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Unfolding the Aryan Papers at the BFI

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If you're heading to the BFI Southbank to catch any of the Stanley Kubrick films playing in its retrospective right now, be sure to check out the accompanying exhibition in the BFI Southbank Gallery.

[Unfolding The Aryan Papers](#) is a video installation by **Jane and Louise Wilson**, focusing on an abandoned project of Kubrick's he planned to make after [Full Metal Jacket](#) in the 1990s.

Aryan Papers was to be an adaptation of Louis Begley's [Wartime Lies](#), a novel about the Holocaust which tells the story of a Jewish woman and her nephew who go into hiding during the nazi occupation of Poland.

The film that the Wilson twins have constructed centres on **Johanna ter Steege**, best known for her debut role in George Sluizer's original version of [The Vanishing](#), who was set to be Kubrick's lead actress in the movie.

Steege recalls her experiences working with Kubrick during this time, relating the initial joy and eventual disappointment she felt when realising this career defining project that had been given the green light was to be shelved.

This is a film filled with ghosts. Photo stills of Steege in character during the pre-production phase of **Aryan Papers** are interspersed throughout the film. The viewer sees her wearing costumes and acting out scenes for what turned out to be a non-existent character.

Also included is new footage shot by the Wilson sisters of Steege moving ghostlike through a series of empty rooms, in which she appears to be placed back within this vanished film. The film's fragmentary quality collapses time in on itself, with the past and the future sent weaving through one another.

This ghostly quality of the installation is amplified by the mirrors placed on each side of the room in the gallery, resulting in the screen being reflected both forward and backwards to infinity. The screen the viewer watches appears like a single frame extracted from a reel of film, a lost relic which the viewer has stumbled into, existing outside of time.

The project was cancelled in 1995. Steege sensed the Holocaust was too depressing and complicated a subject matter for Kubrick to handle, his perfectionism as a director stopping him from feeling like he could do justice to the story.

With so many conflicting narratives and so much horror, Kubrick found it impossible to extract any semblance of truth from this mass of information and get the film off the ground.

This installation may be about loss and emptiness and voids, but by it's very creation the Wilson twins have succeeded in giving new life to something that appeared dead and buried. Kubrick fans can be thankful that they've been given such a fascinating glimpse into what might have been yet another masterpiece by this monumental director.

Unfolding The Aryan Papers is showing at the BFI Southbank Gallery now until 26 April.

James Mansfield