The Ring: Conversation Through Projection

Katerina Athanasopoulou
Royal College of Art
k.athanasopoulou@rca.ac.uk
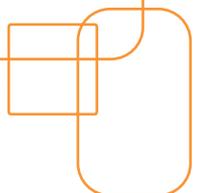
Ian Gouldstone
Royal College of Art
i.w.gouldstone@rca.ac.uk

Brett Phares
aweStruct
brett@awestruct.com

Robert Seidel
Studio Robert Seidel
info@robertseidel.com

| abstract

The Ring emerged as an online art collective during the 2020 pandemic, formed by four artists – Katerina Athanasopoulou (UK), Robert Seidel (Germany), Brett Phares (USA), and Ian Gouldstone (UK) – forging connections in an isolating time. All working with the animated moving image, their practices span fine art, practice-research, festival directing, computer simulation, and curation. This diversity of perspectives shaped the collective's experimental approach into expanded animation. Meeting fortnightly on Skype, members shared and discussed their work, fostering a supportive yet critically engaged environment. A core aspect of *The Ring*'s practice involved disrupting traditional screen-based engagement. Between meetings, members submitted moving image work to each other, which was then projected onto unconventional surfaces. These interventional exchanges were not merely acts of display but became integral to the artistic process, reframing animation as a site-specific and materially embedded experience. By removing moving images from their default flat-screen digital context and placing them within new spatial and physical environments – *The Ring* sought to challenge habitual viewing practices and reveal latent qualities in the moving image work that might otherwise go unnoticed. The projections were documented and formed the ground for further in-group discussion; several works were further developed and exhibited in public events, including *Digital Graffiti* at Alys Beach, Florida (2021), LUMA projection arts festival in Binghamton, New York (2021), and *Phantom Horizons* at Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin (2023). This approach speaks to larger conversations about engagement with screen-based media, as well as shines a light into the in-betweens of a small artists' collective. While the default mode of screen consumption often positions the viewer as a passive observer, the collective's projections activated space in ways that demanded new forms of attention. The re-staging of the animation in unexpected settings recontextualised the work and created hybrid encounters between the moving image and real-world materiality. In doing so, *The Ring* experimented with new forms of collective and individual engagement – bringing together installation, performance, and animation. Equally, it posed fresh questions on ephemerality, documentation, and virtuality as «the unexpected version of reality, the horizon of possible projection» (Silberman-Keller, 2009: 184). This paper takes the form of a conversation between the four founding artists that took place in February 2025, followed by a Flusserian analysis that forms the conclusions and discussion. Through persisting with its dialogic process, *The Ring* is situated within broader debates on the transformation of screen-based experiences, hybridity in contemporary moving image practices, and the ongoing redefinition of audience/artist engagement in an era of evolving screen technologies. With artistic collaboration as a catalyst for transforming limitations into opportunities for innovation beyond technological novelty, the collective reimagines the screen and the ways we interact with it.

1. Introduction

The Ring was initiated during 2020 to provide structure for artists during a time when the world was greatly disrupted. It emerged from conversations between artists Ian Gouldstone [IG], Brett Phares [BP], and Robert Seidel [RS], and quickly grew to include fellow artist Katerina Athanasopoulou [KA]. While public shows were being cancelled or severely restricted, and lockdowns inhibited social contact, the collective sought a way to fight isolation and maintain their artistic practices.

Within this context, the collective treats projection as a site of practice, relation, and inquiry. While much emphasis is often placed on technological innovation – the future promise of a perfected gadget – particular attention is given to the dialogic aspect of the collaboration process, with its iterative re-stagings and improvised setups. The Ring was named for its intended format: participating artists would be placed in a metaphorical circle, where they would form connections with their two adjacent artists by taking on separate roles with each. Their first role was that of a supplier, providing moving image of their own creation to the artist to their "left". Their second role was that of a responder, receiving moving image from the artist to their "right" and projecting it in a way that would visually or conceptually augment the original. They would then share and discuss documentation of this projection with the original artist. This model was envisioned to allow future expansion of the collective; in practice, the collaboration took a different form. With the small number of participants, each artist could respond to all submitted work-including their own. The open structure allowed for more experimentation and expanded the dialogue between the four artists; such plurality would have been difficult to maintain in a larger group. Despite the changed shape, The Ring endured as a name, perhaps echoing the strengthening bond of the group. The core experimental activity of reflexive projection, happening over eight months at the height of the pandemic, has had lasting effects on the four artists; The Ring continues as a regular online meeting.

The collective offered its members a space for practice and reflection-in-action, but its processes of projection can also be examined through Vilem Flusser's "technical images". These differ from traditional images (such as paintings) because they are the products of apparatuses or black boxes, whose processes remain concealed (Flusser 2000 [1983], pp. 15-16). While traditional images were mirrors of the world, technical images are projectors indicating a direction; they "signify instructional programs" (Flusser, 2011 [1985], p. 50).Thinking back at the pandemic era and the lockdowns' enforced isolation while partaking in social networks and video conferencing applications – were we part of a «dialogic, telematic society of image producers and image collectors» or, rather, a «centrally programmed, totalitarian society of image receivers and image administrators» (Flusser, 2011 [1985], p. 4)? The two options, one seemingly promising, the other bleakly dystopian, were offered decades earlier but gained a sharp significance during the pandemic, as technologies of windowed telepresence were creating screens-within-screens. Conversely to this, co-projections through The Ring were making room for each other as artists, and encouraged a re-examination of spaces of everyday life, bathed in brand new electric light. Here, the term co-projection reflects the collaborative aspect as well as the members' co-presence; it relates to the concurrency of their practices while working across different time zones and geographies; it recognises the connections between the multiple projections of shared materials.

Flusser highlights how images produced by apparatuses can appear as objective windows, concealing their programme; in opposition, any criticism of technical images

must be aimed at an elucidation of the black box's inner workings (Flusser 2000 [1983], p. 16). The collective's small-scale, site-specific projections (onto dishwashers, staircase walls, cages, studio detritus) render the apparatus palpable in everyday space and thereby interrupt its automaticity. Writing from a more contemporary viewpoint, Gabriel Menotti and Virginia Crisp reframe projection as a set of practices that are both situated and situating; ones that delineate movement, stage perception, and carve territories (2020, pp. 7-12). This combined lens shines a light into projection as an expressive operation whereby surfaces and sites are not backgrounds but co-authors of meaning. It also clarifies how *The Ring* imagines "Future Screens": rather than grand-scale spectacle, our shared experiments favour DIY screens built from everyday materials, interrupted routines, and dialogic collaboration. For Flusser, technical images risk forming «a collective memory going endlessly round in circles» (2000 [1983], p. 20), so how can we cultivate critical modes of making and viewing, resisting passive repetition? *The Ring* treats projection as an opportunity for such resistance, where artists act critically, as they «use images to create spaces running counter to those that are programmes within apparatuses» (von Amelunxen in Flusser, 2000, p. 93).

The following conversation, recorded in February 2025, captures the group's reflections on their collaboration, and on projection as an artistic and conceptual practice. The edited transcript enacts the responsiveness that defined the group's projection cycles, where process and exposition overlap. "Future Screens" are not only devices but *practices* and *situations*, and the dialogic format aptly *stages* rather than describes only. The dialogic method is therefore both documentary and methodological. To emphasise this aspect, the images presented in this paper stem from the online archive of moving images produced in each cycle; they allow the practice to direct the way while commented upon by their makers. Accessible to the four members, these digital video documentations offer a return to the place of projection, as a repository of experiments and a starting point for dialogue. Apart from screenshots from the individual "home" projections (figures 9-18), there are photographs from certain events where animations previously circulated and tested within the group are in public, within open-air festivals (figures 4-8), as well as two films that were distributed primarily in film festival or gallery settings (figures 2-3). Thus, what was a *homey* setting may also be rehearsing a larger-scale locale, with audiences expanded beyond the original four. However, such exhibitions were not the primary goal of the group, and the cycles archive has not been shared with a wider public as yet.

2. Conversation

IG: Where was everybody when *The Ring* started?

KA: I was at home. I remember looking at you through the screen on Skype, and glancing out through the window into a weirdly silent and empty London.

BP: London sounds like it was a wilderness. I was 90 minutes northwest of New York City. So, in the mountains, Catskills, Shawangunks. Yep, not in the city.

RS: I was in Berlin sitting in my kitchen for the most part. It's kind of obvious that being trapped in one place isn't healthy, so it was good to have you opening my mind and mood.

IG: I can relate to that. I was in London as well. For the most part, I was stuck in my flat with my partner. Towards the end of the pandemic, I could get into the studio. But when

Figure 1. Screenshot from an early meeting of *The Ring* on Skype (2020) Clockwise from top left: Athanasopoulou, Phares, Gouldstone, Seidel.

The Ring started, it was just me, Brett Phares and Robert Seidel, and we were talking about who we could invite to join us, and pitched different candidates, and one of them was Katerina Athanasopoulou.

   KA: I was so happy and a little nervous entering what was, until then, a trio. There was a real sense of pressure – what do I share, what do I *do*? I found some notes of early ideas and they are all expecting to be projected on a flat wall. I was thinking about projection very literally and more as a filmmaker towards a blank screen, but *The Ring* relieved me of my preconceptions.

   IG: What are your favourite outcomes from *The Ring*?

   BP: *The Ring* gave me a different appreciation of the pandemic as a place to reconfigure your head and your practice. Reflecting on it now, I started thinking about this notion of horizon that each of us has, literally and figuratively. The way that we project onto the world gives us a unique sense about where we are in it, but we're so habituated to it that we just don't know it. Breaks like the pandemic reveal to us this world we are in, as it is. I was projecting from my side on the outdoors. But then, with you guys doing the same, we were providing each other these overlays on our own expressions onto other locations. I was really surprised and happy to see and to have my own overlay to the world seen by others, so it's this collaboration that you just didn't know was going to happen.

   IG: That's a really nice term, talking about *The Ring* and projection as an overlay on the world. I'd never really thought of it like that.

   BP: And that's what we're doing, right? So that horizon is super important to me, because it represents multiple overlays.

RS: For me, the most important part was this moment where our artistic process and the therapeutic moments collided. The fact that we had a regular meeting in these uncertain times was really helpful to keep the focus on specific ideas and not let them just slip away. For me, the most interesting result was *Hysteresis*, an experimental film finished in 2021 (figure 2), where the projection became fluid, fusing with a performer's body. Some of the film sequences I used in *The Ring* later became part of the movie itself. I think if we hadn't talked about the expanded screen ideas and the different projection surfaces, I wouldn't have had the confidence to work with someone in a very direct way, because architecture doesn't give you any feedback usually. Buildings are just a different shaped canvas, and working with the body is a whole different thing. We had discussions on a weekly basis, which is something I miss, because at this moment in time it is just complete turmoil with constant travelling. At that particular time we were limited and a lot of things stayed in an experimental stage. But *Hysteresis* is the most refined out of all that time, and it just came to me that everything was connected, even though it wasn't so obvious at that moment. We developed a second language, in a way, to think about projection.

BP: It's like we became both creator and viewer. To me, as an artist, you don't always get that opportunity – simultaneously looking at each other's work and at our work in an unexpected conversation. Of course there are other roles within this cycle, as collaborators in generating new ways of seeing the work and as critics viewing the documentation, kind of crazy, the permutations unfolding in the warmth of a digital domain.

RS: I remember sending you some of the sequences and then everyone projected them in different ways. So I was able to pick out more quickly what would potentially work. I wouldn't call it a *shotgun approach*, but an aleatory way of throwing out ideas and seeing how they refracted through our practice.

KA: Early on we weren't discussing outcomes, it really was a distant-joint studio practice. *The Ring* was about sharing an energy, without fear of exposing oneself too early.

Figure 2. Still from *Hysteresis* (Seidel, 2021).

Figure 3. Documentation images of *The distance between the staircase and the sky* (Athanasopoulou, 2022) as part of *Phantom Horizons* curated by Robert Seidel, Window Display, Künstlerhaus Bethanien. Image credit: Gudrun Krebitz.

On an immediate level, it was special to be able to share work, and we were not too pre-cious with our own, but we were always careful with the *other* persons' work – *that* was precious. I remember feeling that I had to find a way to honour that handing-over, that exchange. We were each other's projectionists, which is a very special job that has been eclipsed by the industry's drive for automation. We were openly handing each other our materials, but also handling each others' materials, and throwing them even further into the world. In the early days of *The Ring* I was in a difficult time in the middle of my PhD, which was on Virtual Reality that I could no longer work with, for fear of contagion. Cer-tain experiments that I started sharing with the group became part of the main filmic outcome of my thesis, the short *The distance between the staircase and the sky* (2022), which you exhibited in Berlin, Robert, as part of the screening series *Phantom Horizons,* in 2023 (figure 3).

IG: My favourite outcome may be a cliche – but I really feel a lot closer to the three of you having gone through this process. We went through a really difficult time together and supported each other. From that perspective, I think that we did a wonderful thing together. Thinking of it from an art perspective... during the pandemic, things got real-ly intellectual because everything was being mediated through the Internet. We were largely sat in front of screens, consuming so many verbal and written ideas, overdosing on memes and irony. We forgot our bodies. Our group brought me back into it. *The Ring* challenged me to feel my way through our work, to place it, to situate it, to augment it in ways that words could not describe. I think that helped keep me sane during that time. There were so many things that didn't make sense and were so unpredictable, and yet it felt the world was growing increasingly logical and technological. It was hard to recon-

cile those two things. So, working in a way that avoided spoken language and embraced ambiguity and uncertainty felt right to me.

KA: Sharing older works brought me a feeling of freedom, and Animation tends to escape containment within screens. Working experimentally, we have so much work that never gets seen, that gets lost in the final edit of a film. We tend to produce more than is necessary because we don't normally work with a storyboard and a set plan. I work with excess, and that excess is what I started giving out.

BP: Did revisiting your personal vault and sharing that excess – those unseen or discarded pieces – help you build trust in vulnerability, or shift your relationship to what's finished or worth showing?

KA: I think that we all had a heightened sense of vulnerability back then, not just creatively but in very physical terms. I remember living in a very short-term kind of way, it was hard to plan too much ahead, so not over-thinking was liberating as well as comforting. There was less time to be precious, I had to put my hand in the hat and see what kind of rabbit I would bring out.

IG: I experienced that too, where I found that I was able to make much more gestural moving image work, and by giving it to the group, I could be surprised by what happened next, what you did with it. And there was something more. Animation can trick you into being a total control freak because it allows you to manage everything in every individual frame. This is sometimes mistaken for an expectation that all these things should be regulated or managed, but doing this often locks things down and the work suffers. The process of *The Ring* opened my work up to others' interpretation, and ultimately their interventions, and helped me resist my urges to dominate the work with a heavy hand. It was liberating and, for me, really enjoyable.

BP: That has had to be my approach curating an event like *Digital Graffiti* – working with pre-existing art and taking it to a context an artist likely has no awareness of and won't be present for. That act makes them vulnerable, because really, they have no idea what I'll do with it. That's the point though, that there is a trust that allows this spontaneity and it's nice when it works above and beyond. And thankfully it works out most of the time.

RS: When we were sending sequences around, I also added some older ones that already had been part of my films. It was a good way to give them a new chance, because each of us was very specific about the approaches. It was a fruitful review of the past in this frozen moment.

BP: The sort of randomized nature of forgotten sequences ended up working well as an overlay to the architecture, to the environment. That helped me rethink forgotten footage. If I had to programme or think through this work, I don't know what *The Ring* would have been for me. It may have been more stressful, it may have been all kinds of different. It wouldn't have contributed to being trustful and more pragmatic to the process.

IG: I'm interested in this word "overlay" that you're using. When I'm that "animator" or the "moving image maker" supplying the moving image to be projected, I'm thinking of what I'm projecting onto as the underlay rather than the overlay – there's a kind of a tussle between what takes precedence. When you're projecting on a cinema screen then the screen acts more like an underlay because the projected images are the dominant thing, whereas, when you project on architecture, it can be so powerful that this does become an overlay, and highlights different features of what's happening in the physical space.

BP: But that's the thing about cinema screens. For you guys, it disappears. It should. For me it can't, I have to work with all surfaces. As a curator, I've had artists tell me they hate doors and windows. As animators or, say, filmmakers, you don't expect your work to be on something else. Architecture is another overlay onto the terrain and it's not something that I'm trying to make disappear. I want it to interact with the artwork. I want it to speak in other ways, and the expression of the architect has been forgotten in a lot of ways. The way I see the work I do with projection is to highlight and re-enliven those under-appreciated instances.

KA: What you're describing is what we were doing – and it seems like the very opposite of projection mapping which prepares itself for a very specific pre-existing canvas, and almost flatters it.

BP: I feel that projection mappers want to negate the surface that they're projecting onto, and an overlay becomes an underlay that's in the screen.

KA: I see the projection-mapper as honouring the surface and that's how the work is designed, as already married to that surface. Whereas when we have independent work falling onto the unexpected, there is a *wandering* taking place, and an opening for a conversation that might be a cacophony; they may be both talking at the same time, over each other.

BP: Right. Well, I want to go back to your reference to projectionists. We became that simultaneous projectionist-audience. That's interesting to me because that happened for *The Ring*. When you're interacting with other expressions, with other overlays, you allow yourself to be vulnerable. You park your self-interest, you are looking at a larger context. You're not thinking about your ego being up there and you become interested in the conversation in a much different, richer way. I just like what it does for artists. I mean, I love the way that they start, and are just taken aback. You guys would see a similar surprise. *Oh my gosh, what did you do? OK, you projected the work in the dishwasher.* Rob is like, *yeah, why wouldn't I want to use the inside of the dishwasher?* That's the kind of instinct as well as the expression. A lot of artists don't get the chance to inhabit that.

RS: The advantage of *The Ring* was that there were no technical obstacles, because I used a tiny projector and walked around my apartment looking for interesting situations. That's why I have chosen, for example, the dishwasher or my bookshelf. When one works at a festival or at exhibition scale, it becomes demanding and prevents a lot of inspirational moments. There is an enormous difference between being a *guerrilla projectionist* and working on a *real scale*. You can work virtually, at a smaller scale or at final scale. I love that it is a step out of the virtual, but still not fully formed into a professional expectation. Today's light art festivals or immersive spaces are glowy and technically perfect. I miss these hybrid, in-progress situations that can change anytime and are allowed to fail, because there is a next iteration in the following week.

IG: The main difference for me is that intimacy that we could achieve within *The Ring*. I liked how we used our personal spaces so much. It was a nice break from institutional or public settings. For example, I got to see my work projected in Katerina's house– on her stairs, in her garden too. Through *The Ring,* I made a mark of sorts in her home and I felt our lives become intertwined. Actually achieving that level of intimacy through projection and installation art can be really difficult. Oftentimes the contexts are so institutional or public. In festivals, galleries and museums, the context can be so heavy. With *The Ring*, placing work in the inside of my friend's dishwasher or the side of their garden shed or the woods beside their house is so light, so unassuming. I get jealous of painters who create a picture, an object, and it is brought into someone's home and they interact

with that thing on a daily basis. They live with this picture and its real meanings are re-vealed in a longer term. It makes me think about how we can make new forms of anima-tion that exist in the same way? All these advances in display technology, how do they open up ways of living with animation as opposed to it being like a special one-off thing? It changes the time scale of their existence. For me, that's a really interesting question.

KA: I love this question "how to live with animation" and it represents a very special drive. As you were talking, I remembered walking around my house in the dark, with a projector, like a detective or a burglar. Reinterpreting our most familiar spaces was shin-ing new light over old things; this is not just a metaphor, but a very literal process. What really delights me, and this goes back to the conversation around in-house experiments versus big festivals, is that we were not hindered by a lack of sophisticated equipment, because we worked with whatever materials we had at hand. In fact, Ian lent me a small projector which was not even HD, but it was very portable and I could push and point it towards any direction, spatially and conceptually. The spectacle of immersive work creates expectations for things that are big, and grand, and very bright, whereas there should be room also for the small and the intimate; that which augments and enlight-ens, but you need to lean towards it. Like poetry, projection does not need to shout.

IG: That makes me think about the throw ratios of projectors. Normally, we have throw ratios larger than one, meaning that the further away the projector is from a sur-face, the bigger and dimmer the image gets. I wonder if you have a throw ratio less than one, do things get smaller and brighter?

BP: Ha – in a way that was the pandemic. A kind of reverse ratio: our environments did get smaller and in a way brighter, while finding ways to be outward-facing, indoors.

KA: It was not just about the projection per se, but about communing. These projec-tions become meaningful when there are people there to move amongst them, so it is also about the ground that we share. For a long time public events indoors were halted, but, when lockdowns were lifted, some of the first things that we were allowed to par-take in were outside and involved projections, like the *Digital Graffiti* or *LUMA* festivals in 2021 where you curated our works, Brett (figures 4-8).

BP: For me this has always been about getting people outside. It's cool that we didn't let the pandemic prevent it from happening in a lot of ways. And it's funny how the pan-demic brought up the recognition that these tiny little projectors have their place.

IG: During the pandemic those mini projectors became really popular and desira-ble. For a while everybody wanted to make a little home theatre for cheap. Going back to *The Ring*: we're talking about it like projection was the final form, but what we were actually doing was projecting, and then recording that, and then sharing the recordings between us. Do you think that that makes a difference? Did that affect the experience, as opposed to actually being there and seeing that with your own eyes?

KA: It changes the experience because, apart from projectionists, we also became cam-era-persons, and, equally, documentarians. It expanded the ephemerality of projection but it also meant that I could take someone else's work, and make my own film based on it. At some point we favoured more of a locked camera approach, a camera on a tripod absorb-ing the view from a static position; an ideal, set place. But I remember thinking, how would you shoot this with movement as well? How would you choreograph it? This relates to how I work in my filmmaking, where I construct a space in CGI 3D and then explore it like a new planet. And while shooting the documentation for *The Ring* was a live performance, I also had permission to rehearse it, and try it again. It was such fun to have your works there, augmenting the world. And I also had a duty to pass it back, to re-project it to you.

Figure 4. *Grid* (Gouldstone, 2021a) as part of *Digital Graffiti* curated by Brett Phares. Alys Beach, Florida.

Figure 5. *Grid (variation 1)* (Gouldstone, 2021b) as part of *lightStruct* curated by Brett Phares. LUMA. Binghamton, NY.

Figure 6. *Sfumato* (Seidel, 2020) as part of *lightStruct* curated by Brett Phares. LUMA. Binghamton, NY.

Figure 7. *Bone Battery 42˚°N &75˚ W* (Phares, 2021) as part of *lightStruct* curated by Brett Phares. LUMA. Binghamton, NY.

Figure 8. *Electric Screen* (Athanasopoulou, 2020) as part of *lightStruct* curated by Brett Phares. LUMA. Binghamton, NY.

IG: It's funny to hear this process described like that. I can see you're on a 2D screen authoring a virtual 3D object, and then you're rendering it down to a 2D file, and then you're projecting it into a 3D World, and then you're re-photographing it into a 2D thing. So it's kind of like a constant vacillation between the two, like a flattening and then an expansion. A compression, then a decompression. It's like breathing, I suppose.

RS: On shooting our experiments – I didn't feel like a documentarian because I was exploring the scene with a moving, hand-held camera. Shooting the dishwasher with a tripod would have been very architectural, but with the constant movement, the focus shifted to reacting to the motion and timing within the projected animations. So there was not only the breathing and the dimensionality, but also controlling the friction within the different concepts of time.

IG: Yes, and I think this was that dance with control I mentioned before. I wanted to find ways of working where I didn't have so much control. That kind of friction was great because reality pushed back.

KA: When I use the word "documentarian" I mean it in the sense of a researcher who goes out to record an event as it is unfolding, without quite knowing how it will pan out. When we were recording these projections, we were also documenting accidental sounds– someone in the room next door, a barking dog, a car horn. These sounds were also augmenting the work and the world. They were infecting and inflecting each other just like in a group show where someone's work is blasting a soundtrack to another's. BP, in the documentation from my *Electric Screen* as part of *lightStruct* at *Luma Festival*, you can hear a visitor chatting with one of the festival workers, and that dialogue is accidental and funny, and instead of looking at the projection I am trying to work out what they're talking about.

BP: It's funny, like you said, because that work of yours is also about the handshake, right? I mean, you have that chirping modem sound, and it's this handshake going on in between the people discussing your work and getting across the street for a beer. That's all part of it though, like you say, that's the bodily response that is amazing about all this. And the pandemic sort of negated that, or tried to negate, the body being in the environment. Given our in-home status, we each found ways to be public in our social and emotional isolation. Ian often interacted with a projected work, in one cycle "marking up" projected

videos on a blackboard surface with chalk. Robert took to finding more internal surfaces, say projecting art into a dishwasher. Katerina and I sought the outdoors in different cycles – Katerina projecting onto a garage door with the moon stage left, while I projected onto a forest stand outside the house. All exploring a means to be public, inside.

KA: Going back into *The Ring*'s documentation archive, which exchanges stand out for you?

IG: My work submitted for round 1 depicts two geometric figures wrestling and forming unique shapes. Katerina's projection at the bottom of her stairs completed the narrative for me. It heightened the dark and humorous qualities of the work while giving it a very domestic context (figure 9). For round 5, I built an assemblage out of objects as a form to receive the images of Brett's film of a simulated horizon. Together, they formed a mood not typically present in my own work, but resonated heavily with the time (figure 10).

Figure 9. Ian Gouldstone's work projected by Katerina Athanasopoulou. Round 1, December 2020.
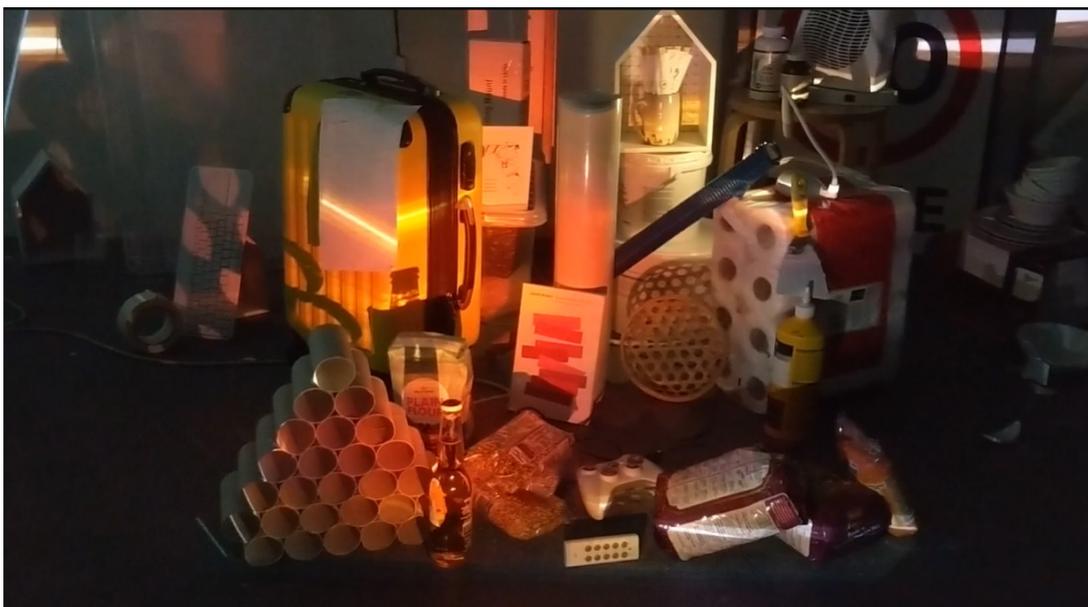
Figure 10. Brett Phare's work projected by Ian Gouldstone. Round 5, May 2021.

RS: This (figure 11) was a key moment early on–taking Ian's graphic work and juxtaposing it with the different shiny surfaces in my dishwasher. The strong colour contrasts shifted the perception of the materials, reflections and shadows became very prominent. And the decoupled camera and mini-projector combination added multiple layers of movement and animation to the minimalist projection sequences. In my own work I try to avoid geometric structures and regularities. But seeing my chaos structured by the venetian blinds opened up a lot of different associations, not even related to the actual geometry (figure 12). Sometimes the projection looked like the stripes that come to life when a DV or VHS tape is fast-forwarded, at other times the changing dimensionality of the blinds added to the perceived shading.

Figure 11. *The Wandering* – Ian Gouldstone's work projected in Robert Seidel's dishwasher. Round 1, December 2020.

Figure 12. Venetian Blinds – Robert Seidel's work projected by Katerina Athanasopoulou. Round 4, April 2021.

BP: I've always been frustrated with projecting my work. Usually low-contrast, low-saturation and low activity, it's tough to find an outdoor placement that doesn't absorb the detail and negate the work. In the first round of *The Ring in* December 2020, Ian and Katerina both projected onto surfaces that echo an intent in the work that was pre-pandemic (figures 13 & 14), bringing with it something bittersweet in their choices regarding being pent-up, and a kind of straitjacket I felt but was not acknowledging. On July 2021, Robert coaxed new layers of subtlety by projecting onto small clear surfaces taken from fruit packaging (figure 15), producing higher contrasts with the reflectivity of the material which then created new structural qualities for me to consider in the future.

Figure 13. Brett Phare's work projected by Katerina Athanasopoulou. Round 1, December 2020.

Figure 14. Brett Phare's work projected by Ian Gouldstone. Round 1, December 2020.

Figure 15. Brett Phare's work projected by Robert Seidel. Round 6, July 2021.

KA: For round 1, my video was of a silver-dressed figure swimming in nothingness, and the stills are from what Brett and Ian did with her. I see the two treatments, how ghostly she appears over Brett's trees (figure 16), how galactic in Ian's surface (figure 17), and it brings out projection as re-animation, but also the spectral virtuality of animation with its endless potential for reinvention. During round 4, projecting Robert's work on my staircase was like releasing a pot of electricity, everything pulsated (figure 18). I look at this documentation still and it brings back the heat of the little projector near my face, the totality of the image taking over my room.
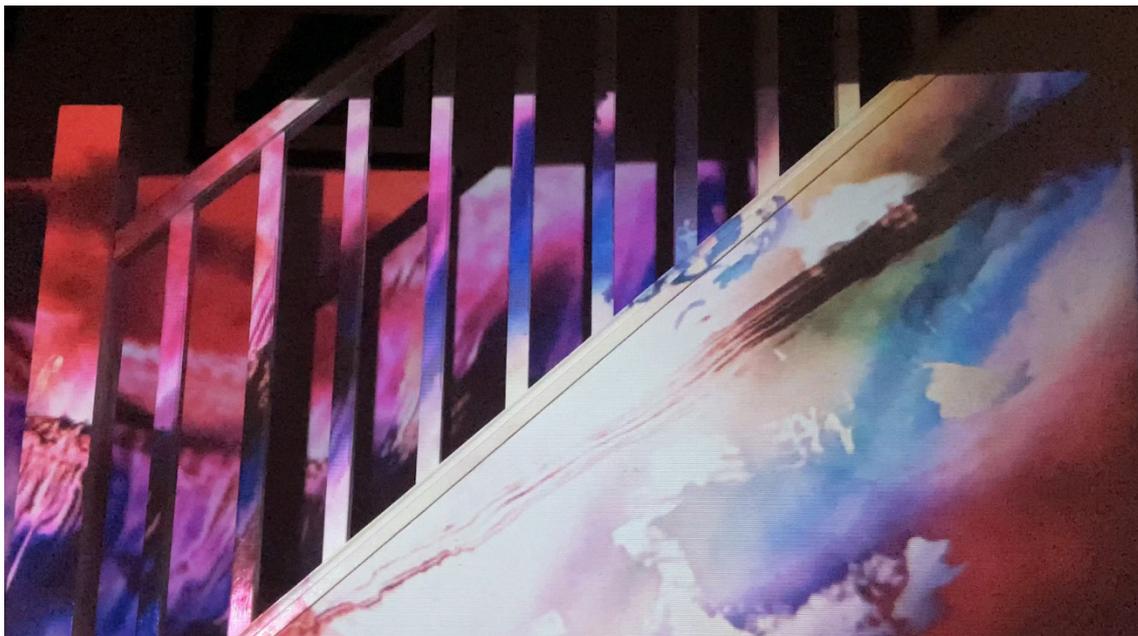
If we were to do another round of *The Ring*, what would you do differently?

Figure 16. Katerina Athanasopoulou's work projected by Brett Phares. Round 1, December 2020.
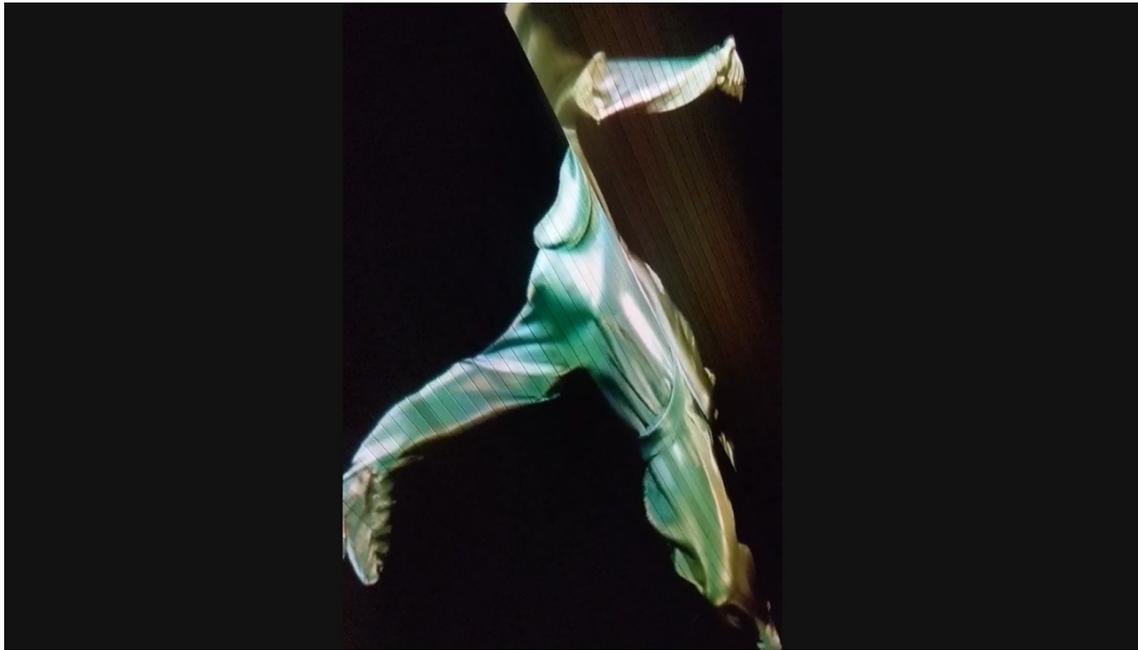
Figure 17. Katerina Athanasopoulou's work projected by Ian Gouldstone. Round 1, December 2020.

Figure 18. Robert Seidel's work projected by Katerina Athanasopoulou. Round 4, April 2021.

RS: Something like a workshop or residency where the same level of intimacy could be achieved would be important. At the moment everyone is busy, so the only chance to break out of the treadmill of life would be a retreat… or, in the worst case, the next pandemic. Something like a conference also would be amazing, even though it might chip away all the lightness of the unbound experiment… I think this kind of freedom is hard to achieve today. But with the right institution, the possibilities of contemporary technology and projection art could be fused in a way that has never been seen before.

BP: Workshop *The Ring*, procure some funding this time, and help set up other artists to do the same, equipped with portable projectors. Find artists with practices outside projection and help them see their work in a different light.

KA: It would be great to continue passing the baton of projection to people outside our existing circle, but how would we carve time to watch and discuss remotely potentially dozens of works? If we forsake the online element, a chain-letter option would involve a single projector and a hard drive with the materials that we would hand (or post) to the next person. Or, there is a *messenger* doing the handover, and the artists do not choose their pairings, so there is a serendipitous collaboration on a level of work rather than personalities. Eventually, we all meet in person, and our documentations could be screened in a live event curated as a culmination of the cycle. That's where the discussion takes place, as we revisit the ground of immersive exchange, together. This option would favour local artists collaborating, and it would probably be less costly. It also carries something of the original idea of *The Ring* – although the feedback between the *supplier* and the *responder* happens at the very end.

IG: During *The Ring*, we brought others' work into our own environments, our studios, gardens, and homes. If we were to do another, I'd like to try doing a similar exercise in a new, unfamiliar environment. We'd still be projecting each others' work, but in new spaces. Our first few rounds helped us form closer relationships with the other artists and their work. By working in new environments, I think we could deepen our relationships with new spaces too. I can imagine exploring a new park, or even an abandoned building, equipped with a battery pack, a projector, and my friends' animation.

As Katerina mentions, though, it would also be great to find a way to work with more people. I learned that the process works best when we make ourselves vulnerable – either by sharing work we're still developing or handling someone else's work we're still getting to know – so we'd need to put some thought into how we could grow the group without making people feel uncomfortable. I suppose the obvious solution is to work through referrals, but I wonder if there is a way of embedding our values in the structure of *The Ring* as well. That way, it could grow to a huge number of artists without a lot of central coordination. Of course, the other way would be to share the model, as we've done here, and let other groups try it out for themselves. I'd love to see how others adapt this model of collaboration to suit their own groups.

3. Conclusions and Discussion

The Ring has been discussed as an experiment in collaborative projection, and as a method of documenting artistic practice in dialogic form; the transcript carries something of the informal immediacy of the participant exchanges, ones that would be impossible to fully recreate today; not only are we not confined in our home environments; Skype was retired in May 2025, mere weeks after this conversation was recorded. In this sense, this paper is also an archaeology of practices of projection that are destined to become obsolete but which Animation may rehearse afresh. The dialogic format of the main body of the text is not incidental but reflects the multiple cycles of exchange, emphasising process over closure and relation over linearity; most importantly, meaning emerges in conversation rather than in isolation.

The Ring engages directly with a Flusserian account of technical images that form a collective memory going endlessly around in circles, and which nothing can resist (Flusser, 2000 [1983], pp. 19-20). By projecting onto ordinary, improvised surfaces, the group interrupts this loop and draws attention to the apparatus and its contingencies. Such interventions make visible what is usually concealed – the mechanics of throw,

scale, and surface; the way these materials co-create and co-determine meaning, re-claiming images from passive circulation and opening them to reflection. Some of these works were later used in new films; others stemmed from "excess" materials that found new life in new surroundings. As Menotti and Crisp also remind us, projection is an event that insinuates itself into space, and is both situated and situating; it depends on new conditions while simultaneously producing new territories (2020, pp. 7-12). *The Ring* ex-emplifies these qualities: in each experiment, surfaces such as domestic appliances, blades of grass, blinds, did not merely receive images but transformed them (and be-came transformed) through unrehearsed (and semi-rehearsed) stagings. In these un-expected arrangements between bodies, technologies, and environments, projection arranges new space rather than simply transmits content. The move away from the tra-ditional flat surface can be discussed in terms of a "broken screen", for how the moving images meet holes, extrusions, rough edges of many kinds. This is a version of expanded animation which allows images to go wild, and to roam into unexpected facets/facades from everyday life. As proposed in the above conversation, a future iteration of the model could venture out in new spaces, carrying forth "friends' animation".

The structure of *The Ring* ensured that no image was final but always on its way to becoming something else: offered, transformed through projection, and returned. This cyclical exchange refigures process rather than product, while at the same time asks questions on authorship: with the work played back-and-forth between multiple hands, a polyphony emerges, that changes tone with every new corner illuminated by the projector. While Flusserian apparatus or black boxes risk producing closed loops, *The Ring* enacted a circle of dialogic transformation rather than passive circulation, so that repetition becomes renewal, and dialogue is affirmed. With the documentations of the projections only ever reaching the four group members, *The Ring* acted less like a public event and more like a remote studio or virtual residency, where the exchanged artwork would be relocated in a new physical space through projection. The audience here was an *insider* one rather than one comprising of passers-by.

This orientation towards a closed circuit, discussed by the artists as proven difficult to expand on a large scale, also belies its central concern with testing how images behave when re-framed and re-situated. The images did not enter the "endless circulation" of mass culture but remained within a critical loop where the apparatus was also interro-gated. The stairwell and the forest produce a temporary territory and a site of reflection rather than a stage for a public crowd. Seeing *The Ring* as a small-scale residency con-ducted via projection, underscores the potential of projection beyond reaching audi-ences and as a method of sustaining artistic dialogue under restrained conditions. This distinguishes it from other pandemic-era artistic activities focusing on circulation and accessibility of the work, such as the online series TRANSMISSIONS, whereby Anne Duf-fau, Hana Noorali and Tai Shani commissioned artists to share their work, in response to the pandemic-induced postponements and cancellations (Somerset House, undated). Rather, *The Ring* foregrounded projection as a dialogic event, not an endpoint but a pro-cess of discovery and collaboration between humans, apparatus and surface. Crucially, the four artists emphasised the healing aspect of their collaboration, and the entrance into each other's personal space extending an invitation to "live with animation".

From these perspectives, *The Ring* proposes a vision of "Future Screens" that diverg-es from dominant narratives of technological seamlessness or immersive spectacle, and whereby screens appear as provisional, relational and dialogic. They are formed in the encounter between images and surfaces, shaped by the conditions of their appearance,

and opened up to criticality through shared reflection. It is a playful and serendipitous process, accompanied by metal reflections sparked when the projector's beam shines – with animated chrome – upon physical chrome (figures 10, 11, 15, 17). The modest scale of the experiments discussed by the artists and presented in process and documentation images, underscore the potential of small, situated practices as a way of questioning the automated logics of contemporary media. The persistence of using small, inexpensive projectors also suggests that the vitality (the *animation*, even) of screen culture lies not only in technological innovation but in the cultivation of practices where screens are environments rather than objects; where they function less as sites of immersion and more as occasions for dialogue, intimacy, and care.

References

Athanasopoulou, K. (2021) *Electric Screen* [video].

Athanasopoulou, K. (2022) *The distance between the staircase and the sky* [short film].

Flusser, V. (2000) *Towards a philosophy of photography* (translated by A. Mathews). Reaktion Books.

Flusser, V. (2011) *Into the universe of technical images* (translated by N.A. Roth). University of Minnesota Press.

Gouldstone, I. (2021a) *Grid* [live simulation].

Gouldstone, I. (2021b) *Grid (variation 1)* [live simulation].

Menotti, G. & Crisp, V. (2020) *Practices of projection: histories and technologies*. Oxford University Press.

Phares, B. (2021a) *Digital Graffiti*. Alys Beach, Florida.

Phares, B. (2021b) *lightStruct at LUMA*. Binghamton, New York. Available at: https://lumafestival.com/feature/lightstruct-catalog/ (accessed: 21 November 2025).

Seidel, R. (2015-2024) 'Phantom Horizons' [screening series].

Seidel, R. (2020) *Sfumato* [short film].

Seidel, R. (2021) *Hysteresis* [short film].

Silberman-Keller, D. (2009) *Mirrors Triptych Technology: Remediation and Translation Figures*. Atropos Press.

Somerset House (undated) *Transmissions with not/nowhere*. Available at: https://www.somersethouse.org.uk/whats-on/transmissions-notnowhere (accessed: 21 November 2025).