WHEEL AND
COME AGAIN

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So Mayer

In Hope Pearl Strickland's film *a river holds a perfect memory* (2025), waterwheels offer a link between Lancashire and Jamaica; between archival black and white, and contemporary colour. They are remnants of the Industrial Revolution, which itself connected the plantations of the colonised West Indies, where enslaved people from the west coast of Africa grew and picked cotton, to the mills of cities in north-west England, where the cotton was spun. In Strickland's film, waterwheels turn like the sprockets of a film projector, making histories of exploitation and revolution, migration and remigration, visible and material.

The three films of this programme share a commitment to materiality: to the stones and streams that mark, not historical presences, but absences. In Alex Nevill's *Notes from Brook House* (2025), the border country between and traversing the north-east of England and south-east of Scotland is surveyed by a steadily panning camera that casts its calm gaze as equally on a UK Border Force office housed in a shipping container, as on a pilgrimage route sign, a tumbled WWI memorial plaque, and the stony ruins of a castle. All walls fall. A brief shot of the Antonine Wall reminds of the many borders that were once considered permanent and authoritative. In the film's opening shots, barbed wire fences both hide and reveal, showing us what we cannot fully see: the secretive mechanisms of current British border enforcement. On the soundtrack, voices of unseen interlocutors read letters and testimony written by refugees forcibly removed to Brook House, a detention centre near Gatwick Airport.

In 2017, the centre was subject to a public inquiry on systematic abuse. Out of thirty-three, only one of the inquiry's recommendations was ever implemented; in 2023, the Independent Monitoring Board found that the safety of detainees had deteriorated. Towards the end of *Notes from Brook House*, Nevill's voice is heard in conversation with a speaker who does not want to read one of the letters, and who tells him that he moved away from Dewsbury when a refugee community settled there, to somewhere white-dominated. Previous speakers have empathised with the letter-writers, understanding the rotating wheel of mutual aid, but later voices escalate and overlap in refusals and exclusions, even as the landscapes on screen become more spacious and less fenced-in. In the gap between image and voice, between voices and the written words refused, there is both a hard border, and the film's softly insistent dismantling thereof.

The sound of water runs through *a river holds a perfect memory*, moving memories from the landscape into ears. The film cuts from archival footage of steamer ships crossing the Atlantic, and a voice says: "Are you ready to listen? I'm ready to talk." The narrator speaks of where the sweet Martha Brae River meets the salty waters of Falmouth, not far from Montego Bay on Jamaica's North Atlantic coast. Later, accounts of colonial exploitation are narrated over shots of the river, young men rafting, swimming and diving, and a sleepy American crocodile floating along. Over a digital hydrological map, a speaker in voice-over critically appraises the industrialisation of waterways: "We've kind of anchored rivers, we've moved them into a single channel … We've removed connectivity."

These films remake connectivity in their precise layering of image, sound and words, so memory and history can flow. This is particularly true of Rhea Storr's *Okay Keskidee! Let Me See Inside* (2025), which asks what film can allow us to access when we are barred from seeing. As with Nevill's pans of barbed-wire fences, Storr confronts closed gates, walls and industrial enclosures, typically ignored in the hearts of residential areas and busy city streets. Storr travels to three locations in north London in search of British West Indian heritage: the West Indian Cultural Centre near Wood Green, the George Padmore Institute and New Beacon Books in Finsbury Park, and the Keskidee Centre, founded by Guyanese architect Oscar Abrams, near King's Cross. The first and last are closed, abandoned; the Keskidee building burned down in 2012. New Beacon Books, the UK's first Black bookstore, was saved from closure by a crowdfunder in winter 2021–2022 that raised over £75,000.

Storr's film, like Strickland's, joins recent films by Onyeka Igwe, Alberta Whittle and John Akomfrah that share a commitment to decolonising and reconnecting archive, memory and heritage in British arts and culture in the face of continued resistance and erasure. The film opens with a sequence of treated film, while glitches and loops cut out her documentation of the redevelopment of the Keskidee site. Storr's use of film inscribes the materiality of the alternative archives she is seeking, the material her film composes because it cannot show. The poetic running subtitles are left unvoiced. The silence within composer Felix Taylor's score reminds that the film works 'in the absence of an accessible and reproducible archive', as an early title relays. Instead, Storr splices dizzying Google Earth drops that zoom in from a height to street level, creating a new kind of stolen archive.

"How does Black youth understand if the space is erased or trapped in the archive?" Storr's film may initially appear to be preserved in honey or amber, but when the treated film repeats, it can be seen as light. She finds and splices in archival photographs from the 1970s and 1980s that show young people reading, listening, looking, talking, eating, smiling, holding babies. Okay! We can see inside. What we see falling as in a Vermeer painting, onto the faces of north London's British West Indian community, pouring from windows and skylights, is light. The final subtitle writes on the screen "to the next generation." Light, writing: as on a river, so on a screen; ephemeral, shimmering, repeating. Collective memory flows and no imposed border can stop it.

This text was commissioned by Open City Documentary Festival to accompany the combined programme 'A River Holds a Perfect Memory' at Institute of Contemporary Arts, 11 May 2025.

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