

University for the Creative Arts
Research Project Portfolios

THE WHALEBONE BOX

By Andrew Kötting



Project Details

Name of Researcher:	Professor Andrew Kötting
Name of Output:	<i>The Whalebone Box</i>
Output Type:	Q – Digital and Visual Media; feature-length film accompanied by a limited edition Vinyl LP boxset and booklet
Year and mode of dissemination:	<p>FILM FESTIVALS</p> <p>World Premiere - FID Marseille, 2019 (https://fidmarseille.org/en/film/the-whalebone-box/)</p> <p>UK Premiere - Cine City Brighton, 2019 (https://www.attenboroughcentre.com/events/3406/cinecity-the-whalebone-box)</p> <p>Cork Film Festival Ireland, 2019 (https://www.corkfilmfest.org/event/the-whalebone-box/)</p> <p>European Film Forum, Lithuania, SCANORAMA, 2020 (www.scanorama.lt)</p> <p>Greek Film Archive, 2020 (http://www.tainiothiki.gr/en/)</p> <p>ONLINE STREAMING</p> <p>HOME & MUBI, 2020 (https://homemcr.org/film/the-whalebone-box/) (https://mubi.com/films/the-whalebone-box)</p> <p>BFI Player, 2020 (https://player.bfi.org.uk/subscription/film/watch-the-whalebone-box-2019-online)</p> <p>LP</p> <p><i>The Whalebone Box Soundtrack</i> (2020) INVADA records. (https://invada.bandcamp.com/album/the-whalebone-box-original-score)</p>

Project Details

Contributors:

Director: Andrew Kötting
Producer: Andrew Kötting
Executive Producer: Jason Wood
Editor: Andrew Kötting
Screenwriter: Andrew Kötting
Director of Photography: Anonymous Bosch, Nick Gordon Smith
Production Designer: Andrew Kötting
Sound: Andrew Kötting
Music: David Bloor, Ollie Cherer, MacGillivray
Principal Cast: Eden Kötting, Iain Sinclair, Philip Hoare, MacGillivray
Animations: Isabel Skinner
Pinhole Photographs: Anonymous Bosch

External Funding:

BFI: £1,000
Home, Manchester: £1,000
Anti-Worlds (DVD) Releasing: £1,000

Key Words:

Feature film, bookwork, music, performance, psychogeography, autobiography, disability

UCARO Link:

<https://research.uca.ac.uk/5509>

Synopsis

The Whalebone Box is a research output by Professor Andrew Kötting consisting of a feature film, double vinyl LP and publications. Kötting directed and edited the film and contributed to its production in a number of other roles.

The film tells the story of a whalebone found washed up on the shores of the Scottish Island of Harris and made into a box by artist Steven Dilworth. Thirty years ago Dilworth gave the box to writer Ian Sinclair, and in 2018 Sinclair took the box on an 800-mile reverse pilgrimage from London back to the Isle of Harris, in the company of Kötting and the photographer Anonymous Bosch, and guided by the writings of historian Philip Hoare, author of *Leviathan, or the Whale*. The journey and the film develop Sinclair and Kötting's joint exploration of psychogeography, invoking autobiography, memory, history

and historical trace. Kötting's disabled daughter, the artist Eden Kötting, provides the voiceover to the film, which is in part structured through her dreams. In addition to its development of the psychogeographical *journeywork*, abstracting the mundane to the point of transcendence, the film's contribution is to explore the work of neuro-diverse 'outsider' artist Eden Kötting in juxtaposition to the work of 'insider' artist Andrew Kötting.

The film was disseminated through festivals and online streaming platforms (its planned cinematic release was disrupted by COVID-19). The supporting portfolio includes evidence of the research aims, context and processes and includes stills from the film, a PDF of the limited edition booklet which accompanied the double vinyl boxset LP and other contextual material.

The history of the box is complicated and at this distance as remote and unknowable as the history of the whale from which it was contrived. Beached bones are given up, as lure or trap, for a particular maker.

(Captions throughout are from the writings of Iain Sinclair, Andrew Kötting and other collaborators in the film, and are taken from The Whalebone Box publication.)





*As the object becomes the
material articulation of a desire
it emerges that collecting is to
life what dreaming is to sleep:
just as the function of dreams is
to ensure the continuity of life...
– André Breton*

*A strong song tows
us, long earsick.*





*Blind, we follow
rain slant, spray flick
to fields we do not know*

Context

The Whalebone Box is a continuation of Kötting's *journeyworks* which to date have included the award-winning feature films *Gallivant* (1996), *Swandown* (2012), *By Our Selves* (2015) and *Edith Walks* (2016). Taking journeys as a starting point, the projects rely heavily upon serendipity, as chance encounters with members of the public or invited interviewees are woven into the narratives of the work. There are thus elements of both Dada and Situationism in the work, that embraces happenstance and non-linear story telling. Public performances are also central, as Kötting and his collaborators dress up and move through the landscape in an absurdist fashion (for instance, in the journey by swan-shaped pedalo in *Swandown*). The journeys within Kötting's work provide a central structure and rigour to an otherwise free-wheeling configuration of sound and image.

Kötting's theoretical methods and contexts are predominantly psychogeographical, hauntological and autobiographical. His exploration of hauntology is aligned to the writings of Mark Fisher (interpreting the philosopher Jacques Derrida) and analyses temporal disjunction, memory rupture and the persistence of the past in the present. Visually, Kötting has developed what he terms his 'shoddy aesthetic'. *The Whalebone Box* builds upon a body of work which uses the language of avant-garde and experimental cinema while remaining accessible and being presented within a mainstream context at independent cinemas. Kötting's outputs are varied, ranging from short films to feature films, animations, public performances, installations, bookworks, soundworks, CDs, vinyl LPs, paintings, collages and drawings. There is 'spillage' in all of the projects that he works on, as ideas are expressed and developed across multiple media and outputs. Kötting's productions are often made in collaboration with other artists, including Jem Finer, Toby Jones, Alan Moore, Claudia Barton, MacGillivray, Hattie Naylor and Glenn Whiting. In particular he has repeatedly collaborated with writer Iain Sinclair, whose works constantly develop the field of psychogeography.

Kötting also frequently collaborates with his disabled daughter, Eden Kötting, and this collaboration is central to *The Whalebone Box*. It encompasses experiments with text, language, interpretation, translation and mistranslation, as Kötting reflects upon the relationship, in which an Outsider Artist (Eden Kötting) is both corrupted and celebrated by an Insider Artist (Andrew Kötting). Eden is 'unfathomable' and therefore the relationship between her and Andrew Kötting as collaborators is always ambiguous and slightly uncomfortable. Is it a relationship of equals? Might it be exploitative? It is a non-binary relationship, and its ambiguity and potential imbalance bring a catalysing energy to the collaboration.

The Whalebone Box draws on tales and myths, including the story of Pandora's box, and the box that contained Schrödinger's Cat. The titular box might be a fetish, a relic or an accidental survivor; what is inside might produce good or bad magic, and it must never be opened. Conversations with the writer and historian Philip Hoare offered insights around the whale's cultural and historical significance, and Kötting took chapter headings from Hoare's book, *Leviathan, or the Whale* (2008) as a structuring device. Kötting also draws upon the writings of novelist and essayist Kathy Acker, philosopher E.M. Cioran and poet John Clare.

REFERENCES

Cioran, E. (2012 [1973]) *The Trouble with Being Born* (New York: Seaver Books).

Fisher, M. (2012) 'What is Hauntology?'. *Film Quarterly*. Vol. 66, No. 1, pp. 16-24.

Fisher, M. (2014) *Ghosts of My Life: writings on depression, hauntology and lost futures* (Winchester & Washington: Zero)

Hoare, P. (2008) *Leviathan, or the Whale* (London: Fourth Estate).

Research Aims and Questions

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- Research aims and questions:
- To use autobiography, psychogeography and hauntology to reflect upon questions of mortality, humanity, disability and normality.
 - To ask questions about narrative structure within the documentary format.
 - To investigate how 'lived experience' can be explored within the structures of experimental cinema.
 - To add to a body of work which celebrates happenstance and chance encounter as a means of structuring documentary or narrative and forge new ways of telling stories.
 - To further explore the technique of 'reverse engineering' in the edit suite, manipulating sound and image in an attempt to bring order and coherence to disparate elements in the construction of a film.
 - To celebrate the notions of the amateur home-movie or lo-fi whilst questioning the concept of professionalism and film industry norms.
 - To investigate how it is possible to use the language of avant-garde, experimental cinema and yet still engage with a mainstream audience through the dissemination of the work, whether using online streaming platforms or theatrical release.
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Research Methods and Process

Kötting's work takes the form of an experimental travelogue, with exploration on foot being a key feature in many of his feature films. Into this journey he then incorporates portraits of diverse communities, all told through a collage approach to visuals and sound. Emerging from an era of BFI-funded British experimental features, Kötting's work draws upon every form of camera format, while taking visual and philosophical inspiration from the most varied and unusual places. Moments are documented using a minimal film crew and then edited through a process of reverse engineering, which gives the work its unique structure. The technique also encourages a poetic register and helps its viewers see the landscape through fresh eyes.

Although Kötting's methods are multifarious and experimental, many of the themes that he returns to are underpinned by a consistent body of writings, including those of Stewart Home, Rebecca Solnit, Samuel Beckett and those listed in *Context*.

Kötting's methodology is experimental in nature, as he digs into ideas like an archaeologist, ignoring boundaries, limitations or pigeon-holing. In *The Whalebone Box*, both the film and the titular box are finely crafted vessels, harnessing the power of their materials. Kötting creates a collage of digital and celluloid footage, archival imagery (including from his own films) and found or reconfigured audio. *The Whalebone Box* mixes genres: road movie, documentary, drama, autobiography and performance art.

Kötting cites the 'noise of memory' as an influencing factor and this correlates with his extensive use of both moving image and sonic archives when collaging his structures together. This use of archive material works as both a mnemonic device and a catalyst into other (past or alternative) worlds which contrast with the real world that Kötting is documenting.

Spillage is also something Kötting consistently explores through both the production and dissemination of his research. The term describes the overflowing of one idea into multiple forms. It may lead to the production of outputs that are disseminated across different formats and media, e.g. feature films, short films, online streaming, theatrical release, CDs, vinyl, performance and installation. The *bookworks* that accompany many of the projects, in this instance a 26 page colour booklet, allow for further reflection and new voices to expand on the research aims, in the form of essays, texts, prose, poetry or photographs. The concept of *spillage* also leads to the connecting of one project to another, as with *Gallivant*, *By Our Selves*, *Edith Walks* and *The Whalebone Box* which all involve collaboration with Kötting's daughter Eden, who often appears to walk out of one project and then straight into another.

Kötting discusses the methods used in *The Whalebone Box* in detail in an interview with Jason Wood for HOME, available here: <https://homemcr.org/article/the-whalebone-box-long-read-andrew-kotting-in-conversation-with-jason-wood/>



*And two hands are so different
than each other isn't
it.... I mean is he struggling with
the?*

*I would say no.
But maybe he's a bit shamed?
Like he has to do it.
Some kind of thing.*



Dilworth told me something about the genesis. 'The whalebone came from a baleen whale, possibly a blue whale. All sorts of ribs and vertebrae, along with racks of baleen, were scattered about Huishinish pier and beach after the whale had been smashed up as a result of a storm.



*Home is also a place within the heart
A scrap of language
Lines of verse that cannot be translated
Memory*

Research Contribution and Insights

New insights:

The Whalebone Box furthers Kötting's contribution, through film, to the fields of psychogeography and hauntology.

As with several of Kötting's other journeyworks (see also *Edith Walks*), *The Whalebone Box* puts a female presence at the centre of psychogeography, in this case the narrator Eden Kötting.

Kötting's narrative structures, documentation of 'real' events, dream sequences and the poetics of his language make possible new readings of the Lived Experience within a documentary context, drawing on autobiographical material and the collaboration with Eden Kötting.

As with many of Kötting's other works, *The Whalebone Box* challenges the separation of mainstream and experimental cinema by combining an organic methodology with industry dissemination. The film confirms, through its critical success and its numerous online distribution platforms, that there is an audience for experimental work that pushes at the frontiers of what is possible, whether it be within the documentary canon or the narrative canon.



I tried to keep a photographic record of the box to prove its passage. An anvil rock with a manmade cave. A pond cropped with reeds like phantom wheat in an abandoned quarry. Fractal

patterns in thick ice, trapped air bubbles. And spidery shatter lines, like that woman's spectacles from the Odessa steps sequence in Eisenstein, after Kötting hurls larger and larger rocks down from above.

Research Dissemination and Recognition

Dissemination:

VIEWING FIGURES

MUBI: 4,000

BFI Player: 1,400

Amazon Prime: 400

Just Watch: 200

YouTube trailer: 10,280

Mark Kermode Film Review: 13,000

LRB website - conversation with Iain Sinclair: 1,788

International Film Festivals (including streaming): 2,000

Follow-on-activities:

TALKS

Kötting presented a Q&A session through HOME in Manchester and MUBI

(<https://homemcr.org/article/the-whalebone-box-reaches-new-audiences-on-mubi/>)

The Whalebone Box was streamed through the LRB website and Iain Sinclair and Kötting presented a Q&A session to over 1,500 'virtual visitors'

(<https://www.londonreviewbookshop.co.uk/events/past/2020/4/lrb-screen-at-home-andrew-k-tting-and-iain-sinclair-present-the-whalebone-box->)

Research Dissemination and Recognition

Influence of Research:

REVIEWS

The film was reviewed in numerous publications:

The Guardian

(<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2020/apr/05/the-whalebone-box-review-andrew-kotting-iain-sinclair>)

(<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2020/apr/01/the-whalebone-box-review-andrew-kotting-iain-sinclair>)

The Times

(<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/the-whalebone-box-review-off-kilter-documentary-centres-on-a-pilgrimage-tvhrdbb0f>)

BFI

(<https://www2.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sight-sound-magazine/reviews-recommendations/whalebone-box-andrew-eden-kotting-journey-collage>)

Mark Kermode

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2eajlbeNgf0>)

The Whalebone Box garnered a 100 per cent review score on the Rotten Tomatoes website

(https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the_whalebone_box)

2nd April 2020, Radio 4 Film Programme focused on Andrew Kötting and *The Whalebone Box*

(<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m000gvcm>)

3rd April 2020 BBC Film Review featured *The Whalebone Box*

(<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000hgtq>)

Research Dissemination and Recognition

Influence of the research and follow-on activities:

FESTIVALS

The Whalebone Box continues to be screened at film festivals internationally, e.g. a retrospective presentation of Kötting's work, centered on *The Whalebone Box*, at Greek Film Archive, Athens Avant Garde Film Festival, 16th-26th of October 2020 <http://www.tainiothiki.gr/en/>

ACADEMIC ANALYSIS

Website The Double Negative published an essay, "Insane Energy: Lifting the Lid on Kötting and Kubrick", in their online journal *Arts Criticism & Cultural Commentary* in which Kötting's work was discussed alongside that of Stanley Kubrick: <http://www.thedoublenegative.co.uk/2020/04/insane-energy-lifting-the-lid-on-kotting-and-kubrick/>

NEURODIVERSITY AND FUTURE PROJECTS

Kötting's ongoing collaborations with his disabled daughter Eden have raised awareness around neurodiverse art communities in the UK. As well as being an associate artist with Project Art Works (a collective of neurodiverse artists based in Hastings), Kötting presents at symposiums and conferences with his daughter, including at the De La Warr Pavilion in Bexhill on Sea and MK Gallery in Milton Keynes. Project Art Works was shortlisted for a Jarman Award in 2020.

The Whalebone Box has led to a new animation commission for Kötting from the BFI, entitled *Diseased and Disorderly*. This will be released to coincide with the BFI's 25th anniversary celebration of *Gallivant*, Kötting's first *journeywork*, undertaken with Eden and his grandmother Gladys.



With two companions, the artist and film-maker Andrew Kötting and the pinhole photographer Anonymous Bosch, I had been walking, in

winter, along the muddy trails of discontinued heresies, among the crags and ruins of the Pyrenees...



*... trying to put together some
footage to add ballast or to further
derange the unconvinced armature
of a film about the final journey of
Dilworth's whalebone box.*



Whalebone is the heaviest bone because it is so full of oil. You imagine that it should be light and floating like the bones of a bird. But it's not.
– Philip Hoare



THE WHALE BONE BOX

A film by
Andrew Kötting

An all consuming and spellbinding
exercise in hauntology



SCREEN
archive
SOUTH EAST

LIC University
for the
Creative Arts

FI MUBI

HOME
ARTIST FILM

PERFORMERS: EDEN KÖTTING IAN SINCLAIR PHILIP HOARE DR HELEN PARIS MACGLLIVRAY KYUNWAI SO CEYLAN UNAL STEVE DLWORTH CAMERAS: ANONYMOUS BOSCH AND NICK GORDON-SMITH
with ANDREW KÖTTING IAIN SINCLAIR TONY HILL PRODUCER SOUND and EDIT: ANDREW KÖTTING EXECUTIVE PRODUCER: JASON WOOD ANIMATIONS: ISABEL SKINNER STILL IMAGES: ANONYMOUS BOSCH
JOHN MAHER and PHIL HEYES MUSIC: MACGLLIVRAY RIZ MASLEN NEOTROPIC DIRCH BLEWN and DAVID BLOOR OLIVER CHERER JOHN WALL ALEX RODGERS LUTTO LENTO O.D.DAVEY QUAI DES BRUMES
SOUND MIX: PHILIPPE CIOMPI COLOUR GRADE and FIX: SAM SHARPLES



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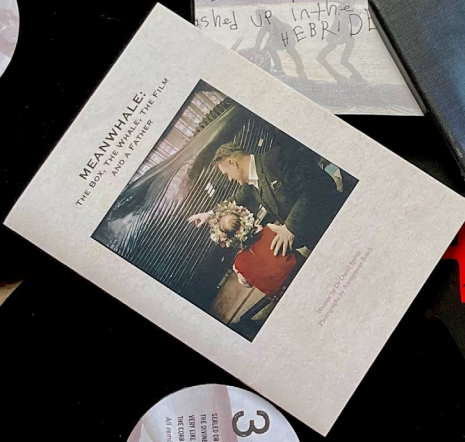
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Graphic Design:

Studio Mothership

FRONT COVER IMAGE
The Box, The Whale, The Film
and a Father

BACK COVER IMAGE
The Whalebone Box LP and
booklets



The history of the box is complicated and at this distance as remote and unknowable as the history of the whale from which it was contrived. Beached bones are given up, as lure or trap, for a particular maker.

Philip Larkin in Lullaby (on the White's side) about how their great ancestral happiness of the ocean, in the deepest fall, among through sand and hearing through their bodies. Whales follow, right at hand, with some sense, about their movement, especially they the water when they have been heard in hollowed-out spaces. On the other side, they collapse under their own weight. The portable whaleness for that momentary mercy for you just now. Steve Decker's, including in the Chris Hahn in an article, the of the p...

When he departed, finally, on his second pilgrimage, would I be left to some people, who was a demanding man with the... He was, indeed, but I'm not sure I could have done it. No... to work and... would you... longer of...

The artist's... S. Galt...



... is taking the box
 ... beach where the whale
 ... shed up in the
 #EBRID

THE
 TA
 ONE



THE WHALEBONE BOX



The man is taking the box
back to the beach where the whale
was washed up in the
HEBRIDES

The history of the box is complicated and at this distance as remote and unknowable as the history of the whale from which it was contrived. Beached bones are given up, as lure or trap, for a particular maker.

Philip Hoare, in *Leviathan* (or, *The Whale*), talks about how these great mammals, elephants of the ocean, defy gravity. 'They are Linnean-classified aliens following invisible magnetic fields, seeing through sound and hearing through their bodies.' Washed ashore, split off from the pod, willed towards suicide on the indifferent sands of some remote island, these monumental creatures defy the scales onto which they have been hoisted in hideously butchered segments. 'Out of their element, they collapse under their own weight.'

The particular whalebone box that came into my temporary twenty-five year possession was made by Steve Dilworth, a sculptor based on the Island of Harris in the Outer Hebrides. It was always intended to be an active thing, kill or cure: an animal battery. Part of the power of Dilworth's elegantly crafted pieces – often containers for dead animals, recovered or, when necessary, hunted – comes from their lack of signature. At best these objects have the anonymity (and moral authority) of tribal art, of fetishes, relics; 'accidental' survivors now cased, explained and curated in museums and galleries.

WHAT CAN YOU SEE?

To acknowledge this inheritance, the cultural and doctrinal antecedents, he sometimes referred to his box as a 'casket'. Which immediately conjured up notions of hidden Cathar treasure, illuminated heretical gospels, the finger bones of obscure saints.

I lived with the box a few yards from the desk where I worked. At first we were wary of each other. And, for its part, the box wondered what the hell it was doing on a dusty shelf in Hackney, in a room that, with each passing year, was more like a premature burial chamber, heaped with dead or convalescent books, spoiled papers, broken pens, cards, toys and fading photographs. But a certain, irritating energy passed between us: 'presyncopal sensations due to transient cerebral hyperfusion'. When I lifted the box, wondering how I could carry it, if I set out to walk to Scotland as Dilworth required, it was always heavier than the time before.

When it departed, finally, on its reversed pilgrimage, would I be left as mute and motionless as a drumming monkey with the battery removed? In a way, I solicited this symbolic abdication. And the freedom it might bring. No more fretting and chaffing at the desk. No more words to be dug out and ample time to walk and wander through my diminishing days. Without the dragging anchor of the box, I could become a small part of whatever caught my dimmed eye. The word-hunger of the box would be appeased.

I fantasised about six months or more on water, employing various craft, kayak to yawl, pleasure cruiser to swan pedalo and survivalist raft, transporting the covert vial of seawater, within its lead chamber, within whalebone, back to the beach where the originating creature was washed ashore.

With my abrupt severance from the box – nobody owns these things – I made a number of discoveries. It was no longer possible to write about London: virtual city, city of digital zombies twitching at mini-maps of their neuroses, stroking black screens, those deathly mirrors grafted to their hands. Then in tidying the shelf, the ghostly outline in the dust where the box once rested, I came on a postcard, picked up who knows when, of the 8th-century Franks Casket from the British Museum. The point being that this casket was whalebone, not ivory, as was more common at that time (and prized among princes of church and state). The casket was a lidded box, the size of a sewing case, cut from the bone of a whale's jaw: '*fine-grained plates suitable for carving*' (according to Leslie Webster in her British Museum publication of 2012).

The animal is converted to battery

– B. Catling



meantime →

SEA EXPELLED THE FISH ONTO THE MOUNTAINOUS HIGH BEACH
OR, INTO A ROCKY BURIAL MOUND. THE KING OF TERROR KNEW
SADNESS WHEN HE SWAM HIGH ON THE SHINGLE. WHALEIS BONE
TRANSLATION. RUNIC INSCRIPTION. THE FRANKS CASKET (BRITISH MUSEUM)



Not long before his death in 1986 the great Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges, who was blind, made a special visit to the British Museum in order to fulfill a long-held wish to touch the Franks Casket and trace the stories it tells.

The scenes that decorate its sides and lid are crammed with detail and have also been chosen from a curious mixture of sources – Germanic and Roman legend, Jewish and Roman history, and the New Testament – few of which are instantly recognizable to us.

First of all, the casket would certainly have been regarded as a prestige object in its day, not just because of its intricate craftsmanship and complex decoration, but because of the very material from which it is made. A stranded whale was a great resource, highly prized for its meat and blubber, and for the bone that came from its jaws, which provided large, fine-grained plates suitable for carving, a worthy substitute for the even scarcer elephant ivory.

One of the most arresting and intellectually complex icons of Anglo-Saxon culture, the Franks Casket is a virtuoso demonstration of how the past can illuminate the present, through ancient narratives that speak to us today as directly as they must have spoken to its first audience so long ago.



Dear Andrew (in haste, to catch post) – I visited the Franks Casket in its vitrine at the British Museum yesterday, with some excitement. This really felt like a big nudge in my own take on the spine of the story. I was already suspicious that Steve's box was part of a much older and longer tradition. That he was working (as we all do) on instinct, blind. And repeating, in his own way – true to place – a version of a sacred (but tough) object. The casket is around the same size and WHALEBONE, bleached in Northumbria, they think. Not ivory as most caskets of this status would have been. Whale as sea elephant? But what really hit me was the form: graphics framed by runes and words (runes like a forest of arrows). And narratives mixing the darkest pagan myths with primitive Christian iconography. These panels come off – and even feel like pictures composed by Eden, under your direction, with you writing Eden's words. Or a mad Alan Moore comic in which everybody has been struck dumb. Or is talking in tongues. Steve's box has been stripped of such imagery. But Franks Casket, it is surmised, once contained a gospel or holy text. (As you planned to put my entire book inside the duplicate boxes.) But might also have contained relics, nose hair, blood stains, wool, nails etc. And how strange that it should finish up in Auvergne.

Maybe all this, when you have a chance to chew it down, might help with the form of the film? I worried about the possibility that I might never write again after the whalebone battery was removed from my room. I poured all those words in, but the skin of Dilworth's box remained bare. The narrative panels are missing. Now here they are on the casket. Pairs of clashing doctrines: pagan, Christian. Wars, raids on the temple at Jerusalem. Hero figures and strange beasts. I love the horse-thing in the missing panel. There is space on our box for all Cathar heresies and Norman bones....

I'm sending the prompt book, marked up. It fires me....







With two companions, the artist and film-maker Andrew Kötting and the pinhole photographer Anonymous Bosch, I had been walking, in winter, along the muddy trails of discontinued heresies, among the crags and ruins of the Pyrenees, trying to put together some footage to add ballast or to further derange the unconvinced armature of a film about the final journey of Dilworth's whalebone box. After the return to Harris, we were carrying a fake, a copy, a battered cardboard quotation with none of the mass and gravitas of the original. But the lightness (in every sense) of the false box gave us the freedom to slide, often literally, on wet stones and ankle-twisting paths that were now rivers, on ice and through crisp snow, into an older and more forgiving definition of time. Through exhaustion and disorientation, we accessed landscapes where place becomes time. A hike into history, to postpone madness.

The Ariège is overwritten by poets and pilgrims scratching at forgotten stories, staring at alcoves and damp stains in Romanesque churches, photographing the marks in the dust where boxes containing holy relics might once have been positioned. This ripe past of myth and rumour, confirmed or challenged by the evidence of wooded hills and river valleys, is a provocation. It should make sense, it should connect: the old songs, the poems, sieges and ambushes, from Roland to the Maquis and the Germans. From gypsies and smugglers to the lost briefcase of Walter Benjamin.



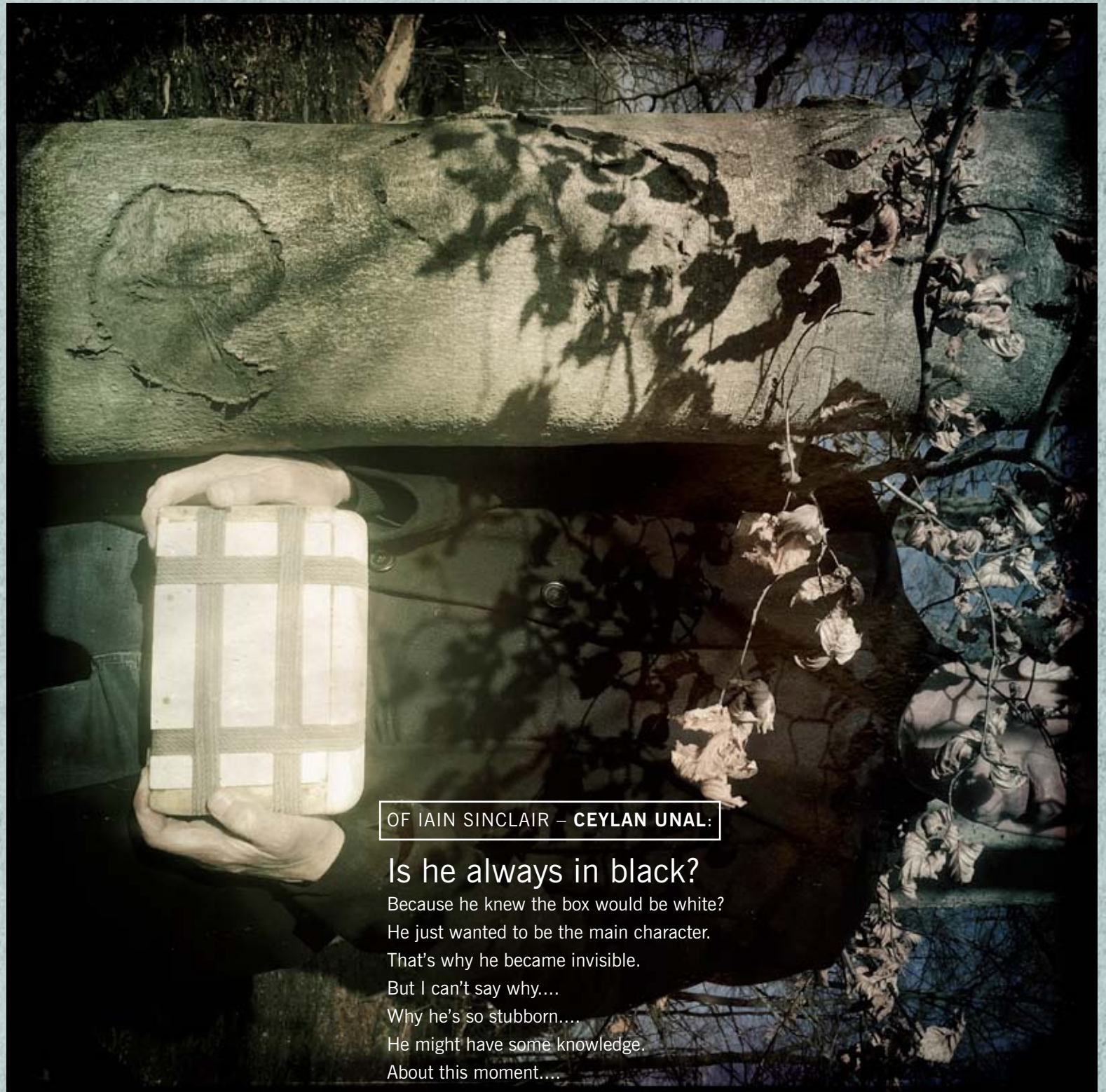


It's a whale like hump isn't it?
Responding transcendently
between the state of being on
land and returning to the ocean.
And the whiteness of the
mountains recording the albino
whiteness of the white whale.

ALL the while →

For Anonymous Bosch

- My head is still full of the mountains and crags. I'm sure you returned with a treasure trove of images, even if the structure in which they will find a place is still to declare itself. The further we push on, the less secure the narrative feels. Which has to be good (but tricky). After those Cathar trails and the brief sequence as we walk through the woods in the snow at Montailou, I began to appreciate that the box should have a much older life than its manifestation as revealed by Steve Dilworth and the washed-up Hebridean whale. I intend (I've no idea if Andrew will run with it, and it doesn't really matter) to compose some sort of brief voice-over (could end as subtitle or title) about the box or casket, holding who knows what, some relic or secret doctrine, treasure of Cathars, foreskin of Christ, McDonald's gift voucher, arriving on these shores with William the Conqueror. (This could allow Andrew to use that wonderful footage of Claudia in the waves and mooning around St Leonards.)



OF IAIN SINCLAIR – CEYLAN UNAL:

Is he always in black?

Because he knew the box would be white?

He just wanted to be the main character.

That's why he became invisible.

But I can't say why....

Why he's so stubborn....

He might have some knowledge.

About this moment....

And two hands are so different than each other isn't it.... I mean is he struggling with the?

I would say no.

But maybe he's a bit shamed?

Like he has to do it.

Some kind of thing.





The unfathomability of Eden preoccupies me, disturbs me and eats at me. I thought that if I kept a sleep diary, if I watched her whilst she was asleep then I might somehow be able to enter her fugue and that she might perchance enlighten me. Instead she continues to confuse me.



OF THE WHALE – KYUNWAI SO AKA PAPER:

So it's by the ocean?

But not the real one but in her dream



ANDREW: She's imagined the whale in her head

PAPER: And she shot the whale in her head

ANDREW: To make a box from the bone of the whale

PAPER: She hunt the whale in her head
Where did she got the whale bone?

ANDREW: From the dead whale

PAPER: In her mind?

ANDREW: Yes

As the object becomes the material articulation of a desire it emerges that collecting is to life what dreaming is to sleep: just as the function of dreams is to ensure the continuity of life...
– André Breton



I dreamt of collecting dreams, that is, wishing for a chance to wish for a chance and then, on waking, I searched everywhere and felt the embarrassing pang of being genuinely saddened by the loss of something that had never existed.
– Jean Baudrillard





Home is also a place within the heart
A scrap of language
Lines of verse that cannot be translated
Memory
Times past
or
Future vision

I remember the man's Ball Spot
like an outcropping
of rock in a dense forest →





Days in these hills, where an enveloping white mist can lift in the time it takes to stir a cup of coffee, pass more slowly. The barking of hunting dogs in the forest, remembered from other visits, is constant. And the guns. And the creaking planks of the saturated decks of mountain huts where creatures hibernate in cracks and crannies. We are folded in against the forest, hard against a track impossible to walk at this season. And we contemplate the portorage of relics through hostile territory and how, when the objects have been removed, the spaces reserved for them are still respected.

Dilworth's whalebone casket is his recovery of the ur-version, the paradigm, the box of boxes. These migrating containers were made to hold secrets, but they were extravagantly hinged. They had lids. And the lids could be opened. Dilworth's model was sealed, you had to take the objects inside on trust.

Beyond its present nakedness, one troubling attribute of Dilworth's box was the maker's determination that it should not be opened. Or opened only once. We have to think of the 19th-century mystic and prophetess, Joanna Southcott, and the sealed casket, which she claimed, held 'the secrets of eternal peace'. The box remained in the keeping of the Panacea Society in Bedford, where a suburban house was prepared for the imminent arrival of Jesus Christ. With toothbrush and weekend case. Sheets laundered and changed. Soap in its wrapper. The secrets of Southcott's coffer could not be exposed without the attendance of twenty-one consenting bishops of the Church of England.





‘Don’t open the box!’ A horrified cry echoes through the aether, out from the aging cadre of believers in Bedford, to challenge hyperventilating game show audiences egging on some nervous TV contestant frozen between materialist greed and the certainty that fate will snatch back whatever small gains have already been made.

‘Don’t open the box!’

A.I. Bezzerides, improving on the punch-drunk tabloid prose of Mickey Spillane, scripts the dialogue for Robert Aldrich’s cult film, *Kiss Me Deadly*. ‘Don’t open the box!’ In the metal locker the flimsy contraband of dope Spillane chucks in (as his MacGuffin) has become a strapped container within a container. A vessel securing the light of apocalypse, biblical and absolute, stolen out of Revelations. The rush and roar of the blinding flash of exposed nuclear fusion. Knowledge ahead of extinction. The sounds of the world tearing itself apart. All the pain and hysteria, the ecstasy and rage, from the first breath taken. ‘Death, crime and corruption was lying on the floor in two metal containers the size of lunch pails,’ Spillane wrote.



Find the time to fill the box and fill the box with a new time: one that offers itself up for storage, and then start half way through. I must have things. I must have things. They pick up anything, a tiny pebble, a bit of earth, a fallen petal, and march along with it.

– Joseph Cornell



For Andrew Kötting - One aspect to consider, perhaps, is the momentum of the quest journey. In 'reality' and as per original impulse, the thrust was to get the box back (as required years ago) to give Joan energy in her fight. But there is also another twist to it: Steve always said, in the past, that the box was intended as a healing/meditative device and that it contained calm water, taken at midsummer's day. Then, when I was doing the Tangerine book, he (mis)remembered that it was STORM water, taken in winter, and that his daughter was photographing him when he took it - and pushing him further and further into the raging sea. I wondered (and I don't know how you'd achieve it) if some wafer of SUSPENSE could be added to the drives, the headlong rush north. As if the box was a ticking bomb of some kind, so packed with arguing narratives and stolen stories. We need to get rid of it before it goes off. Blindness. Drowning. Winter solstice. Pinpricks of light in the tunnel. Perforated butterflies falling into the fire. Chinese voices called paper. Shaman women in Berlin. How do the tea leaves fall. The forest is full of grandfathers trying to forget their biographies.

When I close my eyes, I see those massive animals swimming in and out of my vision, into the blue black below.

Like Ishmael, I was drawn back to the sea wary of what lay below, yet forever intrigued by it, too.

- Philip Hoare,
Leviathan, or The Whale



Dilworth told me something about the genesis. 'The whalebone came from a baleen whale, possibly a blue whale. All sorts of ribs and vertebrae, along with racks of baleen, were scattered about Huishinish pier and beach after the whale had been smashed up as a result of a storm. The date would have been about the middle '80s. I remember taking the kids over to collect what I could. It was winter, February, and very cold. The smell was overpowering. At that time I had a small car, a Vauxhall hatchback, but the whale ribs were too long: so I stuck half out of the rear side window and the other end in the passenger footwell. The kids wrapped scarves about their heads to kill both the smell and the cold.'

They were giant living jigsaw puzzles: no matter how hard i looked i could not grasp the entirety of the creatures, the sense of their structure, the components from which they were made.

– Philip Hoare



I tried to keep a photographic record of the box to prove its passage. An anvil rock with a manmade cave. A pond cropped with reeds like phantom wheat in an abandoned quarry. Fractal patterns in thick ice, trapped air bubbles. And spidery shatter lines, like that woman's spectacles from the Odessa steps sequence in Eisenstein, after Kötting hurls larger and larger rocks down from above.



This for Andrew Kötting

It felt like the swimming stuff filled the final hole in the cullender of the whalebone story. I believe that yesterday was the spring equinox and that floral-garlanded druid folk were out around Tower Hill. So strange that Richard died at the moment we took to the water. Eden was extraordinary, in her element it appears. And a BIG THANK YOU to her for a lovely meal. Great to eat together with all the family. And, like the equinox, to divide things, equally, between light and darkness. One nagging set of dream images not included: Claudia with box at shoreline etc.. I know you felt that introducing another character would only add complications to an already clotted narrative. But it struck me that this might work in the context of 'hauntology'. Eden references the 'witch' and acts as hinge to faery world, via the haunted binoculars. Kirsten as dark woman, Claudia the white. (With Eden: 'When shall we three meet again?') Even on split screen. Even twin songs. That sequence was so mesmerising. Could this be part of what Eden 'sees' or conjures? Claudia (in Edith) was a figure of the woods. MacGillivray of the sea....

WHAT CAN YOU SEE?

The further north the man travels the more incoherent the narrative becomes



I think a lot of it is due to the fact that in pre-Darwinian pre-Modern times the barrier between us and other species was not so demarcated so that you slip in between species.

– Philip Hoare

← species and species



The cord that binds the box, in meticulously incised grooves, is six-stranded. Dilworth says that he took it from a herring net. 'I seem to remember it had bits of lead attached to hold it down under water.' The sculptor detached the weights and melted them in an old saucepan, over a fire in the open air, along with a quantity of lead stripped from the roof of an abandoned house. There were many of these on the island. When there was sickness in a Hebridean family, a visiting hiker told me, the survivors would walk away. After a case of tuberculosis, for example, a new shelter might be constructed and the original dwelling allowed to tumble into ruin. To be pillaged by other islanders, less superstitious, more in need of shelter.

There is a vessel, cast in two sections, inside the enigmatic whalebone casket. The lead is 'about a quarter of an inch thick'. After the vessel was filled with seawater, the two parts were sealed. 'The same liquid that I use in all calm water meditation objects,' Dilworth reported. A pint or so, he reckoned. The sealing element was tar. Any gaps were rendered with resin or beeswax. 'The bone being fresh was full of fat.' The process sounded like a recipe for the worst meal in the world. And Dilworth was a noted cook.



Whalebone is the heaviest of oil. You imagine that it should be light and floating like the bones of a bird. But it's not.

– Philip Hoare

Living with Dilworth's whalebone box, I chose to take the interior mysteries on trust. The box was a memento mori and not, as the maker hoped, a device for flattering sickness. Seawater was imprisoned, spoiling in its lightless trap. The architectural model would be a carved tomb, the lower portion of a transi sepulchre, in which a luridly deathlike effigy would be laid out. Under the fixed whalebone lid I imagined a painted field of stars and a lunar meniscus scything through pressed darkness towards a cup of agitated water. The box required blind faith in a heavenly cosmology.



Then I heard that Joan Dilworth was seriously unwell, undergoing treatment for that word we are too superstitious to employ. For fear of confirming the diagnosis. My decadent fantasy of transporting the whalebone box on water, Hackney to Oxford, Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool, and up the coast, back to the islands, would take too many months. Months I didn't have. Time was heavily mortgaged to other tasks. It must happen now. Right away.

Act now! Before digressions and prevarications overwhelm the narrative purity of my decision. I drove north with Kötting and Bosch and their cameras, the whalebone box wedged on the dashboard.

The whalebone box, my penance and goad, was home. It had never been settled that Steve would accept it, but he took the burden, immediately, from my hands and set it down on a window ledge among smaller pieces, stones and eggs and feathers. The charge of the box, in all its processed fusion, was needed. We adjourned to the table, where a slow-cooked venison feast had been prepared, with customised vegetarian dishes for the gluten-intolerant Bosch. We talked long enough into the night for us to have some knowledge, now, of where we were.



ALL the while →



And so it's the kind of watery scaffolding for this huge creature. I think the reason we like whales and dolphins is because they look a bit like us but zipped up in whale and dolphin wet suits.

– Philip Hoare

The next day emerging from the car with box and spade, where a tumbled cemetery migrated into sand dunes, we coincided with a small burial party. It was tactful to make a wide detour to the shore. Our fantastically elongated shadows fell across the beach in the direction of Taransay. The box was well buried, in a secret spot, in the expectation that it would be recovered one day, enigmatic but undated. A late companion for the walrus ivory chessmen of Lewis found near Uig in 1831. After so much debate and confusion, the interment was swift and easy. The solitary dog walker at the tide's edge and the landscape-collector with the tripod, tramping south, barely noticed our sombre group, silhouetted against the setting sun.

The day was perfect. And the mineral sky clear with a few gauzy clouds scraping along the wave contours of low hills. The placement of the box was the resolution of a long and tedious story.

Now that the box was gone, I remembered how Catholic Steve's art had always been, the religion of his youth inclining towards heresy, the manufacture of relics for a private doctrine. With a Capuchin bias towards burial and mummification.

But Dilworth, the maker, the craftsman, the accepted incomer, had acquired the traditional island skill of *speurdaireachd* or weather forecasting by understanding rites of blessing and cursing. He also, like many sculptors and artists stuck for hours in cold sheds and Hackney Wick warehouses, listened to the radio.



That night, the wind Steve had promised got up nicely, plucking at slates, tearing the roofs from tin shacks, rocking and tilting abandoned coaches. Across from our cottage, the farmer was out with his lantern, grabbing at flightless chickens hurled into the air, ready to nail them to their perches.

Crofters on Lewis, we were informed, had rights to the land but not the buildings. The land was their health, their inheritance. The strength bequeathed by distant generations. Buildings gave them temporary shelter. The most desirable real estate belonged to damaged folk from elsewhere, drying out, putting themselves together, possessing views of machair and shore.

There are bright windows now in the solid darkness, pools of light where groups gather to sing or talk or drink. The tempest has escaped from the buried box. And there is no lid to hold it back.



This motley aggregate of things – this is what the film is – meanwhile the box is as BIG as the appetite....

Reading over my notes, while I could still interpret the barbed-wire scrawl, I thought about a statement by Gavin Francis in his useful book, *Adventures in Human Being* (2015): 'Nothing that ends with a gift will end with nothing.' My long relationship with Dilworth's whalebone box – it was around, I saw it every day – mirrored my contract with the Victorian house in which I lived. The house had a history of occupation, names and families to be recovered from census forms and council lists, but the box remained an object of contemplation. Could it, in any real way, affect physical health and spiritual balance? The book was finished. I printed out the last sheets and came back to business and faced my emails. There was a message from Steve Dilworth. Joan died that day. Steve held her hand, he said, as they listened to Arvo Pärt's *Silence into Light*. Joan enjoyed the singing with Kötting so much, a special moment. Perhaps Pärt identified the particular silence Peter Ackroyd demanded of the riverside parson at Iffley. The Estonian composer told an interviewer that his inspiration, the pass into timelessness, came from hearing three notes repeated on the public address system of a supermarket: the building block for music in the Western world drowned out the tell-tale hammering of his living heart.

Nearly all words by Iain Sinclair – 2018/2019
Most images by Anonymous Bosch 2018/2019

The
End



ADDITIONALS

and

HereafterS

FROM EZRA POUND, THE CANTOS (SECTION: ROCK-DRILL)

Mont Ségur, sacred to Helios... To respect the vegetal
powers...

that the body of light come forth

from the body of fire

And that your eyes come to the surface

from the deep wherein they were sunken...

That your eyes come forth from their caves

and the stone eyes again looking seaward...

O Anubis, guard this portal

as the cellula, Mont Ségur.

Sanctus

That no blood sully this altar...

The four altars at the four coigns of the place,
but in the great love, bewildered

Farfalla in tempesta

Under rain in the dark.'



FROM LANGUEDOC VARIORUM: A DEFENSE OF
HERESY & HERETICS BY ED DORN.

PUBLISHED BY NICHOLAS JOHNSON, ETRUSCAN BOOKS.

Cathar comes from the Greek
meaning pure – they rejected
all food which was produced
from animal intercourse. They
abhorred the sacraments of the Church
bread, wine and water
for they saw in such veneration
the raising up of the material
realm of Satan, the old and only bargain...

The bottom line of that great
Degenerating power is
Bad times get Worse, so
don't expect much, and be grateful
for the occasional porc chop

FOR SOMHAIRLE MACGILLEAIN - SORLEY MACLEAN:

An uair a dheireas mi sa mhadainn

When I rise in the morning

chan fhaic mi ach na raointean glasa,

I see only the grey fields,

far a bheil saothair is anradh

where there is toil and anguish

s am fonn e fhein an impis sgaineadh

and the soil itself almost splitting

le teas murtailna greine craitich

with the murderous heat of the sore sun



FOR BASIL BUNTING:

Every birth a crime,

Every sentence life.

Wiped of mould and mites

Would the ball run true....

Brief words are hard to find,

Shapes to carve and discard....

Dung will not soil the slowworm's

Mosaic. Breathless lark...



miscreants
participants
Band members and
Events from the film

Anonymous Bosch

Anonymous Bosch was born sometime and is an English artist and photographer. Much of his work is about capturing the elsewhere, the stoic comedy of the rattle-taggle band of sleepwalkers, musicians, poets and performers that he regularly accompanies in their heroic absurdity. He is one of the few artists capable of recording the volatile trajectory of myth-making and unreliable memory as well as the spectre of dreams.

Basil Bunting

Basil Bunting, the Quaker poet, chose silence. But he attended. He had been coming to Brigflatts for sixty-two years. 'If you sit in silence,' Bunting said, 'if you empty your head of all the things you usually waste your brain thinking about, there is some faint hope that something, no doubt out of the unconscious or where you will, will appear – just as George Fox would have called it, the Voice of God.' In company with Andrew and Anthony, stamping and blowing on frozen fingers, we searched the Quaker Burial Ground. Bunting's curved gravestone – 'fingertips checking, / till the stone spells a name' – is freckled with spores and mossy smudges, the name is almost gone. 'A man abolished.' This memorial, with all the others, a mortal crop.

The Burial

The box was well buried, in a secret spot, with the expectation of being recovered one day, enigmatic but undated, like the walrus ivory chessmen of Lewis, found near Uig in 1831. After so much discussion, the interment was swift and easy. The dog walker at the tide's edge and the solitary landscape-collector with the tripod, tramping south, would barely have noticed our sombre group, silhouetted against the setting sun. The day was perfect. And the mineral sky clear with a few gauzy clouds scraping along the wave contours of low hills. 'There's a good chance the ferry will be suspended tomorrow,' Steve said. 'The winds are going

to get up overnight. You might be stuck here for weeks.' That couldn't happen. The placement of the box was the resolution of a very long story.

Joan Dilworth

And then, after the gin and the resinous smoke, Kötting began to sing, a cod operatic turn of his own devising, signalling that it was probably time to go home. The scraping back of chairs and slamming of doors usually followed. 'Alone on a hill lives a man with no arms and no legs,' he bellowed, with appropriate gestures. The chorus, never previously heard, came back at once. From Joan. In tune. Vibrato. 'He has no arms, he has no legs.' Then Andrew again. Bass. Resonant. 'Where does he live? Where does he live?' Joan: 'Alone on the hill, alone on the hill.' Ridiculous and magical. This unlikely duet was what we had travelled to Harris to hear. Joan, her story completed, was free to join with, and to elevate, Andrew's operatic nonsense.

Steve Dilworth

'A shaman who took himself seriously,' Macfarlane wrote, 'would be insufferable.' But a shaman who does not take himself seriously is not a shaman. His sickness vocation is misplaced. The clowning of the shaman is a weapon.'

Steve Dilworth was born in Yorkshire in 1949 and now lives and works on the Island of (Rust) Harris, in the Outer Hebrides. This remote location provides much of the inspiration and source material that goes into his sculptures that are often labelled as shamanic. Much of his sculpture incorporates a 'resurrectionist act' when found materials are turned into objects that have an existence not in modern-time but in deep-time.

'All things contain energy. It is self-evident, and by changing their shape or position you can alter the energy or strengthen it. You end up making power objects and that is ultimately what sculpture is for me. It is not primarily visual art. An artist creates music, art or whatever but it transcends the material. Otherwise it is worthless. If it isn't more than the material, then it is not art.'

& IN HIS OWN WORDS:

A baleen whale was washed up near the pier at Huisinish, North Harris back in the late '80's. The violent storms helped by smashing the carcass into pieces, ribs, bones and baleen scattered the length of the shore. It was winter and bitterly cold. I drove a battered Vauxhall hatchback and with my two girls, Beka and Alexe, set off to see what could be retrieved before the endless storms took the rest away. The ribs were huge and the only way I could get them in the car was by putting one end in the passenger footwell with the remaining few feet of rib stuck out of the opposite rear window. The girls wrapped a scarves around their faces to protect against the freezing cold and the appalling smell. Anyone who has been close to a rotten whale will know what I'm talking about.

From these bones I made a whalebone box about the size of a loaf of bread. This contained a thick lead box I also made which could safely hold seawater without leakage. I kept thinking about leaving it in Rodel Church, South Harris, which was, at the time of making, a wonderful place built on a pre-Christian site. Inside there were wooden ladders allowing access to the higher parts of the tower, the top room being the most impressive. A perfect environment to write while listening to the wind howl through the eaves. It was an ideal building to hide this box. The ladders have now been removed for safety. A sad loss.

Iain Sinclair, while filming the 'Alternative Turner prize' for the Late Show in the early '90's, had a notion of taking the box on a journey for which I happily agreed providing that he brought it back to Harris. Somewhere in the narrative having to do this return journey on foot appeared. Suits me. Not my problem.

Finding a place for the box grew over the thirty years Sinclair had possession. Maybe on the chest of the Hag, the same mountain range on Harris where earlier I had carved a navel and in the whorl left another bronze human navel within a polished stone inside yet another. On reflection, maybe not, it was quite a hike up the mountain and these days the thought of carrying the heavy box was enough to deter. It is heavy, as anyone who has had the opportunity to hold it knows.

The chances of it ever returning to Harris whatever route looked ever doubtful as the years passed and I was happy enough to know it kept company with Iain as he wrote in his small room in London.

In 2018 the box arrived along with Sinclair, Kötting and Bosch, on a cold January night. So cold that they slept in the hallway of a rented bungalow all snuggled in an attempt to prevent frostbite. They were always welcome to stay with us but felt that as Joan, my wife, was undergoing chemotherapy for the second time thoughtfully felt it would be less onerous to rent a place down the road.

That evening with drink in hand we experienced a most magical moment. Kötting in all his effervescent energy, which is prodigious, broke into an operatic aria. At the other end of the table Joan rose to her feet and met this in voice with such primal force. It was so special, so stunning. They were the last visitors we entertained before she died shortly after.

Over supper grew the plan to bury the box in a sand dune and I knew just the place. It was a little odd the four of us tramping across the dunes carrying a spade while just a hundred yards away in the graveyard another group also were digging an even larger hole. Wonderful images by Anonymous Bosch captured the day, truly great shots on his plate camera. The box was buried for the film.

It didn't feel right and part of this feeling was the clear emotion that Iain felt on letting go of the box, it was such a part of his life and I felt unhappy but to hand it back wasn't right either. That wouldn't work for him or the box. I made a smaller version for Iain but that didn't have the weight both literally or magically. It had to go somewhere very special and not owned by one person. Somewhere not too far from Iain.

A few years earlier David Anderson knocked on my door asking to see my work. Profuse apologies for not phoning but was kayaking around the Hebrides. Yes of course come in. I'll call the others. House full of wet canoeists. I liked David from the start, a very kind and thoughtful man. He said if I was ever down in London he had an apartment which was quite often empty and I was welcome to use it. My first experience of the Middle Temple. I loved staying there as the Temple is such an amazing place with layers of history while still a working place.

Out of this grew my thinking of leaving the box somewhere in the Temple. Through David's introductions a plan grew to give it a home but first it had to go before a panel of Judges for approval, just one refusal would be enough to scupper this plan.

I am forever grateful to Guy Perricone, Renee Satterley and Colin Davidson and others who were so helpful in making this happen. The whalebone box now lives between the Molyneux Globes in the Middle Temple Library.

Richard Ellis

Richard pointed with his stick to Dentdale. Andrew remembered the farm where he had filmed *This Filthy Earth*. His first dramatic feature opens in mud. The shockingly pink pizzle of a rampant bull arcs like meteor across the dark screen. The mounting is furious. The cow's owner is up to her elbows in sperm.

Isle of Harris

What attracts Meades to this place is what he calls 'an aesthetic bereavement so absolute that it is a sort of insouciant anti-aesthetic.' A palette of corruption. The script for *Isle of Rust*, published in *Museum Without Walls* (2012), states: '*essential to compose frames that show corrugated iron, machinery, scrap, etc., in their surroundings. Emphasise the contrast between natural grandeur and scrap squalor.*'

Phil Heyes

Photographer of whale bones being collected by Maori elders in New Zealand and long distant friend of Anonymous Bosch.

Philip Hoare

It felt like the ideal person to visit with Dilworth's box. I knew that he went into THE WATER, close to the site of the demolished Royal Military Hospital at Netley, every morning. It was his routine. The regime that sustained health and peace of mind. Preparation for the work ahead. Philip returned to the sea, to his childhood home, from a period in London, the art and punk community in Hackney. Philip is preternaturally alert to manifestations of the uncanny. And Andrew is constantly swooping to dig out and capture evidence for a museum of 'hauntings'. Both men, the Catholic Hoare and the virulently anti-fundamentalist Kötting, are superstitious gleaners: of stones, feathers, rabbit bones, postcards and bricks.

Andrew Kötting

Andrew Kötting is an artist, film-maker and Professor of Time Based Media at the University for the Creative Arts in Canterbury. In addition to numerous experimental films, performances and installations, he became celebrated in 1996 for his first feature film "Gavillant". His oeuvre is multifarious in its' outcomes, moving from live-art inflected, often absurdist pieces, through to documentaries, LPs, CDs, collage, paintings, drawings and books. Autobiography, the psyche and its geography and philosophy are the motors that drive his work. He seems to be interested in teasing out the melancholy at the heart of contemporary British culture and collaborates with friends and family on the projects which have included his grand-parents, his dead dad and in particular his muse and daughter, Eden

Eden Kötting

'Written in Eden.' Oh yes. And on Eden too. And by Eden. And through Eden. Eden Kötting. She is warmed by the amniotic memories of the Pepys Estate. The Bence House flat, a short reach from the Thames, AS protective womb. Their late return is just another cold walk in a long sequence of walks: it IS happening always. With Eden, every day IS new. And every day IS the same. The biological clock advanced, her body matured. But the disconnect never changed. Today's gathering up of the scattered seeds of memory is an important ritual for the father. And for me, as I try to understand it. For Eden, present events are accepted, endured, and... experienced? Mapping Perception argues over how Eden perceives herself. Does she perceive memory as a kind of dream state? A gift that Andrew has to labour to interpret, the dissolution of formidable barriers.

Sorley Maclean

On our way to the ferry at Uig, we stopped outside Portree to locate the poet's granite grave, and the white lettering in the Gaelic, hard against a hedge beside the A87. Andrew came away from the heritage centre across the road with the islander's White Leaping Flame, a substantial volume gathering up the work of a lifetime. He reached, at once, for his faithful black pen, to underline and score the text for theft and future quotation. Then he posed, book in hand, stern-faced (pantomime stare), beside a portrait of the poet. Thereafter, as we drove, he chanted in horribly butchered Gaelic. Agus an t-aonar eabair nas miosa / na fiacail nimhe an tuirc. 'And the miry solitude worse / than the boar's envenomed tooth.'

MacGillivray

'The electively possessed poet and blood-singer, Kirsten Norrie, channelling her Highland persona as MacGillivray, carried the box into St Peter's Church at Cassington. Her unaccompanied voice successfully banished all the living inhabitants of the dormitory village. The main street, the formal garden, burial ground and church, were deserted. Cradling the heavy whalebone kist, her long hair swirling and covering her face, the cloaked MacGillivray let out an unearthly, oceanic scream-song; a chant addressed to hunted things trapped between land and sea and finding no respite in either. Her wail clicked and reverberated, throat-fluting and keening, challenging the yellow bone-shaved Hebridean water container to declare its origins. The haunted drone, this Murdered Mermaid Song, would be repeated as we drove through Scotland, beside frozen lochs, over snow-capped hills, at first light and in the thick dark.'

John Maher

Photographer musician and Buzzcock from Manchester, England. He got a second-hand drum kit for his 16th birthday. Five weeks later, an hour before heading back to school to sit his Chemistry O-Level, John was invited to join Buzzcocks. The band went on to have several chart hits. 'Ever Fallen in Love', reached No.12 in the UK charts. The band broke up in 1981. In 2002, John relocated from his home town of Manchester to the Isle of Harris, where he lives and works today. He says it took him seven years to discover a way of photographing the islands in a style that interested him. John created a new way of interpreting the Hebridean landscape, with an innovative series of long exposure photographs – all shot during the dead of night, under the light of a full moon.

Jonathan Meades

Jonathan Meades is a writer, journalist, essayist and film-maker. His books include three works of fiction - Filthy English, Pompey and The Fowler Family Business - and several anthologies including Museum Without Walls, which received 13 nominations as a book of the year in 2012. An Encyclopaedia of Myself won Best Memoir in the Spear's Book Awards 2014 and was shortlisted for the 2015 Pen Ackerley Prize. His first and only cookbook, The Plagiarist in the Kitchen, was published in 2017.

Kyunwai So AKA Paper

She is dreaming about the box.

But the box is a real thing....

And I also seen in the pictures that she was holding a gun.... to hunt a whale in her mind.... But it's happening in a reality. And this one could be.... This box made by paper.... could be the.... Could be the whale box in her dream....But not the real one but in her dream

ANDREW – What is your name?

My name is Kyunwai So. But everybody call me 'Paper'

Helen Paris

Helen Paris is not from Paris. She is a whisperer and Professor of Performance Making, specializing in somatic and immersive work and interdisciplinary research through her collaborations with the biological and ecological sciences as well as Leslie Hill. She received her doctorate from the University of Surrey in 2000, exploring notions of the virtual and the visceral in live performance.

The Playlist

Andrew Kötting had a catholic playlist tailored to the journey. The choices came back, time after time, to the point of madness, outstaying all novelty and uplift, and making this shuddering acoustic penance a toll for our survival. There was a tiny crack in the windscreen, grit from a bad road. Andrew marked its limits with a felt-tip pen. I watched as the line spread into a fearsome rictus. We know Kötting's compulsive playlist pretty well by now: Johnny Cash, a French rapper sampling the soundtrack of Marcel Carné's *Le Quai des brumes*, Beirut and MacGillivray's lament for her murdered mermaid.

Iain Sinclair

Iain Sinclair was born in Cardiff, and studied at Trinity College, Dublin, the Courtauld Institute of Art, and the London School of Film Technique in Brixton. The city of London is his oyster, and his books tell a psychogeography of 'place' involving characters including Jack the Ripper, Count Dracula and Arthur Conan Doyle. His non-fiction works include *Lights Out for the Territory*: (1997); *London Orbital: A Walk Around the M25* (2002); and *Edge of the Orison* (2005), a reconstruction of the poet John Clare's walk from Epping Forest to Helpston and more recently *The Last London* (2017) and *Living with Buildings: Walking with Ghosts* (2018) Iain Sinclair lives in Hackney but has a flat in St Leonards-on-Sea, and is often seen haranguing the waves.

Ceylan Unal

Soothsayer wise woman and coffee grout diviner of Turkish decent now residing in Berlin.

Or she's invisible maybe like a....

Like angel.... like....

A bit naughty angel like

Maybe likes to shoot some I don't know.... Butterflies

Not too bad though

But might be a bit naughty



THE FILM WISHES TO THANK

Leila McMillan

Glenn Whiting

Chloe Dewe Matthews

Will Stevens

Suzie Zamut

Karl Wallinger

Kristin O'donnell

Lawrence Blackwell

Jim Roseveare

Tony Hill

Nicholas Johnson & Roberta

Shona Thomson

Peter & Jackie Mccannon

Nigel & Ute

John Maher

Steve Dilworth

Ma Fine Art Students @ UCA Canterbury

John Wall & Alex Rodgers

David Spittle

Joan Dilworth

Anna Sinclair

Richard Ellis

Susan Hiller

Everybody at Screen Archive South East

Middle Temple Library

Jeff Johnson's ongoing enthusiasms

Deconstruction and reconstruction of soundtrack for Vinyl

WITH KIND PERMISSION OF MUSIC BY:

Oliver Cherer

*Sunrise – Anja and the Memory People –
At the Lake – Death Rite*

Dirch Blewn – David Bloor

*Quiver – Infinity is Bigger than you Think –
Lost Souls – The Sacred Value of
Restlessness*

O.D.Davey

The Drive

Lutto Lento

Partition EP – 1st Partition 2nd Partition

MacGillivray

*Murdered Mermaid Song – O John Sing
Thy Songs To Me – Border Darkness –
Werena Ma Heart*

Riz Maslen

Wreckage of Dreams

Quai Des Brumes

*Julien et Mathias –
Quai Des Brumes sur les Quais*

John Wall & Alex Rodgers

CD 114 Work 2006-2011: CD 234 Soar

Oliver Cherer

Oliver Cherer is perhaps one of Bandcamp's most prolific, contemporary singer-songwriters and yet despite this, he's always been careful to exist just below the radar, much aided by a variety of nom-de-plumes, Gilroy Mere, Dollboy, The Assistant, Australian Testing Labs, etc. He lives in St Leonards-on-Sea and often has trouble finding a place to park his green camper van.

Side A (mixes Oliver Cherer)

Soundings

The Passage Out

The Sperm Whale

Side B (mixes Oliver Cherer)

Far Away Land

The Filthy Enactment

The Whiteness of the Whale

A Cold War for the Whale

Riz Maslen

Riz Maslen is an English electronic music artist. During the mid 1990s, she worked with 4hero and Future Sound of London. After playing keyboards for The Beloved, she took out a loan, built a home studio and created her first albums there. She lives in St Leonards-on-Sea and runs like the wind.

Side C (mixes Riz Maslen)

Sealed Orders

The Divine Magnet

Very Like a Whale

The Correct Use of Whales

Side D (mixes Riz Maslen)

The Whale Watch

The Melancholy Whale

The Ends of the Earth

The Final Chase

Sealed Orders (Drum Sample by Benbo)

The Final Chase (*Wreckage of Dreams*
text by Shaun Gardiner)

**Titles of tracks by kind permission of
Philip Hoare** and his book *Leviathan or
The Whale*

THE BOXSET WISHES TO THANK

Phillipe Ciompi: sound designer,
polymath, mixer and friend
Steve Dilworth
John Wall & Alex Rodgers
David Spittle
Heilco Van Der Ploeg

All original mixes for film by
Andrew Kötting – 2019 Old Town Hastings
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Concept: Andrew Kötting
Design: Julien Lesage



THE WHALEBONE BOX BOXSET



THE WHALEBONE BOX BOXSET

MEANWHALE:
THE BOX, THE WHALE, THE FILM
AND A FATHER





*A strong song tows
us, long earsick.
Blind, we follow
rain slant, spray flick
to fields we do not know*

JAW, nostrils, lips, the restless tongue, cheeks illuminated, opening like fields between shadows and **I LOVE YOU INSIDE OUT** when the eyes become milk as they look backwards into the head, remembering John Clare

I LOVE YOUR BONES as they hang above milling crowds, the scaffolding for water held in air **AND YOUR BLOOD AND YOUR BILE** as feet on ground, the carcass, the happening of your being in and with and of the landscape as a landscape **AND I LOVE THE SHAPE OF YOUR ORGANS** in the pocket and pool of rot and how body clot of jewels to earth is listening and seeing each in the other to be as biomass of place, her process is mine and yours and held, a skin box what of this as any form **AND THE DARK** we approach and come from to stage our flawed vocabulary and dive **BROWN** mulch of bowels the **COLOUR OF YOUR LIVER** as we move on to oaring old-haunts from any shipwreck, in ribs, timber and timbre **AND I LOVE** the foam and spray of change of all-the-while **THE SLUICE AND SPILL** and the impossible container **OF YOUR LIQUIDS** as it moves to *wherever it says* **FORBIDDEN**

THE WHALEBONEBOX is dredged invocation, shrieking occult, family proximity, distance, collaboration, care and ruin; it is the *between* and the *meanwhile*, hidden but central to the decentred and intimate absence of plot. This film presents itself as a continuation of Kötting's journey films: *Gallivant* (1996) *Swandown* (2012) *By Our Selves* (2015) *Edith Walks* (2017) – but, just as

Lek and the Dogs (2017) seem to draw the 'EARTH trilogy' (*This Filthy Earth* 2001, *Ivul*, 2009) into a collaged *journeying* aesthetic, so too does *Whalebonebox* draw its journey into a darker, immovable substance: not quite EARTH or SEA but the breaching between – into, and as, a troubled space. 'Between' is the suggestion of AIR, but the film often feels as encroachingly closed as the 'air-tight' box that is neither simply closed or open but instead in a Schrödinger's inscrutability of simultaneity, is always on the threshold of one-in-the-other. The shore between high and low tide, in a constant restlessness between the possibility of concealment and exposure. And what is left, what is after – beached – a need to return.

Kötting is returning a box North – from his home in the South of England, to the Hebrides islands off the West coast of Scotland (specifically to the Isle of Harris). The box is made from panelled slats, nay, **SLABS** of whale bone, bound together and sealed in a ghost white chest. The bones were taken from a beached whale and then cleaned and sculpted by the artist Steve Dilworth. Dilworth's unique spirit is everywhere in this film, communicating seamlessly (or in shifting séance) with Kötting's own tireless eye-to-soil lensing of landscape and the happenstance of what is found. Dilworth's art has been described as both shamanistic and scavenging, occupying a visionary isolation of 'making' from his remote house on the Isle of Harris. Through resurrecting natural matter and animals from death, decay and neglect, into uncanny geometries of sculpture, he has created his own cosmology of objects.

Two birds, beaks crossed, found dead in the nest. The sun-dried carcass, mummified, skin shrunken around an armature of bones. A cat and a rat, reanimated in frozen dialogue. The armadillo's armour, sparrow hawk's talon, the earth, braided grass and rope, carapace, coffin, the vast geology of indifference, collected and re-built, reimagined as totemic coordinates. The skull and stones. The hidden vial of calm water, storm water, foam and spray. Notched vertebrae and the polished curves of rock. Each in cryptic dialogue with the other, mythologised into shapes of mute speech. Returned to the land. Encased by and with. What is seen and the hidden bird, feathers kept in a hollow of stone. Flight in the immovable.

And the **BOX**, the unopened possibility of its open possibilities. Bone heart as secret, what is hiding contained by the structure of what was hidden. Closed. Something reimagined to be again reimagined by Kötting's film. Excavations and burials, 'in this brief transit where dreams cross' as Eliot put it, and as Kötting then put Eliot in his own quarry of sound.

THE BOX as its own transportation, as the memory of bone and the might-be memory of its contents. Containment as content but trembling with something else, something unsettled –

“CAN YOU SEE THE SEA?”

WHEN THE HUMAN ENGINE WAITS

Perhaps Dilworth's most fascinating and unnerving creation, 'The Hanging Figure', is seen in the film: hanging

from the ceiling of the Dilworth's workshop like the cocoon of an ancient body. Braided rope, woven horsehair, bindings of seagrass and the re-assembled bones of a human skeleton; all painstakingly (re)constructed by Dilworth to (re)create an ageless and genderless being, ordained with the hand stitched aura of ritual. Outside of time, Dilworth's shamanic sleeping-bag holds a lifeless sleeper beyond death, neither male or female, a relic from the future. A bundled taxonomy, suspended and calling out from T.S. Eliot's 'The Fire Sermon' (*The Waste Land*, 1924):

*I Tiresias, though blind, throbbing between two lives,
Old man with wrinkled female breasts, can see
At the violet hour, the evening that strives
Homeward, and brings the sailor home from sea*

This found and re-built collection of bones and papered skin, aleatory angel hanging, could be the guardian of the box or the spirit of the box, or, just as it watched over Dilworth's studio, its image newly found by Kötting, presides over the film. Recalling Walter Benjamin's obsession with Paul Klee's painting, 'Angelus Novus'. The painting, as rapturously described by Benjamin:

His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no

longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. The storm is what we call progress.

‘WHAT CAN YOU SEE?’

‘YOU CAN’T SEE THE PAST?’

Andrew and Eden, father and daughter, two collaborators visiting London’s Natural History Museum. Adverts for an exhibition are placed in the museum’s opening hall, below the suspended skeleton of a blue whale, the adverts are beside an owl in a perspex box and read: *Visit Life in the Dark* and *Visit Today*. Andrew and Eden, child and adult, adult and adult, cared for and caring, seen by and seeing, two explorers visiting the British Museum. They are looking at Franks Casket, an Anglo-Saxon whale bone chest from the early 8th Century. It is adorned with runes, inscriptions, alphabets and, most significantly, narrative scenes. Myth and stories proliferate from different cultures and times: Christian images, Roman history and mythology, Germanic legend, Homeric epic, and the lost and founding tales that – as the audio description informs us – come alive with the multivalence of interpretation. But it *is* narrative. It is knife-cut narrative: *a she-wolf nourished them / a wretched den / rushes / wood / bitter / The terror king became sad where he swam / on the shingle / whale bone...* scenes engraved ‘with all the weight and complexity of narrative’. Meanwhile, the Whalebonebox of Kötting’s film, of Eden’s dream, and of Dilworth’s making, ‘devours narrative, like a black hole’.

Kötting's films return always to the turning away from narrative, the all ways, a turning away as narrative. Arguably the **EARTH** trilogy provided resistance to the intuitive evasion of resolution, adapting novels and plays, coming closer (closest in *Ivul*) to narrative and working themselves *hereon / hereover / hereunder* the ground of drama. In the journey-films, the natural narrative of a journey (the setting out, the feet on the ground, and the return) seemed a convenient spine from which to contort the beast of narrative – with happenstance, opportunity, and tangent. Always beneath these distracting models for narrative was the natural pulse towards the turning further in the mire. The mud beyond the footpath, bounding beyond the chain-link warning (it reads **FORBIDDEN**) at Montségur. Before *Gallivant* (sequences from which, POV looking out from the travelling van's dashboard, are revisited in this film, the box resting on the dashboard like a holding of memory – a mute reminder), back into Kötting's very first early shorts was a (student) film that seemed to unroll itself from the weathered skip of a lost avant-garde, as perhaps envisaged by Beckett in a particularly silly mood...this being the primal pratter of *Klippert Klöpp*. A mischievous but equally unsettling and convulsive rumination of forgetting, in which a man throws himself round and round into and across a field:

*It takes me right back to when things are a lot clearer now.
Foggy wasn't the word it,
It was well muggy.
Exceedingly unpleasant.
See I remember he said ;*

*He said, this my son is a sun
A prehistoric sun.*

The field becomes a trodden Mobius strip, its figure-of-eight infinity beaten into the ground like manic crop circles circled in the hurried confusion to be elsewhere. Films spill over their announced endings, chapters repeat and disregard their supposed function as reliable markers, and most often we return to where we began – never neatly or with calculation, but with the gesture that assures (with its lack of assurance) that any narrative is only ever accidental or illusory. There can be no simple moving forwards but, like Dilworth's 'Hanging Figure', a suspension looking both ways: the whale breaching and beached through change.

WHAT IS THE BOX?

BRIEF WORDS ARE HARD TO FIND

IN THIS BRIEF TRANSIT WHERE

THE DREAMS CROSS

IT IS A BOMB. A black box, the record of what went wrong. Pandora's box, the hurt to be released. It is a coffin. A house, the place we build in place. It is a space. Held and holding. It is the purring of Schrödinger's dead cat. The whale bone box is, without a doubt, a doubting, heavy, multitude. Does it contain the calm water of Dilworth's promise or the slipping memory and metaphor of the whale? Both and neither probably. It contains probably. I dance around its definition (Klipperty Klöpp!) because it is the film's obscure engine, at once intensely personal and endlessly open – without ever opening. I think it is helpful

to remember that a box can contain a world just as it can protect against a world.

In constant and confusing relationship with the box and the whale is Kötting's daughter Eden. Eden paints and sings and dresses-up and shakes and smiles and grimaces in most of his films, as also – the distinction porously examined – in his life: the movement between art and / as family being of recurrent interest. Eden was born with Joubert syndrome, a rare genetic disorder which affects the cerebellum (specifically the absence or underdevelopment of the cerebellar vermis), damaging control around balance and coordination. It stunts areas of cognitive and speech development and can impair internal organs. The most common features are often grouped around hyperpnea (rapid breathing), hypotonia (decreased muscle tone), and ataxia (deteriorating or making near-impossible certain voluntary muscle movements: swallowing / speaking / walking / vision). It can be a very debilitating condition. I mention (reductively and in simplified terms) the medical context of this disorder because Kötting's filmography, as an exploration of how enmeshed life and art can and should be, is frequently (if not always) coming from a very specific relationship with his daughter, and by extension the embodied realities and perception of Joubert syndrome.

In *Gallivant*, a journey around the English coast was energised through the interactions of Eden with Kötting's grandmother – a relationship between someone new to the world and someone playfully bickering into the twilight of their experience with, and in, that world.

ON THE THRESHOLD

In *This Our Still Life* (2011), we see the time passing of Eden's childhood, her interest in painting, the shared joy of collaboration and the restless camera that, like Eden's unstill 'still life' painting, begins to *see* in ways physically moved into new attention(s). A kinetic lens propelled in rhyme and reaction to Eden's roll / range of looking.

OF THE LAST MYSTERY,

The Sun Came Dripping A Bucket Full of Gold (2011) was a short 'Seaside Super-8', later incorporated in *By Our Selves* (2015). Eden walks along the beach, supported by her walking-frame and joined by the 'straw bear' – a creature that appears in *By Our Selves* and that is a version of Kötting, or that is a version of the corruption or market of creativity, or that is an armoured self, a lost self, or that – like a walking creation of Dilworth – seems summoned from a pagan ritual as an idol of blundering multitudes, a shadow that welcomes as it frightens.

AT THE BRUTE ABSOLUTE HOUR,

Then, following a 16mm short film of the same name (with camera work by Ben Rivers, 2014), *The Illuminated World Is Full Of Stupid Men: Eden Kötting Sketchbooks 2015-2017* (Badbloodandsibyl, 2017) was published as a beautiful collaborative book. The scrawled words of Andrew accompanied by Eden's painting and collage. This frenetic, humorous and brooding tapestry itches between diary,

philosophy, despair and giggling shreds of cosmic portent:
STARGEEZER / IT'S RAINING STUPID MEN /
THIS APPARITION

YOU HAVE LOOKED INTO THE EYES

Cartoon eyes, splashed toothpick arms, stars, butterfly
stickers, arrows, and the grinning animal beings EYES
DRIPPING BLUE / THE ENDLESSNESS OF ART
STUFF

**OF YOUR CREATURE SELF,
WHICH ARE GLAZED WITH MADNESS,
AND YOU SAY
HE IS NOT BROKEN BUT ENDURES,
LIMBER AND FIRM
IN THE STATE OF HIS SHINING,**

[from 'King of the River', Stanley Kunitz]

Her drawings were then animated by Glen Whiting in a short, *Forgotten The Queen*, that accompanied the feature film, *Edith Walks* (2016). A rambling archeology of perambulation leads a troop of Kötting's collaborators from Waltham Abbey via Battle Abbey to St.Leonards-on-sea in East Sussex. The journey is in tribute to 'Edith Swan Neck', the lover / wife of King Harold, their remains separated for 950 years to be now (*then*), in fluffed fluxus of drummed enthusiasm, reunited ... and the whale casket [THE BOX] makes its debut, carried onwards to lend cetacean marrow to a king's séance. In Eden's film, Whiting's animation captures the nervous energy of *The*

Illuminated World Is Full of Stupid Men and the fidgeting enchantment of *This Our Still Life*, drawing each pulse and twitch into new discomforts of belief, power, history and religion.

Beneath each twang of arrows, the scurrying hearts.
Each violent asterisk, the crockery of fallen stars
dropped from no god and her lines
spoke red around the eye, a sun.

And circling flights in burial, here
the chattering every wing and look of her
to sketch a blur of being still, the birds a language
drawn from trees, the forest underwater.

I want to try to get at the difficult, but inescapable, ways in which the whale and the box (one in the other) seem to relate to Eden. In watching **THE WHALEBONEBOX**, I found myself in a notably different churning of mood. In Kötting's films there is always the underbelly or in *Lek and the Dogs* (2017) the underground...where memory, viscera, and melancholy become inseparable from the elsewhere buoyant foraging or energy of a journey. Yet, in *Whalebonebox* I found myself, more than usual, in a shifting and troubled sense of sadness. *Lek and the Dogs* is probably the most unnerving or explicitly dark of Kötting's films, however it explores that realm in a mode that feels innately dramatic: adapting a 2010 play by Hattie Naylor, the film has an embedded drama, and, however digressively envisioned, a character-based narrative that foregrounds communication and became powerfully cinematic. **THE**

WHALEBONEBOX feels far closer to an unsettling and personal meditation, something washed up and crawling from the intimacies of a partially encoded diary. Despite being a continuation of Kötting's journey film, despite sequences on the road and passing trees, and despite the usual peripatetic approach...the film is heavy, returning always to a mute ambiguity in, and of, the box. The whale and the box become slipping metaphors for unknowable sites, where the imagination projects, romanticizes and fears in its own speculation.

Whales have a long and ancient history of igniting and confounding human imagination: from mythology and religion, to the eccentric escapades of Herman Melville, and into the 'whale renaissance' around the New Age embrace of whale song that spoke as much to ecological concern as it did to desires of meditative transcendence, or a non-specific and candle-lit spirituality. Equally, the whale is hunted. It becomes an image of reflection, to find ourselves in the whale...and then, in tragedies of power and money, to kill ourselves in hunting the whale. Meanwhile, the box is the container we turn to for hiding personal items, for reverently preserving bodies or the bodies of delicate possessions – a flat-pack world to hold our worlds. Equally, the box is where we hide and repress ourselves, where secrets or shame are packed away; each closing of the box an anxiety that seeks to reverse Pandora's opening of the box...but knowing, as we feel we know the whale, what is there. An uncanny presence that we find difficult to admit or deny. It is this duality as an integral human experience – both uncomfortable and vital – that Kötting's relationship with his daughter seems to emerge.

In the bookwork, **THIS ILLUMINATED WORLD IS FULL OF STUPID MEN**, there is one particular scrawled note from Kötting that seems relevant:

**THE INCOMPREHENSIBLE RESILIENCE
THAT SOME POSSESS AND THAT THE
SELF-RIGHTEOUS MISINTERPRET
EVERY TIME THEY GET DRESSED**

**– WHEREAS I HAVE HER WITH ME
EVERY DAY TO REMIND ME OF
“THINGS ARE NEVER AS THEY SHOULD BE”**

The resilience of Eden, her endurance of a debilitating genetic disorder that, through her living and art in Kötting’s films, and in her own exhibitions, enables a different *seeing* and *making*. The resilience of Andrew and family, creating and caring in the demanding realities of Eden’s life...the unrelenting honesty of bodily functions and the physicality of truly supporting someone. The following words introduce the film, whispered as the camera lingers on the almost-asleep face of Eden: *I love you inside out, I love your bones and your blood and bile, and I love the shape of your organs and the dark brown colour of your liver, and I love the sluice and spill of your liquids.*

Throughout the film, the camera watches over the sleeping Eden and we are told that the whale is living in her dream. The bizarre and beautiful unravelling of a parallel context for the box (beyond Dilworth’s creation) is described as the result of Eden dreaming the whale, and the whale gliding

through a forest where Eden shoots it –using its bones to make the box. We see her, staged in re-enactment of the dream: sat in an armchair in the forest, wearing a wreath of plastic flowers, holding a real gun and a pair of binoculars. The unknowable centre of the film, its unopened box, is created by a dreaming daughter. Or, to introduce the shifting reality of the film's unrest: it is only her dream as dreamt up by a father in an attempt to express his own shifting relationship with his daughter. When Kötting's camera rests watchful over the sleeping Eden there is again a shifting of mood: between an unnerving sense of her vulnerability and dependence and the more warming sense of a caring vigilance.

The camera that roves over her face, as unknown contours draped in shadow or as tongue or eyes in a spill of light, creates a troubled attention or perhaps an attention necessarily difficult in its commitment. It is the look that Eden gives the whale at the film's end, the huge model in the Natural History Museum, she stands beside its immensity and the uncanny calm of its eye. This is a landscape of living, like the close-up attention to hear dreaming face, that is at once unknowable and familiar. It is a moment that reminds me of a character in Bela Tarr's 2003 film *Werckmeister Harmonies*: a man named Valuska, seen as a village idiot but that in fact seems to live in a sensitive dream of this world, stares into the eye of dead whale that is brought into the town as a circus attraction. It is a **MOMENT** of connection and recognition, but one charged with an unsettled and uncanny mystery. One of the honest discomforts of Kötting's film is the

candid strength of love for Eden that nevertheless feels, at times, to come up against the unknowable reality of her very different experience. At one point, we see her lying on the bed with her feet up in the air together, she looks beached, her feet are graphically blistered, her body resistant to the linear plod of feet. The next shot we see is of a whale breaching out of the water.

Understanding that “*things are never as they should be*” is not a defeatist acceptance of difficulty but an honest appreciation: that the expectations of life and its experience, are built on representations and narratives that we are told to follow; always blind in their reduction of variety and cruel in their judgements.

THE WHALEBONEBOX *devours narrative.* There is no *shouldavists/couldavists* that occupy a structured journey, but the tangled experience of truly experiencing our experience and not its hollowed advert. Consequently, when Iain Sinclair describes the box, he suggests ‘the treasure is nothing actual, it’s that strange state of consciousness that you can only achieve out of your own confusions’. There is no answer to what the box holds except our own questioning of what it holds....an existence predicated on the questioning of its possibility.

The realisation of this is embodied in movement
**(OF PERCEPTION/EXPERIENCE/LANGUAGE/
PLACE /AND PHYSICALITY)**

that distrusts any answer, binary or stability, but continues – and in the words of Sinclair, ‘dissolve into something grander, rather than being put into a box and nailed down

in a particular spot. It's much better to be on the move, to be flowing and floating.'

As we hear this in film, we see Eden: she is swimming and smiling, beyond any one step of narrative or any solid truth, she answers the phone with her binoculars –

WHERE WE ARE WHO KNOWS

GUESSES

WHERE WE GO?



Written by Dr David Spittle
Photographs by Anonymous Bosch

