

# Stories from a stay at the *Arena* Hotel

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The BBC's arts and culture documentary series, *Arena* (1975 – present), has produced over 600 television documentaries on a diverse range of subjects. While prizing investigative and artistic rigour, *Arena* allows directors experimental approaches to subjects 'insignificant' and 'worthy', 'low' and 'high'. It is an approach earning *Arena* the descriptions: 'a maverick outfit' (Born, 2004, p. 97); a '*Panorama* for the arts' (Seaton, 2015, p. 92); and 'our best arts programme' (Rees, 2016). Many of *Arena*'s films do not give the didactic experience one might expect from public service documentaries, rather they provide cultural encounters that *Arena*'s creators consider 'valid in their own right' (Walker, 1993, p. 108). *Arena*'s documentaries vary in length and time slot and form a nexus of myriad directors, creative contributors, documentary styles, and subjects. *Arena*'s audio profile is also diverse, using 'live', pre-existing, and specially commissioned music.

In 2012, *Arena* launched an online project, the *Arena Hotel*, hosted at: [www.arenahotel.tv](http://www.arenahotel.tv).<sup>1</sup> The *Arena Hotel* is an archive-cum-exhibition website using the ideas and features of a hotel to organise and present material pertaining to *Arena*. Rooms in the Hotel are linked web pages accessible via the 'lift'. In the rooms, visitors watch short (1 – 6 minutes), re-edited excerpts of *Arena*'s documentaries that offer snapshots of several of *Arena*'s subjects (see Table 1 for a full list). The simultaneous residency of these subjects makes the Hotel's position in time and space ambiguous. The Hotel is a concurrence of people and stories drawn from any *time* from the mid-twentieth century to 2012, and from *anywhere* within a broadly Anglo-American cultural sphere. This ambiguity enables *Arena*'s films and the subjects they mediate to interact in the Hotel's simulated rooms and corridors.

Floor	Room	Artefact/object	Subject(s) of Film	Description of Subject
7	Rooftop	Superman silhouette	Larry Niven	American science fiction writer
		Kerouac's <i>On the Road</i>	William Burroughs	American writer
		Sign: 'Pool Closed: Positively No Swimming'	Pete Doherty	British musician
6	Restaurant	Menu card	Andy Warhol (and W. Burroughs)	American artist
		Trilby hat	Galton And Simpson	English comedy script writers
		Orange cricket	Cricket Bisque	Soup served in a dog bowl
		Crime scene	James Ellroy	American crime writer

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5	Chapel	Stained-glass window	Amy Winehouse	British soul/jazz musician
		Sign: church services and information	Rev. Gary Howington	American evangelist
		Silhouette of a nun	Sister Wendy Beckett	British nun and art historian
4	Tea Room	Margaret Thatcher bust	Luck and Low	Creators of ' <i>Spitting Image</i> '
		Tea cup	Francis Bacon	British-Irish artist
		Round sunglasses	Ozzy Osbourne	British heavy metal musician
3	Health and Beauty Spa	Mirror/portrait of Ekberg	Anita Ekberg	Swedish actress/model
		Pair of trainers	Robert Crumb	American cartoonist/musician
		Inflatable pool chair	Luciano Pavarotti	Italian opera singer
2	Ballroom	Statue of George Formby	George Formby	The George Formby Society
		Leather jacket	Dancing in Texas	Country music and dance
		Sign: 'Robben Island Dancing Lessons'	Robben Island	Dancing in the South African prison
G	Lobby	Flat screen TV	Arena Hotel	Hotel's welcome video
		Stuffed panda head	Chi Chi	London Zoo's giant panda
		Portrait of Peel	John Peel	British radio DJ
		Portrait of Mandela	Nelson Mandela*	South African politician
		Portrait of Warhol	Chelsea Hotel*	Infamous New York hotel
		Portrait of Jesus	American South*	Country music and Christianity in America
		Photograph of Guthrie	Woody Guthrie*	American folk musician
-1	Bar	Neon Sign: 'Cocktails'	Luis Buñuel	Spanish filmmaker
		Photograph of Venables	Terry Venables	British footballer
		Cowboy hat	Kinky Friedman	American country singer
-2	Kitchen	Dinner trolley	Mary Langston	Elvis Presley's cook
		Meat and Yorkshire puddings	<i>Spitting Image</i>	British satirical puppet show
		Sign: 'Now wash your hands please'	Louise Bourgeois	French-American artist
-3	Nightclub	Guitar case	The Other Jimi Hendrix	Hendrix cover act
		Microphone stand and military jacket	Pete Doherty and Poly Styrene	Rock musicians
		Poster: Nigel Finch's film <i>Stonewall</i> (1995)	The Disappointer Sisters	Cabaret drag performers

Table 1: Contents of The Arena Hotel. \* Takes visitors to external web page.

*Arena's* longstanding editor/director Anthony Wall has written a blog article titled 'Archive: Past, present, future' (2014). The article considers how *Arena's* film archive has been reused by *Arena* and introduces the Hotel as such a use. The Hotel is part of a complex non-linear flow between documentary films and archives. In one direction, archive footage moves into documentaries to serve myriad functions, the most prominent being as a primary source that supplies films with certain kinds of 'authority' (Kepley & Swender, 2009). In the other direction, documentary films are found in digital and analogue archives where they are open to interpretation as 'objective' evidence, indexical objects and personal mementos (Baron, 2014, pp. 2 – 4). Documentary practice is both *in* and *of* the archive. This deep-rooted movement shapes, and is shaped by, the *Arena* Hotel; it is central to the Hotel's genesis and to the way this chapter addresses the possible significance the Hotel holds for its creators, 'guests' and visitors.

This chapter comprises four sections. It begins with an account of how the Hotel operates and exposes the important position music is given within the hotel. Attention is drawn to how figurative gaps between subjects and films in the Hotel are blurred by the Hotel's use of sound and by its visual presentation. A second section gives two examples of this blurring in action and draws particular attention to two explicitly musical spaces within the Hotel. The third section frames the Hotel within the discourse of the so called 'archival turn' which was identified throughout the humanities during the late-twentieth-century (Simon, 2002). The final section draws these elements together to discuss how, by encouraging visitors to investigate gaps between *Arena's* archival materials through the use of sound and music, the Hotel acts as a (web)site of 'mediated memories' (van Dijck, 2007). In the Hotel, I argue, visitors can imagine the exhibition/archive space as, following Doreen Massey (2005), a simultaneity of stories. The encouragement and creation of these stories indicates a nostalgic desire to encounter the past, whilst understanding such a past is lost or never existed (Boym, 2001, p. 21). The music found within the Hotel acts both as a tool by which these feelings are conjured, and often as the documentary subject that focuses the Hotel's retrospective project.

But first, two caveats: my doctoral research explores *Arena's* wider relationship with music — how *Arena* constructs ideas about music, and what uses the series makes of music. This chapter, though, examines the *Arena* Hotel. It does not consider the Hotel in isolation, but it does so without extensive reference to *Arena's* televisual output. Similarly, although all films housed within the Hotel form part of my argument,

this chapter limits its scope to a small number of examples. The selected films are identified both as examples of the Hotel's general approach and also as key films that focus the argument and best expose music and sound's roles within the Hotel.

## An Audiovisual Guide to the *Arena Hotel*

### *Looking at the Hotel*

The *Arena Hotel* is a series of highly stylised interactive photomontages. Its collage-like style gives the Hotel an appearance akin to British artist Richard Hamilton's iconic work, *Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?* (1956). Considered as a catalytic work of the British Pop Art movement, Hamilton's is 'one of the most celebrated images in twentieth-century British art' (Stonard, 2007, p. 607). Hamilton's collage, as with the wider Pop Art movement, exposes a fascination (often ironic) with the objects and symbolism of popular culture, especially American popular culture (Ruhrberg, 2000, p. 303). For Karl Ruhrberg, *Just what is it* reveals the 'intelligence and sophistication of a composition rife with allusions and ambiguities' (2000, p. 303). Although not acknowledged as an influence on the Hotel's design, the debt to collages like Hamilton's is plain. By 2012, Hamilton's collage had become a well-known classic of British art and a cornerstone in the tradition of a 'high-art' take on popular culture. Considering Hamilton's work, (and similar works), as a point of reference for *Arena's Hotel*, positions it within the same venerable traditions. As well as the Hotel's use of a similar 'cut-and-paste' style, its allusion to Pop Art aesthetics points to comparable referential themes between Hamilton's collage and *Arena's Hotel*. *Arena's* wider project is also prompted by a fascination with popular culture, an area 'no [television] series before *Arena* entered with such energy and panache' (Wyver, 2007, p. 58). Popular culture offered fertile material for creating those documentaries for which *Arena* became famous. John Wyver described *Arena's* most celebrated films from the 1980s as 'irreverent, imaginative films colliding great characters with submerged skeins of cultural theory, boundless curiosity with a delight in every kind of surprise' (2007, p. 58). The films Wyver considers as contributing to this description occupy important places in the Hotel and the history of British television documentary e.g. *My Way* (1979), *Chelsea Hotel* (1981), and *The Life and Times of Don Luis Buñuel* (1984).

The films within the Hotel are housed in one of ten rooms. Visitors arriving in the lobby must enter the lift where buttons indicate the accessible rooms. Each room is framed by the lift's interior and a sign indicating the current floor; moving a mouse around the room causes the image to scroll left and right behind the static doors, giving the



Figure 1: The Arena Hotel's 'Tea Room'. Screenshot from <[www.arenahotel.tv/floors/tea-room](http://www.arenahotel.tv/floors/tea-room)>. Reproduced with permission from BBC Arena.

impression of a three-dimensional space, much like a box diorama. The Hotel comprises an enviable number of amenities (see Table 1). Looking at these rooms, visitors find a straightforward treasure hunt (see Figure 1). Three or more glowing objects within a room can be clicked on to show short films from Arena's archive.<sup>2</sup> The glowing objects — a guitar case, a pair of sunglasses, and a sign reading 'Now wash your hands please' — are artefacts relating to the films. Sometimes they offer simple associations. For example, a bust of *Spitting Image*'s Margaret Thatcher reveals the caption, 'Spitting Image' and a clip from Arena's 1980 film *Luck and Flaw*, which profiles the show's creators.<sup>3</sup> The association of other objects is initially less clear. A large inflatable armchair floating in a swimming-pool takes visitors to footage of Pavarotti in the pool of his summer residence. In the Hotel's restaurant, a menu stand is captioned 'Andy Warhol'. Clicking on it begins a clip from Arena's iconic film *Chelsea Hotel* (1981) in which Andy Warhol and William Burroughs sit at dinner discussing chicken fried steak.

As these brief examples show, the Hotel's rooms are, in the same way as Hamilton's collage *Just what is it*, littered with allusions and ambiguities. Visitors to the Hotel

must 'decode' these objects and discover or imagine their meaning. At first visitors identify clickable objects which are marked by a subtle glow, and sometimes by a certain incongruity, the Hotel's restaurant contains a crime scene with the chalk outline of a body, for example. Once identified, objects can be hovered over to reveal a caption, in this case, 'James Ellroy'. This action also displays a small description in the lift's scrolling floor sign. For Ellroy's film this is 'Fine dining and murder.' Clicking on the murder scene, visitors join Ellroy and the L.A. Sheriff Department's homicide detectives for dinner. As the film begins, captions inform visitors about what is taking place, though limited meta-data or contextual information is provided. By making visitors investigate the 'cut-and-pasted' objects in such a way, *Arena* relies on visitors' critical engagement to explore and enjoy the archive. Withholding most of the expository information about each film until visitors have watched the first few seconds (11 seconds in the Ellroy film) forces visitors to construct meaning about what they are experiencing. In addition to meanings generated by the film itself, understanding also develops with regard to a visitor's initial reaction to the Hotel at large, the appearance of each individual room and the objects within them. This process blurs the gaps between films in each room and in the Hotel. Thus, it seems possible James Ellroy, the homicide detectives, William Burroughs and Andy Warhol, though not at the same table, simultaneously occupy the same virtual restaurant.

### *Listening to the Hotel*

Paul Long has demonstrated that popular music lends itself readily to curatorial and archival practices in part because of its symbiotic relationship with the audiovisual technologies that 'capture it' (2015, p. 67). It is perhaps not surprising then that around 50% of films in the *Arena Hotel* engage with music, mostly popular music, as a documentary subject. Given the breadth of *Arena's* televisual output, of which less than 30% concerns music directly, it appears that the Hotel gives particular attention to music as a subject. It is notable, for instance, that whilst most rooms are expected parts of a Hotel, two of the more unusual rooms, the chapel and the nightclub, are reserved almost completely for films with music as one of their main subjects. Therefore, parts of the Hotel were probably created with music especially in mind. My primary interest in listening to the Hotel, however, is not the music in its films, but the Hotel's soundscape.

Sound within the *Arena Hotel* can be classified using the categories of video-game sound introduced by Mark Grimshaw (2007). At times sound takes the form of

kinediegetic sound heard in response to a visitor's actions; sometimes exodiegetic sound, heard regardless of a visitor's actions, is used (Grimshaw, 2007, p. 227). For example, visitors are greeted in the lobby by concierge Noël Coward saying, 'Hello, how are you dear? Et cetera, et cetera' (exodiegetic). If visitors click on the reception desk's bell, a 'ding' is heard and Coward is likely to make another droll remark (kinediegetic). A range of atmospheric and location sounds accompany this welcome, including ringing phones, chiming lifts, muffled chatter, and street noise. Travelling to a chosen room requires pushing a lift button, waiting as the lift travels to the room (complete with appropriate sounds and synchronised audiovisual jolts) before the doors open. A layered stereo soundscape throughout the Hotel compounds its collage effect, drawing the visitor's attention to, for example, Gregorian chant, whispers, closing doors and footsteps in the Hotel's chapel. The materials and size of each room — in this case, vaulted ceilings and stone walls — are indicated by the quality and level of reverberation in the ambient soundscape. Within this, sounds are panned between channels to give further indication of the physical space and the impression that visitors occupy a particular spatial zone of audition (Chion, 1994, p. 89).

This sound design is undoubtedly intended to engender a feeling of presence within the Hotel. How we should understand and conceptualise sound's role in creating a feeling of immersion, presence or incorporation within a virtual-world is a fraught issue (Calleja, 2014). As Mark Grimshaw and Tom Garner explore, prevailing understandings suggest that such a feeling is 'technologically deterministic and directly related to the degree of simulation of reality provided by the technology' (2015, p. 7). Conversely, the authors argue, the extent to which a sense of presence is felt does not rely on technology's ability to produce stimuli that simulate reality. Rather it is simulation of the specific context of the virtual world that enables the immersive effects of music and sound (Grimshaw & Garner, 2015, p. 7). In *Arena's Hotel*, this seems to be the case. The context of the Hotel is an exaggerated, tongue-in-cheek world prompted by a fascination with the strangeness, humour, and ambiguity of culture, popular or otherwise. Whilst the Hotel's sounds position visitors spatially, they also act as part of the Hotel's Pop Art collage juxtaposing and exaggerating the everyday and the extraordinary. They position visitors in a symbolic zone of audition wherein sounds convey contextual information pertaining to the social function of the space as well as information about an extraordinary function of the space, to bring together an unbelievable and impossible group of people.



For example, although Gregorian chant is a suitable and reverent choice to accompany a chapel, hearing it with the image of a chapel only does so much to incorporate visitors within the space. Coupled with sounds of incessant shuffling, the image of Amy Winehouse in stained glass, and pink striped wallpaper above Gothic arches, the chant signifies the Hotel's stylised context. For visitors who recognise the chant, the 'strangeness' of the situation is only heightened; it is the sombre plainchant of the *Dies Iræ*, oft quoted in requiems and other works of great tumult or intensity (Gregory, 1953). Thus, the Hotel's soundworld offers visitors a feeling of incorporation into the Hotel's strange, fictional space. This sonic design, which follows visitors throughout the Hotel, concerns not only the visitor's enjoyment of the Hotel but also *Arena's* encouragement of visitors to explore its archive materials in a particular way. The attempt to include visitors within the Hotel via contextually realistic sound enables the Hotel's discontinuous elements — its short, seemingly unrelated film clips — to be conceived of by visitors as part of the same world, and thus to explore them with this referential frame in mind. Situating visitors and guests in the Hotel together blurs the gaps between the films presented. In doing so, the Hotel encourages the film's subjects, and the moments their films capture, to interact in the imagination of visitors.

### Examples from the Chapel and Nightclub

This section explores two instances of this blurring of gaps between the films. The first instance gives an account of the possible gaps between the films housed in the chapel.

Film 1) Amy Winehouse performs in an Irish church. Her performance is intercut with footage of two interviews. In Winehouse's interview she discusses her musical influences and dwells upon Gospel singer Mahalia Jackson. Reverend Máirt Hanley's interview explores performances in his church as acts of worship (04:56).

Film 2) In Louisiana, Reverend Howington gives an evangelical sermon that includes his performance of country music during which the congregation clap, dance and appear to experience involuntary movements. An interview explores drug abuse in Howington's life and his playing/feeling of the blues (02:07).

Film 3) Sister Wendy Beckett goes about and talks about her solitary worship and wider beliefs. A narrator gives information about Beckett's life, and for 51 seconds of the film Gavin Bryars' arrangement, *Jesus' Blood Never Failed Me Yet* (1972), of an unknown homeless man's song underscores the footage, narration, and off-screen interview. Later, a choir begins their service in song (02:00). As with other films in the

Hotel, the gaps between these three films are drawn into the visitor's mind by the function of the room in which they are housed. In this case, religion acts as a referential frame for interpreting the films. Someone's attention might be drawn to the disparity between Beckett's solitary worship and Howington's tumultuous exclamations: 'We're not crazy!' Others might consider the films' varied depiction of religious spaces or types of congregation. Others still would identify the relationship between religious worship and musical practice as a key theme for the consideration of these films. As Winehouse makes clear: 'I'm not religious, but there's nothing more . . . pure than the relationship you have with God . . . apart from your love of music' (01:58). The films prompt similar themes in their own right of course, but juxtaposed in the chapel, each story is contextualised by the others. The different approaches to religion, and musical worship in particular, are brought into proximity in a way they are not when seen only as disparate parts of the *Arena* archive. The gaps between the films — from drug addict to evangelical country musician, and non-religious singer to an early death blighted by substance abuse — are blurred, increasing the potential for the Hotel's stories to interact as part of a multiplicity of stories seldom observed outside the virtual Hotel. In the above example, *Arena* prompts visitors to identify the similarities and differences in the stories, to make new and unlikely connections between the histories and lived experiences the films' mediate, and to acknowledge the wider context in which the stories were found.

There is one instance in the Hotel where stories are not so much encouraged into juxtaposition but forced. Although this is not the norm for the Hotel, I explore this second instance because, by Wall's admission, it is a concrete example of how he wanted the Hotel to operate: it 'encapsulates what I'm trying to get at', which is to 'reveal other meanings in [the] archive which could render it dynamic and creative in a way that suggests the future as much as the past' (Wall, 2014). In the Hotel's nightclub, a red military jacket hangs on a microphone stand. The image is captioned 'Poly Styrene and Pete Doherty'. Clicking on it takes visitors to what appears to be a performance of 'Albion' by Babyshambles. As their performance comes to an end however, footage turns to the outside of a club where another band enters the venue to the final few bars of 'Albion'. The new band takes the stage and performs Styrene's song, 'Art-I-Ficial'. It is an invented gig, but one partially successful in creating a club where Babyshambles, fronted by Doherty, and Styrene and her X-Ray Specs are forced to share a stage and interact across the decades.

It is the soundtrack that allows us to suspend our disbelief for a moment. Babyshambles finishing their song as Poly Styrene and her band arrive at the club helps us to make the journey in time despite changes in video quality and format. It is only when they enter the stage, or when on-screen captions give the game away completely, that we fully realise we are not where, or when, we were before. In this nightclub, meanings within Doherty and Styrene's songs are afforded added significance by their juxtaposition. Lyrically both present allegorical visions of society; Doherty's is a fable of Britain, filled with 'violence in dole queues' and 'gin in teacups', while Styrene protests 'the way a girl should be' in a 'consumer society'. The anti-idealistic, anti-consumerist and anti-authoritarian ideologies the artists present are reinforced by the presence of each other. Musically, Doherty's more melodically orientated indie-punk preceding Styrene's brash, fast-paced new-wave/punk-rock contextualises the artists and the roots and branches of punk's musical aesthetics.

It is not only the artists' *Arena* wants to bring together. 60% of the film is footage of the audience and our attention is drawn to what Styrene later in the film calls the 'hysterical' communities for whom this imagined gig is real. Shots of the audience are similar to the point where we might not be sure if one of Styrene's punks was actually one of Doherty's post-punk revivalists. The ambiguity of the audience's situation makes the existence of the impossible gig more believable; it also brings citizens of Doherty's Albion and Styrene's consumer society together to share the memory of the same 'gig' and a similar British society. The Hotel acts as a venue for this impossible interaction allowing music, musicians and musical communities to realise insights into their shared musical cultures.

This clip is an exaggerated example, but *Arena* employs music and sound throughout the Hotel to construct and organise its virtual world and to endow its fictional world with the hallmarks of a strange 'reality'. It is this ambiguity, resulting also from limited expository information, that helps present the gaps between the archive's materials as part of the archive itself. Rather than drawing attention to their separateness, the Hotel blurs gaps between the archive's materials. Thus, these gaps demand we consider objects on either side not as discrete objects but as ones in communication — a communication that can point to their differences and similarities. Visitors are encouraged to look for reasons as to why clips are presented together and to form stories that exist within the Hotel's fictional space and the real world. These gaps, and the narratives that occupy them, lead to the third section about the Hotel's relationship with the archive.

## Secondary Narratives and the Archival Turn

### *The Curatorial Process*

During visits to the Hotel I was surprised that *Arena* had not chosen to use an existing website already suited for the presentation of archival audiovisual material. A gallery's website or a social media site such as YouTube would offer advantages in terms of access, impact, and user discourse. Indeed, the Hotel's interactive elements feel limited by 2012's standards; visitors are able to pause films but not to jump between parts, for example. Nevertheless, the stylised world of the Hotel ties it to *Arena*'s 'off-beat' brand. By avoiding platforms such as YouTube, *Arena* is able to control the space surrounding its films. In this way, *Arena*'s Hotel follows the now highly problematised 'shift away from curating as an administrative, caring, mediating activity toward that of curating as a creative activity more akin to a form of artistic practice' (O'Neill, 2007, p. 22). This shift in curatorial practice began in the 1960s following attempts to demystify the art world and 'make visible the mediating component within the formation, production and dissemination of an exhibition' (O'Neill, 2007, p. 13). The Hotel's presentation of *Arena*'s archive material is a purposive and artistic act of curation (Farquharson, 2003) that encourages visitors to explore its materials as something more than a series of independent, discontinuous elements; it is firmly concerned with the presentational function of the space. Encouraging a sense of incorporation for visitors establishes not only the sense of contextual realism that allows such exploration but also the visitor's importance to the construction of meaning about gaps between the Hotel's materials. Nevertheless, the *Arena* Hotel appears to engage in, at least partially, the opposite of the shift Paul O'Neill describes. Not wanting to delineate each film by providing metadata and other 'objective' information, the subjective acts of selection, editing, production and other curatorial processes are hidden. Although the Hotel serves as an exhibition of *Arena*'s films, curatorial practices are only one side of the coin. The other side, archival practice, traditionally subordinated presentational functions to focus on the preservation and accessibility of material. Although the Hotel too subordinates the supposed 'objectivity' of the archive in favour of highly stylised presentational modes, archival practice is nevertheless important to an understanding of the significance the Hotel holds. To consider this aspect of the Hotel, I return to the film of Warhol and Burroughs.

In between footage of Warhol and Burrough's dinner, a guide takes a group around the real Chelsea Hotel in New York. Stopping outside the rooms Warhol and Burroughs stayed in, the tour guide evokes the Hotel's Bohemian mystique as a haunt of vanguard actors, writers, musicians and artists. It is not difficult to identify an inspiration for the

*Arena* Hotel's tag line: a rest stop for rare individuals. Indeed, as Wall recalls, the Hotel was based 'on the lobby of the Chelsea Hotel mixed with the back lifts of [BBC] Broadcasting House' (2014). I argue that a hotel serves as a uniquely suitable template for *Arena*'s idiosyncratic exploration of its archive for several interconnected reasons.

Firstly, the Chelsea Hotel built a reputation as the semi-permanent residence of influential, famous, and eccentric figures of the twentieth-century cultural milieu who lived, died and conducted their personal and professional lives within its walls. *Arena*'s archive, full of similar characters and stories, finds a felicitous association with the Chelsea Hotel's reputation and visitor book.

Secondly, the film *Chelsea Hotel*, through which *Arena* also became part of the Hotel's story by documenting and further mythologizing it, remains one of *Arena*'s most well-known and acclaimed films. The film is cited as such in newspaper articles remarking on *Arena*'s earlier years (e.g. Grant, 1988; Selway, 1981) and is repeated more often than the majority of *Arena*'s other programmes, at least six times since 2000. It was described in 1982 as 'the best repeat of the week, compulsory if you missed it first time' (Fiddick 1982, p. 18), and 'fascinating' in a 2001 re-run (Mulvihill, 2001, p. 60). The film, and its reputation, are key parts in the cultivation of *Arena* as 'off-beat' (Selway, 1982, p. 48) but, 'vastly enjoyable' (Davalle, 1982, p. XVI).

Thirdly, Wall identifies the comedy value of hotel culture as a reason for *Arena*'s choice of a hotel, stating 'everything about hotel culture is intrinsically funny' (2014). Though Wall makes no indication of what form this comedy takes, it is no doubt bolstered by the tropes of British hospitality comedies found in *Fawlty Towers* (1975 and 1979), *Carry on Abroad* (1972), and *Are You Being Served?* (1961 – 1970). The latter is not set in a hotel of course but is nevertheless an important hospitality comedy that continues many of the tropes found in the other examples e.g. style of humour, depiction of patrons, inter-staff relationships, and physical settings. This camp ironic tone resonates with the style for which *Arena* became renowned. The *Arena* Hotel is thus presented as an object that delights in, and artistically meditates, the funny and extraordinary nature of culture.

Though these reasons are important in understanding why *Arena* chose a hotel to represent its archive, I suggest that a fourth reason is a principal factor in an examination of the Hotel and its relation to archival practice. This posits the Hotel, on the one hand, as an institutionalised space with well-known physical arrangements and expected behaviours. On the other hand, as with many real hotels (e.g. The Chelsea Hotel) and fictional hotels (e.g. *Fawlty Towers*), what happens in the Hotel is often considered as

something outside everyday experience. In Wall's terms, using a hotel's blueprint 'was a way of randomising the archive but with a kind of acute organising principle' (2014). Hotels of this kind are known structures that are recognised as liminal spaces between public and private, banality and absurdity. The sonic experience of such a hotel is also layered with competing sounds and enforced silences made by the hotel's material features (a reception bell or a Do Not Disturb sign) and by those who inhabit the hotel. As suggested above, *Arena* apes this sonic world as a way to establish its fictional space and engender feelings of presence for the visitor. *Arena's* use of the audible features of a hotel also compounds the notion of the Hotel as a space between the expected and unexpected (a quiet chapel in which Gregorian chant and Amy Winehouse might both be heard, or a restaurant where clinking plates accompany a discussion of a homicide investigation, for example). Thus, these spatial, social, and sonic blueprints are presented in the Hotel as means to establish the *Arena* archive as part of an ill-defined 'third space' or 'third place', (evoking Bhabha (1994) and Oldenburg (1989) respectively), in which interactions occur between two or more cultures and between the private and professional. This contributes to the expansion of *Arena's* archive from a fixed series of objects to a nebula of stories of, and about, culture.

### *The Hotel as Archive*

A central theme of Wall's article on *Arena's* archive is the changing nature of archives. For Wall, the changing meaning of archives has 'turned into every kid with a mobile phone constantly recording experiences to such an extent that you can't be clear exactly what archive [sic] is anymore' (2014). Wall conceived of the Hotel partly in response to this incorporation of the archival into the everyday. Jussi Parikka used the phrase 'information management society' to encapsulate this trend (2013, pp. 1 – 2). Technologically developed communities now 'archive' emails, tag digital galleries and rely on archival metaphors and processes to curate lived experience. The proliferation of digital technology has brought a challenge to previous conceptions of the archive as a concrete, institutionalised place of preservation — a place offering privileged access to authoritative texts, which occupies figurative spaces between knowledge and power, memory and truth and real spaces in the basements and backrooms of establishments. It is a challenge that continues to provoke post-modern ontological discussions of the archive, what has been termed the 'archival turn'. The turn problematized the archive's status in the light of changing socio-cultural conditions including the proliferation of visual and digital cultures, contemporary forms of nostalgia, and postmodern anxieties

over time-space compression (Simon, 2002, p. 102; see also Cook, 2012). The archival turn reconsidered the archive's physical and privileged requirements and was driven by the work of critical theorists, especially Foucault (2012 [1969]), Benjamin (1968. [1939]) and Derrida (1998). Foucault and Benjamin's work reimagined the archive 'as a site of cultural power and social transformation, but one which is nonetheless abstract: an imaginary terminus wherein cultural expressions find meaning through contingencies, in allegorical associations and discursive formations' (Simon, 2002, p. 104). Later, in his famous work, *Mal d'Archive*, Derrida's psychoanalytic account (Steedman, 2001) of our preoccupation with archives drew attention to the nostalgic desires that drive and are driven by archival practice (Derrida, 1998, p. 91).

In many ways, the Hotel retains some of the principles of the 'modernist' archive: it has limitations to its access and how visitors may view material. Fashioning the website around the organising principles of a hotel certainly resonates with conceptions of the archive as a place with expected physical and social boundaries. Nevertheless, the *Arena* Hotel follows the archival turn. It takes the form of an imaginary space; it is certainly virtual and the rooms within it present imagined situations. The Hotel also undermines some sense of textual authority by chopping and re-cutting *Arena's* footage and presenting it in new contexts. The Hotel necessitates a contingent experience of its materials and encourages visitors to engage with possible allegorical associations (as with Doherty and Styrene) discovered in the space between its clips. Wolfgang Ernst, argues 'the archive does not tell stories; only secondary narratives give meaningful coherence to its discontinuous elements' (2004, p. 3). He continues, 'there is no necessary coherent connection between archival data and documents, but rather gaps in between: holes and silence' (2004, p. 3). It is these gaps that *Arena's* Hotel attempts to draw into our consideration of the archive's materials. Through its ambiguity of presentation and immersive experience, both of which are enabled and intensified by the use of music and sound, the Hotel encourages the discovery of secondary narratives between clips and between the cultural formations documented by *Arena*. To conclude, I consider what purpose these secondary narratives might serve.

### Cultural stories

Cultural memory has a complex theoretical history; it can be seen on the one hand as the practice of groups that construct versions of the past to document and recall national, institutional, or family histories (Erlil, 2008, p. 5). On the other hand, cultural memory points to the neuropsychological act of an individual mind influenced by socio-

cultural frameworks. The *Arena Hotel* engages with both interconnected meanings. The Hotel is built by the purposive selection of an institution (*Arena*) to create and present histories about *Arena* and certain parts of culture. At the same time, it relies on the particular experience of the individual to interpret this 'history' and owes its creation to nostalgic desires to experience the past in the full knowledge that such a past is lost or invented, what Svetlana Boym calls 'reflective nostalgia' (2001, p. 21). The role of music is paramount to the nostalgic desire the Hotel relies on and drives. Music, and popular music in particular, is recognised as sharing a complex and powerful relationship with nostalgic modes (for a summary see Dauncey and Tinker, 2017). Indeed, music serves in the Hotel as the means by which and about which the visitor's retrospective activity is often focused.

Following theories that consider cultural memory as inseparable from networks of mediated experience, Ann Rigney foregrounds new media technologies 'as an integral factor in the production of cultural memory today' (2016, p. 15). Such media, or technologies of memory (Plate and Smelik, 2009), 'operate within various symbolic systems' and 'broaden the temporal and spatial range of remembrance' (Erll, 2008, p. 12). Van Dijck takes this further to argue for 'the mutual shaping of human cognitive memory and media technologies in everyday cultural contexts' (2007, p. 150).

The memory practices and technologies conditioning Anglo-American understandings and enjoyment of the past have undergone great change as part of the so-called 'time-space compression' wherein the geographical and temporal gaps between communities and cultures become blurred as technologies speed up and disperse how and what we experience (Massey, 1994, p. 146). These changes resonate with new conceptions of 'space' as a product of global and local interrelations: a sphere, 'always under construction', 'in which distinct trajectories coexist' (Massey, 2005, p. 9). In the light of these conditions, Massey reimagines the notion of 'space' as a 'simultaneity of stories-so-far' (2005, p. 9). The *Arena Hotel* is such a space, created in response to the same conditions. The Hotel spatializes *Arena's* archive and allows it to draw upon an extraordinary referential frame, which simultaneously includes the global and local; the past, present and future — a coexistence of mutable histories. *Arena's* Hotel artistically encourages users to create alternative stories which provide added or meaningful significance to the Hotel's materials. These stories are generated within the gaps between films. Music and sound are employed as subjects and tools used to aid visitors' engagement with these gaps. Music affords the Hotel the means by which, and often about which, simultaneous stories surrounding cultural meaning and shared memories might be experienced, remembered or imagined.



## Endnotes

- 1 The *Arena Hotel* is a collaboration between *Arena* director/editor Anthony Wall, Emma Matthews and several other *Arena* associates, Tony Ageh and Bill Thompson of the BBC, and The Space. The Space (funded by the Arts Council) supports online platforms for art. The Hotel's Software was designed by Klik. The original intention was to expand and update the materials housed in the Hotel. Apart from some minor additions and changes, this has not been carried out.
- 2 Although without the same goal-oriented function, the Hotel is similar to a 'point-and-click' adventure or treasure hunt video game, some of which are themselves indebted to twentieth-century collage techniques (Janik, 2015).
- 3 In 1992, Hamilton reworked his original 1956 collage. The remake was prompted by an invitation from the documentary series *Q.E.D.* to explore computer generated art. Hamilton produced the work digitally and included a bust of Thatcher (Manchester, 2007).

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