

University for the Creative Arts
Research Project Portfolios

THE WHALEBONE BOX

By Andrew Kötting



Project Details

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

Project Details

Contributors:

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

External Funding:

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

Key Words:

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

UCARO Link:

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

Synopsis

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

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

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

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

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

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





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

*A strong song tows
us, long earsick.*





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

Context

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

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

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

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

REFERENCES

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

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

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

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

Research Aims and Questions

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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



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



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

Research Contribution and Insights

New insights:

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

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

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

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



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

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

Research Dissemination and Recognition

Dissemination:

VIEWING FIGURES

MUBI: 4,000

BFI Player: 1,400

Amazon Prime: 400

Just Watch: 200

YouTube trailer: 10,280

Mark Kermode Film Review: 13,000

LRB website - conversation with Iain Sinclair: 1,788

International Film Festivals (including streaming): 2,000

Follow-on-activities:

TALKS

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

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

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

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

Research Dissemination and Recognition

Influence of Research:

REVIEWS

The film was reviewed in numerous publications:

The Guardian

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

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

The Times

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

BFI

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

Mark Kermode

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Research Dissemination and Recognition

Influence of the research and follow-on activities:

FESTIVALS

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

ACADEMIC ANALYSIS

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

NEURODIVERSITY AND FUTURE PROJECTS

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

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



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

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



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



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



THE WHALE BONE BOX

A film by
Andrew Kötting

An all consuming and spellbinding
exercise in hauntology



SCREEN
archive
SOUTH EAST

LIC University
for the
Creative Arts

FI MUBI

HOME
ARTIST FILM

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



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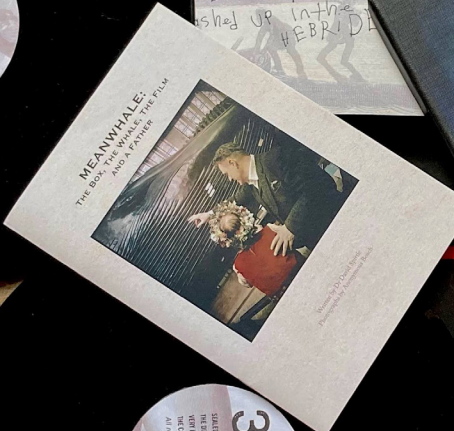
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Graphic Design:

Studio Mothership

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

BACK COVER IMAGE
The Whalebone Box LP and
booklets



... is taking the box
Beach where the whale
washed up in the
#EBRIDIA

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

Philip Larkin in Larkinist (on the White's who should have their great unworldly happiness of the ocean daily gratified. They are Larkinist, clanked down following in the deepest fall, among through sand and hearing through their bodies. Washed ashore, right of from the rock, wild waves, reach on the sandstone remnants defy the water when they have been heard to suddenly buckled against. On of absence, they collapse under their own weight. The portable wharfhouse for that momentary mercy-for your presence. Steve Devereux's, including in the Chris Fildes in an article by...

When he departed, finally on his second pilgrimage, would I be left to some people, who was a demanding encounter with the sea. He was, indeed, the one who might have been the one to do it. No one else would have been able to do it. He would have been the one to do it. He would have been the one to do it. He would have been the one to do it.



THE
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