

# PORTAL ATOP A BUS STOP



KATIE HARE  
BETH BLOCK  
DANIEL COCKBURN  
DEIRDRE LOGUE  
CLAIRE DAVIES  
EMILY FURNEAUX

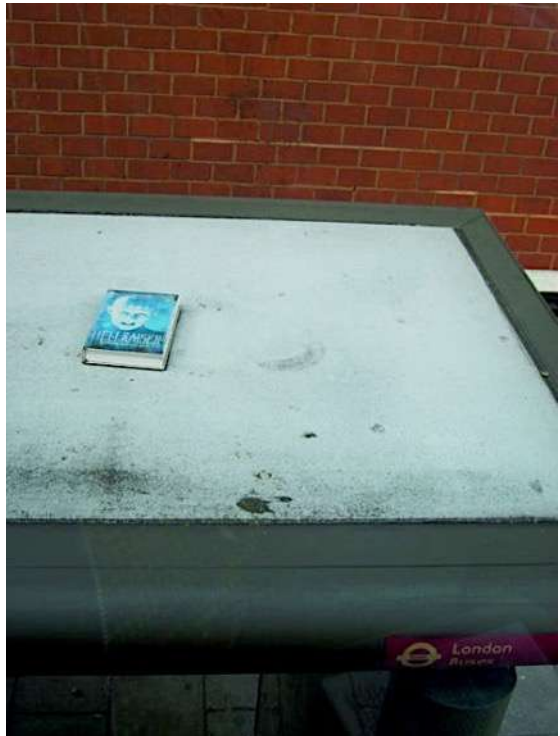
MAHA MAAMOUN  
MOREHSHIN ALLAHYARI  
PAUL SIMON RICHARDS  
MARY HELENA CLARK  
JENNET THOMAS  
MICHAEL ROBINSON

**SMC** KINO SALÉ

**CAC** CINEMA

## ***Portal Atop a Bus Stop***

The appearance of a weathered VHS copy of *Hellraiser* atop a bus shelter on Old Kent Road in South London became a kind of urban legend, or at least a puzzle. Since this first occurrence in 2012 there have been other instances, other portals opening, visible from the upper level of double-decker buses; countless more VHS tapes placed upon a roof. Copycats aside, the content of the bleached VHS case, Clive Barker's 1987 film, has at its core a puzzle box, grandly titled the 'Lament Configuration'. This box, when solved, can suture dimensions. From the other side of a portal the 'Cenobites', demonic in appearance, claim the clever individual who solved the 'Lament Configuration' for a suturing of another kind; between pleasure and pain. A pop mystery, the VHS tape in its odd placement—now a different sort of analog puzzle box—offers a detour on a routine commute. Portals, mundane or not, need a here and there, a clever body to pass through.



In *Notes on the Occult Media* Eugene Thacker writes: "...the magic circle serves an important function as medium between the natural and the supernatural. Such boundary-management addresses both anthropological divisions (e.g., between players and spectators) and more importantly, metaphysical divisions (e.g., between life and death, earthly and divine, known and unknown)."<sup>1</sup> The magic circle offers the potential of a gateway if its rules are followed. As players, it's conceivable that the human element may disobey through misuse or misinterpretation. Another possibility: the magic circle may be a tool of visibility, a decoding device. As Thacker contends: "...we are already bathed in the invisible viscous world of the supernatural..." channeling H.P. Lovecraft's concept of 'cosmic horror' wherein our lived world is overlapped by unknown worlds and forces beyond our conscious understanding.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps then the tools of 'the beyond', differently ordered magic circles—portals—may appear to us in a myriad of ways, ascribing us as players in a game with unknowable rules.

*Portal Atop a Bus Stop* is a screening of international artists' films and videos (im)materializing in various constellations for a multitude of sites. This incarnation features work by: Katie Hare, Beth Block, Daniel Cockburn, Deirdre Logue, Claire Davies, Emily Furneaux, Maha Maamoun, Morehshin Allahyari, Paul Simon Richards, Mary Helena Clark, Jennet Thomas, and Michael Robinson.

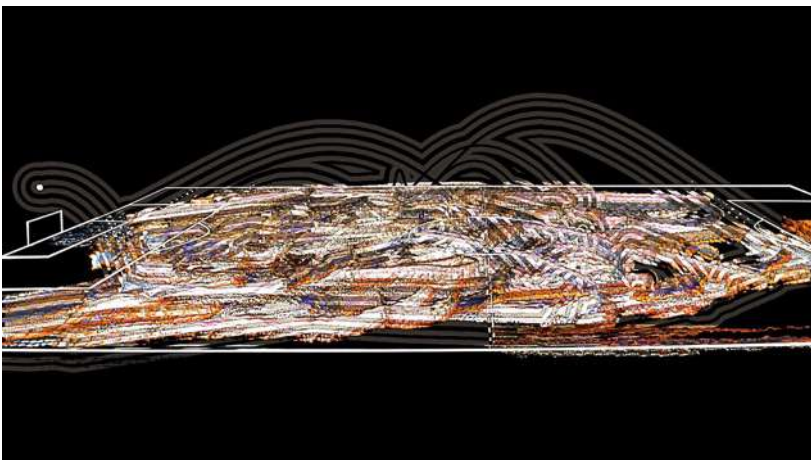
<sup>1</sup> Eugene Thacker, *Notes on the Occult Media*, in Volume 24: Counterculture, 2010, p. 132.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.* p. 134.

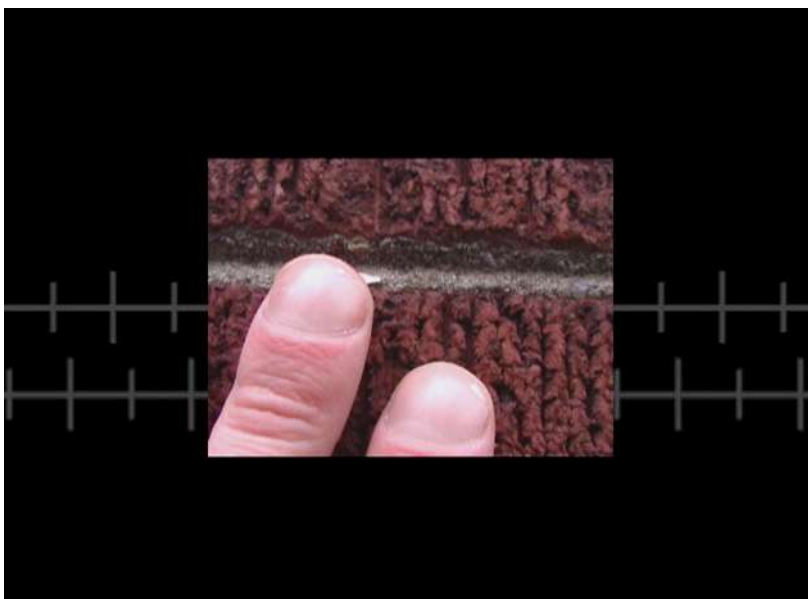
Starting in darkness, the narrator of ***Skip* (Katie Hare)** speaks about a television documentary and its subject whose troubled story lingers years after first viewing. A screen void of images mirrors the lack of specifics given. It is not the story that is being shared, but the story's impact. Images break through the dark chamber of voice, fleetingly connect for moments, before receding. A 3D rendering of a window rotating; a slipstream of data tunnelling to a digital eye; a fish riding the crest of an animated wave; a plume of smoke; a montage of faces. Incongruous yet connected, the images are linked by their latent potentiality of becoming material in something else. Remarkably, the narrator tells us that a recording of the television documentary is discovered in a library years later. When the alert comes that the library plans to decommission its videotape collection, action is taken in a skip full of discarded VHS tapes. The desire to preserve the potential of this documentary as source material leads to stacks of tapes selected to be saved based on title and brief blurbs alone. Surrounded by these video tapes, in a bin teeming with them, their contents offer a multitude of directionality, of many becomings. The orphaned images seep back into existence through obscuring swirls and fits of the tangential.



Though it unfolds in time, there isn't really a beginning to ***Successive Approximations to the Goal*** (Beth Block). It starts with what appears to be a game of *Pong* played on a screen suffering from burn-in, the bleeding trails of the ball tracked from one side to the other, and then crossing itself back. It's a start, but not a beginning. It's a reveal. It's all the moves played out, layered in time across the field. It is the consequences of actions, the dividing of cells, a match between emotion and logic over influence, and more. As this ball bounces, the players move accordingly, their pixel trails unfurling. "The quantum phenomenon of superposition is a consequence of the dual particle and wave nature of everything. In order for an object to have a wavelength it must extend over some region of space. Which means it occupies many positions at the same time. The wavelength of an object limited to a small region of space can't be perfectly defined though. So it exists in many different wavelengths at the same time."



The thumping of a metered beat and pull of a metered line across the screen offer a baseline measure for a rattled yet curious narrator who has newly dawned suspicions about the world. “Today I woke up certain, as certain as any one could ever be about anything, and I knew that everything had doubled in size overnight.” What occurs in ***Nocturnal Doubling*** (Daniel Cockburn) is a series of exploratory gestures and thoughts in this new yet strangely similar world, a testing of empiricism secured by the senses and questioned by the restless mind. Something does not compute. If “no measurements could be taken” given the spontaneous growth of absolutely everything—the sameness is unnervingly all encompassing—how does the mind know? A nervous pang of an extra-sense perhaps, a blip in the order of things, barely perceptible. Nevertheless, there seems to be some residue of a happening if only in this mind. A sneaker on pavement, trees, a brick wall—all appear the same. The pull of the meter across the screen doubles, its twin pushes the other way in the same cadence. A barely sensed sense; it happened once, it can happen again. Certainly. The heart’s throb keeps its pace.



Finding a path to the unruly within an everyday setting is the goal of ***Beyond the Usual Limits: Part 1*** (Deirdre Logue). Even if it seems there is no space between, there is. It's an idea that requires tireless testing. It deserves a tireless tester. If a mythic pea can reside there, so can a body. There may be resistance, but getting through is its own reward. It will be different on the other side, having set out and made the journey ensures that. It will all be a little tweaked after. While crossing the divide of fabrics and springs, take a rest gap. Stay in the threshold. There is time and all is fine under the feline perch.





There's this thing, a blobby thing; it pulsates and extends out of itself only to fall back in. It hovers over photographs, many of them featuring a cat. The voice tells us that the cat "has a thing for GIFs"; a thing for things that bump around, looping, in perpetuity. The voice tells us that perhaps the reason for the cat's interest rests in "minimal colour usage" and reduced "frame rates" as compared to other forms of moving image. Both the cat and the voice in **GIF Cat GIF (Claire Davies)** seem to fixate on the gap the blobby GIF creates just before it resets itself. This line is seamless and as such projects an air of stasis—it's ever so easy to look at—to be lost in. What if that line could be demarcated, made physical? A way through the GIF, a way to break its spell. The voice makes it a screen shot, but off-screen. It's a slime pool on paper. Subtly inflating and deflating itself as its mixed components react. It's rather minimal though, so the screen shot effect is achieved. Then with gradient lighting changes and recording the now physical blob, it is transported back to the flatness of the screen. Loop GIF.





In *A Tale of a Ziggurat* (Emily Furneaux) American style multiplex entertainment is imported to the UK in the mid 1980s. The Point Entertainment Complex in Milton Keynes stands tall, a beacon to suburban escapism, the literal one-stop shop. Carried by balloons across the Atlantic, this Ziggurat manifests, bringing with it a “disease of indecision.” Hands shuttle it in over the backdrop of construction paper; a performed animation, a crafty power-point presentation. The company mandate is one of “concept embodiment” and variations of the same means good business, therefore “choice” becomes a living and working mantra. The same hands spread out a plethora of coloured candies, clustering them around multi-directional pathways indicated by lines surrounding drawn question marks on paper. When there are “500 variations of coffee and milk from over 200 species of mammal” to choose from, a distracted existence settles in. One finds their place in this pyramid scheme. Come to The Point for the “same hot dog” with “different sauce” or the “same film” at a “different time.”



A set of postcards depicting the Pyramids at Giza are cycled through by a pair of hands in ***Most Fabulous Place (Maha Maamoun)***. Sound clips from scenes shot at this revered location, sourced from various Egyptian films, forms a disjunctive narrative. The lives of individuals fall away, only their fragments of conversation remain as if to place quotation marks around the pyramids. One could say that the points of the pyramids extend vertically out of their polished postcard snaps, skewering the multiple narratives of countless films and fictional lives, pushing even further beyond the screen, to our eyes and memories of other snaps and films, and perhaps even lived experience. The tension of the image, its surface, is no match for the ultimate punctum.



In a greyscale digitally rendered environment void of bodies, a connection between two individuals sparks in and out of existence. The domicile depicted could belong to either participant of the online chat, it's a marker, a holding place for a long term relationship existing only through a screen. At the crux of ***In Mere Spaces All Things Are Side By Side I (Morehshin Allahyari)*** is a friction. The digital veneer falls away from the sterile space to a blank dark screen every time there is the sharp pang of a dropped connection. A relationship always in catch-up, morehshina and johnson619 frequently miss each other's meaning. Typing, morehshina says: "Doing my best to re-connect as fast as possible. It's not my fault. Internet is so slow in Iran." Replying, johnson619 says: "Too bad. You miss half of the things I write to you." This is true for both of them, though morehshina is being unfairly singled out for it based on a privilege of access. A coil of cable in the vacant grey third-space of their meetings appears to leak a glowing essence. A viscous build up of exposition, its furies and sentiments, lost to the ether. Typing, morehshina says: "My slow and interrupted online being cannot escape the oppression of the country I live in. But persisting to be online every day is my only way of resisting it."



A night out divides \*a and \*b. Standing in the doorway \*a faces the dark void of their flat, virtually another terrain altogether, all well worn footpaths to the bed and the snoring \*b are lost. The mundane is treacherous in *L\*a\*b* (Paul Simon Richards), or more apt, the mundane is not itself. Clicking the light switch on for only a split second creates a “map of the room and its contents” and the beleaguered \*a can “see everything all at once.” Equipped with fading after-images, \*a stumbles forward, a voice against brightly hypnotic digitally rendered still-lives featuring half-phased objects. A spindle of CD-ROMs falls from mid-air, scattering as they hit an aubergine floating just above a stack of magazines and collaterally cascading into a wicker laundry basket standing idly by. Stacks, piles, and tentative steps. A relationship on precarious footing in that moment. It all feels different in the dark, but resentment is wrestled by restraint. The same goes for \*b, who made dinner and waited up for only so long to see \*a return home. Hours like agony, yet timeless in the half state of slumber. Known space becomes other, \*a and \*b occupy the same flat, but their sync is off. Another timeline has been imposed, separating them by a flimsy layer. They can sense one another is near.



Staring at the wallpaper, through muddied VHS grain, the flower pattern begins to vibrate. From the green-brown the rust of petals pop. This happens optically even before the gentle oscillations of dissolves massage the patterns, lifting them from the wall. Fixated, the emergence of superimposed blooms pulsate. In dulcet tones a voice speaks a guided meditation. All is trance inducing. From this position ***And The Sun Flowers (Mary Helena Clark)*** becomes felt, embodied. Like an ASMR effect, the shivers of emerging blooms and words extend from the surface of the image and “penetrates the skin, the muscles, the nerves, and the bones.”



Against the backdrop of warm wood slats, two-gold faced sharers take turns standing at the microphone and open up about the effect 'it' has had on their lives. After each successive share follows clapping, the kind you get at support groups, awkward and encouraging. John and Jennifer reveal more about 'it' and its unique manifestation to them in ***Return of the Black Tower (Jennet Thomas)***. What becomes clear is that 'it' is not a "perceptual problem" but rather "meaning embedded in the relation of things, it was like a shape." Some of us see 'it' and see 'it' differently. "Encounter groups" formed and tried to map 'it' with string, but this was seen as a "fad." Others "were accused of anthropomorphism" in demarcating their relationship to 'it.' Appearing at the microphone 'it' shows one version of itself, a Rorschach-like shape blinking in and out of this plane. A dark split in realities. But even still, this is one side of 'it', there are many "angles" to this "multi dimensional hole that keeps rotating." One could say 'it' exists at the blind side of our perception, a threshold at which our sense stands teetering on the chasm of something else. Tendrils give us glimpses, testing our readiness to accept that which is beyond. For some, after a lengthy process "it fell open and showed us more of what it was really like." Elated, John says: "I have to tell you now, it's totally beautiful. Now that its constantly moving and remaking itself in each moment."



Floating through clouds a voice proclaims: "I saw gold triangles" and "I can see through them." The cadence of this voice compels, its testimony breaks our vision. "There's a place, I can't make the place out because I'm looking through a fire." Then we're there. The pulsating crossing of spotlights reveals the stage. Constructed in part from music awards shows of the 1980s, ***Mad Ladders* (Michael Robinson)** filters this footage to become Heaven's Gate-esque. The signal is worked over, the figures and stage designs split from themselves, like souls leaving their frames behind. Each movement has a reverberation, echoes itself in a cultish kaleidoscope. A triangular craft on stage opens its triangular door, beckoning us. In front of a crystal backdrop dancers usher in the new era. "On the other side I look at myself, and the people who are with me, and we are all changed. We all look like the sun...." Floor spotlights connect to a point above in the darkness. The pyramid of light shimmers there fleetingly before the mechanized movement pulls the beams apart.





## Programme:

*Portal Atop a Bus Stop*

*Skip*, Katie Hare, 2015, 7:48, UK

*Successive Approximations to the Goal*, Beth Block, 2015, 14:11, USA

*Nocturnal Doubling*, Daniel Cockburn, 2004, 4:07, Canada

*Beyond the Usual Limits: Part 1*, Deirdre Logue, 2005, 2:55, Canada

*GIF Cat GIF*, Claire Davies, 2016, 7:51, UK

*A Tale of a Ziggurat*, Emily Furneaux, 2014, 6:41, UK

*Most Fabulous Place*, Maha Maamoun, 2008, 1:11, Egypt

*In Mere Spaces All Things Are Side By Side I*, Morehshin Allahyari, 2014, 4:25, Iran/USA

*L\*a\*b*, Paul Simon Richards, 2016, 15:31, UK

*And The Sun Flowers*, Mary Helena Clark, 2012, 4:47, USA

*Return of the Black Tower*, Jennet Thomas, 2007, 15:46, UK

*Mad Ladders*, Michael Robinson, 2015, 9:45, USA

Total Duration: 94:58

ŠMC Kino Salė / CAC Cinema

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curated by Erik Martinson

text by Erik Martinson

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