



Starve Acre (dir. Daniel Kokotajlo, 2023)

the weird and the eerie
the psychology of place and space
Lecture 8 | Coexistent Perspectives (ADAA7000)



Album Release October 16th 2026 – Matthew Herbert – theukhasmorefoodbanksthanbranchesofmcdonalds.com

today: thresholds, hauntings, oceans

Aim: a working vocabulary for the strange places of art and film (the liminal, the uncanny, the weird and the eerie, the haunted, the oceanic and the heterotopic) and for how artists and filmmakers make us feel them.

	block	theory	practice
01	thresholds	van Gennep · Turner · Lévi-Strauss	the Backrooms · Bourgeois · Hatoum · Wallinger
02	the uncanny, the weird and the eerie	Freud · Fisher · Deleuze	Whiteread
03	haunted ground	Derrida · Fisher · Macfarlane	The Caretaker · Tarkovsky · Wheatley · Pollard · Dean · Fisher and Barton
04	the littoral and the oceanic	Rolland and Freud · Foucault · Barthes · Blum · Balsom · Hau'ofa	Westerveld · Calle · Hutton · Sekula and Burch
05	heterotopias	Foucault	the ship · Derek Jarman's garden
	close	summary · reading · seminar	

Content note: includes nudity (Hatoum), references to illness, depression and death (Fisher, Jarman, The Caretaker), and some deliberately unsettling sound and images.

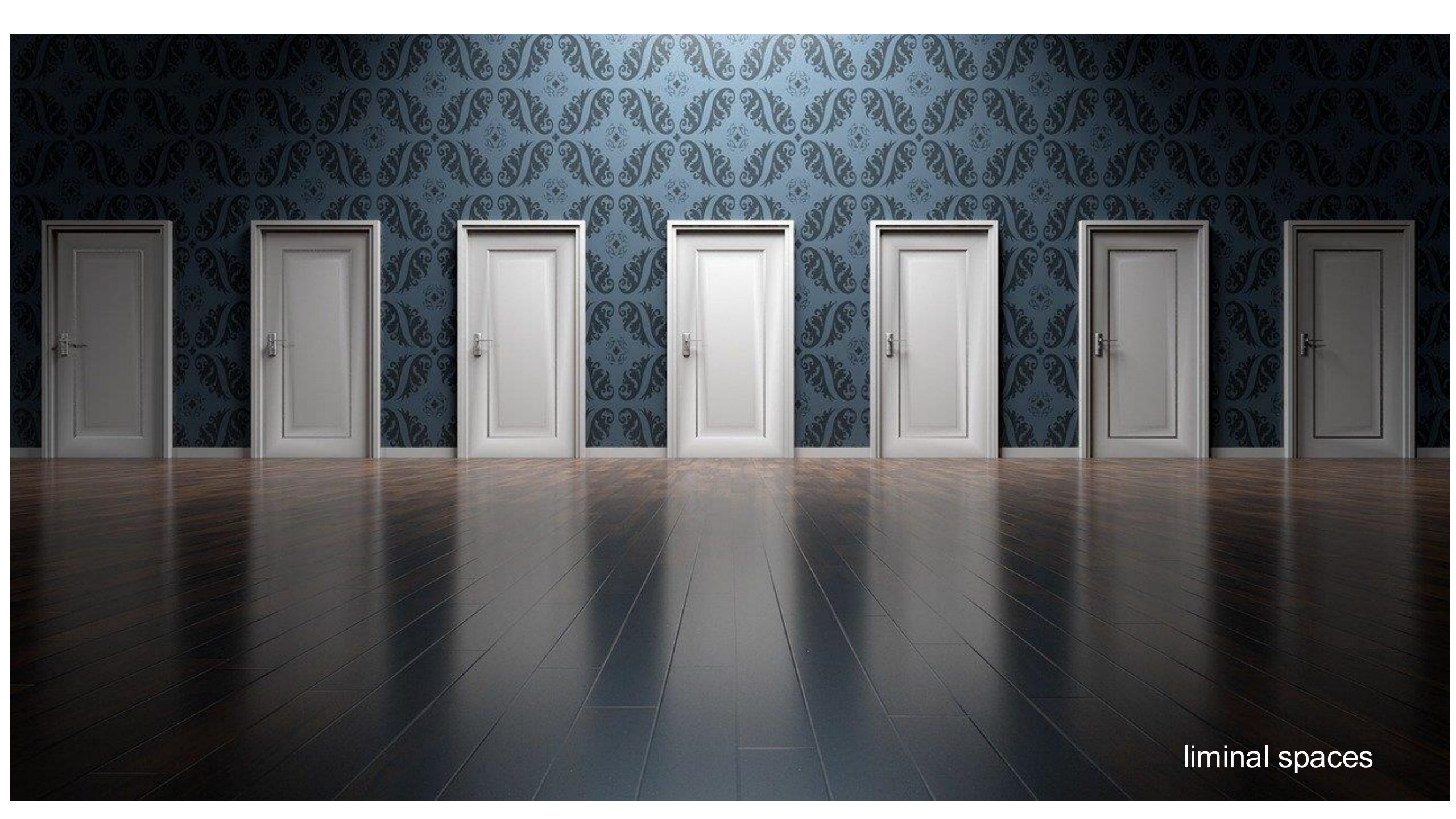
01

thresholds

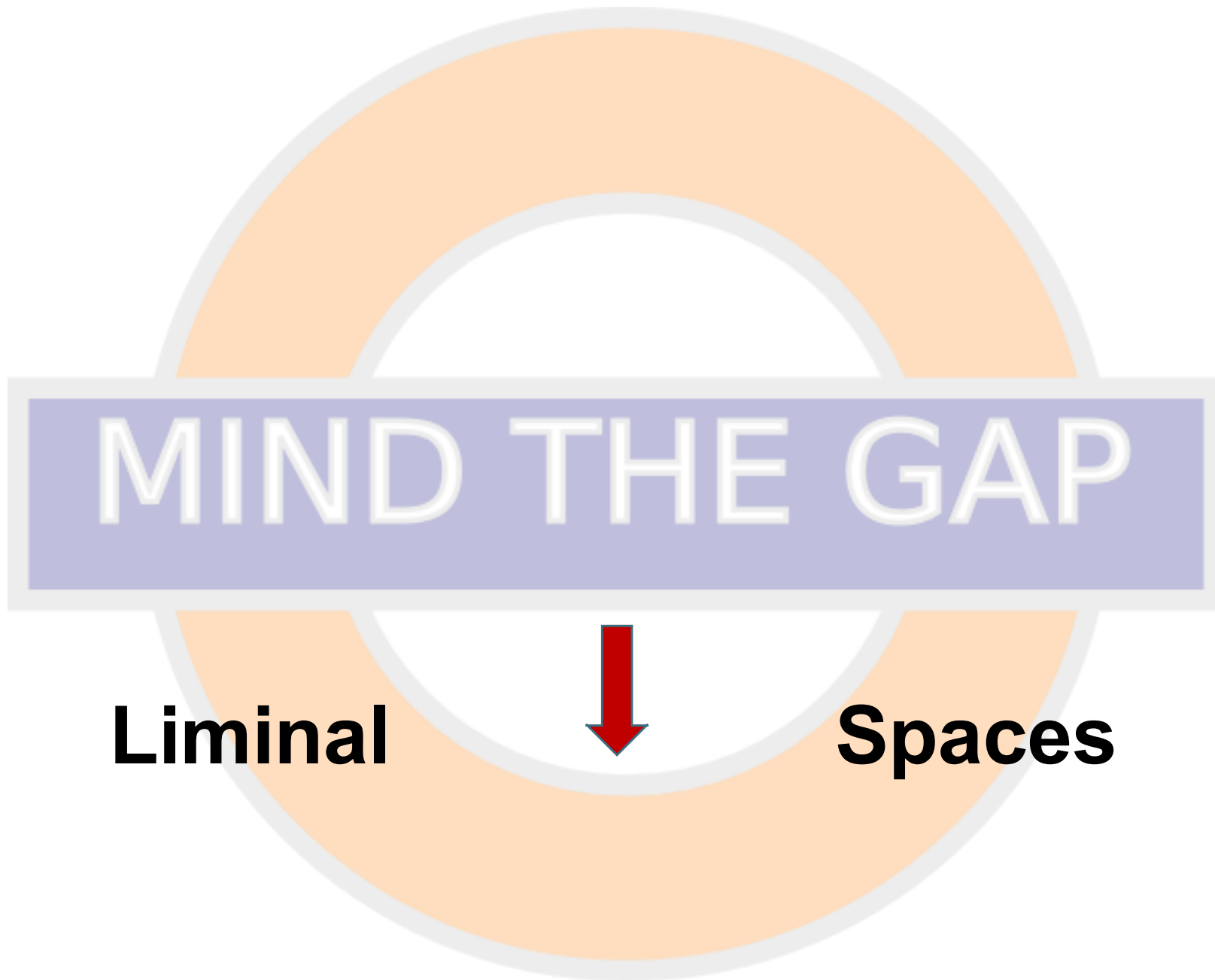
theory van Gennep · Turner · Lévi-Strauss

practice the Backrooms · Louise Bourgeois · Mona Hatoum · Mark Wallinger

What happens to us in the in-between?

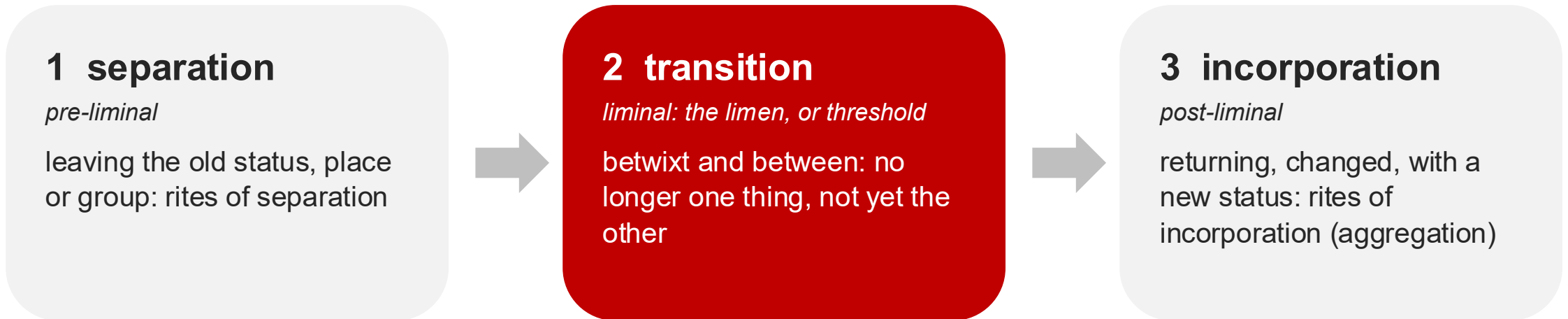


liminal spaces



rites of **passage**

Arnold van Gennep, *Les Rites de passage* (1909; English 1960)



Limen is Latin for threshold. Van Gennep starts from the doorway: crossing a threshold is the basic image of every change of state, from birth, initiation and marriage to death.

Victor Turner takes up the middle phase and makes it the centre of the theory.

Liminal roots in Anthropology

"The attributes of liminality or of liminal personae ("threshold people") are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. As such, their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualise social and cultural transitions. Thus, liminality is frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon."

Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process* (1969), p. 95



Victor Turner (1920–1983), British anthropologist; fieldwork with the Ndembu of Zambia; from 1964 at Cornell, Chicago and Virginia. [check photo]

liminal or liminoid?

liminal

Turner, *“Betwixt and Between”* (1964); *The Ritual Process* (1969)

- part of a ritual: obligatory, collective, often sacred
- temporary: you pass through and are reincorporated
- produces communitas: a bond between equals, with status stripped away

liminoid

Turner, *“Liminal to Liminoid”* (1974)

- in modern, industrial societies: optional, chosen, often leisure
- art, theatre, film, festivals, clubbing, sport
- can criticise society, not only renew it

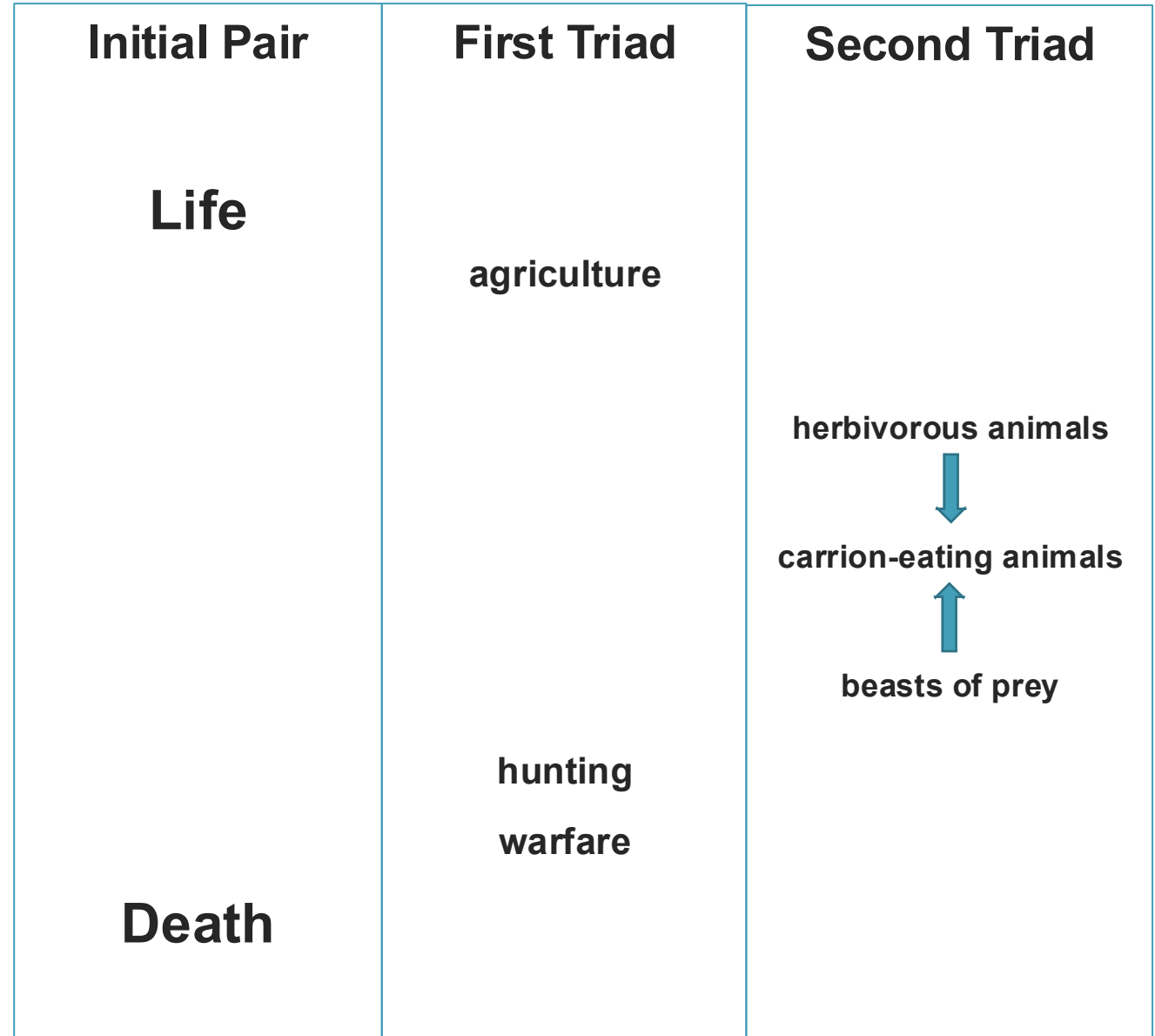
The internet’s “liminal spaces” (empty corridors, car parks at night, the Backrooms) are rarely liminal in Turner’s sense: no ritual, no passage, nobody there. They are closer to Augé’s non-place (Lecture 6) and to Fisher’s eerie.

An art gallery or a cinema is a liminoid space. What passage does it offer?

mediators

Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth" (1955)

the **Law of the Excluded Middle**
is not operational in mythical thought.



Liminal Space

“Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between.”

Turner, *The Ritual Process* (1969), p. 95

- Online, “**liminal space**” names an aesthetic: transitional spaces such as corridors, car parks, waiting rooms and pools at night, photographed without people.
- **The Backrooms** began as an anonymous 2019 image on 4chan. Kane Parsons’s web series (2022–) became A24’s feature *Backrooms* (May 2026).
- **Ask:** is this Turner’s liminality, Augé’s non-place or Fisher’s eerie?



the Backrooms aesthetic

betwixt and between (Turner's phrase)

...Louise Bourgeois, ***Spider*** (1997) and ***Maman*** (1999)



Bourgeois's spiders sit on the threshold between opposites: protector and predator, mother and monster, home and trap. *Spider* (left) is also a Cell, a room you can look into but not enter. *Maman* (right) in the Turbine Hall, Tate Modern, 2000.

Measures of Distance (1988)

Mona Hatoum



Mona Hatoum, Measures of Distance (1988), colour video with sound, 15 min. Contains nudity.

Threshold to the Kingdom (2000) **Mark Wallinger**

Slow-motion footage, filmed covertly, of travellers coming through the International Arrivals doors at London City Airport, set to Allegri's *Miserere* (Psalm 51).

Arrival in the United Kingdom, or in the kingdom of heaven, with a border officer as St Peter?

Video, 11 min 20 s; Tate collection



02

the uncanny, the weird and the eerie

theory Sigmund Freud · Mark Fisher · Gilles Deleuze

practice Rachel Whiteread

Is the strange inside us, or out there?

Unheimlich the uncanny

“the uncanny is that class of the
frightening which leads back to what is
known of old and long familiar”

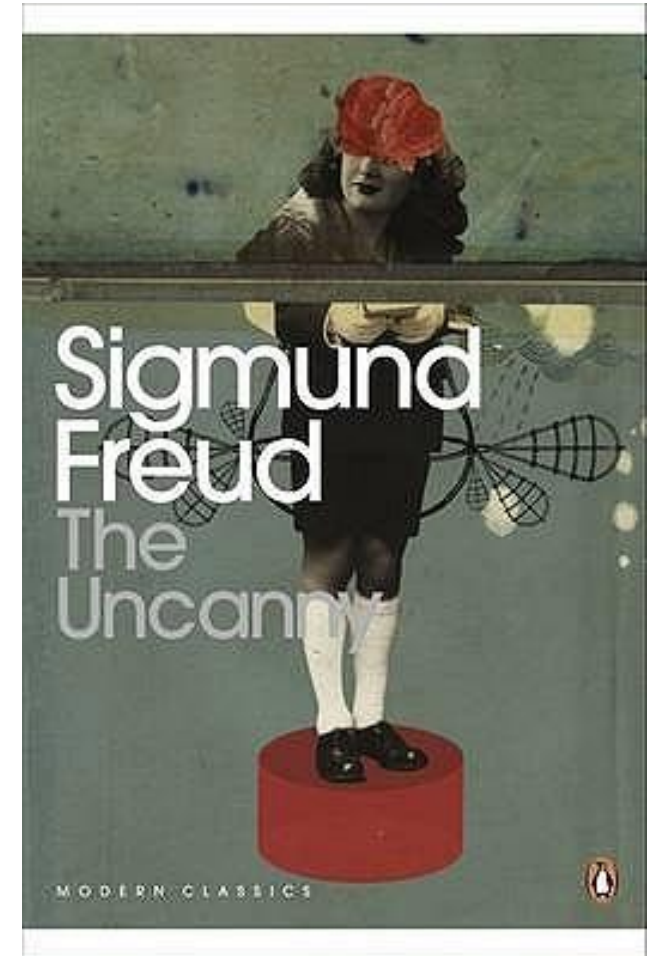
Freud, “The Uncanny” (1919)

“everything that ought to have remained
... secret and hidden but has come to
light”

Schelling’s definition, quoted by Freud



Rachel Whiteread, *House* (1993)



from the inside, **from the outside**

the uncanny

Freud, 1919

the strange **within** the familiar

heimlich (homely, but also concealed) turns
unheimlich

it “operates by always processing the
outside through the gaps and impasses of
the inside”

the weird and the eerie

Fisher, 2016

“a fascination for the outside, for that which
lies beyond standard perception, cognition
and experience”

**they “allow us to see the inside from the
perspective of the outside”**

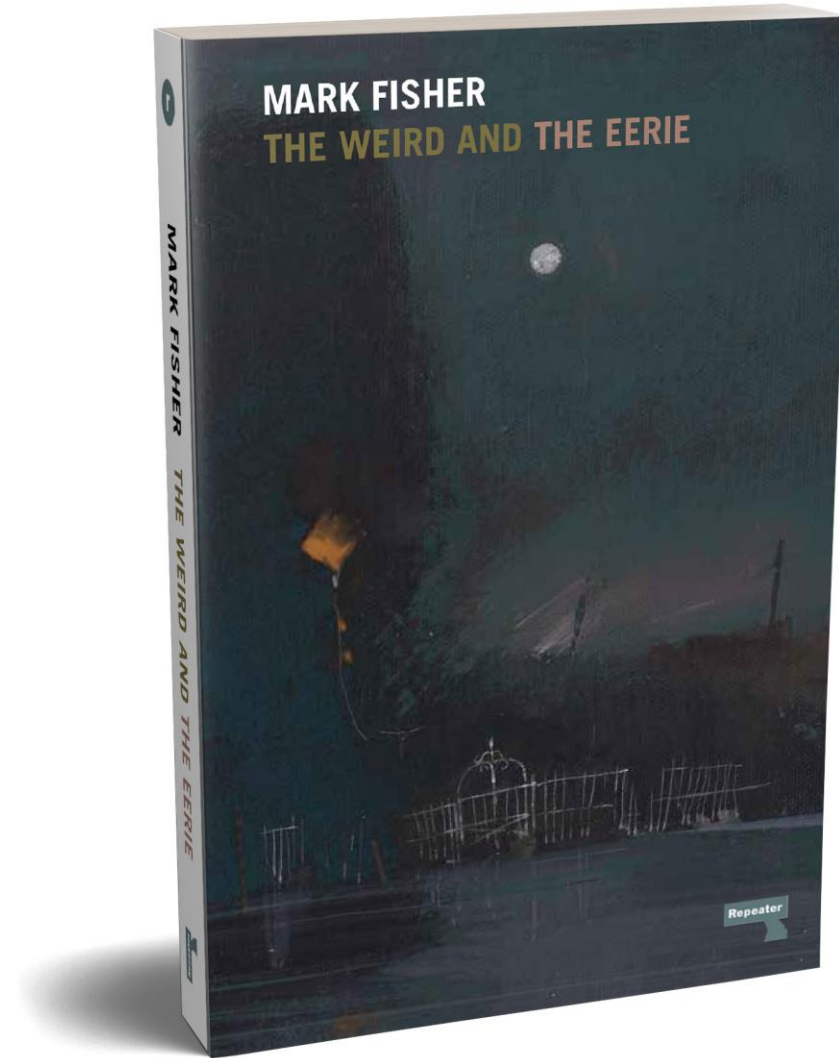
Mark Fisher (1968–2017), *The Weird and the Eerie* (Repeater, 2016), Introduction. The weird and the eerie are not horror: “The strange, not the horrific.”

The Weird and the Eerie

Mark Fisher

The **concept of fate** is weird in that it implies twisted forms of time and causality that are alien to ordinary perception, but it is also eerie in that it raises questions about agency: who or what is the entity that has woven fate?

Mark Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie* (2016)



the weird: a sense of wrongness, the presence of **something that does not belong**, which our existing frameworks cannot contain.

...the weird

Fisher suggests that the quality of the weird as manifesting “*that which does not belong*” is a sign that we (as readers) **are in the presence of the new** — “*that concepts and frameworks we have previously employed are now obsolete.*”

“*that which does not belong*”

“The door was always a threshold, leading beyond the pleasure principle and into the weird.”

...and the *eerie*

the *eerie* as

a **failure of *absence***

(something where there should be nothing)

a **failure of *presence***

(nothing where there should be something)

the feeling of the *eerie* is very different from that of the *weird*.

The simplest way to get to this difference is by thinking about the (highly metaphysically freighted) opposition — perhaps it is the most fundamental opposition of all — **between presence and absence**.

As we have seen, **the weird is constituted by a presence — the presence of *that which does not belong***.

In some cases of the *weird* (those with which Lovecraft was obsessed) **the weird is marked by an exorbitant presence**, a teeming which exceeds our capacity to represent it.

The *eerie*, by contrast, is **constituted by a failure of *absence* or by a failure of *presence***. The sensation of the *eerie* occurs either when there is something present where there should be nothing, or there is nothing present when there should be something.

uncanny · weird · **erie**

	the uncanny	the weird	the erie
in a phrase	the strange within the familiar	the presence of that which does not belong	a failure of absence, or a failure of presence
direction	inside: the self, the home, the repressed	the outside breaking in	the outside, sensed through gaps
question	What have I repressed?	What is this doing here?	Is anything here? What kind of agent is acting?
on screen	doubles, dolls, the home made strange	the portal, the impossible object, the Zone	empty landscapes, ruins, abandoned machines, a cry with no source
today	Whiteread, House	the Backrooms; Stalker	Dean, Sound Mirrors; On Vanishing Land

Use it as a test, not a box: the same work can move between columns. Fisher's own terms are in the middle and right columns.

the fold

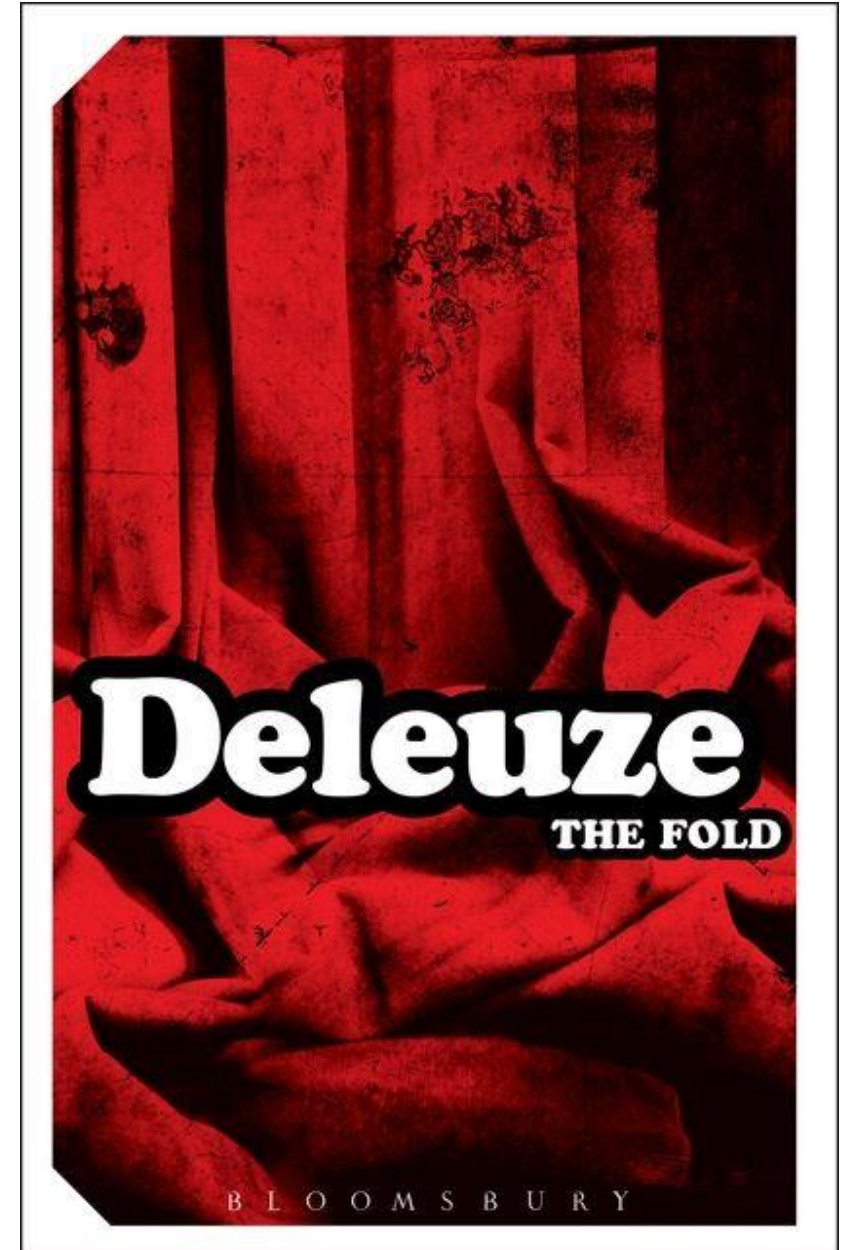
“... an inside which is merely the **fold** of the outside, as if the ship were a folding of the sea.”

Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault* (1986; trans. Seán Hand, 1988)



Either it is the fold of the infinite, or
the constant folds [replis] of finitude
which curve the outside and
constitute the inside.

— Gilles Deleuze —



03

haunted ground

theory Jacques Derrida · Mark Fisher · Robert Macfarlane

practice The Caretaker · Tarkovsky · Ben Wheatley · Ingrid Pollard · Tacita Dean · Fisher and Barton

What does the land remember, and whose land is it?

hauntology

“the time is out of joint”

spectral spaces

semiotic ghosts

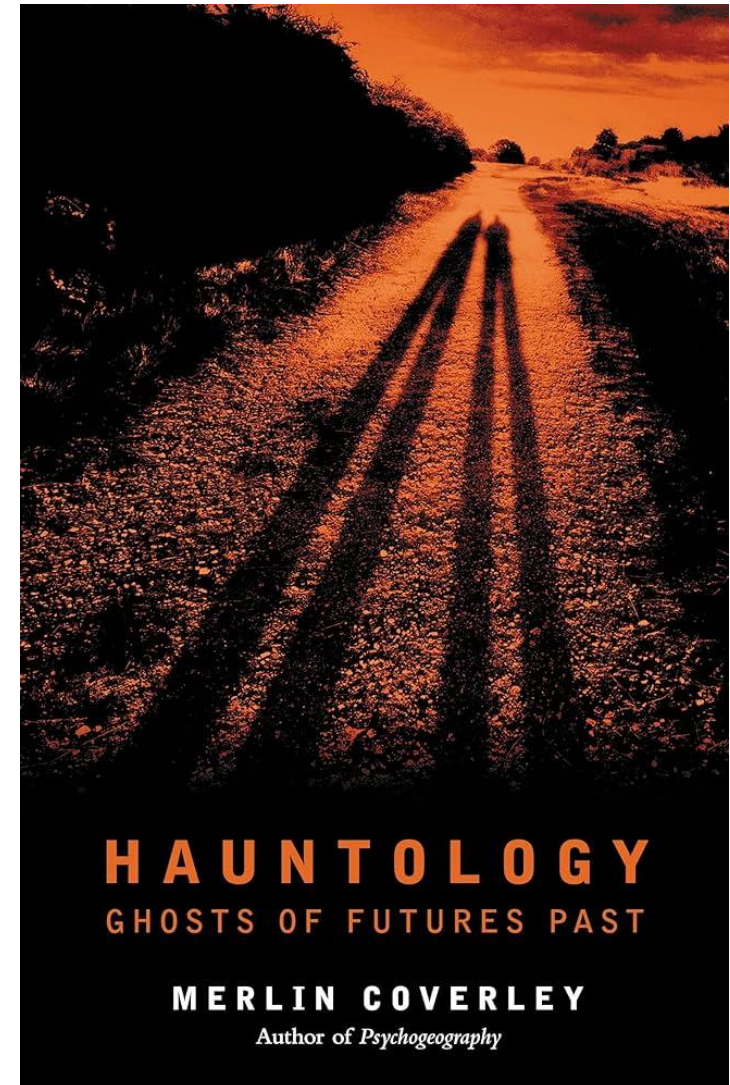
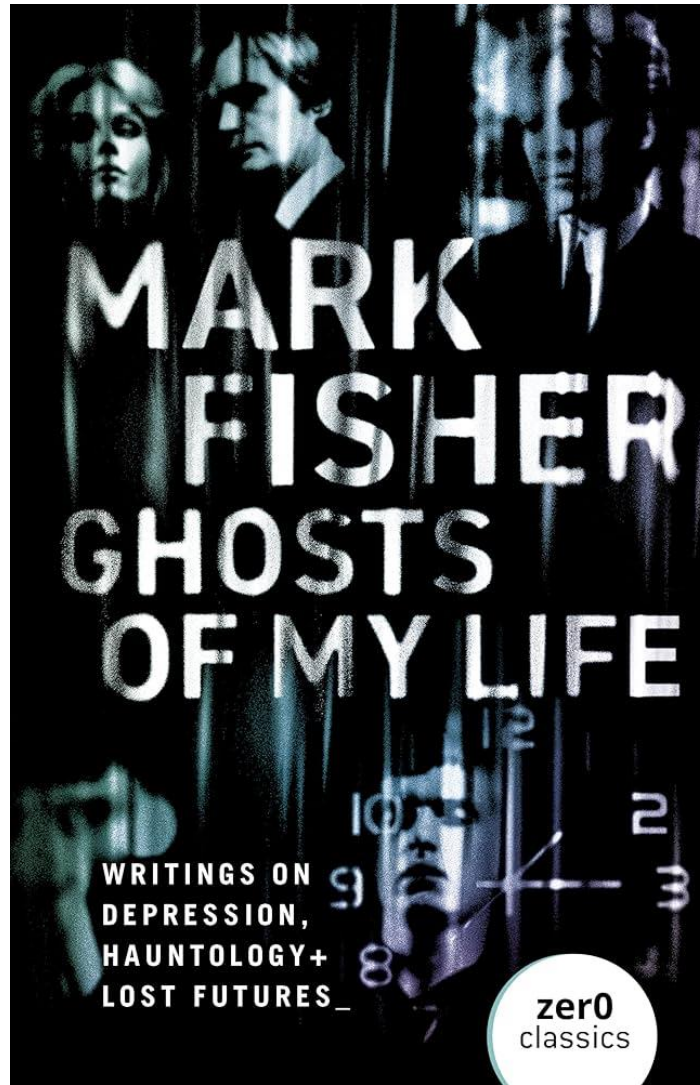
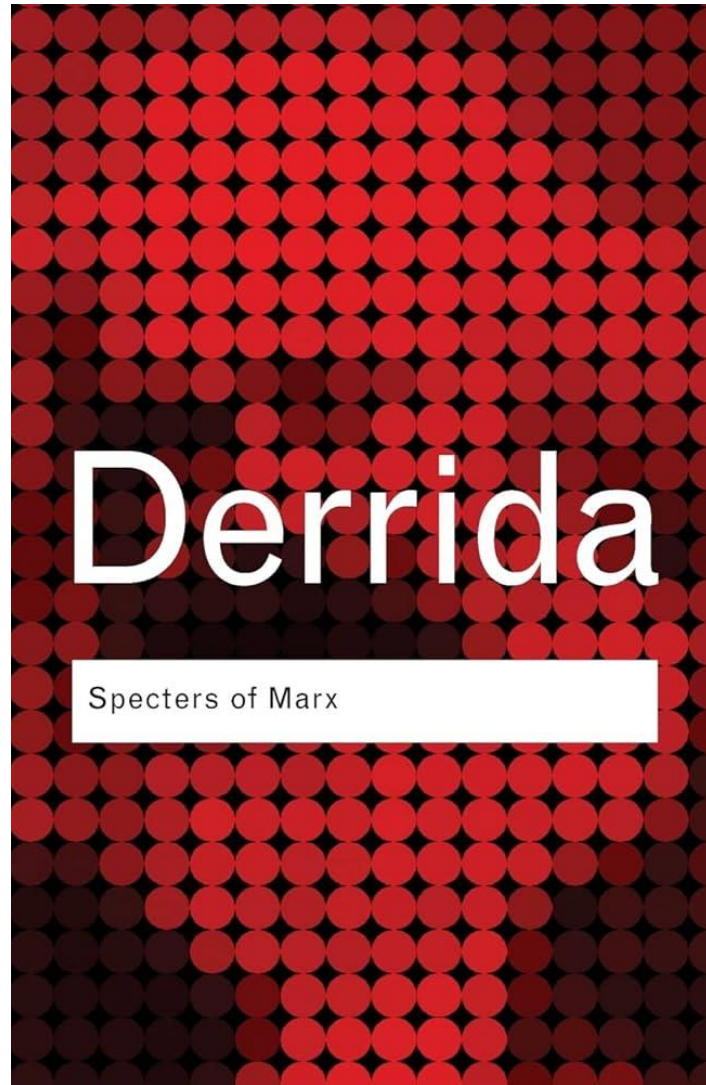
lost futures: the *no longer* and
the *not yet*

Hauntology: Derrida’s pun on haunting and ontology (in French they sound almost the same), coined in *Specters of Marx*. The present is never simply present: it is haunted by what is no longer and what is not yet. “The time is out of joint” is Hamlet’s line.

Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx* (1993; English 1994)



Installation view: Ivan Seal and The Caretaker, *Cukuwruums*, Unsound Festival, Kraków, 2019





Stalker (dir. Andrei Tarkovsky, 1979): the Zone

the eeriness of the English countryside

Robert Macfarlane, *Guardian*, 10 April 2015



‘There was something in that landscape that plainly terrified me.’

Ben Wheatley, *A Field in England* (2013)

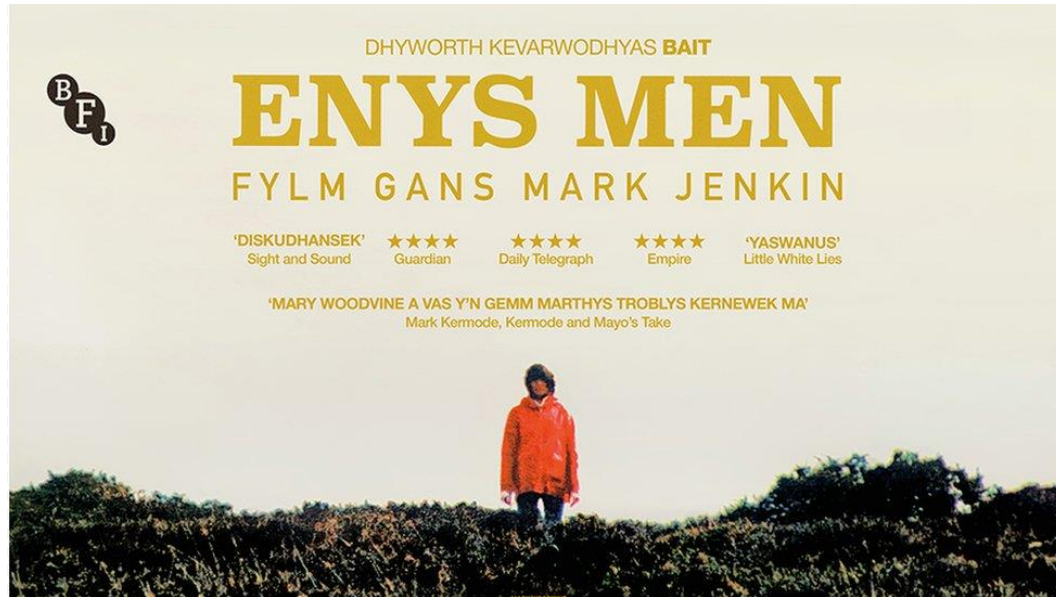
Pastoral Interlude (1988)

“A visit to the countryside,”
she wrote in the caption to
one image, “is always
accompanied by a **feeling of
unease, dread.**”



Ingrid Pollard, from the series *Pastoral Interlude* (1988). Photograph: ingridpollard.com

beyond England



Enys Men (dir. Mark Jenkin, 2022)
Cornwall: an island, a flower, a lost mine



Gwledd / The Feast (dir. Lee Haven Jones, 2021)
Wales: a Welsh-language dinner party, land and extraction

The “English eerie” is not only English. Both films root the eerie in a particular landscape, language and history.

Adam Scovell’s “folk horror chain”: landscape → isolation → skewed belief systems → happening or summoning (*Folk Horror*, 2017).

Eerie Archaeology

Listening for the Enemy

Brian Dillon on the Denge
sound mirrors [check source]

Denge, near Dungeness, Kent:
concrete acoustic mirrors built c.
1928–30, made obsolete by radar



Sound Mirrors (1999)

Tacita Dean

16mm film, black and white, optical sound, 7 min

A-Side



On Vanishing Land

B-Side



Mark Fisher and Justin Barton, *On Vanishing Land* (2013; LP on Hyperdub's Flatlines label, 2019): an audio essay about a 2006 walk along the Suffolk coast, from Felixstowe container port to Sutton Hoo.



the “nerve ganglion of capitalism”: Port of Felixstowe



Photographs by Mark Fisher, Suffolk coast, from his k-punk blog

04

the littoral and the oceanic

theory Rolland and Freud · Foucault · Barthes · Hester Blum · Erika Balsom · Epeli Hau'ofa

practice Judith Westerveld · Sophie Calle · Peter Hutton · Allan Sekula and Noël Burch

Does the sea divide us, or connect us?

the oceanic feeling

1927

Romain Rolland writes to Freud: the true source of religion is a feeling “*as of something limitless, unbounded, as it were ‘oceanic’*”.

1930

Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, chapter 1. He can’t find the feeling in himself, and traces it back to infancy, before the ego has separated itself from the world: “*a feeling of an indissoluble bond, of being one with the external world as a whole*”.

link

Lecture 4 Psychoanalysis: this is a self **before** the mirror stage, before an “I” faces a world.

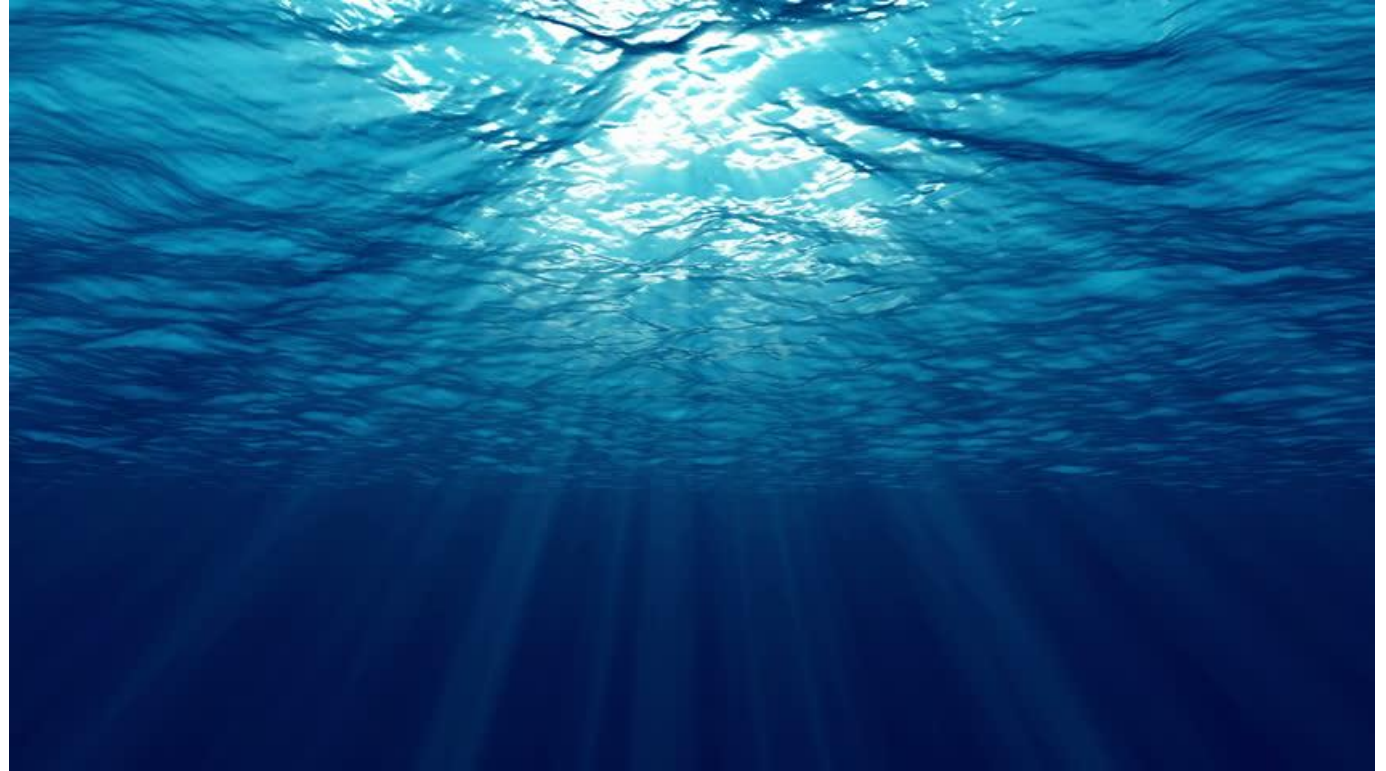
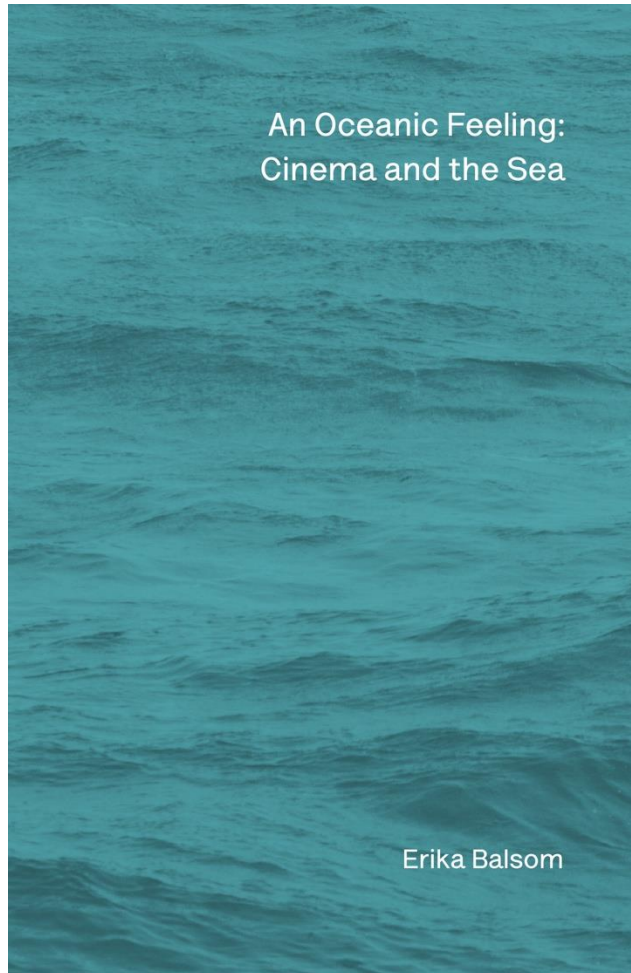
Freud quotes the playwright Grabbe to describe it. **Littoral**: the shore between high and low tide, neither land nor sea. The liminal, as geography.

***“...out of this world, we cannot fall. We are
once and for all within it”***

Christian Dietrich Grabbe, *Hannibal* (1835), quoted by Freud (1930)

Oceanic Feeling

The Littoral and the Liminal



Erika Balsom, *An Oceanic Feeling: Cinema and the Sea* (Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, 2018).

Balsom takes Freud's term out of the psyche and into the world: the sea as a space that connects people, communities, and the human and the nonhuman, and the camera as a way of registering it.

Judith Westerveld

Liminality in Contemporary Art
(her study of William Kentridge)

Littoral and the **Liminal**



The sounds and traces of the land slowly disappear into the dark mass of the water (2010), 11 drawings, charcoal and pastel on paper, each 50 × 65 cm

The Order of Things

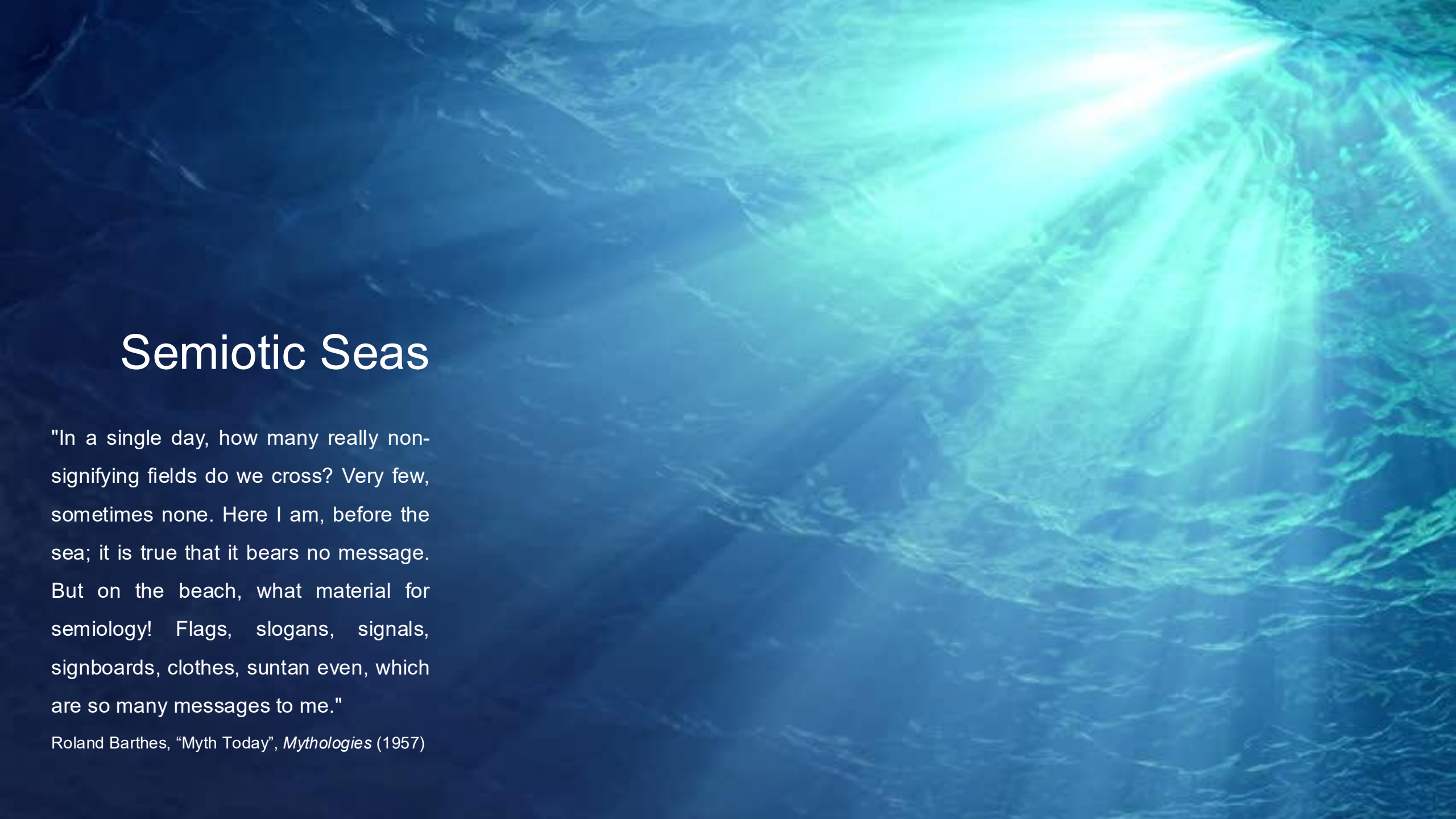
Michel Foucault

Michel Foucault turns to the ocean..

..in search of a metaphor for the end of philosophical humanism, looking forward to the day when the concept of ...

"man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea."

Foucault, *The Order of Things* (1966; English 1970), the book's last sentence

A full-page background image showing a deep blue underwater scene. Sunlight rays (crepuscular rays) are visible, filtering down from the surface in the upper right corner, creating a bright, hazy area. The water has a textured, rippling appearance with various shades of blue and green.

Semiotic Seas

"In a single day, how many really non-signifying fields do we cross? Very few, sometimes none. Here I am, before the sea; it is true that it bears no message. But on the beach, what material for semiology! Flags, slogans, signals, signboards, clothes, suntan even, which are so many messages to me."

Roland Barthes, "Myth Today", *Mythologies* (1957)

beneath
the deep blue sea

*"in its geophysical, historical, and
imaginative properties the ocean
instead provides a new epistemology
- a new dimension - for thinking
about **surfaces**, **depths**, and the
extra-terrestrial dimensions of
planetary resources and relations."*

Hester Blum, "Introduction: Oceanic Studies," *Atlantic Studies* 10, no. 2 (2013): 151.

the
lens-based
image is
oceanic

The lens-based image belongs "**inseparably to the external world,**" as the product of a triangular encounter between **it, technology, and aesthetic intentionality.**

After Erika Balsom, *An Oceanic Feeling* (2018), quoting Freud in Joan Riviere's 1930 translation

“If there is really
something that is **unimaginable**
if you haven’t seen it,
it is the **ocean.**”

Gilles Deleuze

quoted in Balsom (2018) [check source]



Sophie Calle, *Voir la mer* (2011), Istanbul

At Sea (2007)

Peter Hutton



THE MALTINGS IN ASSOCIATION WITH BERWICK VISUAL ARTS PRESENTS A NEW SERIES OF ALTERNATIVE CINEMA



COME AND EXPERIENCE THE THRILL OF EXPLORATION AND DISCOVERY AS YOU BROADEN YOUR CINEMATIC HORIZONS

The Forgotten Space (2010)

Allan Sekula & Noël Burch

Based on Sekula's earlier work *Fish Story* (1989–1995), the film seeks to understand and describe global capital in relation to the complex symbolic legacy of the sea. As the directors state:

“Our premise is that the sea remains the crucial space of globalization. Nowhere else is the disorientation, violence, and alienation of contemporary capitalism more manifest, but this truth is not self-evident, and must be approached as a puzzle, or mystery, a problem to be solved.”



ASPECT screening #1:

THE FORGOTTEN SPACE

A film essay by Allan Sekula & Noël Burch

WED 21 JAN 7.30PM

Henry Travers Studio

£5 / £3 | PG tbc

To rule the sea is to ruin the world.

This extraordinary film essay follows container cargo aboard ships, barges, trains and trucks, listening to workers, engineers, planners, politicians, and those marginalized by the global transport system - from displaced farmers and villagers in Holland and Belgium, and seafarers aboard mega-ships shuttling between Asia and Europe, to factory workers in China, whose low wages are the fragile key to the whole puzzle.

ASPECT is an Independent Cinema Office initiative funded by Arts Council England

the **maltings**
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24-hour online booking
maltingsberwick.co.uk
Box Office 01289 330 999



Screening poster, Special Orizzonti Jury Prize, Venice 2010.



The Forgotten Space (Sekula and Burch, 2010)



The Forgotten Space (Sekula and Burch, 2010)

Oceanic Feeling

what if the ocean **does not**
divide us, but **connects** us?
What politics, what ethics, would
follow?

a sea of **islands**

“There is a world of difference between viewing the Pacific as ‘islands in a far sea’ and as ‘a sea of islands’.”

Epeli Hau‘ofa, “Our Sea of Islands” (1993; *The Contemporary Pacific*, 1994)

Hau‘ofa (1939–2009), Tongan and Fijian anthropologist and writer, answers the question from the Pacific: the ocean is not empty space between small islands but a home that connects them.

05

heterotopias: the ship and the garden

theory Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces”

practice the container ship · Derek Jarman’s garden at Dungeness

Where do we go to be somewhere else?

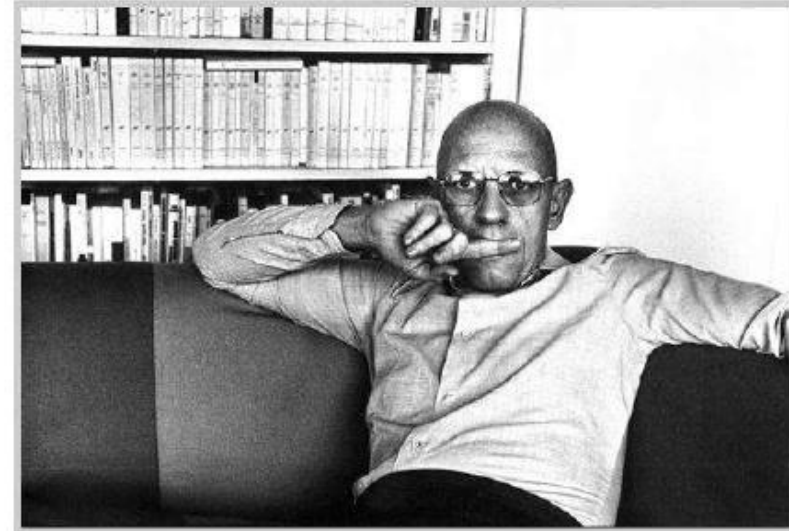
heterotopias

Heterotopia - a real place that is also 'other', a counter-site in which the other sites of a culture are 'simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted'.

The mirror, the cinema, the cemetery, the museum. Today: Foucault's two favourite examples, the ship and the garden.

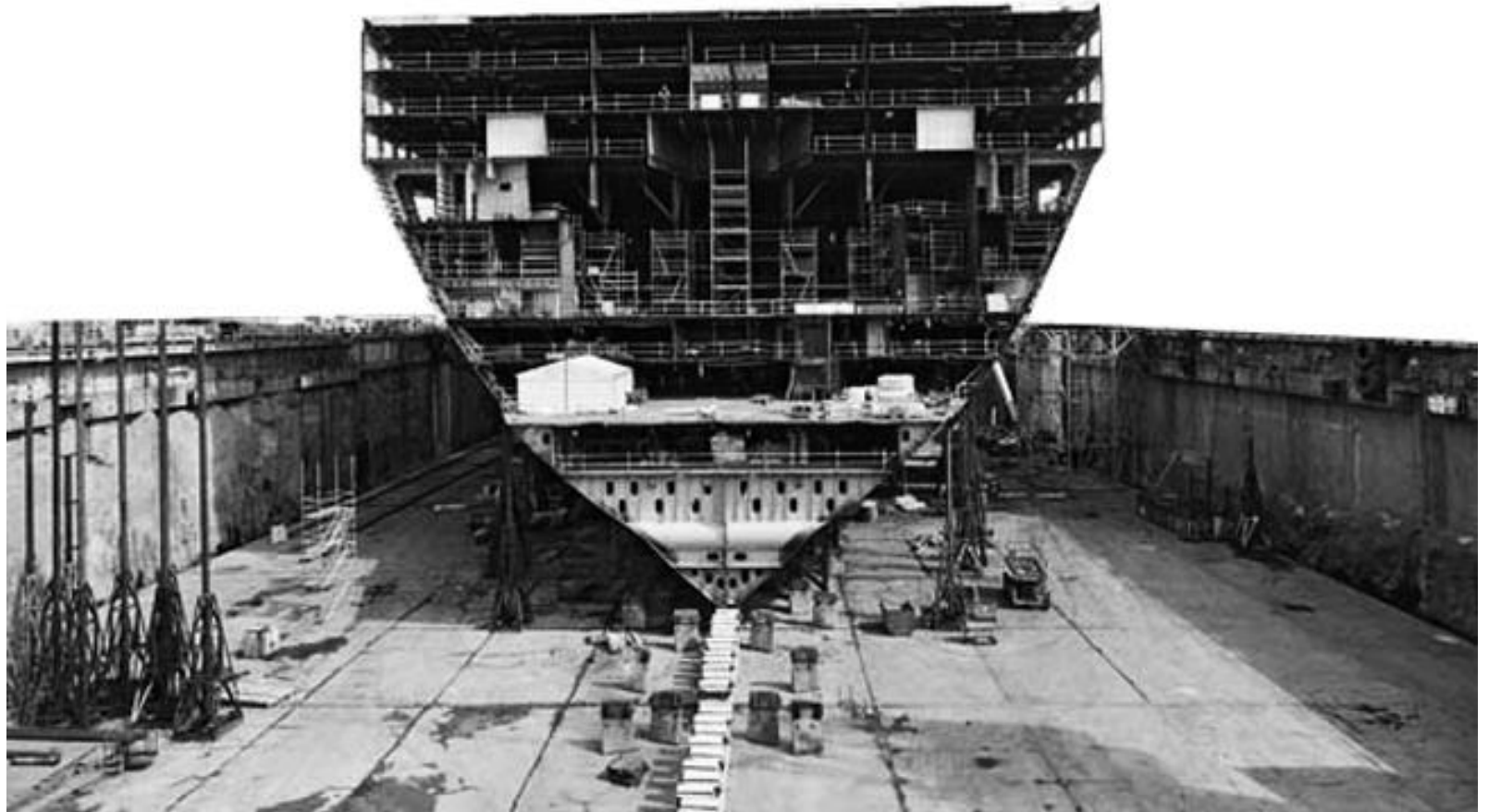
"Of Other Spaces" (lecture 1967; published 1984)

Of Other Spaces



Michel Foucault

heterotopias



“The ship is the heterotopia par excellence. In civilizations without boats, dreams dry up, espionage takes the place of adventure, and the police take the place of pirates.” Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces”, trans. Jay Miskowiec (1986)

heterotopia and gardens

‘... but perhaps the oldest example of these heterotopias, in the form of contradictory emplacements, is the garden’.

Foucault, “Different Spaces”, trans. Robert Hurley (1998)



Derek Jarman's garden, Prospect Cottage, Dungeness

the psychology of place and space

summary

- **01 thresholds:** van Gennep's three phases; Turner's liminal (ritual) and liminoid (art and leisure)
- **02 the uncanny, the weird and the eerie:** the strange within the familiar; what does not belong; failures of absence and presence
- **the fold:** every inside is a folding of the outside
- **03 haunted ground:** hauntology's lost futures; the "English eerie", and whose countryside it is
- **04 the littoral and the oceanic:** the shore as threshold; the sea as connection, and as the forgotten space of capital
- **05 heterotopias:** the ship and the garden, real places that are somewhere else

From the doors of the Backrooms to a garden on the shingle at Dungeness: thresholds everywhere.

where to start **reading**

- Mark Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie* (Repeater, 2016). Short, and essential for today.
- Victor Turner, 'Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in *Rites de Passage*', in *The Forest of Symbols* (1967).
- Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny* (1919), trans. David McLintock (Penguin Modern Classics, 2003).
- Robert Macfarlane, "The eeriness of the English countryside", *Guardian*, 10 April 2015.
- Merlin Coverley, *Hauntology: Ghosts of Futures Past* (Oldcastle, 2020).
- Erika Balsom, *An Oceanic Feeling: Cinema and the Sea* (Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, 2018).
- Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics* 16:1 (1986).

seminar: **where is the strange?**

Choose one work from today. Is its effect liminal, uncanny, weird or eerie?

Use Fisher's distinction (the presence of what does not belong, or a failure of absence or presence) and point to specific decisions: framing, sound, duration, the absence of people.

Then: whose place is this, and who is missing from the frame?

format

- 5 minutes in pairs: choose a work and a term
- 2 or 3 pairs report back

if you're stuck

- **the Backrooms**: liminal, non-place, or eerie?
- **Sound Mirrors**: what is listening, and to what?
- **Pastoral Interlude**: whose unease?
- **The Forgotten Space**: is the container weird or eerie?