to be at once about truth and in self-aware critique, test alternative notions of truth. The critical relationship of testimony, history, and memory reappears in essayistic works, which is unsurprising as the essayistic enacts a hybridity of personal subjectivity, autobiography, and collective social political experience. What is at stake for me in the work of *Capteur* is a critical engagement with truth, authenticity, and testimony in essayistic art time and space, and beyond truth, trauma, and therapy, and a hauntological encasement of futurity and E/utopia.

²³¹ Elisa Adami, "The Truth of Fiction: Some Stories of the Lebanese Civil Wars," in *Civil War and Narrative* (Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2017), 109-127.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Peter Osborne, "Art Time," in *Anywhere or not at all: Philosophy of contemporary art* (Verso Books, 2013), 94.

²³⁴ Ibid.

Essaying Trauma and Play

I used speculative play as the central creative process in my meta essayistic praxis to create *Capteur*. In the following sections: *The Ghost Walk*; *Restaging Archival Photographs*; *The West Riding Riot Re-enactment Society*; and *Algorithmic testimony*, I detail four of these processes of speculative play, and the resemblance of essayistic forms that I produced, in order to analyse the creative critical relationship of play and crises in essaying moments of trauma. *Capteur's* formal logic is one of contradiction, problematising: the construction of historical experience with memory and testimony; the role that memory, the document, and the image play in the formation of cultural memory; and perceptions of truth and knowledge, and past, present, and future. In my creation of *Capteur*, I address in the essayistic work, the hauntological condition of looking into the past with a nostalgic lens and viewing lost futures. The following processes of speculative play in my archaeology of crises of the Poll Tax Riot suggest that the hauntological condition can be restaged as a reflexive meta-hauntological critique in the essayistic work.

The Ghost Walk

On the 31st March 2019 I took a train to London to re-walk the route of the Poll Tax demonstration. Exactly twenty-nine years to the day, I retraced the steps of the march starting in Kennington Park and ending in Trafalgar Square. It was a Sunday, it was quiet, the weather was overcast, and I travelled alone. To capture images and my thoughts I carried with me three disposable black and white tourist cameras, my mobile phone and notebook and pencil. Prior to the walk, whilst researching the Poll Tax demonstration I discovered a large PDF of Home Office and Police correspondence from 1990, detailing the demonstrations that had taken place across the UK, starting in Scotland in 1989.²³⁵ The documents were now accessible by the public through a freedom of information act. My route was plotted based on the original route detailed in the police reports. The route of the original demonstration had been divided into five police zones. Just before lunch I started in Kennington Park - the demonstration in 1990 started at approximately 12:00pm - and I finished in Trafalgar Square at approximately 4:40pm, the time that the South African Embassy on the corner of Northumberland Street,

²³⁵ A three hundred- and seventy-one-page PDF is available to view and download from this site: Evan Smith, et al, "Poll Tax Story," *Specialbranchfiles*, 31 March, 2018, <http://specialbranchfiles.uk/poll-tax-story/>.

was damaged. On that day, the riots ran late into the night. I wrote to my friend a month after my walk:

All in all, it was kind of an odd ghost walk, possibly due to the black and white photos. I took a lot on my phone as well. Haunted and quiet in many places. It was getting very Sebaldian²³⁶ at times when I was looking at the peripheral info along the route like signs and architectures. I was hoping to pick up Brexit demonstrators in Westminster, but no-one was around, probably because it was a Sunday. Even the media vans were deserted. I need to reflect more on the walk and the personal significance of the new memories in relation to the older memory. I'm thinking I may do the walk again on the 30th anniversary next year.²³⁷

In fact, I was not able to return the following year as the UK went into lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic on the 24th March 2020. My lasting feeling from the walk that day was one of melancholy. This was, in part, due to the solitary nature of the walk, revisiting traumatic memories and events, combined with the weather conditions and the black and white imagery I captured. There was a sombre feeling to the day. Yet, the melancholy I felt was also a feeling of dislocation, my embodied retracing of the steps of the demonstrators, combined with my search for the location of my memory, were both disconnected from the origins of both events. I was a ghost haunting both the historical detail and my personal memory. I noted: 'For something so socially and politically significant at the time the day felt deeply personal and autobiographical, almost isolating.'²³⁸ As Jonathan Crary interprets the idea of melancholy from Walter Benjamin's view, melancholy is held in the realisation of this dislocation, in the sensitivity to modernity and its oscillation with post-modernity, and the seemingly impossible challenge of uncovering the genesis of history and memory.²³⁹ I was the ghost of the capitalist present. I wrote the following in my notebook:

Visual culture is cloaked or veiled in capitalist neoliberal conditioning. We continue to render ideological invisibilities due to the homogenised nature of aesthetic and political conditioning brought about capitalist, financial and business-related markets,

²³⁶ Reference to the work of WG Sebald and his essayistic walks converted into photo and text accounts that mix historical detail with personal intimations blurring fact and fiction.

²³⁷ Email correspondence dated April 24th, 2019.

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Jonathan Crary, "Vera Lutter: Spectres of Negation," in *Ruins*, ed. Brian Dillon (MIT Press/Whitechapel Gallery, 2011), 171.

infrastructures, imagery, and language. We are almost stuck in a hauntological loop of trying to remember lost futures through fashion, music, art, literature, film, museum, and worse consigned to a fixation of past informing present, with no expectation of a future possibility, the only future down this one path is one of destruction and apocalypse. These inferences are shaped further by both professional and individual advertising, our subjective advertising reinforcing the veil of independence, difference, experience, and ability to live freely outside of this conditioning, when our actions and gestures only help to reinforce the wearing of our commodified cloak and veil. And where does this leave image making and exposition of the invisible and hidden amidst a global capitalist economic framework. What do we look to, to break this stasis?²⁴⁰

I was revisiting and working through a view of Capitalist Realism in my notes.²⁴¹ The melancholy I felt on my ghost walk of the poll tax demonstration was brought about by a tension: How will the work not just simply perform anti-capitalism and how does the work move us on from a hauntological state? I questioned the potential feature of Interpassivity in an artistic work. In an interpassive state, as Robert Pfaller states, the viewer's associative anti-capitalist thinking, and a critique of the ideological state are presented by the work, so much so that if there is enough of an anti-capitalist performance in the work, the viewer has had their anti-capitalist fix and returns to their everyday life to fix their ideological veil.²⁴² I suggest that what must exist in the work to provide the opposite of interpassivity is interactivity and critical longevity for the viewer.

Restaging Archival Photographs and Memory

I named my disposable black and white tourist cameras Kensington, Westminster and Trafalgar, establishment names related to the police zones in the Home Office files. I used one camera for each of the zones on my route. There are many archive photos from the day of the demonstration. I selected a sample of the most arresting archive photos, tried to pinpoint their location on the route and plotted these points. On my ghost walk I tried to recreate the positioning of the photos from my research. In addition, I photographed any peripheral

²⁴⁰ Notes written on my phone between March and April 2019.

²⁴¹ Mark Fisher, *Capitalist realism: Is there no alternative?* (John Hunt Publishing, 2009), 12.

²⁴² Robert Pfaller, *Interpassivity: The aesthetics of delegated enjoyment* (Edinburgh University Press, 2017).

information along the way, including images of St Agnes Church, in Kennington Park, The Black Prince Pub, and a range of monuments.

Exactly twenty-nine years to the day, I searched for the monument that formed the centre point for one of my recurring memories: a man climbing a statue of a man on a horse. One of my quests was to capture an image from the position of my ten-year-old self. Although the events of the day have never felt traumatic to me, the images that are imprinted in my memory, when described, appear traumatic. Trauma is associated on more levels, the individual and collective trauma for the people involved that day. The political trauma and the cultural and social trauma due to the impact of the policy introduced to communities and the population. And as Jenny Edkins notes, Memorial trauma and a process of change enacted through memory.²⁴³ Where was it that I had crouched, looking through the legs of the adults as the violence of the day played out in front of us? I called it my memory position.

After navigating the streets around Trafalgar square on Google Maps before my journey I discovered that a conclusion to photographing my memory position would be difficult. There are several potential monuments in the surrounding area, including the King George III equestrian stature on Pall Mall, the equestrian statue of George 1st on Trafalgar Square, and the equestrian statue of George Duke of Cambridge on Whitehall. Despite having the detailed historical information of the day, from the Home Office and Police Records, plus archive photography, I could not reconcile this information with the image from my memory. I asked my parents, who were both there that day, if they knew where we took cover. They could not remember.

The catalogue of black and white images I took that day, on my mobile and on the disposable cameras, when viewed together reinforced my sense of melancholy from the walk. The images cemented a hauntological approach and returned me to my question of interpassivity and anti-capitalism: how is futurity enacted in the work, and how is the aesthetic and political space changed by its representational presence? *Junkopia* (1981), filmed by Chris Marker during the production of *Sans Soleil* (1983), as Catherine Lupton notes, enacts a state of melancholy, in relation to the future.²⁴⁴ The short film shows the slow weathering and degradation of a series of sculptures located on the Emeryville Beach in San Francisco. The sculptures are built from scrap and driftwood and Marker's film is a study of ephemerality as

²⁴³ Jenny Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2003).

²⁴⁴ Catherine Lupton, "Into the Zone," in *Chris Marker: memories of the future* (Reaktion Books, 2005), 151.

the sea gently removes their forms. However, the film is also a study of mediated image and memory, a theme expanded upon by Marker in *Sans Soleil*. In the opening shots of *Junkopia*, the sculptures are lost at sea in a maritime machinic zone. A dystopian zone not that far removed from the apocalyptic zone of Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker* (1979). A future time is presented to the viewer. Later in the film future and present temporalities are collapsed as the sculptures are shot with a busy highway behind them. The lost future from the beginning of the film is relocated to present day, a Holiday Inn overshadows their construction. When the sculptures have been finally removed by the elements of the sea, their form and existence, as Lupton notes, live on in the images of the film.²⁴⁵

The neologism 'hauntology' was coined by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida to overtly show the spectral quality of ideas from the past, thought to be laid to rest, visiting the present, and a propensity of these spectres to materialise as the routes of lost or abandoned futures.²⁴⁶ For example, an affirmation that free market capitalism had a locked grip on all aspects of aesthetic political society after the fall of the Berlin Wall marking the 'failed futures' of the Soviet Union.²⁴⁷ Derrida uses a line from Hamlet, 'The time is out of joint' to suggest the political status quo should be reconstructed or reset.²⁴⁸ As John Riley notes, Communism in the Soviet Union in the early 1990s collapses as the destructive plasticity of capitalism, via socio economic inequality, war, terrorism, and environmental devastation takes hold. And as Ernesto Laclau observes of Derrida's line, 'the spectral spiritualisation that is at work in any *tekhné*', trauma is linked to the concept of technological production.²⁴⁹ Marker's *Junkopia* predates Derrida's *Spectres of Marx* and 'Hauntology' as a neologism, but prophetically and metaphorically supports this hauntological conditioning. Congested infrastructure and corporate identity live on in the lost futures of the sculptures. The Community Charge policy, introduced by Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government, part of their political reorientation of the nation to free market capitalism, takes on a spectral quality in our collective political and cultural identity. The political action in 1989 and 1990 to remove the poll tax was successful and this action marked the collapse of Thatcher's time in power. Yet,

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The state of the debt, the work of mourning and the new international* (Routledge, 2012).

²⁴⁷ John A Riley, "Hauntology, Ruins, and the Failure of the Future in Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker*," *Journal of Film and Video* 69.1 (2017): 18-26.

²⁴⁸ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The state of the debt, the work of mourning and the new international* (Routledge, 2012).

²⁴⁹ Ernesto Laclau, "The time is out of joint," *diacritics* 25.2 (1995): 86-96.

the conservative party continued to govern under John Major until 1997 and the Poll Tax became the Council tax, which still stands today. The poll tax demonstrations, although revolutionary in one sense, sit alongside other political and economic strategic developments and subsequent demonstrations. For example, the Miner's Strike and the Battle of Orgreave in the stark political period of the 1980s. Thatcher, during her period of power and with the often-used catchphrase for a market economy 'There is no alternative', oversaw the economic shifts that her government introduced.²⁵⁰ The Conservative government laid some of the groundwork for our present capitalist and neoliberalist ideological state, a reason why Mark Fisher riffs on Thatcher's catchphrase in the title of his book *Capitalist Realism: Is there no alternative?*, and why these political moments are revisited and haunt our present culture.²⁵¹ Restaging the ephemeral nature of my memory of the poll tax riot or reconstructing the historical imprint of the day with the archive of black and white photography did not go far enough to transmute space and time in a way that might critique this hauntological condition. The images were not transformative as I had hoped and on reflection, I was trying to capture ghosts.

The West Riding Riot Re-enactment Society

The London Riot Re-enactment Society is a fictitious group I discovered when I was researching the poll tax riot. I came across a forum which talked about the group and after some further research I found the group to be made up. In that moment, it occurred to me that a sibling group, the West Riding Riot Re-enactment Society (WRRRS), would be a useful and playful mechanism to break the melancholy of the ghost walk and the hauntological condition of my black and white photography. In many of the photos from the day there are unusual gestures or poses from the action. The image sensor of film of the camera, in the uncontrived moment of photographing a demonstration in full force, captures inartificial behaviour, which seemed perfect as a starting point for performative processes of collage and cut out. I was able to use these performative processes to engage with the same trauma and crisis from the day, yet in an irrational and alternative context, repositioning the behaviours from the day in a parallel space and time. In one archive clip I viewed of the protest in London on March 31st, drummers

²⁵⁰ Mark Fisher, *Capitalist realism: Is there no alternative?* (John Hunt Publishing, 2009), 8.

²⁵¹ Bradley W Bateman, "There are many alternatives: Margaret Thatcher in the history of economic thought," *Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 24, no. 3 (2002): 307-311.

played out in the background, while the interviewee noted the carnival atmosphere of the demonstration.

The movement of people is critical to how the day played out and how I was captured within those events. The police officers' movements on the day were organised, dictated, and choreographed. The Home Office Records detail the commands that were given, and the decisions made to enclose and contain the demonstrators. The route of the demonstration was known to the police before the start of the day. Documents such as the ACPO Public Order Tactics and Training guide detail the different physical cordons that can be used. The illustrations in these guides resemble choreographed dance moves. I engaged with these control procedures in a playful way enabling me to explore the performative capacity of the gestures in the photographs. I used the WRRRS as a device to create images and moving image animations that reencountered these gestures. I reposed and rephotographed the gestures and behaviours and mixed the images with the Public Order Tactics, a starting point for an alternative movement of people, both individual and collective, to the events of the day. When the images and illustrations are sequenced with carnival drums from the day of the Poll tax protest in London, March 31st, 1990, this starting point creates an opening for the viewer to enter a not yet existing space and time.

In the collage work of Dennis Busch, such as *Rainbow Light Body* (2019), *Splash 01* (2015), and *Holotropic Ride* (2017), figures are covered in bright colourful overlaid collages of paper. In *Rainbow Light Body* a seated figure is adorned with a range of colourful paper jewels, some of which appear like shells, which finish at the edge of the figure. In *Splash 01* and *Holotropic Ride*, a figure of a woman and an assemblage of dancers are overlaid with bursts of folded colour paper that thrust forward from the page like explosions or fireworks. A dynamism and force of movement is brought to the original image and as Busch explains, the collages seek utopian possibilities in their new forms.²⁵² Busch's work, akin to filmmakers working with the essay form, for example Black Quantum Futurism and their use of collage in their video work, plays with the formal logic of the image, challenging boundaries and uses a speculative irrationality to push the limitations of space and time.²⁵³

²⁵² Dennis Busch and Francesca Gavin, eds., *The Age of Collage III: Contemporary Collage in Modern Art* (Gestalten 2020), 232.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*

Intervention in the image through collage is one method of transforming perception and collapsing time and space, or as Derrida borrowed from Hamlet, putting time out of joint.²⁵⁴ The artist or filmmaker can use the features of the essay in whatever form or re-semblance, to mix fact and fiction, autobiography, past, present and future, and to bend and transmute spatial-temporal zones. The illusory capacity of the essay suggests that the testing of ideas in this thinking process can be mythical, fantastical, or utopian. Even the feature of ideological critique and making visible the invisible is mythologised in the meta-morph or the shape shifting form. In short, the essayistic is whatever formal subjective mythology the author requires to test his or her ideas. The attraction of this process to me is that even if the myths that are created through these formal meanderings and weighing are fictionalised, for example the WRRRS, or the *Black Space Agency* by Black Quantum Futurism, they enable a philosophical critique and vehicle with a mirror to view our contemporary condition and a window to look on to a future possibility.

Algorithmic testimony

Three screens held up by wooden frames hold projected images created through the various creative processes of *Capteur*. An arm with a fist clenched, a colourful array of feathers, two wooden joints come together with police officers on horses, a cone floats through black space, police officers dance, and a photograph of the Black Prince Pub sits atop a wooden structure. The sonic space is filled with fragments of archive testimony and a synthesised voice reads passages from an account of the day. The sound of the voice has been manipulated, the tone has been lowered and an effect has been applied. The man's voice is hidden, the witnesses' identity has been concealed. The installation is in miniature, a speculative environment, a test, and the images and sounds are sequenced by an algorithm.

Essayistic authorship is problematised and at play in the environment. There are one hundred and thirteen images and one hundred and thirteen images audio clips that can be sequenced by the algorithm across the three screens. One hundred and thirteen images are the number of people injured on the day of the protest. Once the algorithm is started the sequencing and combination of images and sounds is limitless. The work is continually reconstructing itself.

²⁵⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The state of the debt, the work of mourning and the new international* (Routledge, 2012).

The viewer would enter a spatial environment that is constructed by an author, but the images and sounds that play out in the space, although created by the author, would be sequenced by chance by a machine. Yet, the author codes the algorithm. The algorithm I coded in this speculative installation is by no means the most sophisticated but on a base level, its use, and its ability to determine the ordering of image and sound, and thus the testimony of the work, in relation to the creation of the parts and the viewer's passage through the work, asks the questions, who is in control, and where does the power lie?

The speculative environment I created offered conditions for the production of new images. Using Harun Farocki's idea of 'soft montage', in the loose assemblage and layering of the reconstructing images and sounds, a latent image is held.²⁵⁵ The viewer is presented with a latent condition, a lacuna, and an environment for agents of latency, events and growth, viewer relationship, liberating the latent narrative. In the reconstructing layering of image and text the viewer is asked to engage with images and sounds that exist but are hidden or concealed and have not yet developed. Yet, this latency, choreographed, first by me then by the algorithm, is problematic. As Adam Greenfield writes, 'Beliefs about the shape of the future can be invoked, leveraged, even weaponised, to drive change in the present.'²⁵⁶ What Greenfield is writing about, for example, is the politicised role of meta-data in social media accounts. The creation and use of this data by individual and corporation brings into question the distance and proximity of memory and memory neutrality, the physical and virtual self, real and algorithmic self-identity, and meta-identity. This type of data was weaponised on a large scale and controversially by organisations such as Cambridge Analytica and similar entities in big political campaigns such as the UK Brexit Vote and the 2016 US elections that brought Donald Trump into power.²⁵⁷ Rather than political campaign imagery distributed generically across social media, confidential data was used in a nuanced, targeted, and individualised way. Confidential data from personality tests performed by users on Facebook was sold by Facebook to organisations such as Cambridge Analytica. Cambridge Analytica, for example in the UK Brexit vote, were able to create individualised voter profiles and then create politically persuasive 'psycho graphic profiling' to target the specific personality type of that

²⁵⁵ Nora M Alter, "Two or Three Things I Know about Harun Farocki," *October* 151 (2015): 151.

²⁵⁶ Adam Greenfield, "Machine Learning," in *Radical technologies: The design of everyday life* (Verso Books, 2017), 257.

²⁵⁷ Joanne Hinds, Emma J. Williams, and Adam N. Joinson, "'It wouldn't happen to me': Privacy concerns and perspectives following the Cambridge Analytica scandal," *International Journal of Human-Computer Studies* 143 (2020): 102498. And Iga Kozłowska, "Facebook and data privacy in the age of Cambridge Analytica," *The Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies*, Seattle 30 (2018).

voter.²⁵⁸ The privacy, or lack of privacy, of the individual's data was key to shaping the future through targeted images of what the future may hold for that individual. The use of these techniques by companies such as Cambridge Analytics has changed political campaign strategies and has created, as Frank Pasquale terms it, 'The Black Box Society', where power lies in the mining, handling and execution of data, ultimately determining who holds control of economics and the state.²⁵⁹ Information and image are now brought together via a proliferation of the self and the image across global networks, via what Peter Osborne calls, 'The Distributed Image', the smart phone acting as sensor and self.²⁶⁰ In turn, a new politics of the autobiographic image and the autobiography of data from machine-to-machine learning is leveraged to drive change in the present.

A reflexive meta-hauntological critique

My speculative environment for *Capteur* provided more than an interpassive critique of anti-capitalism, the essayistic work asked the viewer to actively participate. I had created an interactive essayistic zone. My act of play in the critical relations of the images and sounds is self-aware and self-reflexive. Artistic unity and agency are left unresolved and come into operation through the participation of the viewer. I deliberately assembled the parts in the essayistic environment to bring together what seemed like disjunctive or even impossible relations. I presented the viewer with latent image and sounds formed from the unresolved tension and space in between the de-realised parts, working to form part of a whole from the established lacuna. I constructed the environment to paradoxically liberate an expectation of the future, as the control of authorship is problematised. I invoked a hauntological condition, with past spectres and lost futures presented alongside representational space for alternative futurity and change. The temporal lineage was collapsed, and a latent narrative evolved in the thinking space. One aspect of essaying with speculative play is its potential for reflexive meta-hauntological critique.

²⁵⁸ Margaret Hu, "Cambridge Analytica's black box," *Big Data & Society* 7, no. 2 (2020): 2053951720938091.

²⁵⁹ Frank Pasquale, "The black box society," in *The Black Box Society* (Harvard University Press, 2015).

²⁶⁰ Peter Osborne, "The Distributed Image," in *The Post Conceptual Condition: critical essays* (Verso Books, 2018).

Encountering Capitalist 'Sur' Realism

Fictional Concrete and the Irrational

The thin wooden leg rises from the floor, a joint connects diagonally to another wooden leg, and a second joint connects to a third leg. A wooded tripod stands vertically. At the apex of the three legs wooden support structures hold a horizontal wooden plane. Resting on top of the plane is the Black Prince Pub. The photograph of the pub has been cut. The cut runs around the edge of the building and at the base a single fold has been made. The pub has been lifted from its two-dimensional fixing. The Black Prince Pub stands vertically supported atop the wooden assemblage.

In this section I consider how, by essaying with irrationality and play, using architectural assemblages, and support structures, the idea of fictional concrete that I developed as part of the meta-essayistic praxis in *Capteur*, can be used to create cracks in the hauntological condition of the essay film and enter speculative post-hauntological zones.

Architectural Assemblages, Support Structures and Japanese Joinery

Two wooden assemblages rise from the floor. They stand side by side, tripodic wooden siblings supporting two cut and folded images. Panoramic views of metal railings foregrounding a concrete wall, with a forest mural and an empty construction site. A tower block is cast away with its scaffolding still attached and plastic sheeting flapping in the wind.

Trying to edit *Capteur* as a single channel film proved problematic due to an overfamiliarity with splicing fragmentary material together: an editing process I had worked with on all the essayistic moving images works up to this point. Spending weeks editing the material I had collected into a single channel essay to then expand into a multiscreen seemed like a replication of the process of *Lorraine*. Instead, I took a speculative change of process, based on the ideas of open cinematic architectures and essay zones that had come about through making *Lorraine*. In my notebook I had collected a vocabulary of speculative terms that I had generated from the praxis. A cluster of these terms were related to architecture and construction, for example, mytho-architectural screens, re-assembled performative architecture, hallucinated structures, performative architectural gestures, cartographic assemblage, cinematic assemblage, sculptural essay, the post digital zone. All are word play. I

had become interested in the join, the joint, the point where two materials are joined, stemming from an interest in bringing fragmentary images and sounds together through montage, but also in looking at the many placards that had been constructed for the Poll Tax demonstration. The construction of the joint sits in critical relation to the interstice and rejoining of time, discussed previously. I took a detour, a side alley into the world of Japanese Joinery for a while. Japanese joinery is carpentry method dating as far back as two hundred BC where wooden architectures are constructed with no other joining materials than interlocking wooden joints. I was fascinated with the simplicity and complexity of the various wooden joints in the book *The Art of Japanese Joinery*.²⁶¹ I was reading about the aesthetic and material purity of this subject at the same time as looking at the construction of film sets, and the wooden support structures used to hold up the mock buildings, for example in the classic western street. This fictional element of the filmic image, the façade and artifice, the open cinematic architecture, and the rejoining of the cinematic set and space, led me in a speculative direction, to sketch a range of wooden assemblages, with the artifice holding up the image, made visible. I was bringing into play, the absent and present, the invisible / visible, and the veil. I built some of the assemblages to hold the cut out and folded photographs and I built more to become the support structures that held the screens in the speculative environment of *Capteur*.

The support structures I created took on a symbolism for the people of the poll tax demonstration holding the placards, entrapped by the police cordons, and the architecture and monuments of central London. I cannot escape the psycho-geographical or psycho-architectural implications of my ghost walk on the anniversary of the poll tax riot, and its relation to my original experience of the built environment of the route when I was captured in the demonstration. The Black Prince Pub, and the forest mural and construction site, from the cut and folded images, are on the route of the demonstration. It had not been my intention to situate this walk in a psycho-geographical context, although by its very nature I was enacting an embodied passageway of discovery and re-discovery through a built landscape. Psycho-geography can be problematic as a term due to its association as a male focused practice, due to the image of the lone male wandering and reflecting, and, as Alexander

²⁶¹ Kiyoshi Seike and Rebecca Blaine Harding Davis, *The art of Japanese joinery* (Tokyo and New York: Weatherhill, 1977).

Bridger notes, these reflections drawn from the male gaze.²⁶² In addition, the practice is problematised by a lack of gendered, antiracist, and disability focused alternative perspectives and gazes. Yet, there are people working in this arena; Sukhdev Sandhu's work including *London Calling: How Black and Asian Writers Imagined a City* (2004), expands the psychogeographic perspective by shifting the white male gaze of London to the gaze of marginalised and neglected black and brown writers across previous centuries filling gaps in the historical context of the city.²⁶³ Writers such as Beryl Bainbridge and Beatrix Campbell in their books *English Journey, or, The Road to Milton Keynes* (1984), and *Wigan Pier Revisited: Poverty and Politics in the 80s* (1984) have reworked and reimagined earlier works, in these cases JB Priestley's *An English Journey* (1934) and George Orwell's *Road to Wigan Pier* (1936), rendering these male-centric explorations of subjectivity, class, politics and landscape, through a feminist gaze.²⁶⁴ In Beryl Bainbridge's 1983 work, Bainbridge retraces the steps of Priestley's 1933 *An English Journey*, detailing the economic landscape presented to her. Similarly, in Beatrix Campbell's 1984 reworking of George Orwell's 1936 journeying and accounts of The Great Depression in *The Road to Wigan Pier*, Campbell surveys the bleak economic landscape of the 1980s through conversations with the unemployed, single mothers, factory workers, miners, all told through a working class and feminist lens.

The term psychogeography falls in and out of fashion but what is entangled in its slippery exposition is a politics of identity and subjective transformation of the spatial politics of landscape. The term was first used by the Letterist International group (LI), who formed in Paris in the early 1950s, and relates to Surrealist and Dadaist Avant-Garde writing practices such as 'the exquisite corpse' and 'automatic writing', used by the original Letterism movement in the 1940s to develop their own expanded and experimental form of visual communication called hypergraphy. In 1952 Guy Debord took a faction of individuals from the original Letterism movement, created by Isidore Isou, and formed the LI which later became the Situationist International (SI) movement. Part of the LI's practice was walking or drifting through the urban environment of Paris. Debord later defined psycho-geographical

²⁶² Alexander John Bridger, "Psychogeography and feminist methodology," *Feminism & Psychology* 23, no. 3 (2013): 285-298.

²⁶³ Sukhdev Sandhu, *London calling: How black and Asian writers imagined a city* (HarperCollins, 2003). And Sukhdev Sandhu, *Night haunts: A journey through the London night* (Artangel/Verso, 2007). And

²⁶⁴ Beryl Bainbridge, *English journey, or, The road to Milton Keynes* (George Braziller, 1984). And Beatrix Campbell, *Wigan Pier Revisited: poverty and politics in the 80s* (Hachette UK, 2013). And John Boynton Priestley, *English journey* (Great Northern Books, 2009). And George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier (1937)* (Harmondsworth/New York, 2001).

exploration as 'the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals'.²⁶⁵ The Situationists pursuit was 'Unitary Urbanism', a Utopian critique of Urbanism: 'collective creation of the urban environment through the integration of artistic and technological means, and the production of emancipatory spaces that would be dynamic, transcend current divisions and separations, and be lived by their creators'.²⁶⁶ For Debord, the nature of urban transformation using psychology and geography lay in the critical relationship of the irrational to the concrete, or exploring the 'ambiences' of the urban environment to propose alternative changes in resistance to capitalist development.²⁶⁷ For the Letterist and Situationist movements, their interest in the irrational was born out of radical reaction to the concrete environment and political encasement of the times. The Situationists intervention was radical praxis and to revolt against the advancement of capitalism, and the commodification and consumerism taking hold of all aspects of society, theorised by Debord in *Society of the Spectacle*.²⁶⁸ Later, in a resurgence of psycho-geographical practice, beginning in the UK the 1990s, artists and writers responded using text and film for a retelling of subjectivity, politics, history, and landscape, using, as Steve Hanson notes, occultist, mythological and semi-fictionalised interpretations.²⁶⁹ Or as Nick Papadimitriou's termed his pursuits, deep topography.²⁷⁰ This later psychogeographic turn in the 1990s was exemplified by artists such as Ian Sinclair, Peter Ackroyd and Patrick Keiller. All three artists used the relationship of the psyche to place to mine the landscape of London as their subject. Sinclair wrote *Lights out for the territory: 9 excursions in the secret history of London* (1997), Ackroyd wrote *Hawksmoor* (1985) and *The House of Doctor Dee* (1993), and Keiller made his Robinson focused films, which began with *London* in 1994. Yet, the political radicalism of Guy Debord's situationist approach to critique ideological states, through political activism and revolution, had been replaced in the 1990s with less revolutionary appropriations, the products set in contrast to the interventions of classical psycho-geography.

There is a hauntological implication in psycho-geography, and hauntology and psycho-geography can be intended principal features of an essayistic work. The ghosts of the past will

²⁶⁵ Guy Debord, *Introduction to a critique of urban geography* (Praxis (e) press, 2008).

²⁶⁶ David Pinder, "Situationism/Situationist Geography," *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography* 10 (2009): 144-150.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 147.

²⁶⁸ Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Bread and Circuses Publishing, 2012).

²⁶⁹ Steve Hanson, "Mind the gap: psychogeography as an expanded tradition," *Street signs* 6 (2007): 10-13.

²⁷⁰ Arup K Chatterjee, "Interview with Nick Papadimitriou," *Writers in Conversation* 5, no. 2 (2018).

forever resurface through re-examination of the geographical landscape and the built environment in the personal-political-aesthetic, whether this be during an interventionist, surrealist, or mythological approach. Lost futures may be present in the architectural fabric of society, set in stark ruined stasis to the rapidly developing virtual world and the data of the 'black box society'.²⁷¹ Or as Patrick Keiller states: 'The way we experience space now changes much faster than the fabric of the spaces that we occupy'.²⁷² Yet, the relationship of the irrational and the concrete, when adopted as a strategy by the artist or filmmakers in an essayistic work, becomes a flexible critical structure that enables the viewer to operate with hauntology as an accepted part of our condition, but without dominance and privilege of its attributes. What can be brought into play by the author and filmmaker and tested for the viewer is a counter point of future change.

Fictional Concrete

Capitalist Realism has set in due to ways of seeing in our everyday life. The slow architectural adjustments to the built environment and fabric of our spaces, contrasts, as Patrick Keiller observes, with the transmutable spatiality of the image and its information at our fingertips: a critical relation of the concrete and the irrational.²⁷³ Our view of the architectural fabric of our spaces does not change fast enough, while the combination of image and data in our devices, or as Peter Osborne calls it 'The Distributed Image', is adjusted, transformed, reconstructed and pinged in a nanosecond.²⁷⁴ Even the desire and fascination of projection mapping, the ability to map projections onto the façade of a building, however complex the intricacies of the architecture, the act is spectacle and illusion. If the projections are not abstract patterns, as Alexandra Georgescu notes, they are usually historical, and heritage orientated or cultural remembrance.²⁷⁵ However intentional the mediation of the image on the architecture when the lights go out the building or monument is left static and stationary

²⁷¹ Frank Pasquale, "The black box society," In *The Black Box Society* (Harvard University Press, 2015).

²⁷² Patrick Keiller, *The view from the train: Cities and other landscapes* (Verso Books, 2014), 129.

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Peter Osborne, "The Distributed Image," in *The Post Conceptual Condition: critical essays* (Verso Books, 2018).

²⁷⁵ Alexandra Georgescu Paquin, "Heritage Mediation through Projection Mapping," *Image Beyond the Screen: Projection Mapping* (2020): 177-197.

in all its darkened glory – much like the architectural interior of in independent cinema once the film has finished.

My idea of *Fictional concrete* can be read in several ways: 1, As an artistic appropriation of an age-old building material, a surrealist endeavour, in the view of Andre Breton, as sand, cement and water are never fully set.²⁷⁶ 2, A physical certainty that the architectural fabric of our buildings and society will have a concrete element often as a foundational element, as Colin N Waters and Jan Zalasiewicz, note, a marker of the age of the Anthropocene, yet the society that plays out within this fabric is fictional, imaginary, illusory in an ideological context, and in the last twenty-five years virtual and black box in its inhabitation.²⁷⁷ 3, The Anthropocene registers concrete as something that will inhabit the spaces of the future, but carries the remnants of the past spaces, for example, as Wojciech Niebrzydowski notes, brutalist architecture and for Siobhan Lyons, ruin porn.²⁷⁸ 4, Fictional concrete is a foundation that is illusory, for example a fictional concrete of Capitalist Realism is used to set in posts, for example, post truth and as Rosi Braidotti notes, post human.²⁷⁹ 5, As Ryan Gunderson, Diana Stuart, Brian Petersen, Luke Goode, and Michael Godhe, view, in the arena of critical future studies, fictional concrete is a response to the end of the world now envisaged through a crisis of ecological devastation, uninhabitable spaces, endangered and broken ecosystems brought about from human impact on the planet, exacerbated by the global capitalist framework.²⁸⁰ Capitalist Realism is a fictional concrete that can be broken down, grounded, in turn responding to what Lynn Badia, Marija Cetinić, and Jeff Diamanti observe as ‘Climate Realism’.²⁸¹ 6, As Speculative Post-hauntological Zones. The fictional concrete of Capitalist Realism can be used to set a post-hauntological structure where we can see through the cracks of Capitalist Realism with an ability to locate a workable future. Capitalist Realism is inextricably entangled with the geological and climate crisis of future inhabitable spaces, but

²⁷⁶ André Breton, et al, *What is surrealism?* (London: Faber & Faber, 1936).

²⁷⁷ Colin N. Waters and Jan Zalasiewicz, "Concrete: the most abundant novel rock type of the Anthropocene." *Encyclopedia of the Anthropocene* 1 (2018): 75-85.

²⁷⁸ Wojciech Niebrzydowski, "The Impact of Avant-Garde Art on Brutalist Architecture," *Buildings* 11.7 (2021): 290. And Siobhan Lyons, "Introduction: Ruin porn, capitalism, and the Anthropocene," in *Ruin porn and the obsession with decay* (Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2018), 1-10.

²⁷⁹ Rosi Braidotti, "Posthuman critical theory," in *Critical posthumanism and planetary futures* (Springer, New Delhi, 2016), 13-32.

²⁸⁰ Ryan Gunderson, Diana Stuart, and Brian Petersen, "In search of plan (et) B: Irrational rationality, capitalist realism, and space colonization," *Futures* 134 (2021): 102857. And Luke Goode and Michael Godhe, "Beyond capitalist realism—Why we need critical future studies," *Culture Unbound* 9.1 (2017): 108-129.

²⁸¹ Lynn Badia, Marija Cetinić, and Jeff Diamanti, "Climate Realism: The Aesthetics of Weather, Climate, and Atmosphere in the Anthropocene," *Resilience: A Journal of the Environmental Humanities* 7.2-3 (2020): 1-12.

global geo-economic politics is a fictional concrete that can be broken down. Spectral global capitalism can be grounded to view the systems that create it, however complex, as in, for example, Alan Sekula's treatment of maritime trade routes in *The Forgotten Space* (2010).

Capitalist 'Sur' Realism

The spectre is back, the black plastic form sat across from me on the yellow chair this morning. The plasticity of an arm pushed through the corner of the tabletop and black drops spotted on the vinyl floor...

The plasticity of its form is intriguing, when two of the tiny black spots were placed on slides and magnified 1500 times, their makeup is not cellular, appearing then disappearing, millions of tiny carousels, spinning in proximity, forming this entity that sits across from me on the yellow chair. A mirror, a mimic, an unconscious ruin, a black hole to look for a memory of remembering to remember a forgotten future. It was holding me, my thoughts, my space, my flat, my hand, it touched my shoulder.²⁸²

I will finish the chapter by discussing a variation on the Oulipon writing constraints I used to create the base text for *Capteur*, followed by analysis of the collages, cut out images, and essayistic folds in the modes of *Capteur*. Then, by entering a speculative post-hauntological zone, how creative critical encounters, such as Capitalist 'Sur' Realism, may function as essayistic futurism.

Oulipon Constraints

The textual base for *Capteur* is a series of passages I wrote before starting work on the variety of forms. I imposed a set of structural writing constraints on myself and each morning I would start the day's writing with a set of limitations. Instead of facing a blank page and open map of locations, routes, and destinations I pushed back at myself to force ideas and inspiration to push through from the cracks in these constraints. Examples from the ten structural constraints are listed below:

²⁸² Text taken from *Capteur* (2019-2020).

1. Every fragment from the day appears at one hundred- and thirteen-minute intervals in that each event for each person or testimony is set with the same proximity throughout the events, this means that the occurrence for each person happened at the same historical time but differing space, although the locations may be similar in some instances.
2. Each fragment is written as an ellipse in that the text describes the events from a starting point that moves out in a curved manner, then returning back on itself in a symmetrical curve.
3. Each ellipse takes us on a micro journey, the text spirals out from the starting point
 - a) Starting point
 - b) Challenge / obstacle
 - c) Point of no return
 - d) Overcoming the obstacle
 - e) A moment of change

My full set of constraints is loosely based on the work of the Oulipo, a group of mathematicians and writers from the 1960s that used structural writing constraints to explore the potentiality of their literature. OuLiPo taken from Ouvroir de Literature Potentielle, as Harry Matthews notes, the Ouvroir relates to communal beneficiary.²⁸³ The Oulipo consisted of around eighteen members that met frequently in Paris. Georges Perec being one of the members and Perec's works exemplifying the pursuit of the group. For example, Perec produced a 5000-letter palindrome, *Le Grand Palindrome* (1969), and a novel, *La Disparition* (1969) written as a lipogram, words with the vowel e were not used in the book. The Oulipo are famous for the N+7 whereby a text is transformed using a structural device. The equation N+7 is used for the noun in a sentence, N=Noun, so when a noun appears, the dictionary is used to locate the next noun 7 words on. An example below:

Wuthering Heights:

Original: I lingered round them, under that benign sky; watched the moths fluttering among the heath and hare- bells; listened to the soft wind breathing through the grass; and wondered how anyone could imagine unquiet slumbers, for the sleepers in that quiet earth.

²⁸³ Harry Matthews, "Oulipo," *Word Ways* 9.2 (1976): 2.

N + 7, Random House Unabridged: I lingered round them, under that benign skyflower; watched the Mother Gooses fluttering among the heathenesse and haircots; listened to the soft windcheater breathing through the grasshopper; and wondered how anyone could imagine unquiet slurs, for the sleeping chair in that quiet earthiness.²⁸⁴

The Oulipo preferred and applied the meaning of potential rather than experimental to their works and met not to discuss the structural transformation of the texts in a syntactical way, instead the potential of what the transformed text offers, or makes possible. In reaction to the Surrealists the irrational or inspiration, as Jan Baetens and Peter Consenstein both note, is produced from the transmutable concrete syntax of language, in its radical expanded form.²⁸⁵ My text written for *Capteur* is both textual base and expanded essay form, its creative critical approach, language games and set of formal essayistic constraints place it in the broader essayistic resemblance of works.

Collage, Cut outs and Essayistic Folds

The Black Prince Pub has been sliced with a scalpel. The photograph has a cut that runs around the edge of the building and at the base a single fold has been made. The pub has been lifted from its two-dimensional fixing. The Black Prince Pub stands vertically with its surroundings left behind. In *Capteur* I continued working with the processes of collage, cut outs, and folds I started in *Lorraine*: static photographic collage cut outs, and how they can be used in an essayistic moving image installed form.

I used a surgery of the incision and then fold to lift the images into a criticality of space and time, with a potentiality to resemble transplanted autobiography, sense of place, memory, political critique, and play. My cut created a gap between the past image of the photograph and the future image of the folded cut out. An interstice appeared. In folding the image upwards, I created a distance and proximity to the absent space of its original position in the frame and surroundings of the static history and memory of the photograph. The folded image is present with the relations and associations, and potentiality of the new surroundings. The

²⁸⁴ For a full list of examples of Oulipo structural writing techniques including N+7: Harry Mathews, "Oulipo," *Word Ways* 9.2 (1976): 2.

²⁸⁵ Jan Baetens, "OuLiPo and proceduralism," in *The Routledge Companion to Experimental Literature* (Routledge, 2012), 131-143. And Peter Consenstein, *Literary memory, consciousness, and the group Oulipo* (Brill, 2021).

interstice in the photograph becomes the place to arrive at and move off from, a limbo, and a pausing state. A promise is held in the next place, or as Uriel Orlow observes in the dialectics of the static images used as moving images by Chris Marker in the film, *La Jetee* (1962), a reanimation, a futurity, and a past encasement in decline and ruin.²⁸⁶ My lifted images started afresh, the object, after the fold is released from its past and occupies a space for transference, transmutation, and transcendence. My lifted images critical potentiality is in the surgery of the concrete, as Hito Steyerl states, 'Besides the capitalist media assembly lines, there are alternative audio-visual economies.'²⁸⁷ My cut in the static image lifts it from a permanence of the past and offers the image into the realm of the moving image with the past placed behind its present and future state. The lifted image is a microcosmic essay zone, placed in essayistic resemblance to the images of the larger zone of the elements of the work. The lifted image becomes a zonal time machine, complicating its temporal state. The Black Prince pub stands, as Gilles Deleuze termed it, a 'crystal image', folded in time, in multi-lateral potentiality of time and space.²⁸⁸

The horse is contorted, folded around on itself, the police officer has nearly fallen. A man lifts a man lifting a man. A piece of wood flies overhead, yet the capture of the wood in the photo appears like the joist has been transposed in a neat incision of counterfeit. A man laughs. A man looks at the camera. The debris and cones scattered randomly across the floor seem artificial. The absurdity of the positions and gestures of the black and white archive photos suggests the figures, the artefacts, the assemblages, in that moment, a moment captured to celluloid, are absent from the historical ideological state of the photograph. The figures are contorted and bent in time and space and one step away from liberation and extraction into an essayistic futurism. My collage, my cut out and essayistic fold, offers the viewer a step into the transmutable aesthetic-political zonal space of the interstitial image. The essayistic may be present for the viewer in the artist's assemblage of artefacts in the installation space, in the filmmaker's cinematic ecology, in the arrangement of apparatus, in the technological characteristics, and gestures that determine the essay form. The artists or filmmakers

²⁸⁶ Uriel Orlow, "Photography as cinema: La Jetée and the redemptive powers of the image," in *The Cinematic*, ed. David Company (Documents of Contemporary Art, 2007), 179.

²⁸⁷ Hito Steyerl, "19. The Essay as Conformism? Some Notes on Global Image Economies (2011)," in *Essays on the essay film*, ed. Nora M Alter and Timothy Corrigan (Columbia University Press, 2017), 278.

²⁸⁸ Gilles Deleuze's 'Crystal Image' in: Raymond Bellour, "15. The Cinema and The Essay as a Way of Thinking (2011)," in *Essays on the Essay Film*, ed. Nora M Alter and Timothy Corrigan (Columbia University Press, 2017), 230. And Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema II: The Time-Image* (Columbia University Press, 2020), 9. And David Rodowick, *Gilles Deleuze's time machine* (Duke University Press, 1997).

personal, public, abstract essayistic relationship may unfold for the viewer through the politics, collection and show of architecture, apparatus, thematic and assemblage – a composition of thinking, reconstructed, re-encountered, unlikely, uncertain, problematised in the zone.

Capitalist 'Sur' Realism and Essayistic Futurism

On the 19th July 2019 I made a sketch in my notebook of one physical installed form of *Capteur*. The sketch shows a stack of foam blocks, skimmed with plaster, and painted to look like concrete. The artificial architecture is a fictional concrete. Underneath the sketch I wrote + encountering Capitalist 'Sur' Realism + 113 encounters. *Capteur*, in its many essayistic forms, is an elaborate assemblage of in-betweens: a series of essayistic assemblages with the resemblance in each form spanning the body of work. Between each work there is a space, and between the fragments and elements of each work, an interstice. The essayistic in-betweens offer a critical moment for a hallucination: a temporal collapse of a non-existent spaces.

The temporal collapse of past, present and future, and the weakening of the concrete prospects of Capitalist Realism is also enacted in the work of the Otolith Group (2002–2022). The group is made up of the artists, writers, and theorists Anjalika Sagar and Kodwo Eshun. Works such as *The Otolith trilogy* (2003–2009) situate a present post-colonial-aesthetic-political conditioning of the image in relation to, as TJ Demos notes, the practices of racial capitalism and the Anthropocene.²⁸⁹ Earlier works from The Black Audio Film Collective (1983 – 1998), such as *Handsworth Songs* (1986) and *The Last Angel of History* (1995), examine in experimental essayistic form, African and Asian diasporic experiences in Britain. And as Nina Power notes, the works of collectives such as the Otolith Group and Black Audio Film Collective, carved artistic space for present day collectives, such as Black Quantum Futurism.²⁹⁰

A key signifier for a critical essayistic futurism in *The Otolith Trilogy*, and the Otolith Group, is the biological function of the Otolith, a part of the ear for sensing gravity and acceleration, for

²⁸⁹ TJ. Demos, "Radical Futurisms: Insurgent Universality, Solidarity, and Worlds-to-Come," *Shifts – Photography, Environment, Action*, June 24-25, 2021, Online Event.

²⁹⁰ Nina Power, "Waiting for the Future," *Frieze: contemporary art and culture* 129.1 (2010).

example, as Wang Lundberg notes, movement in a straight line.²⁹¹ A fictional component of the trilogy suggests that through space travel and migration the human species loses the function of the otolith for sensing gravity and linear movement, permanently separating humans from their home planet, as they may no longer orientate to the earth's gravitational effect. As TJ Demos writes, this separation is metaphor for the disentanglement of history and linear temporality of past, present and future.²⁹² Yet, paradoxically, the movement to non-linear space and time, and disentanglement from the colonial present of Earth, through space travel and migration, only reinforces a multilateral colonisation of space time.

In *Infinity minus Infinity* (2019) the Otolith Group invoke separation again through a linked chain from the practices of racial capitalism to the brutality and ferocity of the climate crisis. The racial 'hostile environment', as Huon Wardle and Laura Obermuller call it, of the present Windrush politics, immigration policies more broadly, and scandal of British Afro-Caribbean individuals criminalised by the UK state, with the intention of deportation, is performed by the group as a zone of the political, ecological, and material economy of the uninhabitable and 'hostile environment' of the earth. The work intimates, as TJ Demo notes, a proximal reparation for the crimes of slavery and climate catastrophe.²⁹³ The blurring of fact and fiction and hybridity of documentary and essayistic modes across the Otolith Group's films, installations, and exhibitions, opens a technological Pandora's box of global image economies through the critical legacy of colonial histories in relation to the spatial temporal hostility and irreparable damage of high capitalism and its historic spatial temporalities. An alternative perception of the future is sought by the Group, through the intertwining in their works of the post-human, pervasive media, networked realities, science fictionalised technological infrastructures of the aesthetic political markets; with cerebral, paradigm, physical and metaphysical shifts and migrations of post-colonial, diasporic, geopolitical economies, of person, document, and image.

²⁹¹ Yunxia Wang Lundberg, et al. "Mechanisms of otoconia and otolith development," *Developmental Dynamics* 244.3 (2015): 239-253.

²⁹² T. J. Demos, "Sabotaging the Future: The Essay Films of the Otolith Group," in *The Migrant Image* (Duke University Press, 2013), 58.

²⁹³ Huon Wardle and Laura Obermuller, "'Windrush generation' and 'hostile environment': symbols and lived experiences in Caribbean migration to the UK," *Migration and Society* 2.1 (2019): 81-89. And T. J. Demos, "Extinction Rebellions," *Afterimage: The Journal of Media Arts and Cultural Criticism* 47.2 (2020): 14-20. And "Infinity Minus Infinity." *Berlinale*, <https://www.berlinale.de/en/archive-selection/archive-2020/programme/detail/202010790.html>.

Capitalist 'Sur' Realism is word play, an intervention in the concrete proposition of Capitalist Realism. The irrational is taken from the concrete. My intervention of 'Sur' sutures a proposition of a potential that is over and above Capitalist Realism. This potentiality, as Demos views it, is of an aesthetic political state that is in addition to the present condition.²⁹⁴ Rather than bringing together dreams and reality into a super reality, 'Sur' references a range of creative critical acts of post-digital and post-conceptual revolt, and efforts to liberate imagination with human, architectural, political, ecological, and technological players.

My intervention of 'Sur' is essaying with speculative play. I disrupted the aesthetic political space of the syntax. My zone of play was simply two words, but my simple interjection sets the conditions for a multiplicity of potential non-existent aesthetic political zones. Capitalism has a material plasticity, as Alberto Toscano notes, so embedding a fictional concrete in this plasticity encourages a future of the non-existent spaces that appropriate a capitalist-sur-realism.²⁹⁵ The questions of alternatives to capitalist and climate realism exceed the rational means of answer but, as Hito Steyerl rightly states, withdrawal is not an option.²⁹⁶ A critical function of essaying is to present philosophical speculation. An artist or filmmaker's speculative play, such as the plan in my research process, is as a starting point to open the fixation of hauntology and capitalist encasement to alternative spaces and times. Past, present, and future linearity can be abandoned and instead an interconnectedness and network of post-hauntological spatial-temporal zones can be assembled and viewed, providing critical potentiality in lateral futures.

The Otolith Group use states of spatial and temporal collapse to weaken the concrete future of capitalism realism in their works. The essayistic zone offers the viewer an apparatus, a machine, a thinking operation, a precarious glimmer of a chance to hallucinate an alternative aesthetic and political horizon. The maker can use moments or critical points of conflict and crisis, or terror and the sublime, as points of departure for the viewer into alternative hallucinated and meditative embodiments. The essayistic is a zone for speculation on the horizon of expectation. The essayistic zone is a space for the viewer to encounter latent images, hallucinated political and architectural techno spatiotemporal structures, a post-

²⁹⁴ T. J. Demos, "Sabotaging the Future: The Essay Films of the Otolith Group," in *The Migrant Image* (Duke University Press, 2013), 58. And Giorgio Agamben and Daniel Heller-Roazen, *Potentialities: Collected essays in philosophy* (Stanford University Press, 1999).

²⁹⁵ Alberto Toscano, "Plasticity, Capital, and the Dialectic," in *Plastic Materialities* (Duke University Press, 2015), 91-110.

²⁹⁶ Hito Steyerl, "Let's Talk about Fascism," in *Duty Free Art* (Verso, 2017), 177.

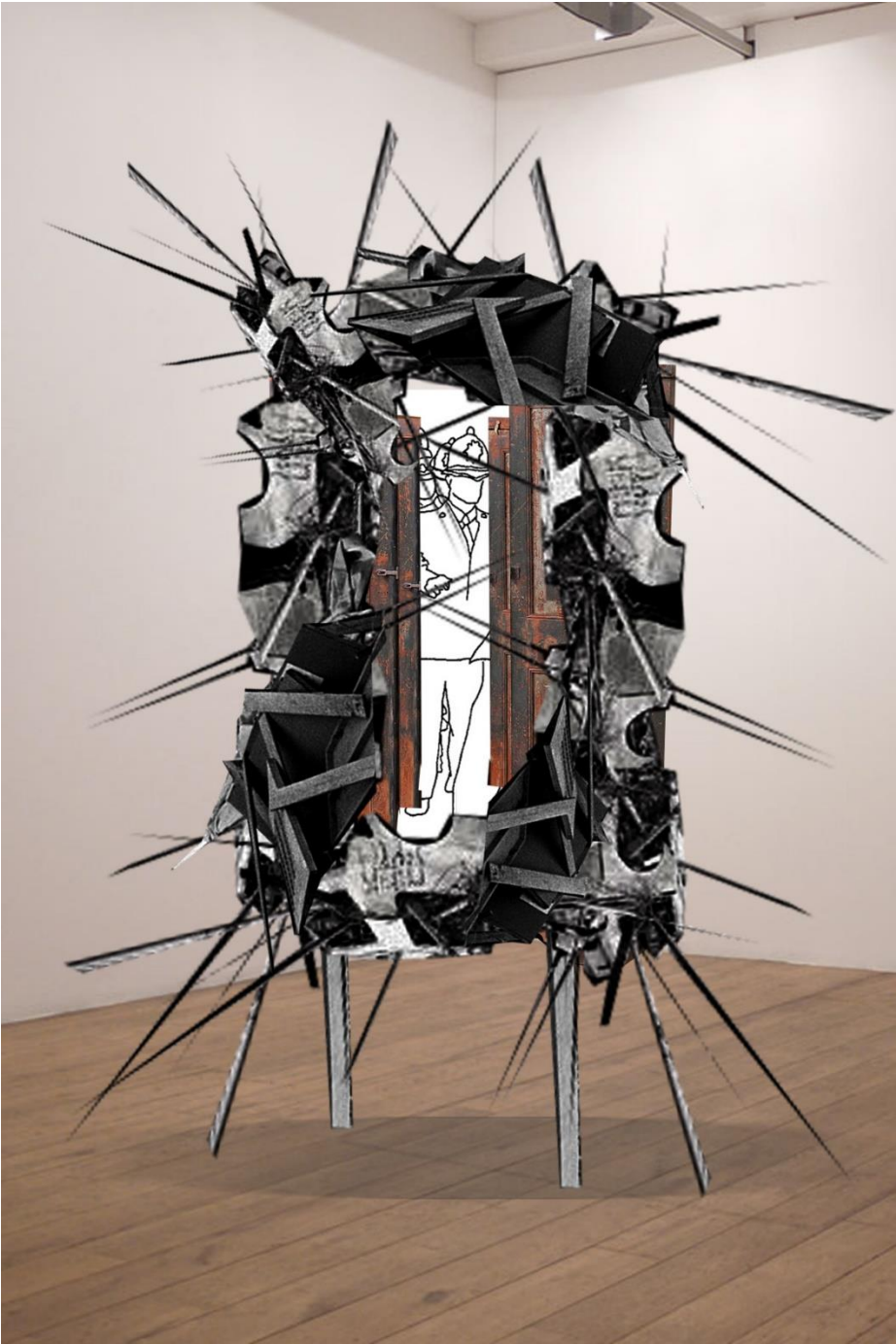
hauntological embodiment, and the personal, the public, the abstract. Capitalist 'sur' Realism is one such test, a step by me into the unknown critical potential of essayistic futurism.



The Debris



The Chair



The Tower



Closing: Exit Through the Crack

Exit through the Crack

Age forty-two, I stepped into the office of my family home and reflected on my practice-led research from the previous six years. I reflected on my starting point, my findings, and the current position of my research in relation to the multiple instances of crisis that surrounded me. When I started my research there was no global pandemic, Covid-19 did not exist, the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine had not taken place, people were not facing a cost-of-living crisis, health and social care was not in its current state of crisis, oil prices had not inflated and there were not the levels of fuel poverty that there are now. Crisis, as a word, is now used daily, proliferated by the media from the micro to the macro, from abject states of personal crisis in the communities that we live in, to the macro geopolitical and international crises of military invasion and conflict, and global climate crisis. The next twenty years are critical in terms of how we, as a global community of people, on a micro and macro level, respond to and reverse the contributing factors to irreparable damage to the climate and to the environments we live in.

In April 2019 the climate activist Greta Thunberg, talking to the BBC Radio 4 Today programme, used her often cited line, climate change is an 'existential crisis...listen to climate scientists', and that the responsibility lies with the 'corporations and states'.²⁹⁷ Entangled in this personal, community, national, and international action is a required intervention in the global framework and ideology of capitalism. The mantra of existential crisis and capitalist intervention needed is raised again by Noam Chomsky in the introduction to his book with Robert Pollin on the climate crisis and the global green new deal.²⁹⁸ The resulting crisis that Thunberg and Chomsky speak of is an interrelation of Capitalist Realism with Climate Realism. And for me, as a practising artist and filmmaker, after a period of 6 years research on the significance of the expanded essay film at points of crisis and how we produce essays in our current personal-aesthetic-techno-political climate, I can see the role the expanded essay form can have in challenging Capitalist Realism and engaging in Climate Realism.

²⁹⁷ Greta Thunberg, "From Climate change activist Greta Thunberg: 'Listen to climate scientists'," interview by BBC Radio 4 Today Programme, April 23, 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-48018034>.

²⁹⁸ Chomsky, N., & Pollin, R. (2020). *Climate crisis and the global green new deal: The political economy of saving the planet*. Verso Books.

In my thesis I have addressed the significance of my practice as research to theorise the essayistic and expanded essay form. In my theoretical response to my film and installation work, I have identified four key ways in which the expanded essay form can be used in the future to challenge and engage in discourse on the interrelation of Capitalist and Climate Realism.

1. The Meta-Essayistic Praxis I developed is a new methodology that can be applied to future practice-led research projects that use expanded essay forms or artistic enquiry as their central mode of creative practice research.
2. The concepts I developed from my praxis such as: essayistic futurism; essayistic assemblage and resemblance; fictional concrete; architectures of injustice; and open cinematic architectures; have theoretical implications for widening the established field of study on the essay form, from its focus on the written essay, photo essay and film essay.
3. Capitalist 'Sur' Realism is one example of how expanded essay making can make a critical intervention in debates relating to our present human, aesthetic, and political conditions of ideological crises.
4. When the above three research contributions are combined, my final work, *The Black Prince*, demonstrates how the creative critical potential and radical praxis of future research into alternative artistic essayistic practices can challenge Capitalist Realism and engage in climate realism.

The Black Prince is a spatial essayistic form combining elements of sculpture, architecture, moving image, sound, testimony, archive, collage, and text, in an essayistic assemblage. I created The Black Prince to translate and draw together elements from my previous expanded essay works, close my cyclical praxis of expanded essay making, and act as a practice-led conclusion to my research.

The Debris

A shoe cast in concrete, a traffic cone, an assemblage of burnt wood, a placard from the Poll Tax Riot, a camera, a beer can, and a metal pole. The debris is placed on the gallery floor in an assembled constellation. The cast and real artefacts are arranged in essayistic resemblance

and assemblage. In the opening to my thesis, I identified that my PhD research is concerned with widening the dominant research focus on the single channel essay film to consider alternative artistic essayistic practices. I have explored the difficulty in definition of the essay form raised by writers and theorists such as Theodor Adorno, Philip Lopate and Michael Renov,²⁹⁹ and the growth of academic research on the essay film starting in the 1990s and how this research, crystallised by scholars such as Nora Alter, Catherine Lupton, Laura Rascaroli, and Timothy Corrigan in the early twenty-first century,³⁰⁰ re-examined the development and translation of the literary essay form to photographic and essay film forms at points of personal, political, aesthetic, and technological crises. I then placed this in a twenty-first century context, providing an account of rapid technological development and governing capitalist ideological states as a creative critical condition and position of crisis that offer a departure point to expand the essay form further. The crystallisation of this departure point in my thesis is significant. I have argued that it is clear that one direction the expanded essay form must move in is to critique further the neoliberal economic conditions and rapid technological development that provided the context for my body of work. Authors of expanded essay works can treat the 'radical technologies',³⁰¹ as Adam Greenfield calls them, of our rapid technological development as tools for critical interventions into the spaces of Capitalist and Climate Realism. And by authors I use the word to represent, artists, filmmakers, researchers, all who are working with the essayistic as an expanded form in their practice. The response and interventions by authors to these crises can be radical and there is a responsibility to use the essayistic to test ideas and provide alternative images and reverse thinking that is leading to what Mark Fisher and Franco Berardi refer to as the 'slow cancellation of the future.'³⁰² I conceptualise these hybrid and alternative practices and praxes as essayistic futurism.

The historic narrative of the photographic and film essay as dominant translations of the essay form should be widened. Without further practical and theoretical analysis of expanded essay

²⁹⁹ Phillip Lopate, "In search of the centaur: The essay-film," *The Threepenny Review* 48 (1992): 19-22. And Michael Renov, "12. The Electronic Essay (1995)," in *Essays on the Essay Film*, ed. Nora M Alter and Timothy Corrigan (Columbia University Press, 2017), 172-182.

³⁰⁰ Nora M Alter, *Chris Marker* (University of Illinois Press, 2006). And Catherine Lupton, *Chris Marker: memories of the future* (Reaktion Books, 2005). And Laura Rascaroli, "The essay film: Problems, definitions, textual commitments," *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 49.2 (2008): 24-47. And Timothy Corrigan, *The essay film: from Montaigne, after Marker* (Oxford University Press, 2011).

³⁰¹ Adam Greenfield, *Radical technologies: The design of everyday life* (Verso Books, 2017).

³⁰² Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of my life: Writings on depression, hauntology and lost futures* (John Hunt Publishing, 2014), 6. And Franco Berardi, *After the future* (AK press, 2011), 18-19.

forms, there is a substantial risk of undervaluing their critical potential, leading to a one-sided view of how the essay can exist formally and operate critically. I addressed this gap from two starting points: firstly, why expand the essay film and why now? Or what is the contemporary personal-social aesthetic-political significance of the expanded essay film form? And, secondly, to what extent do expanded essay forms operate critically on the interrelation of the human condition with instances of crisis under Capitalist Realism? In one sense the questions are timeless, as these questions can be asked again: what is the contemporary personal-social aesthetic-political economic-ecological significance of the expanded essay form? These questions are a call for action. Forthcoming expanded essayistic works can intervene in what TJ Demos notes as our 'socioecological crisis – informed by past colonial genocides, ongoing corporate ecocides, and transatlantic slavery', the 'endgame', as he calls it, of 'catastrophic environmental breakdown, global pandemic, neocolonial extractivism, algorithmic governance, disaster and racial capitalism, antimigration populism, and endless war.'³⁰³ There is clear scope for new expanded essay forms to exist.

In *Zone 1: Locating the Metamorph*, I introduced the meta-essayistic praxis that I developed as part of my practice-led research methodology, drawing upon close analysis of two of my notebook films, *The Golden Record* and *The Derealisation Effect*, as well as essayistic objects and processes, my notebooks, and maps. I brought together various critical and practical features of essay form theory with Ludwig Wittgenstein's theory of family resemblance,³⁰⁴ to conceptualise the terms essayistic resemblance and essayistic assemblage, using *The Derealisation Effect* as a starting point. My concept of essayistic resemblance and assemblage is significant as I theorise the essayistic in a way that enables authors to arrange key features of the essay in a flexible, constellated form. I used the key essay form features of hybridity and the creative critical potential of the interstice, developed by Laura Rascaroli and Gilles Deleuze,³⁰⁵ to show that an author can use this constellated form as a critical making strategy. My argument for this critical making strategy is twofold:

1. To encourage further artistic and research development of new essay forms using recent technologies outside of the cinematic and moving image, for example spatial networks, new

³⁰³ T. J. Demos, *Beyond the world's end: arts of living at the crossing* (Duke University Press, 2020), 1.

³⁰⁴ Ludwig Wittgenstein and G. E. M. Anacombe, *Philosophical Investigations: The German Text*, trans. GEM Anscombe (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 27c.

³⁰⁵ Laura Rascaroli, *How the essay film thinks* (Oxford University Press, 2017), 47-48. And. Gilles Deleuze, Robert Galeta and Hugh Tomlinson, *Cinema 2: The time-image*, trans. Robert Galeta and Hugh Tomlinson (University of Minnesota, 1989), 180 & 206.

imaging technologies, podcasts, and smart technologies. And, to draw methods from wider disciplines, such as architecture, new media, sculpture, performance, sound, and hybrid combinations of these. To effectively respond to entangled contemporary capital climate crises this hybridity must be widened to include disciplines such as ecology, economics, and political theory. As Noam Chomsky and Robert Pollin list, there are four key actions to take to untangle the political economics of climate realism. In addition to the reduction of international greenhouse gas emissions, and investment in the green economy, what is also needed is job security and economic security for the workforce in the fossil fuel industry. In their final point they state, 'economic growth must proceed along a sustainable and egalitarian path, such that climate stabilisation is unified with the equally important goals of expanding job opportunities and raising mass living standards for working people and the poor throughout the world'.³⁰⁶ For these reasons, I conceptualise the expanded essay form as an open essayistic architecture to make visible architectures of injustice.

2. The second reason for this critical making strategy is to place past, current, developing and not yet developed essay forms in a constellation, an essayistic family of resemblances, instead of a linear history of forms, so that no one form dominates and there is space or interstices between forms for new hybrid essayistic forms to develop.

As I have explored in this thesis, the essay form is a meta-morph. An author of the essay form has the meta-morphic ability invoke the constellated essay form as a critical making strategy, not only in a reflective way but also to enact the active engagement of the viewer as a thinker. Essaying is a continued practice by an author, artist, researcher, or collective over a corpus or body of work and the essay is a shape shifting form that can test meta-crises.

My intention with developing a meta-essayistic praxis, a cyclical practical and theoretical testing of form and concept across of a body of five essayistic works, is to provide a practice-led methodology to probe the interstices in-between forms, which in turn builds an ever-expanding network of hybrid forms. For example, if one author creates a form using moving image and screens, another author may create a form with architectural form, screens and moving image, another author may use architectural form, photograph and sound, another may use podcast, sound and text, another may use podcast, spatial network, text, and projection, and so on. The interstice in between forms can be filled and tested by an author

³⁰⁶ N. Chomsky, and R. Pollin, *Climate crisis and the global green new deal: The political economy of saving the planet* (Verso Books, 2020), ix.

and the possibilities of formal hybridity are endless. The same authorial interstitial testing can be applied to the technologies used, especially considering the rapid development of recent technologies beyond photograph, film, and video. Authors can use the interstice in the hybridity of the expanded essay form as a critical space for the 'radical difference' that Frederic Jameson observed could 'jumpstart history' and 'to transmit feeble signals of time, of otherness, of change, of Utopia'.³⁰⁷ Or as Adorno put it, 'render the transient eternal'.³⁰⁸ Authors can use essayistic resemblance and assemblage to reconstruct space and time and develop the creative critical conditions and openings needed to widen artistic and research based essayistic practice. These are spaces where our present states of crises can be tested by authors and researchers with meta-morphic expanded essay forms.

The Chair

A chair is suspended in time, halfway between the act of pushing it over and its descent to the floor. Small structures have been built onto the chair. Atop the structures sit photos. The photos have been cut and their characters folded and lifted. A voice reads a testimony.

The figures and buildings from the photographs, including The Black Prince Pub, have been lifted from their static frame and restaged in a new spatial temporal zone. An undercover police officer posing as a demonstrator reads his testimony from the day of the Poll Tax Riot in 1990. The testimony that fills the sonic space was published in a pamphlet titled *Poll Tax Riot* by ACAB press.³⁰⁹ The authorial presence in the testimony of the pamphlet is complicated by the identity of the undercover officer, and the complication of authorial presence is reflected in an essayistic work through the entanglement of fact and fiction, and subjectivity, objectivity, and the abstract. An author does not use an essayistic work to seek truth in the same way as documentary film. An author can use the expanded essay form, for example, to encounter Capitalist Realism through irrationality and play.

In *Zone 3: Capitalist 'Sur' Realism*, I used my body of essayistic works titled *Capteur* to discuss the entanglement of hauntology, trauma, and memory as crisis in expanded essayistic practices. My simple inclusion of 'sur' disrupts the syntax of Capitalist Realism. I argued the

³⁰⁷ Fredric Jameson, "Future city," *New Left Review* 21 (2003): 76.

³⁰⁸ Theodor W Adorno, "4. The Essay as Form (1958)," in *Essays on the Essay Film*, ed. Nora M Alter and Timothy Corrigan (Columbia University Press, 2017), 68.

³⁰⁹ Anon, *Poll Tax Riot, Hours That shook Trafalgar Square* (ACAB Press, 1990).

multiple essayistic modes of *Capteur* functioned as an archaeology of crisis in political history and personal memory, yet the meta essayistic process used in the creation of *Capteur* can be adopted as a creative critical process to test alternative textures of personal-political trauma and crises.

Capitalist 'Sur' Realism is a significant example of how the use of an expanded essay form can produce a critical intervention in the cultural and political debate of the extant field of Capitalist Realism. I argued an author may assemble and set an expanded essay form in an essay zone, and the author's use of the essayistic resemblance of features used to create the form, in relationship to the materials, subject, and technologies used, has the potential to displace the hauntological condition. The condition developed by Jacques Derrida³¹⁰ and pushed by Mark Fisher and Franco Berardi.³¹¹ If an author places the present hauntological and ideological condition of the subject they are working with in an essayistic resemblance with potential post-hauntological and ideological conditions, the author has an awareness of the interstices between these conditions. The essayistic form allows an author to bring together hybrid fragments of material in an essayistic zone. An author has the creative critical conditions to collapse time with the hybridity of these fragments. In the filmic space an author may choose a series of image fragments brought together using the montage of the authors choice. In an expanded spatial essayistic form, the hybrid fragments brought together by the author may be in the physical space rather than the edited filmic space, or both. Authors can self-reflexively treat the post-hauntological condition with the hauntological condition, using the hybridity of fragments both in the virtual and physical space. In the essay zone, this critical making strategy is a post-hauntological structure where space and time are treated in non-linear form. The essay zone is a space and environment for the expanded essay form to exist. The essay zone provides the conditions for hybrid and meta-morphic essayistic relations of author, material, form, and technology, which engage the viewer as a thinker on points of personal, aesthetic, and political crises. What is significant is that an author can use a resemblance of spaces and times in collapsed form to offer glimmers of alternative futures through the interstices of the work. These interstices take on a materiality when the viewer is engaged in addressing these liminal spaces through the essayistic hybridity of fragments in a

³¹⁰ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The state of the debt, the work of mourning and the new international* (Routledge, 2012).

³¹¹ Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of my life: Writings on depression, hauntology and lost futures* (John Hunt Publishing, 2014), 6. And Franco Berardi, *After the future* (AK press, 2011), 18-19.

physical or virtual, or physical and virtual space. The essayistic does not privilege and it is a key point that the essayistic may be translated by an author across media, material, and form. As Nora Alter points out, both Walter Benjamin's and Theodor Adorno's theories on language fragment underpin how essayistic features can be translated via the fragment into new essayistic languages and modes.³¹² The maker of a work, through the relationship of author to form to viewer, may use the potential materiality of the liminal space of the interstice to unlock an essayistic futurism that critically addresses the personal-political-aesthetic crises of the human condition under Capitalist Realism.

I argue that the hauntological condition present in an essayistic work can be restaged by an author as a reflexive tool for meta-hauntological critique. Authorial spatial essaying with irrationality and play, for example using architectural assemblages, support structures, cut out images and essayistic folds, to form open cinematic architectures in the essay zone, engages the viewer and allows them to see through cracks in the hauntological condition of the essay film and enter speculative post-hauntological zones. The author can break the fictional concrete of the hauntology of Capitalist Realism. If the viewer enters a speculative post-hauntological zone, creative critical encounters, such as the intervention of Capitalist 'Sur' Realism, becomes an act of essayistic futurism performed by the viewer. Authors, artists, and researchers can use my concepts such as Essayistic Futurism; Open Cinematic Architectures; Post-hauntological Structures; Essay Zones; Fictional Concrete; and Capitalist 'Sur' Realism to develop a deeper theoretical layer of understanding of how to create a creative critical space where expanded essay forms may exist.

The Tower

The smashed wood is black and burnt and assembled in a makeshift tower. Metal posts have been struck through the tower like needles through a pin cushion. The assemblage is violent and fractured. At the front there is a crack and the start of an opening. Text is collaged onto the wood and deeper into the opening image upon image is layered and collaged. At the centre of the opening, partly obscured by the black and burnt wood, a series of images and

³¹² Nora M Alter, "Translating the essay into film and installation," *Journal of Visual Culture* 6.1 (2007): 44-57. And Theodor W Adorno, "1. The Essay as Form," in *Notes to Literature* (Columbia University Press, 2019), 29-47. And Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969a 69), 82.

sounds play out. At the heart of the fractured and violent tower is an intervening space. The viewer can leave the chair and exit the assembled debris from the floor through the crack in the tower. The crack is the opening to a liminal space. For the viewer this is a liminal space leading to an essayistic futurism.

In Zone 2, I used my essayistic installation, *Lorraine*, to introduce my concept of *Essayistic Futurisms*. Walking became an essential part of my practice and meta-essayistic praxis, and I linked this to how an author can use the essay form for wayfinding and exploration of what is present and absence in their chosen subject. I consider the formal components of my essayistic installation *Lorraine*, *Capteur*, and *The Black Prince* as acts of spatial essaying. In addition, I argued that movements through space and time, either through walks, or as a viewer as part of an installed essayistic work, suggest that the essayistic form can be considered an open cinematic architecture if moving image is used; or an open essayistic architecture if moving image is not a key feature. An author's choice of montage for the cinematic image can be applied to the three-dimensional elements of the sculptural, architectural, sonic, or hybrid installed spatial essayistic form. Open cinematic architectures, or open essayistic architectures, offer the author and viewer three-dimensional space and time in which to bring disparate or fragmentary elements together in an essayistic zone.

The interstices or intervening spaces of the installed essayistic work in the essay zone are significant. The author's arrangement of interstices in the open cinematic architecture or open essayistic architecture of spatial essaying provides the creative critical conditions to render the invisible visible. An author can use the interstice as a temporal disruption and a crack in the spatial condition of the expanded essayistic form. When the author's chosen disparate fragments are brought together, the essay zone is a flexible critical structure where the viewer is asked to become a thinker and see through the spatial temporal cracks. The author's intended use of the interstices in the open cinematic architecture of personal, abstract, aesthetic, and political relations, open the internal logic of the expanded essay form. What is significant, and what I address in *Four Dichotomies of Spatial Essaying* is that the viewer can move physically and virtually in sideways and lateral directions to stumble upon alternative aesthetic-personal-political horizons. Therefore, the viewer's probing of the spatial dichotomies and active engagement in the work tests the hidden and invisible as glimmers of alternative futures or essayistic futurisms.

Authors can use the creative critical potential of Essayistic Futurism and test expanded essay forms developed using radical technologies such as, smart technologies, spatial and social networks, machine learning, AI, and algorithms. Authors can create works with future personal, aesthetic capital and climate political viewpoints, in essayistic resemblance to the single and multi-channel essay films that are produced. For example, Essayistic Futurism could be used to analyse radicalised influencers using social media and other networked technologies to promote fascist and nationalist rhetoric and offer a way to explore how these expanded forms of fascist essaying are positioned politically, socially, and culturally. This enquiry can be set in relation to artists using focused collective expanded essaying practices and technologies for future community, cultural and political action, and impact. If authors and artists adopt this concept and explore this formal approach the neat view of the expanded essay form's location in leftist political dialogue can be disrupted. The essay form's heretic, irrational and complex internal logic allow for the form to expand without privilege of medium, form and political side, as is the case with the fascist essaying across social media and digital spatial networks. Authors can then widen and provide a new perspective in the debate on how the essay form is used as a vehicle for critical reflection at points of personal, political, and aesthetic crises. The Otolith Group and Renee Green are examples of artists and artist collectives who are at the forefront of developing spatial essayistic forms that widen the scope of what an essayistic work can be. But it is Black Quantum (BQF) Futurism, the artistic partnership of Cameae Ayema and Rasheedah Philips, who have developed a practice that is a prime example of working with futurity across multiple essayistic forms but also multiple sites. BQF's essayistic work spans creative media, DIY aesthetics, sound, video, installation, text, lecture, book, yet also works on multiple levels of place, for example, high end museum, but also local and grassroots neighbourhood community centres, all focused on restorative future political action and process.

What my research has shown is that when hybrid and meta-morphic essayistic relations of author, material, form, and technology are brought together using spatial essaying in the essay zone, expanded essay work actively engages the viewer as a thinker and provides the creative critical potential for cracks to appear in the viewer's ideology or present personal, aesthetic, or political condition. In the context of Capitalist and Climate Realism, the next twenty years require a critical engagement in essayistic futurity in this way.

Exit through the crack.

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