

VIDEO COMMISSION

27 December 2022 – 12 March 2023

a head is a place to go

James Vaughan and Tom Polo

Text by Giles Fielke

Cinematic narrative is, like narrative as such, an ongoing concern for what we still call the arts today. As Pier Paolo Pasolini understood in 1965, and perhaps Stan Brakhage before him: there is no dictionary of images. The cinema is not a text. Film is an inversion of the arts—*ut pictura poesis*—in that it is images that come first, with language in their wake. This is why images are often claimed as evidence of the universal (and are the ‘other side’ to the same coin as mathematics). Our ultimate image of the world, after all, is a map. More than seven-hundred years ago now, a man wrote a love-letter. Dedicated to the ideal of his love, to her memory, it was composed in the ideal form of a poem. To fully reveal this world to his love, it was necessary to imagine a map of the whole world. This map was not a spatial representation or facsimile of the world, it was allegorical. Therefore, it was possible to visit all points on this map, as if it was a path. To go there and back again is the basic definition of a narrative. But if this pathway led to the stars, so too does the cinema. To reach them, the man, a poet, spent the most his time approaching his destination in the company of another man, also a poet. The two men visited everyone who had ever lived (and could be remembered). We might ask: but how do we do this today?

what would you say if you were speaking to someone who's trying to understand you? – Olúfẹ́mi O. Táíwò, Twitter, 9 December 2022.

Virgil and Dante arrived by boat to the mountain, an island, that is the location of the Purgatorio. To come to Purgatory is to arrive at the threshold of Paradise. We anticipate, with every other living soul—in their own time and with others—the possibility of salvation. However, the language we speak today is not the language of poetry, or even of love, necessarily. Our language is inverted, it is the everyday language of the present and it is the way we go about our days (and as antipodeans). Today purgatory is for us an aimless, endless, and completely unquestionable way to live in our world. We have lost the mandate of heaven. Yet if we feel as though we still may remain at the threshold of paradise, we might ask: why? What is it that gives us the sense that we are nearly there, or that our arrival at every destination is also our purpose? Perhaps it is the knowledge that we are already living in our paradise, and that we are already living in our hell. It is a secret held by everyone, that the map of our world perfectly fits over the map of every other world, and that they are the same worlds, and that they are all of them happening right now. Alongside us and in every possible iteration, we are on the pathway to the end of the poem without poetry.