This is the story of a man who had something wrong with his eye, and it affected what he could see; wherever he went he could see it, it was like a blockage but he also had a kind of interest in it. He thought it might be inside of him; he tried not to focus on it but it was always there, even when he blinked [...]. It was like a kind of full stop. So he went to the doctor.

Jennet Thomas (1996)"
gnome-like, nerd-like, teat-like hat, green leggings, day-glo trainers and a vocoder in one gloved hand. In the other, she holds a green rectangular flag bearing a red arrow that points upwards; she has the home-stitched air of an ersatz steward, an enthusiast. And she/it is speaking as film flickers, feet away:

And the man said:

‘Doctor I need a gorgeous operation, I need someone who can deal in atoms, I need nanotechnology with microscopic explosions; every time I look into a sheep’s eye I think of keyhole surgery.’

When she stands in that Oxfordshire summer’s field, Thomas is performing not as a member of Exploding Cinema but as an affectionate guest-turn. She had been there from the start; her name is on the first collaged posters for the ‘Cinema Café’ of 1992, set up with friends and fellow artists Duncan Reekie, Stephen Houston, Kathy Gibbs and Jenny Marr. In written and oral histories, Exploding Cinema is traced back to the squatted sunscreen factory Cooltan, in a post-Thatcher Brixton of the early 1990s, where workshops, exhibitions and studios were already happening in an ad hoc way. Venues shifted but the emphasis always stayed on the creation of an ‘interactive public forum’. It was cinema as experience, with not just one screen but with images projected onto every available surface; eating, drinking and talking was encouraged as they screened. As a means of unravelling the exchange between spectator and screen, Exploding Cinema, whose ranks had now swelled to include Paul Tarragó, Caroline Kennedy, Thomas Zagrosek, Clive Shaw and Paul Motel, proposed film in the round; Exploding Cinema set inclusivity against exclusivity; it established DIY as an abiding principle as well as open access (tiny-charge-on-the-door) and a commitment to show all films submitted. ‘No Stars, No Funding, No Taste’, was the tagline that endured. At one point, the artists used aliases (‘We were all Pat’) and equipment was always collectively owned, but tellingly, it was generally stored at Thomas’s house.

Exploding Cinema was for both making and showing much as the Arts Lab and the London Film Filmmakers’ Co-op had been twenty years before, but it was against what it perceived as the elitism of ‘Experimental Film’. The policy at Exploding Cinema was for demystifying; show, don’t tell. Thomas explains,

We try to make the whole mechanism of the show transparent, making it clear how the films get to be shown, often how they got to be made, we try to get the filmmaker to come up and answer any questions. (2000: 25)

There were precedents in The Grasshopper Group, founded in the 1950s by John Daborn (Reekie 2007: 114), and before that in European Dada’s convergence of theatre, attraction and poetic form in pre-narrative cinema. This fluidity is important: Exploding Cinema stood for animation, abstraction, narrative and avant-garde.

In July 2015, at Blackpool’s Grundy Gallery, a new commission opens; Jennet Thomas’s latest work, The Unspeakable Freedom Device (TUFD) is presented. There is no live performance; instead a 40-minute film, an ‘experimental narrative’ is being screened in the main gallery space, with ‘an epic installation show’ spreading across the three surrounding Edwardian rooms. The exhibition is contextualized by a day-long seminar featuring Martin Rowson, Esther Leslie, Sally O’Reilly, Jennifer Thatcher and Alwyn Turner, and Leo Chadburn performs a new music/text piece. The Grundy Gallery event also marks the launch of the eponymous book, The Unspeakable Freedom Device (Thomas 2015), a Book Works commission in the series, G.S.O.H. The Rest is Dark, The Rest is Dark, curated by Clunie Reid.
Thomas’s leaning towards the hybrid/genre-mix can be traced as a line of continuity in her practice. It was in Exploding Cinema that Thomas moved from the ‘sculptural events’ she had created as a painter in Camberwell in the 1980s – featuring object/paint/food/metaphor collisions – to film-making, combining film projection with spoken monologues. *All Suffering SOON TO END!* (2010) and *School of Change* (2012), Thomas’s two previous long works were commissioned by Matt’s Gallery in London and mixed performance, installation and video projection. The new show TUFĐ involves no live performance and has toured as a stand-alone film without its accompanying installation. For reasons of political censorship, the original launch date was postponed and the film previewed in artist-run venues. Blackpool Council objected to Thomas’s declared critique of the government’s education policy and felt that her irreverent approach to the image of Thatcher might influence the outcome of the general election in May of 2015. The film itself came as a response to the Grundy Commission but also as a reaction to the public ritual of mourning at Mrs. Thatcher’s demise.

Thomas describes the work as ‘a warped folk tale’ that follows two pilgrims, Glenda and Mary through a post-apocalyptic England of industrial detritus. The pilgrims are in thrall to a Thatcher cargo-cult, its grail, the Winter Gardens in Blackpool (AKA Blupool) where ‘the Ultimate Upgrade’ is promised to the few. This is an internal device that brings consummate ‘unspeakable freedom’. ‘With this device, you will always know where you are, and what you want […] You will be the right colour, at the right time’ (Thomas 2015: 119). Beyond the boundary of that Mecca, Mary, a young woman, somewhat lost, pushes a bedraggled buggy, her baby-in-a-box across a rural wasteland, enduring hallucinogenic visitations from the ‘Blue Lady’ (handbag and pussycat bow) who intones Thatcher soundbites: ‘I can't bear Britain in decline, I just can’t’. Glenda (a tribute to Glenda Jackson, one of the few who refused to participate in the Thatcher hagiography of 2014), is an older non-believer, a rebel who carries a clutch of ‘stones’ and intends to disrupt the ‘Ultimate Upgrade’ show. En route they come across an illicit pedlar’s fayre where Mary acquires a Blue Lady doll that recites Thatcher quotations at the pull of a string. All this is monitored by a blue-painted man in a blue bunker (Blue John), a Green Man (featureless, soft-edged) and a Red Woman wearing a welder’s visor and a suit made of red rubber gloves. The Red Woman speaks different aphorisms and quotes from Franco Berardi, the founder of Radio Alice and a key figure in the Italian Autonomia movement. The denouement takes place in the Winter Gardens, where the film began, where Blue, Green and Red forces multiply and meet in a tricolour showdown. Mary’s ailing baby (‘what’s wrong with him? […] He’s the wrong colour’), is sacrificed or perhaps saved and transmuted into an Iron Lady simulacrum. The Blue force may or may not have won.

Party politics shimmer on the film’s sleeve, but it parodies partisan positions rather than promoting any one of them. The themes of belief and technology, and of what Richard Hofstadter defined in his eponymous 1964 essay as “The Paranoid Style in American Politics” are etched into the film’s fabric. These are common motifs in Thomas’s work; she both employs and interrogates the strategies of rhetoric, ambiguity and conventional representation. Above all, this work shares with her back catalogue a quality of play, of anarchy expertly manoeuvred. She still uses objects, paint, metaphor and food in her work. In TUFĐ, this last becomes ‘feed’: verb, noun, euphemism, mechanism, a trope whose semantic (post-Internet) evolution is a running joke.

Thomas defines hers as ‘an aesthetic of sufficiency’, a phrase coined by Peli Grietzer in reference to the work of experimental American writer Kenneth Goldsmith. I sense that in Thomas’s terms, this is a doing what is required with an economy of means, a scavenging ethos and a skewed wit.

Jennet and I are meeting at her studio in Nunhead. TUFĐ plays on a monitor. Her cats, Kino and Pixel, look up at our entrance and yawn …
Jennet Thomas: My films always come out from constraints, or embrace them. The restraint that came with this one was the use of that location, the Winter Gardens, which was such a gift; it became a major character in the work and something I wrote towards – I always begin writing with a location in mind, writing ‘for’ a specific place. It offers an extreme contrast to the other locations, which are completely depopulated, filmed in the Ashdown Forest and on the Sussex Downs, the only places where I knew I could make lots of incredibly wide shots without any sign of human habitation. So we go from the super-saturated, sickly detail of the Baronial Hall in the Winter Gardens and arrive in the empty landscape I knew I wanted to use – but I didn't join the dots until I knew it was going to be a pilgrimage, from one extreme to another.

KJ: … with the Baronial Hall as the grail. There is something intriguing about Blackpool, as mass-production resort, and the period in which it developed is interesting too. There was the initial attempt to lure mill-owners and the gentry away from holidaying on the East Coast (Scarborough), which succeeded with the arrival of the railway (the Talbot Railway, 1843) linking the industrial North, the cotton towns to Blackpool. This marked the start of organized leisure for the mill-workers. The Grundy was built later (1911) and here we witness the synchronous construction of housing and civic institutions, which take as their model the motifs of medieval England.

JT: There's a little bit of a time slip there – the Hall and the John Dowland song that features in the work are more early Renaissance than Medieval, but the Medieval period produced a much more exciting world. It's the Victorian nature of the Winter Gardens that also relates to Thatcher, the sense of layers of falseness and artificiality – faux, one thing posing as another, a false authenticity.

KJ: It is about the invention of tradition. The Winter Garden (opened in 1878) aimed to develop a Winter Season, ‘to provide a select indoor heated promenade with a display of exotic plants as a setting for formal concerts’. This was an attempt at gentrification that fell flat. A female human cannonball featured by Easter 1882 and there was always a social segregation with the two piers, one charging 2d, the other a penny; it was the beginning of aspirational tourism.

JT: None of this is conscious in my planning, but the rooms I chose to use had the quality of a queasy mixing up of what's false and what's true, which is the theme from then on, in clothing, food and technology.
KJ: I remember our first conversation at the Whitechapel Gallery in 2013 when you were developing the film. You asked me what I thought the word ‘device’ meant and you liked the idea of the heraldic device. Baroness Thatcher's arms bear the words 'Cherish Freedom', with a portcullis.

JT: I didn't run with that in the end, but in a way it crops back up, in the Hall's heraldic banners.

KJ: I couldn't think of another film of yours that moves so explicitly from one location to another or that resolves in a wilderness or here, a post-apocalyptic outdoor, backwards England. In the first scene of the film, we see Glenda being thrown out of the formal 'Convention'/Baronial Hall of the Winter Gardens. A point of eviction often comes up in your work; people are between one place and another place.

JT: The whole first scene, the beginning of the film, is focused on somebody being expelled a couple of times. Glenda is thrown into this chamber then trapped, and then she is ejected from the chamber into a different place. So, there is this sort of digestive process of the main character being projectile-vomited out into the narrative. That is when the theme tune starts and when the momentum begins to build up as the characters are thrown into the film world. It is a bit like machinery getting into gear. But the two 'worlds' of the Hall and the landscape are very different, they offer contrasting environments.

KJ: In this film you use the device of the dissolve, which isn't common in your work. Often you will use a series of images, configured as a montage or in the form of a superimposition.

JT: I'm not a big fan of dissolves because I think they are an easy way out. Here it is to do with the pacing of the film and the music track. Leo (Chadburn) doesn't exactly score the film, he gives me stuff that I respond to and, as here, that can influence the pace of the edit. I wanted to let the music inform the viewer of the nature of this reality. It goes from a wide-shot to a close-up of foliage and then to a ruined office interior.

KJ: What's created by a layered dissolve, often, is an unresolved image. Here you have a shift; you were filming in a real landscape and you switch to a superimposition which is not a set, it is a found-image, for me a flat image, so it breaks any sense of depth of screen space.

JT: Most people don't read it as flat, most people think I was there with a camera; they read it as a 'being there' place. I get asked lots of questions about the shots I use of factories, or workplaces that are in ruins, that have been completely trashed. I find them in online searches amongst the Urban Explorer communities. These are people who get their kicks – and there are some very good photographers among them – in entering places that are out of bounds and there they take 'post-apocalyptic' photographs. They are very happy for me to use their work in my own.
KJ: You have always used found images, but here you are using them in an illusionistic way; you aren’t breaking the illusion.

JT: It is only subtly disruptive; it is a way of creating a mise-en-scène that is very economical. I have recently watched a couple of post-apocalyptic films (Children of Men [Alfonso Cuaron, 2006] and Looper [Rain Johnson, 2012]), which spent vast amounts of money creating a smashed-up world. I am evoking that same environment in a short-hand way.

KJ: And how would you have done that in 1994, before the Internet?

JT: I would probably have gone to places; I did, in fact. But then again in 1994 you could come across ruins, which you cannot now.

KJ: Now you can source good locations online and paste in high-resolution images shot with excellent camerawork. So, ersatz looks very sophisticated when what you find in the Internet skip is of high quality.

JT: There is a consistency for me in the shake-down of what can be done with a certain level of budget and ingenuity. I have a filter of what I feel is honest and what I feel is direct. I try to find as direct a way of communicating as I can. So there is a kind of poetry to it, but hopefully it is a direct kind of poetry.

KJ: I assume you mean it is a language we are familiar with. I can see poetry in the assembling of real places (the Hall, the heath), only for the reality of that frame to be taken from us and put inside another frame. It pulls rugs; it is a kind of slippage. You use strategies such as intertitles, shifts in point-of-view and characteristic effects that tell the viewer, this is a Jennet Thomas film. I’m thinking of Mary’s visions of the ‘Maggie’/Blue Lady who appears surrounded by a kind of DAZ/OMO spiralling halo in Conservative blue and white.

JT: The radiating stripes remind me of the Japanese flag and also of the iconic 1950s and 1960s packaging of cleaning products. It’s a fascinator.

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KJ: It is uncertain whether the Lady is something that Mary is seeing or we (the audience) are seeing. This is another motif in your films: a character, centre-screen, who addresses the audience.

JT: It is both; it is breaking the fourth wall, but it may be that the audience at that moment has exactly the same point of view as Mary: you could do a diagram of possible relations, but there is no one answer. The space between the viewer and the narrative is complicated. All the things that the Thatcher impersonator says are things Maggie herself actually said. That is a rule I stick to, I do not put any words in her mouth.
KJ: It would have been possible to use found clips of Mrs T.

JT: That would have been completely pointless. I like the ersatz quality of things standing in for other things, but not standing in properly, or being inappropriate.

KJ: And this also relates to your habitual way of working: mixing up the real and the invented, with minimal means. You often assemble a group of friends for a shoot. I remember turning up on the Downs, bringing my own clothes and seeing a costume rail propped up in a woodland car park.

JT: I learned to be a film-maker with Exploding Cinema in very specific conditions. There were no funding schemes available for the kind of work we were doing when we started out. And anyway, that wasn’t a model of production that we worked with. There is something I liked about the lo-fi, the imaginative worlds that were created in early pop videos. That is why I eschew high production now and, particularly, I avoid getting lots of people involved to ‘professionalize’ my practice. It is also incredibly fashionable to enhance the colour, the tone of the film with massive graduated filters, and to bring out the reds.

It was hot and bright when we were out filming. I liked that quality. I have used a number of post-production tricks to tone down parts that were over-exposed, but I haven’t thrown the whole kit at it, in a way that seems obligatory now. It is called post-production for a reason – as soon as you start that process, you take away from the moment. In terms of the funding structure for a FLAMIN commission, for example, they give you a producer, an editor, a colourist, a director of photography, an assistant editor, and all those people will want their work to look a certain way. I don’t see why artist film-makers should be so complicit unless they are pushing it all the way out the other end, like Rachel McClean, into levels of extreme artificiality. The use of unnecessary effects is going to look very mannered and a bit silly in 30 years’ time.

KJ: So we can speculate on what has been lost in the demand for what you call ‘the overcooked’; perfectly ‘post-productioned’ work. You talk about a gauge of honesty that determines the effects you use. So, the decision for you is about truthfulness, a sense of being there?

JT: I don’t feel I am making a conscious effort. I enjoy using absurd and sometimes clearly inadequate visual methods to represent a gap in our understanding, to embed our inability to comprehend reality into the process of film-making. My hope is that lo-fi ingenuity functions as a kind of resistance to despair.

KJ: I would suggest that if your last work, School of Change (2013) is about an imaginary future, TUFDO is about the persistence of the past. As with all sci-fi, they are also about the present. I am thinking of Fredric Jameson’s essay on Philip K. Dick, ‘Futuristic Visions That Tell Us About Right Now’, which refers to a double
commentary that later he terms ‘Nostalgia for the Present’. There are temporal slippages in TUFD, as in so much of your work. You referred elsewhere to a phrase of Franco Berardi: ‘We are the last generation to have a future […] and that was only until 1976’ (2011: 17). Francis McKee’s catalogue essay for your film All Suffering SOON TO END! (2007) makes a connection in your work between nostalgia and suburbia, but to me this time-warp thread has an affinity with another influence you cite, Nigel Kneale’s BBC TV drama, The Stone Tape (1972). What comes over in your new film is a sense of nostalgia as yearning for a mythical or imaginary relationship to the past; in TUFD, nostalgia becomes a form of entrapment. In Kneale’s The Stone Tape there is a line at the centre of the play: ‘It is in the computer!’ ‘It’ being the historical experience that is stored in the fabric of a building.

**JT:** I am not keen on nostalgia. There are lots of things I like about that play. Nigel Kneale’s work turns complex ideas into popular drama. And those ideas are about art, about the relation to what we believe about technology; the spirit versus the machine. After The Stone Tape there was a period in the 1970s and 1980s where sci-fi film stories turned on the idea of technology being ‘possessed’.

**KJ:** Stanley Kubrick’s 2001, A Space Odyssey (1968) or David Cronenberg’s Videodrome (1983).

**JT:** They present a queasy confusion of belief and technology, an H. P. Lovecraft confusion between what is stable and unstable, between dream-worlds and reality. Kneale creates that in an economical way, which is genuinely scary and raw.

**KJ:** If you think about the historical moment when Lovecraft was writing, he represented the overlapping of Freud’s account of the psyche, and psychics. The spike in popularity of spiritualism and the parlour medium occurred in 1917. The triumph of engineering is synchronous with faith in the unmeasurable.

**JT:** There is also a sense of horror at the invisibility of technology.

**KJ:** It is there in the idea of the ‘wave’, the radio wave, the phonograph, with its disembodied voice.

**JT:** And in magnetism. So many spectacular magic tricks of the past and of today are achieved by the use of magnetism, which is a magical and powerful force. The mixing of wonder, fear and repulsion, the power that you derive from being able to understand and control technology, these are themes in my film.

**KJ:** And now our contemporary world has connection without sensory action. The next grand project is neural mapping, the integration of human and digital circuits. And the task of sci-fi is perhaps to consider our cyber relation to the future, which takes us to another recurrent element of your work. You use strange or familiar objects that are more than just props. They function as devices on various levels.
JT: I like a lot of objects. A few people have commented on how much they enjoyed the detail of little coded objects, in particular in the 'Peddler's Fayre' scene where I use dolls, broken sunglasses and bits of bone. I wanted to create the sense of an incomprehensible set of things that might be exchanged or be offered for sale, a glimpse of the way this [filmic] world works. And it also contains the fairytale of a little bag of magic beans that Glenda collects. They seem worthless but they are actually weapons. The costumes are also very much like objects, which was an important aspect of the film, having the costumes function as scenes, almost, in themselves.

KJ: As well as magic beans, there is the figure of a 'Blue Lady Doll' at the centre of the plot. It works as a form of prop but also as a token, both linguistically and literally. The words I used when we first began to talk about your work were 'materializing' and 'rendering'. They seem to be acts at the core of your film-making. Language is material, a conceit takes concrete form.

JT: I want there to be a real, visceral sense of the physical world the characters occupy. And it is one that we recognize from the mundane nature of the objects and their textures. The familiar is rendered strange, but not in a way that produces comedy or bathos.

KJ: Yet the absurdly comic is there and bathos is a word that came to me while viewing the film. The modes of pathos and bathos are present as rhetorical strategies. The shift from conceptual to literal is often a move of bathos. Fear becomes tangible but also ridiculous; the translation from abstraction to embodiment can be an action of fantasy or humour; of exaggeration or shrinkage.

JT: It can be disappointing, a mixture of the mundane with an element of the unheimlich. There is also a sense of a slippage or glitch. And here I go back to one of my very earliest pieces: The Real Hamster Film (1994, Super 8 and live performance, 7 min.)

KJ: I have read the script of that piece, but not seen it, sadly. I remember the line, 'on the hamster planet our every longing touches them; it can take on the shape of whatever you want'.

JT: The visuals are that your hamster dies and goes to heaven and becomes this really badly animated, stuffed thing. You are being told that it is in Hamster Heaven but it is a scarily zombie-like thing that is not your real hamster at all. It is almost as though an angel has come down and created this thing on the floor, an unseemly, wet thing.

KJ: I noted down a line of monologue from your Return of the Black Tower (after John Smith) (2007): 'A stain, a pattern stuck in the visible world' and that image seems to me to underpin most of your work.

JT: That is probably putting the finger on it [laughter].
KJ: John Smith begins *The Black Tower* (1985–1987) with a voice-over: ‘It seemed very close […] this building’ and the film captures this singular, anonymous structure from a number of different perspectives in the city of London. He says himself that the work came from seeing a building near his house covered with unreflective black paint. It looked like ‘a hole in the sky’. In your *Return of the Black Tower (After John Smith)* (2007), two characters dressed in gold speak to the audience as if confessing in a revivalist meeting: ‘At first I thought it was a perceptual problem.’ They too see inexplicable shapes. For me, patterns and stains conjure a childhood horror: the mark of an accident, or an event, that resists erasure. In *TUFD*, they revolve around the idea of Maggie Thatcher as an ‘afterburn’ on collective memory. What strikes me, in linking this to John Smith’s earlier work, is that where he uses montage and static shots (the mysterious shape grows larger and larger in fixed frames), in your take on that theme, the static shots give us images of people’s bodies mapping out the mystical shapes in domestic interiors; fitting themselves to the contours of sofas.

There’s an echo, too, of John Smith’s earlier work, *Leading Light* (1975), which traces the path of light crossing a room over the course of a day. In your revisiting of Smith’s work, women get out wool and start to draw light with that. The seriousness of structural patterns becomes a cat’s cradle.

JT: It is like seeing someone perform a category error. It is about a material/immaterial slippage; it is also a clear wrongness done with conviction.

KJ: I see something that is not ‘dumb’ about that, in that it is also a way of giving weight to abstraction.

JT: I think it is also a way of talking about the shock of embodiment and mortality, the realization that people are objects. If you see the dead body of someone you know, they are suddenly a thing. There is a sense of us all being slightly inappropriate material. We are always so… if you scan your brain, you will see it … we have to carry this burden of just being things.

KJ: Burden is an important word. There is a conceit I like in the strategy of having a ‘failing’ metaphor, where the tenor and the vehicle, the concept and its carrier are not matched. In *TUFD*, the Red Woman (a character played by Alison Edmundston, the same actor who takes the part of Glenda) emerges from underneath a derelict railway bridge on the edge of the forest our pilgrims have just crossed. She is dressed in a suit made of red household rubber gloves and she talks about ‘the onslaught of semiotic emissions, the deafening infosphere’, terms you draw from Franco Berardi. ‘Their language machines were so powerful’, Red Woman continues, ‘our hands became useless, and dropped off. We are trying to get them back.’

The device of the film’s title promises that ‘with this upgrade you will get an intense sensation of Unspeakable Freedom!’ with the qualification, ‘yet you will always, always be working.’ And here I
want to go back to Berardi. We live in a workplace without borders, we are always-already or always-about-to-be working: we are remote, fragmented units. For Berardi and others like Catherine Malabou,\textsuperscript{25} this is an effect of 'semicapitalism,' or it represents a shift from what Le Corbusier called the engineer's aesthetic of the twentieth century, to the economist's aesthetic. Berardi speaks of the effect of this as a de-territorialization, because its work is invisible, its tools are not machines but algorithms. He argues that the absence of 'territory' disables resistance. And so, in a roundabout way, my argument would be that your installation, your process of 'materialization,' presents a sort of resistance. As if you are saying, with irony, 'here is a territory'; 'here are the hands that dropped off.' That may well come from a wrongness, a category error, but it offers critique.

When you create an installation as in your last two shows at Matt's Gallery\textsuperscript{26} and at the Grundy, what emerges is not a viewing space but an intermediate space. In the Grundy you filled four different rooms with objects, which felt like expelled debris from the world of TUFID.

JT: I liked working with the given features of that building, its radiators and picture rails. The largest room was painted white and we put red, blue and green lights above the picture rail. I knew I wanted to cover the beautiful parquet flooring, and I had the idea of using carpet tiles, in red, green and blue. The way that they were placed on a whitened floor meant that they hovered and had a slightly vertiginous quality, so you see objects placed on them, like a grid, as though this stuff has landed but you are not sure if it has landed or not.

KJ: They seem to me like relics or an explosion from the screen. I see them as a slippage or an overspill.

JT: As if they have fallen out. That is a good way of putting it. I liked the way the installation manifested at Matt's Gallery, where the screen touched the floor and touching the floor were the carpet squares.

KJ: At that screening, perhaps because it was a Saturday afternoon, there were small children sitting on the tiles. People took drinks and sat on a sofa to watch the film. In other venues, I believe the film is going to travel without objects.

JT: There isn't a definitive iteration of the work, which doesn't sit well with the contemporary art model that dictates there should be one correct version. I have elements at the end of the film that are not there in the beginning, although it ends and begins with the same character in the same place. In a panel discussion at the Norwich screening, Pil and Galia Collectiv suggested that if the film's structure is a closed loop, it implies an inevitable doom that they related to certain accelerationist tendencies. Originally it was to be a closed loop, but I decided that a rupture is more playful, more hopeful. For me this is a film about repetition rather than a repetitious film.
Jennet Thomas in conversation with Kyran Joughin

KJ: Or we could say, it is not a loop but a hinged device; it opens and closes and that echoes your own description of your work as expanded narrative, rather than expanded cinema. We should talk about the other medium you use for this piece: the book form. The series your book appears in calls for work that is 'sensual, affirmative, popular and with a G.S.O.H.'

JT: The book came after the film and I added more material. I was clear that I didn't want it to be a picture book. I would have been happy for it not to have had any images.

KJ: Do you find that you have to fix an interpretation in prose? It is linear, horizontal not vertical. Whose is the point of view in the narrative?

JT: I think it can leave space for ambiguity. Glenda becomes the central figure in the book more so than she does in the film. The text gives more of a sense of her situation, not through interiority, but by suggesting what she has to deal with externally. I suppose I explored the logical questions that the film presented to see where they would go.

KJ: I was thinking about your text in relation to a book we both love: Raymond Queneau's *Witch Grass* (1933). The novel has a very formal pattern but it is also chaotically funny. Where do you see that humour in other people's work?

JT: There has always been a tendency for British work to be looked down on if it uses humour. I don't use humour; it is just a natural strand of what I do. In other artists' work? I like the dry humour in Marianna Simnett's work. However, some of John Smith's work, when he tries to be funny, I am not that keen on. The strongest work has a dark, wry sensibility, a sense of enquiry, or the surprise of paradoxes when you are trying to make sense of the world. It seems that humour is a natural by-product of the stupidity of human affairs, as much as embodying a sense of outrage.

KJ: Playfulness comes with lightness, flexibility. That spontaneity can be hard to sustain over a two-year period. I'm thinking here of the fact that play is not only resistance to seriousness, but also to work. Is there a contradiction here?

JT: There is a lightness in smaller works. With long pieces there is the potential to build a structure, for example, through music. Sound design has always been integral to how I make meaning in a work. With Leo (Chadburn), it reads as though the work is scored but actually he generates a lot of material and I organize and score it. I have the freedom to work against the mood of my images. I'm not sure he would feel able to do that in the same way.

KJ: He is not working to images?
**JT:** Sometimes to images, sometimes independently. I send him scenes and ask him to make things inspired by the mood. He sends me samples, even instruments he has invented, and then he will go away and write with the freedom he needs to put something together. If I really like what he has done, I may decide to extend the edit of a scene or use a piece as a counterpoint, in terms of mood: a violent sound in a pastoral setting, again to give the viewer provocations and problems to solve.

**KJ:** You and Leo have collaborated on your last two long pieces. Will you carry on working with sound design, rather than sampling?

**JT:** I love working with Leo, but at the same time, it would be good for me to have to develop my own skills in that area. I would like to compose and to get into music production.

**KJ:** And if you had an unlimited budget?

**JT:** I don't think I would do much differently because it is about control. I am a bit of a control freak really. On each film I have done I have let go a little more. I now want to start doing the things that I have got other people to do: costumes and music, because there is such a lot of pleasure in doing those things. Maybe it is about working more slowly with less pressure to produce a result.

In Manchester, Paul (Tarragó) asked the audience if I would like more animals in my films. This is something I would like to do; maybe I would like to work with horses. There is something very exciting about horses on film, I think. When I was a little girl I was a bit of a pony freak. Or I would like to work with an animal trainer. There was once a fund I didn't get round to applying for, which asked artists to come up with a proposal for working with a person they had never collaborated with before, to combine their talents, and I thought it would be great to work with a dog wrangler, or a sheep wrangler.

**KJ:** Animals and dance, they would have a great time. And meanwhile?

**JT:** Meanwhile I am working on a monologue but with other voices in it too. It has to have a rhythm and a flavour and a colour that is self-standing. I'm working now on a set of images that also have an autonomy to them. But they will mesh together in a way that produces a third thing. They allude to each other and interfere with each other, but they don't represent. They produce another set of collisions.

[We watch a pink head turn on her screen.]

**JT:** This will be a performance homage to a Powerpoint that someone sent to me once, nominating it as the most obscure presentation they had ever encountered. It is about new procedures of Quality Enhancement: 'a more risk-based approach to quality assurance.' I am calling it 'Enhanced Monitoring Event'.

The matte is malfunctioning, so it looks like time-lapsed maggots. This is all about University of the Arts London really, as you can probably tell.
REFERENCES
Reekie, Duncan (2007), Subversion – a Definitive History of Underground Film, London: Wallflower Press. The chapter, 'The Search for the Cool Place' is subtitled 'Underground Cinema vs Avant-Garde Film'.
Thomas, Jennet (2000), with other members of the collective, 'No Stars, No Funding, No Taste', interview with (the fictitious) Molly Spartan, Filmwaves, 11, pp. 24–27.

CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS
Jennet Thomas is an artist whose films, performances and installations explore connections between fantasy, ideology and the everyday. Her film work is distributed by Video Data Bank and has screened widely at international film festivals including: Rotterdam IFFR, New York Underground Film Festival, European Media Arts Festival. She lives and works in London as a senior Lecturer in Fine Art at Wimbledon College of Arts, UAL.
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Notes


4. In a 1992 Exploding Cinema programme, co-founder Duncan Reekie lays out an A-Z of Independent Film: E is for Experimental, 'a type of Avant-Garde film made by artists who think they are scientists'. British Artists' Film and Video Study Collection (BAFVSC), Central Saint Martins, UAL, n.p.


6. The London Filmmakers' Co-op (LFMC) was founded in 1966 and merged with London Video Arts to form LUX in 1999. Arts Lab was its original premises on Drury Lane.


8. For an account of the political censorship that led to TUFD’s launch being delayed until after the General Election May 2015, see (Anon. 2014), 'Artnotes', Art Monthly, no. 380, October, p. 16.


13. Thomas’s collaborator, Leo Chadburn based his sound design for the film on the John Dowland song, ‘Flow My Tears’, first published in 1596. The song’s motif is interwoven with original composition for synthesizer. ‘Flow My Tears, the Policeman Said’ is also the title of Philip K. Dick’s 1974 sci-fi novel and the subject of Fredric Jameson’s essay referred to later.


19. The catalogue was commissioned by Matt’s Gallery, London E3, April 2010.

20. First broadcast 25 December 1972 on BBC1. Neale’s drama turns on the idea that the stones of an historic building store the sounds of a death that happened there in the past. A group of scientists find they can tap into this recorded sound using computer technology.

21. H. P. Lovecraft (1890–1937) was an American writer of gothic fiction and is the subject of a biography by Michel Houellebecq (2005), H. P. Lovecraft: Against the World, Against Life, SF Believer Books.


25. Catherine Malabou, at the Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy (CRMEP), Kingston University works on combining philosophy and neuroscience (transsubjectivation, neuroplasticity).

26. All Suffering SOON TO END! (2010); School of Change (2013).

