

University for the Creative Arts
Research Project Portfolios

Lek and the Dogs

By Andrew Kötting



Project Details

Name of Researcher:	Professor Andrew Kötting
Name of Output:	<i>Lek and the Dogs</i>
UCARO link/s:	https://research.uca.ac.uk/5265/
Output Type:	T- Other – multi-component project comprising feature-length film, short film and artist's book
Contributors:	Director: Andrew Kötting Executive Producers: Lizzie Francke, Ian Berg, Christopher J. Reynolds Producers: Nick Taussig, Paul Van Carter Assistant Producer: Jan P. Dahlgren Production Manager: Jan P. Dahlgren Production Accountants/Auditors: Nyman Libson Paul Getty Archive Researcher: Lisa Clayton Additional Archive Researcher: David Leister Script Editor: Vicki Jung Words: Hattie Naylor, Andrew Kötting Inspired by the stage play <i>Ivan and the Dogs</i> by: Hattie Naylor Director of Photography: Nick Gordon Smith Special Effects: Zeroh Editor: Andrew Kötting Music: Jem Finer Sound Design: Philippe Ciompi, Andrew Kötting Sound Recording: Nick Gordon Smith, Andrew Kötting Sound Mix: Philippe Ciompi
Key Words:	Experimental, psychogeography, narrative, autobiography, performance, documentary, sound, bookwork

Project Details

Year and mode of
dissemination:

FEATURE FILM

LEK AND THE DOGS (2017) SCREENINGS AND EVENTS

June 2018

Whitstable Biennale - Q&A

ICA, London (7 day run) - Q&A

HOME, Manchester (7 day run) - Q&A

Tyneside, Newcastle (6 day run) - Q&A

Filmhouse, Edinburgh - Q&A

Glasgow Film Theatre - Q&A

Broadway, Nottingham - Q&A

BFI Southbank, London

Losing the Plot (a Star and Shadow Film Retreat)

Watershed, Bristol

QFT, Belfast - Q&A

IFI, Dublin - Q&A

Triskel Arts Centre, Cork - Q&A

Star and Shadow Cinema, Newcastle

Electric Cinema, Hastings

July 2018

Showroom, Sheffield - Q&A

Phoenix, Exeter - Q&A

First Site Gallery, Colchester

Quad, Derby - Q&A with Hattie Naylor

August 2018

Curzon Goldsmiths, London

Phoenix, Leicester (2 day run)

September 2018

The Ultimate Picture Palace, Oxford

Project Details

Year and mode
of dissemination:

LEK AND THE DOGS (2017) DVD
Lek and the Dogs (2017) dir. Andrew Kötting. HOME Artist
Film. ISBN 9780993591297

LEK AND THE DOGS (2017) ONLINE
Amazon Prime (<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Lek-Dogs-Xavier-Tchili/dp/B07DJ5SPST>), MUBI (<https://mubi.com/films/lek-and-the-dogs>) and BFI player (<https://player.bfi.org.uk/subscription/film/watch-lek-and-the-dogs-2017-online>)

SHORT FILM

THEIR RANCID WORDS STAGNATE OUR PONDS (2018)
Presented as an installation at Towner Gallery, Eastbourne.
Single-screen version shown in film festivals around the world
including the London Short Film Festival, the Swedenborg
International Film Festival and festivals in Winterthur,
Switzerland and Oberhausen, Germany.
The film is distributed by LUX in the UK and is also included on
the *Lek and the Dogs* DVD and DVD Blu-ray.

THE EARTHWORKS TRILOGY

Entire Earthworks trilogy, including *Lek and the Dogs*, shown:
Towner Gallery, Eastbourne (<https://www.townereastbourne.org.uk/event/andrew-kotting-earthworks-trilogy/>)
Close Up Cinema, London (https://www.closeupfilmcentre.com/film_programmes/2019/andrew-kotting-earthworks/)
Sputnik Cinema, Geneva
(<https://sputnik.info/director/kotting-andrew/>)
Athens Avant Garde Film Festival (<http://www.tainiothiki.gr/en/11aagff/11o-festival-profil>)

PUBLICATION

Kotting, A. (2018) *The Earthworks Bookwork*. Distributed by
BFI, LUX and Badbloodandsibyl. ISBN 978-0-9568733-7-8



Lek and the Dogs film still

Synopsis

Lek and the Dogs is a research output by Professor Andrew Kötting consisting of the experimental feature film *Lek and the Dogs*, the short film *Their Rancid Words Stagnate Our Ponds*, and the publication *Earthworks Bookwork*. Kötting directed and edited the films and authored/edited the book.

The films take as their starting point Hattie Naylor's play, *Ivan and the Dogs*, that in turn draws upon the real-life story of Ivan Mishukov. Having fled (or been thrown out of) his home aged four, Mishukov spent two years living on the streets of 1990s Moscow, befriending a pack of wild dogs that became his companions and guardians. In Kötting's film, Ivan is renamed Lek, developing the central character from Kötting's earlier films in his *Earthworks Trilogy*. Lek looks back upon his feral life, with a cassette recorder on which his younger self has recorded his formative experiences.

The film's contribution is its blend of social realism with dystopian science-fiction, recent traumatic history, an original investigation of animal-human relations, and experiments with invented language. It commenced in the collaboration with Naylor and is an exploration of the translation of stories, from documentary to stage, film and on into other forms (short film and bookwork), developing Kötting's concept of *spillages* between artistic forms.

The film was presented at festivals worldwide and released in cinemas by HOME. *Their Rancid Words Stagnate Our Ponds*, based on reworking a scene from the film, played at film festivals worldwide. Kötting expanded the research in a 180-page chapter in his *Earthworks Bookwork* that presents sketchbook pages, scripts, notes, photographs, and contextualising essays.

Context

Lek and the Dogs (2017) is the final part of Kötting's *Earthworks Trilogy*, along with two other feature films, *This Filthy Earth* (2001) and *Ivul* (2009). It develops Kötting's existing body of work which is underpinned by exploration of the psyche and its geography and it furthers Kötting's research that pushes at the frontiers of the cinematic experience.

Kötting's research is based upon concepts from psycho-geography, 'the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals' (Debord, 1955). Kötting explores the nature of performance within public space, frequently through journeys, both into the landscape or into the mind.

He also draws upon the related field of hauntology, aligning his work to the writings of Mark Fisher and his interpretations of Jacques Derrida. Both 'see history as . . . characterized by repetition and disruption, as the past recurrently irrupts into the present, forcing us to reconsider events and ideas we might have regarded as safely consigned to the past' (Coverley, 2020). Memory rupture, existential angst, nostalgia and the persistence of the past are common themes within all Kötting's work, as is language. The Lek character speaks in an invented language, created by Kötting and French performance artist and actor Xavier Tchili, who plays Lek. The film explores new, invented and fictional languages and celebrates 'different' voices.

Kötting's outputs are often made in collaboration with other artists, including Iain Sinclair, Jem Finer, Toby Jones, Alan

Moore, Claudia Barton, McGillivray, Isabel Skinner and Glenn Whiting. *Lek and the Dogs* builds upon this collaborative practice. It grew out of a project which was initially instigated by the BFI Film Fund and SALON Pictures to collaborate with the writer Hattie Naylor to adapt her 2010 prize-winning play *Ivan and the Dogs* for cinema. Xavier Tchili is a regular collaborator, and appeared in Kötting's earlier films in the *Earthworks Trilogy*.

Lek and the Dogs was conceived as a crossover project between narrative film, contemporary art, performance and documentary. The film draws on a range of techniques, genres and material, including home movies, archive footage, interviews and voiceover to produce a montage essay on the state of the world. Kötting's research is developed through the *spillage* between artistic forms; the *Lek and the Dogs* feature film led to the short film, *Their Rancid Words Stagnate Our Ponds*. Moving beyond film, a chapter in Kötting's *Earthworks Bookwork* is devoted to *Lek and the Dogs*. This presents a collage of materials which articulate the filmmaking and research process alongside written contributions which further develop its analysis and insights.

REFERENCES

Coverley, M. (2020) *Hauntology: Ghosts of Future Past*. Harpenden, UK: Oldcastle Books.

Debord, G. (1955) 'Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography'. *Les Lèvres Nues #6*. Reprinted in *Situationist International Anthology*, ed. and trans. By Ken Knabb (Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981), pp. 5-8.



Lek and the Dogs film still

Research Questions and Aims

Research questions:

How can narrative structure be developed within the documentary format?

How can new, invented and fictional languages celebrate 'different' voices?

How can avant-garde and experimental cinema be made accessible and presented within a mainstream, commercial context?

Research aims:

To explore the no-man's land between documentary and fiction, between essay and narrative.

To celebrate difference, and specifically difference in language and verbal expression.

To investigate hauntology through film, including in its relationship to nostalgia.

To investigate human/animal relationships, and to develop and complete the *Earthworks Trilogy*.

Research Methods and Process

In *Lek and the Dogs*, Kötting investigates psychogeography in a number of ways. Setting is used to explore space and place, through, for instance, archive clips of a Russian supermarket with bare shelves or new footage of the Atacama Desert. In each instance, image is juxtaposed with voiceovers from the past which link the exterior setting to the interior life of the protagonist Lek. At times the voiceovers are Lek's own thoughts, recorded on cassette and layered throughout the film. At other times they are the explicitly psychoanalytic musings of a 'body psychotherapist', 'child psychologist' and 'animal behaviourist', all of whom consider Lek in terms of his formative traumas.

This non-chronological presentation of Lek's life also speaks to Kötting's engagement with hauntology. By bringing together archive and new footage and constantly juxtaposing voiceover with image, *Lek and the Dogs* develops a fragmented form which draws attention to the recurrence of the past within the present. This is exacerbated by the film's self-aware approach to technology and the role it plays in bringing past and present into dialogue, as well as by the voiceover of Kötting's frequent collaborator Alan Moore, who expounds upon the concept of time and the way we move through it.

The thin membrane between fact and fiction is an area of ongoing interest for Kötting, and *Lek and the Dogs*, based loosely upon a true story, presented an opportunity to explore this border. The film was an adaptation not just of factual source material, but of a play which had already dramatized that story. It presented an opportunity for collaboration as Kötting worked with playwright Hattie Naylor to adapt her prize-winning stage play *Ivan and the Dogs* into a groundbreaking and innovative screen play. The film introduced a made-up language, or 'gramlot', invented and then translated using subtitles.

Kötting's methodology extends beyond the making of feature films, and encompasses multifarious outputs that span many media, including, as well as films, gallery installations, books and performance. The *spillage* from *Lek and the Dogs* led to the short film *Their Rancid Words Stagnate Our Ponds*. Cut scenes from the original feature film were reconfigured to be presented as an installation for multiple screen or single screen projection, taking the film from the cinema into gallery space. The research also spilled into the *Earthworks Bookwork*, this alternative form allowing additional scope through which to explore the themes of the work.



Lek and the Dogs film still

Research Insights and Contribution

New insights:

Lek and the Dogs further develops Kötting's investigations into 'psychogeographical' storytelling.

The film completes Kötting's *Earthworks Trilogy* of films situated on the surface of the earth (*La Terre*, based on Zola's novel), above it (*Ivul*, set in the French Pyrennees and telling the story of teenage Alex, who, after a family quarrel, climbs onto the roof of the house and vows never again to set foot on the earth), and below it (*Lek*, in which the lead character survives in a subterranean existence).

The film develops further Kötting's concept of *spillages* and the translation of a story from one art form to another. Hattie Naylor's play is the film's source material, but Kötting significantly transformed it to make the Ivan character in Naylor's play a continuation of his own Lek character from the earlier *Earthworks* films, developing Lek's invented language ('gramlot').

The critical success of the film has enabled further research by other filmmakers into the notion of the experimental documentary format, an area of investigation that Kötting has pioneered for almost 25 years, inspiring a new generation of artists and filmmakers such as Ben Rivers, Joshua Oppenheimer and Mark Jenkin.

Research Dissemination and Recognition

Recognition:

REVIEWS

Mark Kermode gave *Lek and the Dogs* 4* in his review for *The Guardian*, writing that ‘Watching an Andrew Kötting movie is like digging your hands deep into a steamy midden of ideas, leaving you to pick the conceptual dirt from under your fingernails for days’ (<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2018/jun/10/lek-and-the-dogs-review-andrew-kotting>).

Geoffrey Macnab’s 4* review for *The Independent* calls the film ‘a disconcerting affair, pitched between drama, archive-based documentary and art world installation’ (<https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/reviews/lek-and-the-dogs-review-andrew-kotting-s-latest-feature-is-a-disconcerting-affair-a8386491.html>).

Ben Nicholson’s review for *Sight and Sound* described the film as ‘Kötting’s typically singular new work’: (<https://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sight-sound-magazine/reviews-recommendations/lek-and-the-dogs-andrew-kotting-xavier-tchili-psycho-geography-apocalypse>).

Phil Concannon of *Little White Lies* considers the film ‘another remarkable audio-visual experience’ (<https://lwlies.com/reviews/lek-and-the-dogs/>).

Tara Brady gave *Lek and the Dogs* 4* in *The Irish Times*, describing the work as ‘rich, weird and wonderful’ (<https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/film/lek-and-the-dogs-andrew-kotting-s-rich-weird-and-wonderful-film-1.3537304>)

Research Dissemination and Recognition

Recognition:

AWARDS

Their Rancid Words Stagnate Our Ponds won best film at Swedenborg International film festival and was shortlisted for an AHRC Inspiration Award (<https://ahrc.ukri.org/research/readwatchlisten/features/rifa-2018-inspiration-award-public-category/#Their-Rancid-Words-Stagnate-Our-Ponds>)

Follow-on-activities:

PROJECTS

The success of *Lek and the Dogs* enabled Kötting to realise several following projects, in particular his feature film *The Whalebone Box*, which was acquired by MUBI, BFI Player and Amazon Prime for online distribution as well as HOME in Manchester for theatrical release.

BBC Radio 4's Film Programme commissioned Kötting to keep a studio diary in the Autumn of 2020, and this covers various projects including *Lek and The Dogs*, *By Our Selves* and *The Whalebone Box* (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m000kg3v>). An updated studio diary will be broadcast in April 2021.

WORKSHOPS

Kötting has presented masterclasses and workshops in Europe and Australia using this film and others as a catalyst for discussions around autobiography, disability and psychogeography (e.g. <https://www.felixmedia.com.au/flux-artfilm-masterclass>)



*Stills from Their Rancid Words
Stagnate Our Ponds*



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