





Edgar Martins

The Life and Death of  
Schrödinger's Cat

MOCA London  
04 - 26 February 2022

Goldsmiths University of London  
screening and lecture  
4 May 2022

In February 2022 MOCA London projected Edgar Martins' film *The Life and Death of Schrödinger's Cat*, onto the outside front windows. This was followed by a screening and lecture at Goldsmiths University of London in May 2022.

The film is one part of a multifaceted body of work titled *What Photography & Incarceration have in Common with an Empty Vase*, developed from a collaboration with Grain Projects and HM Prison Birmingham (the largest, category B prison in the Midlands, UK), its inmates, their families as well as a myriad of other local organisations and individuals.

Using the social context of incarceration as a starting point, Martins explores the philosophical concept of absence, and addresses a broader consideration of the status of the photograph when questions of visibility, ethics, aesthetics and documentation intersect.

By productively articulating image and text, new and historical photography, evidence and fiction, Martins' work proposes to scrutinise how one deals with the absence of a loved one, brought on by enforced separation. From an ontological perspective it seeks answers to the following questions: how does one represent a subject that eludes visualization, that is absent or hidden from view? How can documentary photography, in an era of fake news, best acknowledge the imaginative and fictional dimension of our relation to photographs?

By giving a voice to inmates and their families and addressing prison as a set of social relations rather than a mere physical space, Martins' work proposes to rethink and counter the sort of imagery normally associated with incarceration.

The project thus wilfully circumvents images whose sole purpose, Martins argues, is to confirm the already held opinions within dominant ideology about crime & punishment: violence, drugs, criminality, race – an approach that only serves to reinforce the act of photographing and photography itself as apotropaic devices.

“The film element of this project, titled *The Life and Death of Schrödinger's Cat*, deploys a succession of photographs, strongly reminiscent of scientific illustration and documentation, and that remarkable 1977 photobook by Larry Sultan and Mike Mandel, *Evidence*, in which their appropriations use an older, outdated mode of photography to show a testing

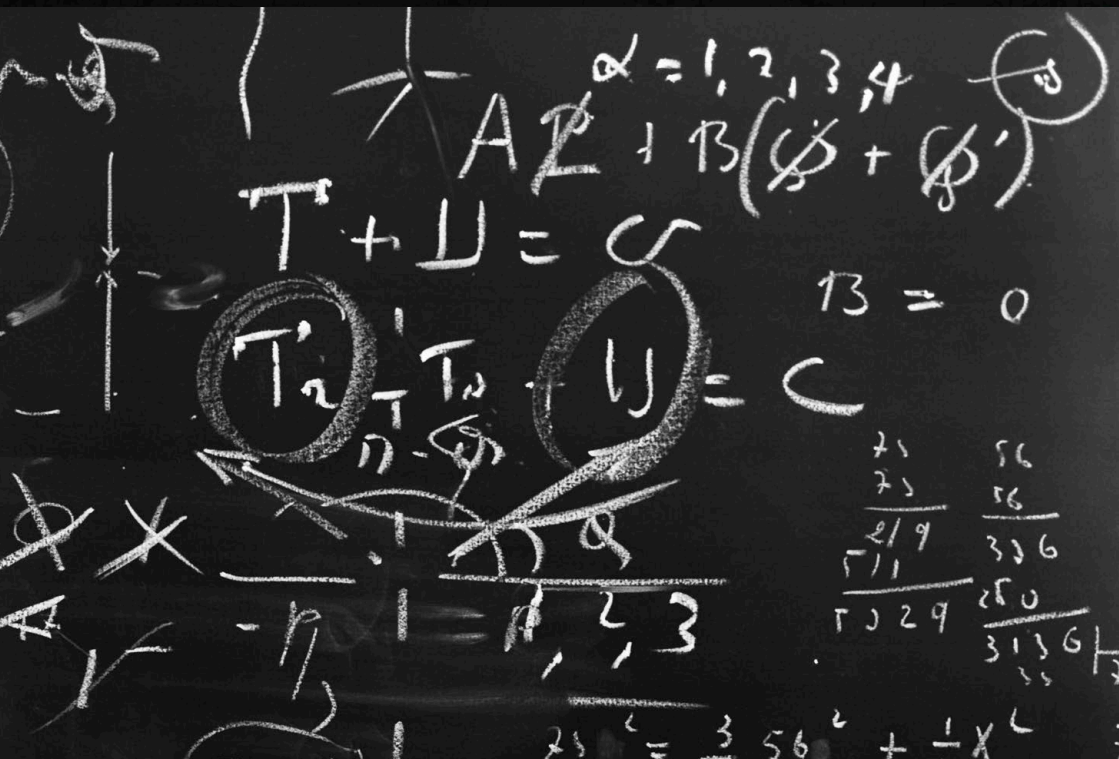
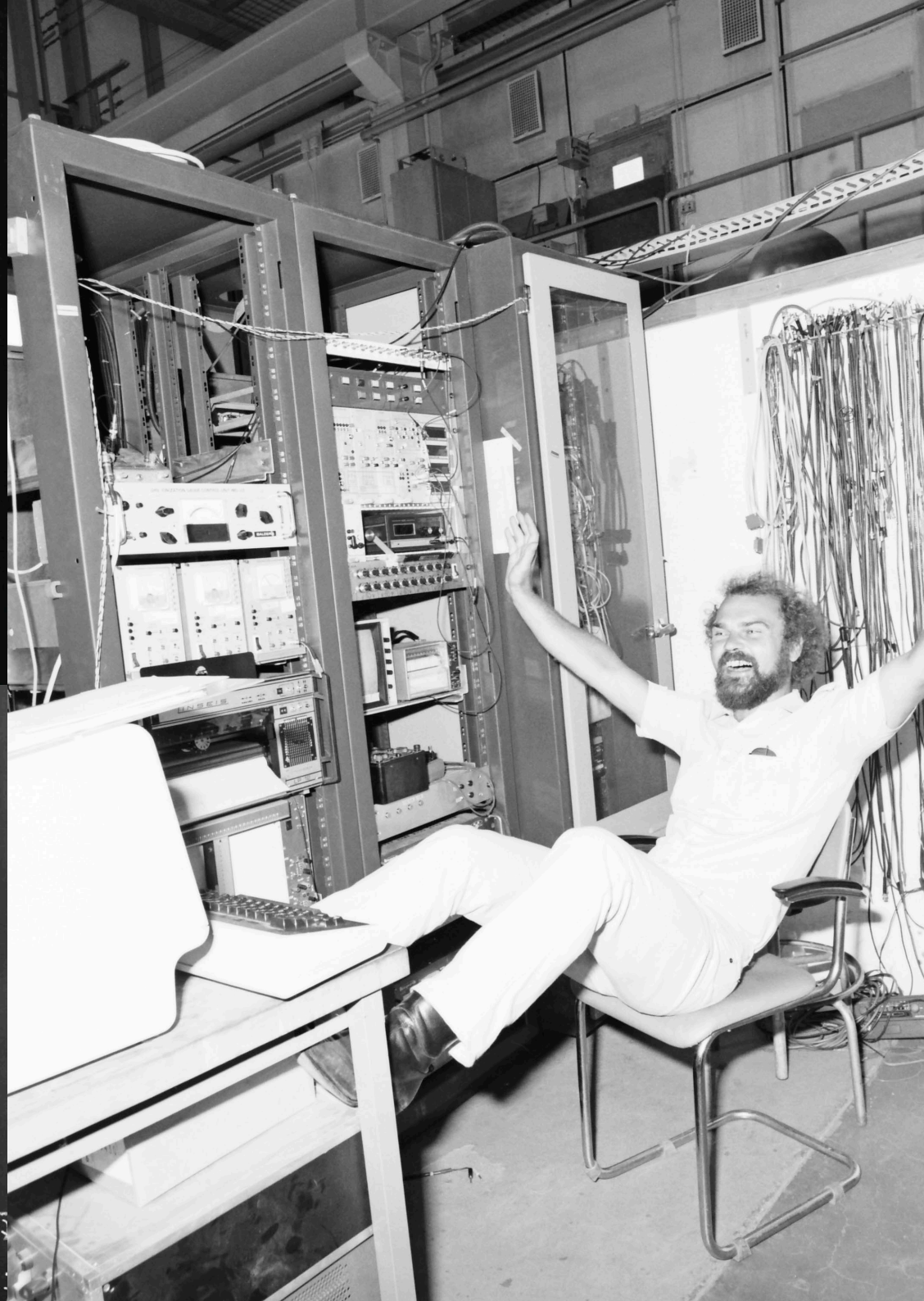
of truth and certainty in the wake of Watergate and Vietnam. All fail to illustrate and communicate and become instead science fiction, beautiful enigmas.

Martins sourced his photographs from the archives of CERN, the European Space Agency and an archive he has built up from images in defunct newspapers. They typify a dated scientific aesthetic, testimony to a faith and fascination in the value and virtue of technology. The photographs show tests, experiments, very often with materials, images about vision, about looking and a lot of pointing, deictic gestures that do not give us clarity, but underscore the shortfall between what is being presented to us in the picture and what sense we are supposed to take from it.

The difference with *Evidence* is we do not encounter just pictures. Martins' photographs are sequenced to accompany an elaborate fiction (a script produced in collaboration with the renowned Portuguese physicist and CERN scientist João Seixas), an absurdist story of a prison that is built to create the maximum absence of its inmates from society. The prison is an experimental facility set-up in the Midlands in the 1950s to explore the feasibility of two different incarceration models, Cryoguard and QSafe. Cryoguard involves having fully automated penitentiary systems managed by autonomous robots and with prisoners undergoing cryopreservation, so sentences can last centuries. QSafe involves confining dangerous prisoners in an unknown remote location, with only two judges having keys that give them access to the quantum encrypted information as to where the prisoners are. In relation to this fiction, we should bear in mind Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1975) - its powerful opening pages, which set up the opposition between the public spectacle of the brutal execution of a regicide in mid eighteenth-century France and the rules for the “House of young prisoners in Paris”, eighty years later; an account of torture and a time-table, in order to show how punishment became the most hidden part of the penal process. In many ways Martins' “documentary-fiction” about the disappearance of prison and prisoners might be seen as an extension of this shift towards invisibility in the penal system.” (Excerpt from *Against Documentary* by Mark Durden, in *What Photography & Incarceration have in Common with an Empty Vase*, The Moth House, 2019).

This project marks a significant transition in Martins' creative trajectory, signalling a growing inclination towards a broader, more hybrid and interdisciplinary perspective of images.





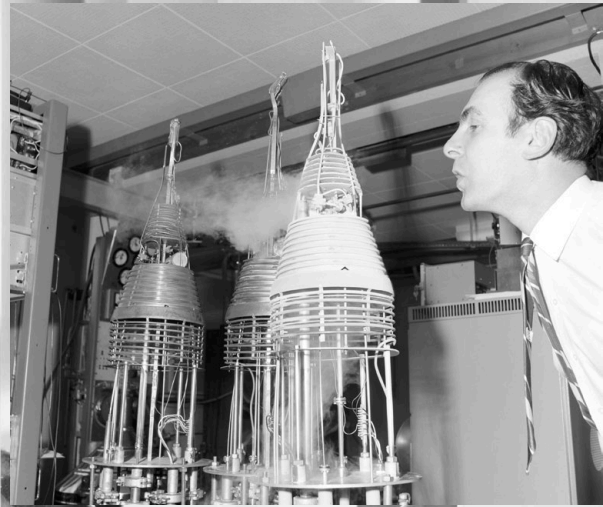
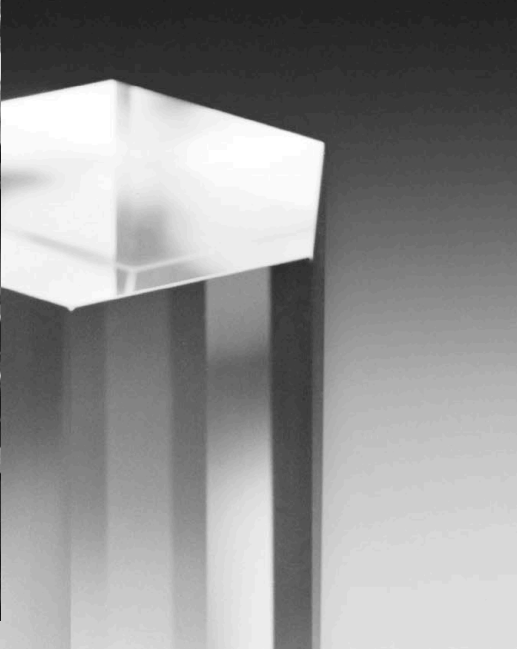




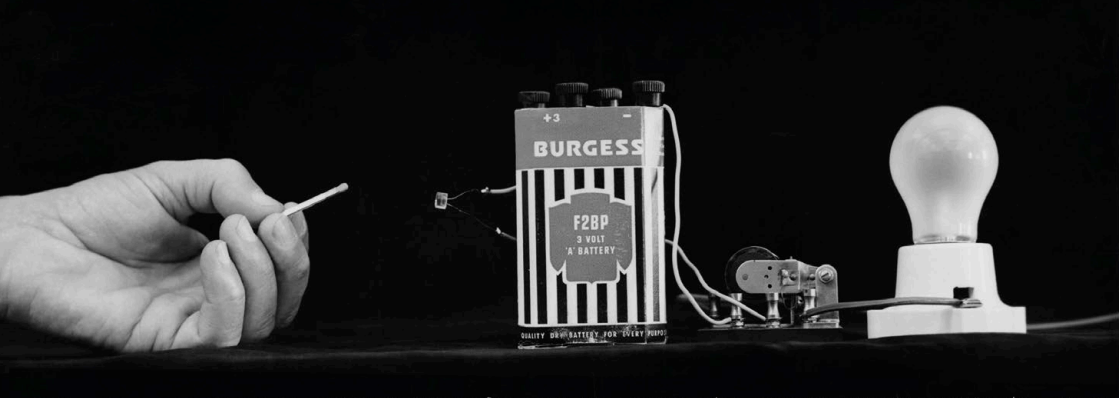




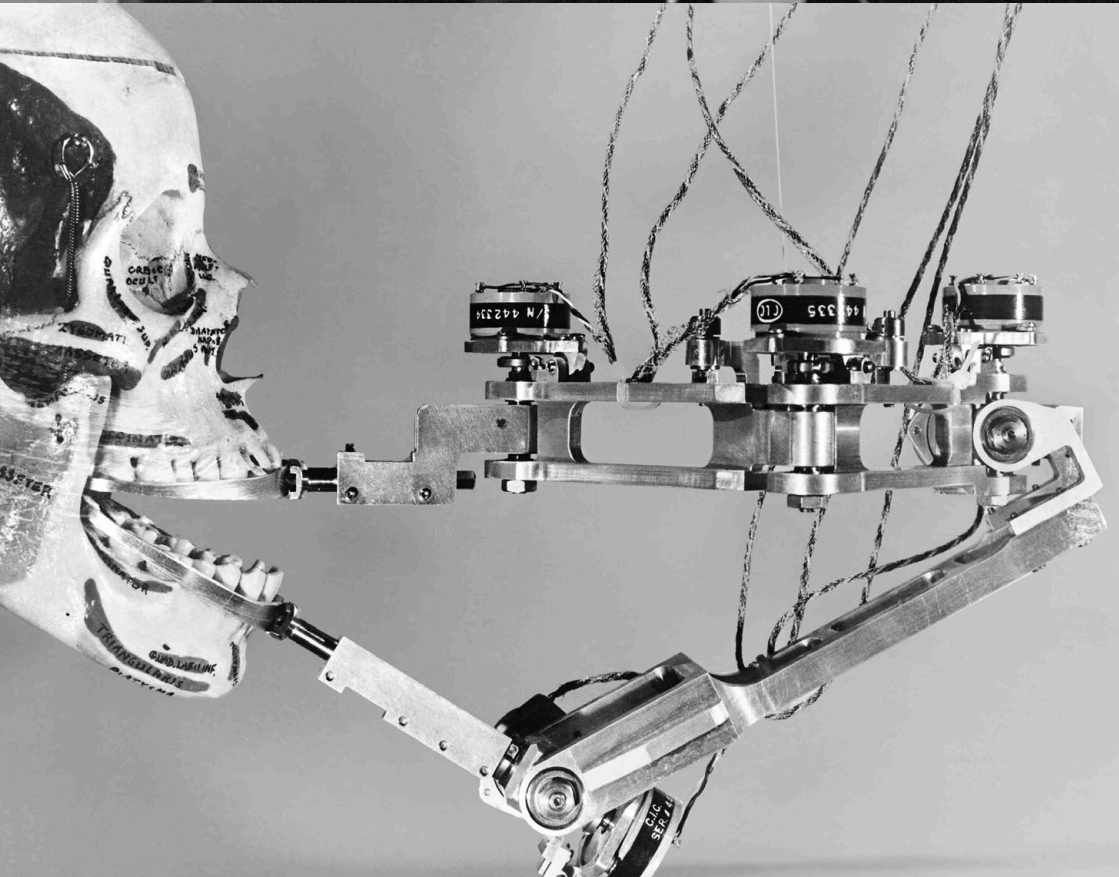
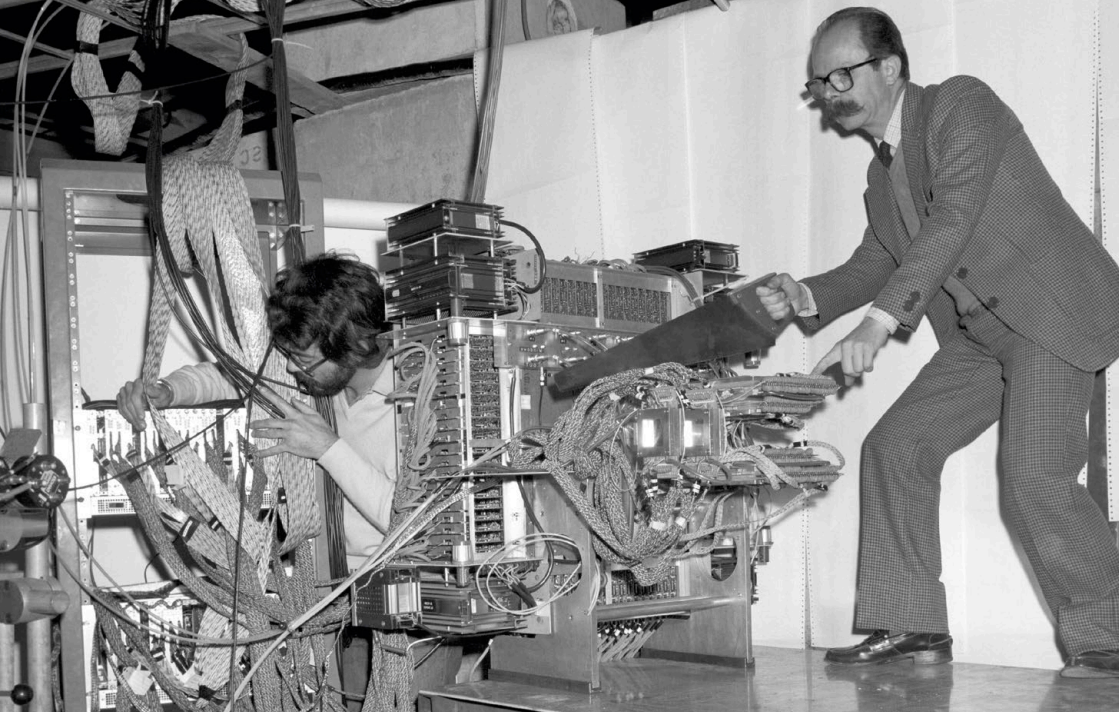














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All images from *The Life and Death of Schrödinger's Cat*, by Edgar Martins, from the series *What Photography & Incarceration have in Common with an Empty Vase*, 2019.

The images in the catalogue have been cropped, superimposed and slightly adjusted.

[www.edgarmartins.com](http://www.edgarmartins.com)

Screening and lecture, 4 May 2022, Goldsmiths University of London.

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