AESTHETICS OF ABSENCE

Mia Engberg

To everyone who made this possible, thank you.

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C'EST PAR LE MANQUE QU'ON DIT LES CHOSES.

MARGUERITE DURAS

FOREWORD

As I sit writing this, Stockholm's early summer nights are ablaze again, huge flames flare up over the city alongside the hot air balloons that always turn up in the sky around this time. They say it is young people at the edges of the city setting fire to cars and other things, and I think to myself that nothing will ever be able to extinguish their anger this time, nothing will ever be able to restore their faith.

Vince, are you there?
Yes.
Everyone is innocent.
No they aren't.
And you, don't you deserve more than this?
No.

He comes from the city by the sea and his parents are poor and when the father leaves them, he goes to Paris and has to live under bridges with the prostitutes. He learns to steal, he learns to be hard and strong with an inside smooth like velvet. How I wanted you. One night she descended into the catacombs of Paris, those sprawling subterranean tunnels under the city – at first that was where they brought their dead so they wouldn't spread their illnesses in the city, and then later, during the second world war, it became a secret meeting place for the resistance movement – but she could never bring the man she found there back up from the darkness, he remained there, and all she had left were the memories that belonged to him, and to her. And the question that runs like a thread through Belleville Baby: what is justice?

When I saw the film for the first time, it slammed into me like a wave. I sat there alone in the darkness of the cinema and felt that it had been my story, that my beloved had been the one who had disappeared in the underworld. It was as if enormous ocean waves were crashing into the cinema; waves of cold, shimmering silver photographic developer coursing through my veins. What was it that I had recognized? Perhaps that odd, paradoxical feeling of standing in the light, but so close to someone else's darkness? Not only that. It was also a question of the boundary between vulnerable and privileged, the question of those staggering seconds in which our lives diverge, the moment that is usually called fate. But most of all, what I recognized was probably the roaring heartbeat of a person missed, which sounds the same all over the world: in a prison cell in southern France, in a little Stockholm suburb. Afterwards, when I emerged into the light, I wanted to write down those voices, Mia Engberg's lonely, naked voice and then his, the voice of the dreamt love. I thought that the voices were like a thin Marguerite Duras novel, and I thought about how text and images and sounds can never bring back what we have lost, that the world outside is a horrible place, that every angel is terrible, like Rilke wrote, and that nothing can ever be put right, but that the word love exists, as Duras wrote. That word, the one that can stretch down into the underworld, into the darkness of the flickering hate of prison cells and back to the room in Marseilles a long time ago, over the white sheets of the narrow bed, over loneliness and destruction.

Why were you in jail?
It's a long story.
Tell it.
A robbery that got out of hand.

Did you kill someone?
Why are you asking? You want to make a film about me. You're a colonizer.
Maybe, your life is political.
No. I'm a gangster. I don't want you to make a film about me.
One day you'll be gone, and all I'll have left is the film.
But I'm already gone.
Not for me.

They say that every work of art must commit a crime. That's what propels it forward, it's what spins the thread of beauty and significance that weaves in and out of a work: a secret revealed, a trust broken, the destruction of decorum. Art always entails violation, and Vincent is not the only criminal here; Mia Engberg shares criminality with him, just as they once shared everything, dreams, bodies, days, nights, the heavens over that little skylight in Marseille. I find the skies to be so strangely present in Belleville Baby. And maybe the clouds that push along and dissipate in the skies of Europe are also a reminder that heaven belongs to all of us, and maybe everything on earth should, too.

Sara Stridsberg

–I HAVEN’T BEEN IN PARIS SINCE...
YOU..

EVERYTHING BEGINS

I got a phone call from a man who had been very close to me. It was winter and I had just given birth to my second child. At that time of my life I was single. I was 36 years old. Eleven years had passed since I had last heard from that man and the conversation upset me. Our conversation would later be the opening scene of my film.

- Hello
- Is this Mia?
- Hello, who is this?
- It's me.
- Who?
- It's me, Vincent.

- Is it really you?
- Yes... I'm sorry that I...
- How did you find me?
- It was easy. I searched online... there's a lot about your films and...
- But...
- Are you in Stockholm?
- Yes, and you?
- Paris.
- I haven't been in Paris since... you.

- I'm sorry...
- Where did you go?
- I'm really sorry I disappeared like that.
- So where...
- I wanted to come back to you, but I couldn't.
- What do you mean you couldn't?
- I couldn't...
- Vince?
- I was locked up, ok?

- You were in jail?
- Yes.
- All these years?
- Yes, almost.
- But why didn't you write to me?
- I knew I'd be in a long time. I didn't want you to wait for me... I was embarrassed maybe. I don't know. I wanted to keep you away from all that.
- You wanted to keep me away for ten years?
- Yes, but...
- Then why are you calling me now?
- I just wanted to hear your voice and... I wanted to say I'm sorry.

Why did the conversation upset me? It felt like the man who had once been so close to me had come back from the dead and time was out of joint. I saw my life through different eyes, as if I had once again become the 20-year-old I had been then and was looking at the middle-aged woman I had now become. Suddenly I could sense the dreams and the longing I'd had and forgotten but maybe also preserved.

All of the things that are usually concealed became visible; time that passes, the ageing that changes us, the memories preserved inside of us and the fact that everything, everything, will someday be taken from us. Our love, our youth, our

dreams, our memories and finally our lives. That thought had never been part of my life before then. Maybe because I had been young, younger. Because I had been busy giving birth to children, making films, falling in love, breaking up; the things people do when they are young. I knew I would have to die, but I also didn't know it. Now everything had become visible. I write visible because it came as images. Images of my children who will someday be adults. The image of myself as an old woman, sitting alone at my kitchen table with a cup of coffee. The image of the impermanence of everything.

Even the moment in which I am writing this text will become a memory. (Or it will be forgotten. What will it be then?) Or, like so often, I will only remember it when I am reading this text. And thus the text's account of reality has become more real than what was lived. Is that why we create? To stop time? To triumph over death? All these thoughts flowed through my head during, or maybe after the conversation with the man who had once been so close to me.

William Shakespeare
Sonnet 64

When I have seen such interchange of state
or state itself confounded to decay
ruin hath taught me thus ruminate
that time will come and take my love away.
This thought is as death, which cannot choose
but weep to have that which it fears to lose.

The thought of a film came quickly. Like a way out.

I wondered how I could render time visible. I thought about how I spoke with that man from my past and how his voice in my ear was giving rise to visual memories while my gaze rested on my children playing on the living room floor. The now that has to disappear. Sound - Image - Time.

There was another aspect of all of it that upset me. The fact that the man who had once been so close to me had been in prison for so many years while I had been living a good life, gotten an education and made a name for myself as a film director, had children. The injustice bothered me and filled me with shame. We had, at one time in our lives, occupied the same space socially, financially, mentally. Then life had led us different places. I had become one of the privileged. This was another fact I hadn't reflected on much before.

It troubled me that our life choices are controlled by our social heritage to such a great degree. As if our lives had been determined in advance. He was a street kid, born into a migrant working class in France. I came from a pretty stable Swedish middle class. People like to think that they make their choices themselves. That they earn their place in the cultural elite. I was a film director and a teacher at a film school, but he, who was just as intelligent and creative as me, had become a bank robber.

- Are you still as good looking as you used to be?
- No (laughs). I only have gold teeth now, because they knocked out all of my teeth.
- Who? The police?
- No, other inmates. It was war in there and I didn't know anyone, so I had to defend myself. That's why I had to stay in so long. My sentence was shorter at first.
- What happened?
- I knew they were coming one day, so I sharpened the handle of my toothbrush and waited.
- What did you do with the toothbrush?
- After that they left me alone.

My first thought was to make a documentary about the man who had once been close to me. Describing what's around me in a documentary way – that's what I do. That's what I used to do. (See the chapter on Cinema Direct). But I soon gave up that idea. He didn't want to be in a documentary film. And I didn't want to make that film.

But the idea of representing it artistically remained. Some ideas are hard to shake once they have gotten hold of you. The basic idea was Time - Memory - Longing - What has been lost.

THE STORY OF FLORENCE REY

I took out the box where I keep my diaries. First I read my diaries from Paris. Then I read all of the other ones too. I've been writing since I was eight years old. Then I read all of the letters I've kept, all the notes, newspaper clippings. It took me days. I got stuck on a clipping from the French magazine VSD from 1994. Or not a clipping. The whole magazine had been saved, tucked neatly in a plastic sleeve so that nothing would get lost.

There is a close-up of a girl's face on the cover of the magazine. The girl was Florence Rey. She was involved in the deadly shoot-out at Place de la Nation. She and her boyfriend had broken in to an arsenal and a police chase had ensued. Shots had been fired during the chase and four police officers and a taxi driver were killed. Florence's boyfriend, Audry Maupin, had also been killed. Later, during the police investigation, it came out that the bullets from Florence's weapon hadn't killed anyone, but no one knew that when the article in VSD was published. "Dialogue with the murderess" was printed under the image of her face. She had a cut on her cheek and was looking right at the viewer with hate-filled eyes. The image exuded violence. Florence Rey was 19 years old at the time.

I was living in Paris when it happened. I remember that I read everything I could get my hands on about Florence. I felt like her. I wanted to be friends with her. To visit her in prison. Already back then I wanted to make a film about her.

My French friends were not as enchanted. A lot of them were anarchists who lived in squats. Others were involved in various subversive or illegal activities. There had been raids all over Paris after the shoot-out at Place de la Nation. The police wanted to uncover the connection between the anarchist movement and Florence Rey. Squats were evacuated, people who didn't have anything to do with the incident were put in custody.

The man who was close to me then was angry and thought that Florence and Audry had made a mess of things. "Stealing weapons to make a revolution. Idiotic." He forbade me from making a film or talking about Florence Rey anymore. I did what I was told at the time. But I saved the magazine with her face on it and I thought that: maybe someday...

Now, when I found the magazine in my box, the thought returned. Maybe this was my film about Time - Memory - Longing - What has been lost? A documentary about Florence Rey that could reflect my own story as well? She must be about 40 now. Maybe she would be released from prison soon. Maybe we had shared acquaintances. Shared memories? Maybe she could have been me, if things had gone differently.

I wrote a synopsis and submitted it to the advisory officer for documentary film at the Swedish Film Institute at the time, Tove Torbiörnsson.

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Florence and The Absence

Her eyes stare coldly from the photograph. Her face bears the marks
of violence. Probably traces of the guards and police who hate her
and led her to her cell. She just killed three police officers and
will be spending the next twenty-five years of her life in jail.
Florence Rey is nineteen years-old.
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This is where my film begins. The year was 1994 and I was living in Paris with my French friends and with Love. We lived illegally in squats, many of us were unemployed and made a living stealing or selling hash. I made my first film, a short documentary about the street kids in our neighborhood, Belleville.

We hated society and sometimes we went on rants about shooting police, but Florence Rey and her boyfriend Audry Maupin did it for real. They broke into a police car-pound, took a taxi-driver hostage and shot their way through Paris in a violent car chase that would be their last ride together. Audry was fatally shot and Florence was arrested. Before that happened, they had killed three police officers and injured many other people, including civilians.

I didn't know Florence personally, but her story gripped me because we were so similar. Both of us came from broken middle-class homes and both of us had replaced our families with a boundless relationship to a criminal man with violent tendencies. She had changed her entire life for him; I had moved to Paris for Love and had come to be at home in the same environment where Florence had become a police killer. If he had asked me to kill, would I have done it?

My film will be about Florence Rey, but it will also be about what drove her over the boundary and what drove me almost as far… I will travel back to Paris and try to find my old friends and describe the milieus I lived in back then. Julien the thief, and Marie-Lou with the trumpet, Laurent with the tattoo covering his back that read "Tout à gagner Rien à perdre" (Everything to gain Nothing to lose). And Moussa and Mamadou, my African street kids who wanted me to take them to Sweden. And Pierrot with the heroin. And Florence Rey.

I wanted to write to her already back then. To ask her: How could you do it? How did it feel? To tell her that she wasn't alone. But I couldn't write her because my boyfriend said we couldn't get involved. Already then I wanted to make a film and I have a lot of documentation from the time. Images, videos, diaries, letters.

After a while I got into film school in Sweden and moved back home. Love stayed in Paris and gradually chose to break contact. My life became calmer and more Swedish, but the thought of Florence Rey never left me. I still take out that old magazine sometimes and look at the picture of her face. She has now been in jail for more than ten years and the media attention has quieted. She has grown to symbolize a part of me that I will always yearn for, but never understand.

And now, fifteen years later, when I decide to write to Florence and make the film, something surreal happens: I get a phone call from the man I lived with back then. After all of these years of silence he found my name on the internet. He tells me he has been in jail and that he never stopped thinking about me and about Sweden and about the life that could have been his if fate had willed it so. He does NOT want me to visit him. But I want to. Do I dare?

Right now I don't know which direction this project will take. How much of it will be about me and how much will be about Florence and what pushes a person in one direction or in another. Who gets

to go to film school and who has to go to jail.

But I do know that I want to do this now and that I don't want to get TV or too many investors involved at this point. My last film was a large Nordic co-production with a lot of different investors and I felt that I lost something of my own voice in that project. This time I want to let myself and my film develop on their own terms and to enter the blackness and the intensity that are mine but cannot be expressed in a project proposal. I want to let it take the time it needs and tell the story in a way I know I have the courage to.

Stockholm, October 1, 2007

Tove Torbiörnsson liked the idea and approved funding for the project.

This was nine months after the conversation that had upset me. During that time, I had spoken on the phone with the man who had once been close to me several times. I started writing down our conversations in my diary. I hadn't thought about using them yet. I just wanted to preserve them. Sometimes I had the feeling that he was a ghost from the past and that he was actually dead. Since I was the only, what could you say... witness of his life it became important for me to document our conversations somehow. I tried recording one of our conversations, but it felt too private. Besides, he sometimes talked about illegal things that I didn't want to have recordings of. So I wrote.

I asked if I could make a film about him. He said no.
I asked if I could visit him. He said no.

I found out where Florence Rey was in prison and I wrote her a letter. I explained who I was and what I wanted to do. I also wrote that if she didn't want to be in the film then maybe we could meet and just talk. She didn't answer.

I read more articles about her and they said that she hadn't given a single interview since the events at Place de la Nation. They said that she didn't even accept visits from her relatives anymore. She wanted to be forgotten. I wrote her another letter. She didn't answer.

THAT WAS PUNK.

CINEMA DIRECT

I was trained at a film school in Paris called Ateliers Varan. It is a pure Cinema Direct school. At least it was when I went there in 1994. Cinema Direct, or Cinéma Vérité as it is sometimes called, is a documentary tradition based on long takes and a deep belief in reality's capacity to fill a film with meaning and content. At the school we made films following certain rules regarding the creation of films that were as close as possible to the reality being depicted. For example:

1. No narrators
2. No talking heads (i.e. interviews where people are seated in front of the camera to be interviewed)
3. As few cuts as possible. If a cut was unavoidable, "jump cuts" were encouraged – visible cuts that showed that a scene had been shortened and altered
4. No music
5. No slow motion or image manipulation
6. You couldn't cut out your own voice if you asked your actors a question for example. Everything had to be accounted for.
7. The director herself did the filming with the camera on her shoulder.
8. No tripods.
9. No "postcards", i.e. no images that were included because they were beautiful or cinematic. Only the essential should be shown.
10. No zooming. If you wanted a close-up, you had to move closer.

The cinematic interpretation should lie in successfully capturing interesting events with your camera. Being attentive to the people being depicted, and not trying to manipulate reality or the viewer's perception of reality by adding something.

As directors, we were encouraged to – with our cameras on our shoulders – interact with the people we were filming and account for that in our films. To not be "silent bystanders." ("Fly on the wall" films where the filmmaker doesn't account for her presence have become more common in the American Direct Cinema school, but the principle is the same: Reality is the most important thing). This method benefits if there is a lot of time available to take footage and wait for real events to take place without instigating their course.

> *Reality has its limits, it can't always be staged into a good show, but it remains our common treasure, a gem to be handled carefully if you want the meaning to shine!*

From Ateliers Varan's website, 2012

Cinéma Vérité and Direct Cinema were part of the nouvelle vague in French and American cinema in the 1960s, strongly inspired by the political ideas of the 1960s. The idea was for cinema to liberate itself from the dominant film studios and for filmmakers to go out with cameras on their shoulders and give a voice to the people. The new, lighter-weight 16mm camera that came out at the time made this possible – as did new audio equipment, which was now portable enough to be carried by one person. Technically speaking, for the first time it was literally possible to give the people a voice. Earlier documentary films had been synced retroactively, or else consisted mainly of an explanatory voice-over narration and sound effects.

There was thus a political aspect to the Cinema Direct aesthetic. That a director shouldn't add anything, because her voice was no more important than the real people she had filmed. That unadulterated reality should be presented to the audience and not be filtered through an artistic temperament. In the 1960s, a lot of documentary films were shown in cinemas as supporting films for longer feature films. The short Cinema Direct film had in other words a forum to spread people's films.

I did my training there in 1994, but those ideas were still prevalent for the school and for me. They aligned closely with my own political ideals and my desire to delve deep into marginal realities, far from the bourgeoisie and the cultural elite. That was punk.

My first short film was called Les enfants du square, and it was about some children I had met in Paris' Belleville neighborhood. Their parents had emigrated from Senegal and Mali and many of them were living in France without residence permits. They spent most of their waking hours on the street, often living in very close quarters. The children were lively and had a lot of ideas about how we should make the film together. It was fun. The Cinema Direct method worked extremely well for my subject matter and the people involved.

Over the years I have made other documentaries, most of them based in that tradition. The most recent documentary I made was a long film called 165 Hässelby. It's about the 12-year-old boy Frazze who lives with his mother Camilla, the graffiti artist Dino, and the hip-hop star Ayesha. I followed these young people on and off for two years and for the first time I began questioning the Cinema Direct method. More than anything else, the ethical aspects became problematic. Frazze was having trouble at school and I was unsure if it was really good for him to participate in the film. In a way it emphasized his bad-boy identity, and my method of "objectively depicting reality" with adding anything from myself as a director made him even more vulnerable in some ways. His reality had to bear the film, and he had to be the essence of the story. But the essence of the story was actually me. I had chosen the dramatic scenes that showed his vulnerability and I had made the choice to film him during the most sensitive period of his life.

The film was actually about me and the vulnerability I had felt when I was growing up in the suburbs. But the film didn't show that at all. The film's true reality was invisible, concealed behind the "objective" reality I was showing. I could just as well have shown Frazze when he was baking bread with his mom or going door-to-door and selling magazines to little old ladies at Christmastime, just like other schoolchildren. But I didn't. I showed how he tried to set fire to gasoline cans and got kicked out of the youth center. I felt like a parasite profiting from other people's realities. When I finished the film, I was also done with the Cinema Direct method and the documentary approach.

That's not to say that I reject the genre as a whole. A lot of the best films in cinema history are Cinema Direct films, for example Titicut Follies by Frederick Wiseman, and Axel Danielson's Twin Brothers. But for ME it was time to move on. I had come to a point where I had to get closer to my own story.

FROM MEMORY

So, I had two main characters – Florence Rey and the man who had once been close to me – but neither of them wanted to be in my film. Other than that, I had only myself, my memories and the vague idea of making a film without traditional documentary scenes. Writing pure fiction was never a question. Just the thought of actors performing scenes from my life felt both laughable and unbearable. Traditional fiction has never interested me.

I sat down with a notebook and thought. I wanted to depict Time - Memory - What has been lost. How does one do that? I thought about how we perceive time and concluded that memory is what is central... memory is the mechanism we have for dealing with time. For enduring its passing. For holding on to moments that have passed and making them our own. I decided that memory should be central to my story in some way.

How do I experience a memory? My earliest memory is a physical one. It's from when my little brother was newborn and laying in a baby carriage. I used to walk next to my mom and hold the handle of the carriage when we were out. The feeling of the carriage's stainless-steel handle in my palm is my earliest childhood memory. Further down the handle there was a metal hook where my mom would hang her purse. Sometimes my hand slid down and I remember exactly how it felt when my hand bumped into the hook. A physical memory.

My other memory from that time is of my father frying black pudding in the kitchen. He points out the window at a zeppelin flying in the sky, a cigar-shaped dirigible. I remember it as a visual memory. I remember the tiny grid pattern on the laminate table top, my dad's silhouette by the stove and the zeppelin hovering outside the window. Now I wonder if it really was a zeppelin. Did people fly them in those days, or did I see a picture in a book and mix up the memory with my imagination? It must have been 1974, when we were still living on Gästrikegatan in Stockholm. So I was four years old and couldn't read or write yet.

My first memory from when I lived in Paris is a party in the catacombs, the closed tunnel system under Paris. I have no physical memories from that party and hardly any visual memories either. Instead, the memory is a like a story with words. The hole in the ground where we climbed in, the sand in my eyes, the narrow tunnel leading to a bigger one, the drums playing, Julien's best friend who tried to kiss me and the fight that ensued. Words.

Why words and not images or emotions? During that time in my life I was writing a lot in my diary. Because of that, these memories were articulated with words, and when I read my diary later, words revived them. A verbal memory. I wondered about the fact that friends who had been at the party in the catacombs that I spoke to afterward didn't remember the drums or the fight, but that I could be certain that it had happened since I had written it down. Right? Could I be certain?

I came to the conclusion that memories can be experienced with different senses and that they are subjective. We hold on to different aspects of an event when we remember it, depending on who we are, who we were at the time and how we want to use the memory in our own story. In my memories from Paris I had held on to the most violent and spectacular events because at the time I wanted to destroy the old and enter something new. In a manner of speaking, I had already started writing the fiction of my own life.

I decided that words would be the backbone of my film and that sounds and images would be subordinate to the written word. Later I also decided that the images and sounds should seek to move beyond realism and instead be more stylized.

I wanted to create an archetypical iconography in which a tree symbolized a tree and a boy represented a boy – maybe all boys. In this way, I wanted the images and the sounds together to listen to even the spectator's memories.

SINCE WE HAD A LIMITED NUMBER OF FILM REELS WE FILMED JUST ONE IMAGE AT EVERY LOCATION.

ONE SINGLE LONG SHOT.

FIRST JOURNEY: PARIS

I had a few important resources at this point. I had a small, quiet workspace by Mariatorget where I could think clearly. I never work at home. I had put up pictures that I liked on the wall (a picture of Marguerite Duras, an image of Robert De Niro from the film Taxi Driver, a photograph of a crucified Jesus that I had taken in France, a blurry picture of a train and a suburb). I had a shelf with beautiful books and a French dictionary. A large and tidy desk and a good chair for working.

The other resource was my colleague Åsa Sandzén. She was a Francophile, a skilled researcher and translator, and we had met when she translated my earlier films to French. Her expertise and her enormous enthusiasm about the project made her a fantastic resource in a phase when I had so little to go on. I was lucky because she was open to working for a long period of time for a pretty low salary.

I didn't have a film, but I had a workspace and a co-worker.

We sat for days and dug up material from the French media archive INA (Institut National de l'Audiovisuel). The archive is accessible online and anyone can search it. We found a lot of reports about the legal proceedings against Florence Rey, but also other events that were linked to my memories. Riots I had taken part in. An incident where a young Algerian was killed at a police station.

This is where the thought began to take shape that the film could consist in part of images from the archive, together with newer images taken of places I had once been that had been meaningful for me.

We applied for permission to stay at the guest residence of the Centre Culturel Suédois in Paris and were approved. That was another resource for the project: That beautiful place. We travelled there for two weeks in April when the cherry trees were in blossom and everything was gorgeous. We had borrowed an Arriflex Super 16 camera. It was very heavy and came in a silver box that we took turns carrying. I didn't want to use video to film. I wanted the images to feel blurry and for filming them to involve great pains. I tried to create images that were a bit glorified and surreal. The locations weren't supposed to appear as vibrant as they were in my memory. Or as boring as they looked now. We didn't record any audio for the same reason. Instead, all of the audio was taken from elsewhere and added later.

Since we had a limited number of film reels (and a limited amount of money to develop and scan them) we usually filmed just one image at each location. A single long shot.

We chose places I remembered. If you visit places all the time their charge wears off. New memories are formed and new trivial events overshadow the old ones. The place is trivialized in the mind. I hadn't been in Paris since I had lived there in 1994 and the places I remembered had remained there in all of their exalted mistiness. I had written about many of the places in my diary or photographed them. Now they just looked like regular places, but they looked good on film.

We also took some footage with a Super 8. Super 8 is good because there is a broad chaos factor that contributes something unique to the film. You never know what you're going to get. Sometimes there was nothing at all on the reels. Sometimes the picture hopped because the cassette was out of alignment. Sometimes the camera didn't work at all (it was a cheap plastic one I had found at a flea market). I wanted chance to be an element in the work at all times. That can be a big help when one's own imagination alone isn't enough.

The man who had been close to me once didn't want to meet with me. I had thought returning to Paris would feel strange, but it was easy. That beautiful guest residence at the Centre Culturel Suédois in the Marais neighborhood was so far removed from the life I had once lived in Paris that it felt like a different city. Another world. I still entertained the thought that the man who had once been close to me was only a figment of my imagination. The only proof of his existence were my diary entries, and I could have made those up myself.

The thought of looking up my old friends... I let it fizzle out. Why? Most of them had moved to other cities. I hadn't had any contact with them for ten years and I felt shy. They had lived hard lives. I was ashamed that I had become a film director and the idea of interviewing them repulsed me. It was out of the question.

I wrote a lot on that trip. The memories that surfaced. An effort at structuring. But I didn't quite find my way to the film. I was still waiting for THE IDEA to come to me. And then one day it did.
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SOPHIE CALLE

Åsa took me to the Bibliothèque Nationale to see an exhibition of works by Sophie Calle, an artist that I didn't know at the time, which was strange because she is frequently referred to as "France's best-known living artist" and the exhibition was France's official contribution to the Venice Biennale in 2007.

The exhibition was called *Prenez soin de vous* (Take Care of Yourself), and it was about being left. Her partner had broken up with her via email, or maybe it was in a letter. In any case, the text closed with the phrase "Take care of yourself" and the letter was published in its entirety in large format at the entrance to the exhibition. After it was a text written by Sophie Calle: "...I received an email I didn't understand (...) so I asked a hundred experts to interpret it for me." The exhibition consisted of a hundred different interpretations of the letter. Psychoanalysts, astrologists, mediums, singers, dancers. Each of them interpreted the letter differently. Parts were on film, some of it was written or presented in stills. All of the experts were women. The work filled the entire Bibliothèque Nationale.

It was a humorous piece. At least I thought so. I laughed the whole time. At the same time, the exhibition was razor-sharp and personal. But in no way self-disclosing. It was so conceptual and well-defined that it became symbolic. Universally applicable. Not private. It isn't certain whether her ex-boyfriend had really written the letter or if it was pure fiction, but it made no difference, because what was central was the feeling of being left and the artistic representation of that feeling. Not the hypothetical reality that preceded the work.

I bought a book by Sophie Calle in the museum shop called Des histoires vraies (True Stories). It was a thin volume with short stories from her life. A story about a secret note she found behind a painting in her parent's home. Another story was about a white dress someone had given her. Every story was illustrated with a black and white image.

I sat on the stone steps outside the museum shop and waited for Åsa to come out of the bathroom. I flipped through the book and thought about the exhibition I

had just seen. That was when the idea for the film came to me. Maybe it was the brilliance of the exhibition, or perhaps the simplicity of the book, or the whole intense working period in Paris or everything together that made the idea come so suddenly and clearly.

My film would consist of chapters – or tableaus – just like Calle's book. I would recount one memory per chapter and every memory would be illustrated with a single film shot. The scenes wouldn't be adapted around a dramaturgical structure, but instead stand on their own. Whether or not the stories were "true" would be of secondary importance. The film's foundation wouldn't be documentary, but instead conceptual. I wouldn't find any political superstructure or "purpose" for the film (which one usually does with documentaries, for example, "show the conditions in French prisons" or "talk about class differences and segregation"). The film would be built on my desire to tell a story and my wish to develop a new cinematic expression for that story.

Once I had gotten the idea, all of the pieces began falling into place. I sat on the stairs for a long time and wrote down everything on napkins that I had in my bag. Åsa sat and waited. I didn't dare to move before I had written down everything. I was afraid that it would vanish if I walked out without committing it to paper.

The fundamental idea of working with sections – tableaus – remained part of the film work all the way up till the final phase, when everything melted together into a long film.

I WANTED TO SHAPE THE PROJECT TO FIT THE IDEA, NOT THE OTHER WAY AROUND.

IDENTIFYING THE OBSTACLES

If you simplify it somewhat, filmmaking can be divided into two types of work: Idea and Execution.

The execution part consists of a number of stages with varying degrees of craftsmanship – financing, filming, cutting and so on. It is concrete work, often done in collaboration. Working with ideas on the other hand is abstract and can't be learned or influenced at will. It has to do with inspiration, the subconscious and…flow?

Where do ideas come from? How do they arise?

I got the idea for Belleville Baby when I was sitting on the stairs and thinking about Sophie Calle. I had been actively working to gather information and actively searching for my idea for a long time, but I had yet to find the right one. I had a subject, but no film. The idea revealed itself when I was thinking about something else. I write 'revealed itself' because that was how it felt. The idea came from the outside and I received it. It wasn't the result of active mental effort; possibly a collaboration between my conscious self, my subconscious and something else. The times we live in?

When I reread the first manuscript, the one I wrote based on the notes I made on the napkins that day, it strikes me that the film was there in its entirety. Every scene, image and text (almost) in the final film was present in the first idea, and I spent the years that followed carrying out the idea in the best possible way according to the circumstances at hand. I didn't add much.

The idea, then, had its very own form and had come to me in one swoop. All at once. I sometimes had the sense that the idea had a life of its own, independent of me. The best thing I could do would be to carry out its wishes without questioning or correcting them. My most important task is to protect the idea from being diluted or getting lost.

In his text Ich-Du (You–I), Martin Buber writes beautifully about the creative process:

Martin Buber
Ich un Du

> *" This is the eternal source of art: a man is faced by a form which desires to be made through him into a work. This form is no offspring of his soul, but is an appearance which steps up to it and demands of it the effective power. The man is concerned with an act of his being. If he carries it through, if he speaks the primary word out of his being to the form which appears, then the effective power streams out, and the work arises.*
>
> *The act includes a sacrifice and a risk. This is the sacrifice: the endless possibility that is offered up on the altar of the form. For everything which just this moment in play ran through the perspective must be obliterated; nothing of that may penetrate the work. The exclusiveness of what is facing it demands that it be so. This is the risk: the primary word can only be spoken with the whole being. He who gives himself to it may withhold nothing of himself. The work does not suffer me, as do the tree and the man, to turn aside and relax in the world of It; but it commands. If l do not serve it aright it is broken, or it breaks me."*

Buber describes the idea as a living character/figure that approaches a human and "wants to become a work." In other words, it's not a product of the human's thoughts, but something external to the artist as an individual. The artist is just a

channel whose task is to allow the work to come to life.

The primary word that Buber speaks of is the primary word I-You, which is different than the other primary word, I-It. The artist's relationship to the figure that wants to become a work is the relationship of I-You.

Martin Buber
Ich un Du

> *"If I face another human being as my Thou and say the primary word I-Thou to him, he is not a thing among things, and does not consist of things."*

A filmmaker who takes her idea seriously and wants to create something new can no longer treat her film as a product. An It. For the filmmaker, the idea is a You with which the filmmaker is in a direct relationship and for which she IS RESPONSIBLE: *The work commands: If I do not serve it right it is broken, or it or it breaks me.*

The journey from idea to work is not as long in other art forms where the execution consists perhaps of writing, painting or playing rock 'n roll. But in film the process is more complicated and entails a great deal of collaboration in which the maker needs to communicate aspects of her idea over and over again. Maybe even make compromises. If there isn't enough money; if the co-producers have different ideas. If the technology fails, etc.

In some of my earlier projects I experienced a shift in the way I looked at the film. I started to view my film as a product, I-It, and thus lost hold of my original relationship to the film, I-You. I re-formed my idea so that it would fit other rules – established by others – about how a production should be, and in doing so killed the idea with compromises.

When it came to executing the idea for Belleville Baby I wanted to do things differently. I wanted to shape the project to fit the idea, not the other way around.

What was in my way?

THE WILL TO PLEASE IS INCOMPATIBLE WITH THE WILL TO CREATE SOMETHING NEW.

THE WILL TO PLEASE

I determined that one of my biggest obstacles was my own will to please. I'm a person who smiles a lot. I want to be good and well-liked. A star. This is destructive behavior. The will to please is incompatible with the will to create something new.

Since it's hard to raise money for a film with just Swedish financing nowadays, I've brought in funds for some of my earlier film projects by pitching them to some of the Nordic and European forums for co-financing. From a production perspective, it's an effective way of raising money, but for me as a director it has been destructive. I have been forced to present my projects with simplified, selling expressions that speak to a broad public. I have been expected to laugh and shake hands and sit in meetings where different TV corporations say things like: "We already have a film about immigrants. Can't you do a portrait of Swedish youth instead?" or "If you can do the film in a half-hour format, we might be interested. But you'll have to use a different photographer" or: "Would you consider using a Finnish narrator instead?" Meetings like those trigger my most self-destructive behavior. I nod and smile and I am ready to adapt my projects in order to be liked and get funding, at least then and there. Afterwards it's hard, almost impossible, to get back to the place from which the original idea can grow and develop.

Gilles Deluze
Having an idea in cinema

> *"What is the relation between the work of art and communication? None whatsoever. A work of art is not an instrument of communication. The work of art has nothing to do with communication. The work of art strictly does not contain the least bit of information.*
> *To the contrary, there is a fundamental affinity between the work of art and the act of resistance. There, yes."*

I decided that I wouldn't pitch Belleville Baby myself and I wouldn't personally attend any meetings with financiers except the ones with the Swedish Film Institute. That made the task of my producer Tobias Janson more demanding, and we had to make do with a smaller budget. But it was worth it.

I went so far as to decide that I wouldn't communicate about my film at all. Not with friends, not with my students, not with my financiers or with other Scandinavian co-producers. Not with anyone at all. This was also one of the reasons why I did almost everything myself when it came to the execution. It was a very good decision. In this particular phase of my life and when it came to this personal project, it was a necessity.

It might seem strange that I can't communicate with others without losing myself. Some directors who are more competitive or willful than me probably find it a positive thing to pitch to narrow-minded TV-channels or to argue with a grudging editor. They can even draw energy from the negativity and lack of understanding surrounding them. But for me it was important to have respite from just that. The best way for me to protest against it was to pull back from it. Why should I want to please others? There can be various reasons – who I am, my social class of origin, the kind of personality I have. This might also be a question of being male and female. I think that if you've been raised as a woman in our culture it can be more difficult to stand by – and command respect for – your ideas in an artistic context.

A few years ago I made a short film called Come Together. It consisted of a number of clips of women who had filmed their faces while they masturbated and reached orgasm. Only their faces were visible, not their bodies, and the filming was done with mobile phones. Come Together was also on the website for the Stockholm International Film Festival for a while. It got a lot of views there, and reading the

comments left anonymously under the film was surprising. There were comments like "They look so ugly. Couldn't they have at least put on some makeup" and "Yuck. Disgusting." The comments were signed with men's names. I found that interesting. The women in the film were my friends – women in their prime who were both good-looking and sexy. Why did the men find this "disgusting?"

I think it has to do with us as spectators not being used to seeing female sexuality depicted like that. Women who show their sexuality in images – in pornography but also in art – are sexy in order to please the viewer. They are targeting the (male) viewer so to speak and are there for his desires. They aren't there to satisfy their own desires. A woman is not supposed to touch herself and direct her gaze inward, away from the gaze of the viewer. That makes the woman provocative, threatening. She is perceived as "disgusting."

Where am I going with this?
In our culture, women are raised to please the viewer's gaze to a greater extent than men. Studies have been done about how women are perceived in contrast to men. Men who radiate willpower, integrity, willfulness, and authority are perceived as reliable. They inspire trust. Women with the same characteristics are perceived as frightening, threatening,
unwholesome. If I want to get somewhere as a woman, I learn to be smiling and accommodating, to make sure I look good and to be responsive to what my surroundings want from me. It is a survival tactic. And as such it's difficult to get rid of.

It's not just a question of male and female, of course. A lot of men suffer from the will to please, too. Many film projects suffer from it. Public service channels suffer from it. One could even go so far as to say that the will to please is also a problem in moving pictures as a whole today.

Roy Andersson
Tagning eller tystnad

> *"To please can certainly be innocent and positive. To please in a calculated way however is unkind, false, cynical and essentially an expression of contempt for those one purportedly wants to please and make money on. In the battle for high ratings, cynicism is precisely what perfuses what's on offer in the realm of moving images of our time."*

NEVER UNDERESTIMATE THE POWER OF THE PURE AND NEW.

RESISTANCE

I learned some things about resistance from a former student of mine, Stefano. He was a young filmmaker that I had the pleasure of collaborating with on a Save the Children project where I was a supervisor. The project was called Run Away Doc, and it was a collaboration between Save the Children Sweden and the media company Fanzingo in Alby where I used to hold courses and workshops for young filmmakers.

This particular course was aimed specifically at young people who had run away from home or couldn't go on living at home for some other reason. Each of them was to make a short documentary of their own about their situation and I was to be their advisor. Save the Children would then use the short films to influence politicians and educate their social service workers and municipal employees.

The group consisted of six young people, all of whom lived or had lived in Husby. Some of them had some really difficult experiences behind them that they didn't want to talk about in the group. Others were extroverted and talked openly about their history. A lot of them had run away from home because of what is usually called honor-related issues. All of them were enthusiastic about making the films, but for the most part they didn't have clear ideas about what they wanted to do or how they were going to tell their stories.

Stefano was the least talkative of them. He was distinctive in other ways. Instead of wearing a down jacket and baggy pants like most of the young guys in Husby, he wore button-down shirts and a red scarf tossed over one shoulder. He looked like a French intellectual. On top of that, he was the only one who went to an upper high school in the city and didn't listen to hip-hop.

Stefano had been born in Chile and was named after an Italian soccer player. He had come to Sweden with his father five years earlier. For a number of reasons, he couldn't keep living with his father, and in the end he decided to move out and live alone. Against his father's will.

At our first one-on-one meeting Stefano had a very clear vision for his film. He showed me a YouTube clip with a song that he wanted to use, and he wanted to run through all of the images wearing a black balaclava. I was a bit skeptical, and this was where Stefano displayed a quiet but resolute resistance that taught me something.

I find that the following situation is a good example of how resistance can be used without a lot of fuss to protect an idea. I had positioned myself as superior to the filmmaker's idea to "help" him make the film better. Stefano's actions to preserve his integrity and his idea were exemplary. The film was called "Låt det bli ljust" (Let there be Light) and Stefano had written the following text, which he himself would read:

Thirteen years of joy and sorrow
moved to the old world
Lofty expectations of hope, happiness and safety
are just around the corner
in what seems to be: Home Sweet Home
The dream of happiness is like a broken glass
Everything gets worse, existence grows darker

A distorted life of dishonesty and lies
covers the boy's face like a black balaclava.
The only thing that remains is an insincere gaze
trying its very best to show that there's nothing going on here.
There's nothing to worry about.
But even with the best façade he cannot conceal it from himself
every adversity feels like collapsing heavily to the ground.

In spite of it all he lifts himself up
and with the same force
continues on toward the light on the horizon.
After all the struggles
after all the battles
he stands before the hardest decision in his life.
The decision between returning to the old
or leaving it all behind.
Two paths determining his life.
One choice...
two paths.

Let there be light, thinks the boy
and without looking back
continues on toward the light on the horizon.

Save the Children had been looking for unambiguous documentaries that they could use to educate their social service employees. The films were intended to give concrete accounts of how young people in situations like Stefano's had not gotten the help they needed, so that politicians and others responsible could improve their work. My job was to help those young people find the courage to "really" tell their stories, also so that they could feel relief afterward, which they did. Many of the people in the group said that after making their films they felt like a weight had been lifted from their hearts, and that making a film that no one could ignore felt meaningful. "Now for once they have to listen to us."

I knew that Stefano had been through some really difficult things in the short time he had been in Sweden, and I felt a certain sense of responsibility to get him to talk about that in a more tangible way in his film. What was it that hadn't worked with his dad? Was what I had heard about his dad going to jail true? Why had Stefano chosen to go to a school in the city where he was the only person from Husby and the only one with a migrant background? I began cautiously:

- It might have more impact if you aren't wearing a balaclava when you're running... so that people don't think you're a robber, you know...
- Uh-huh....
- And then your situation. Do you feel like you could maybe talk about your experiences more concretely? With your dad, and so on ...
- ?
- Well, the text is pretty abstract and poetic right now...

Stefano thought for a moment and replied plainly:

- This is the film.

Stefano chose to ignore my advice and carried out his idea as he had envisioned it. In the film, he runs through different places in Husby: nature settings, urbanized areas,tunnels. At one point he's standing on a playground and looking right into the camera; in another sequence he falls to the ground but gets up again. The music is

intense and the film is heavily edited. The images grow darker and darker, like at dusk, but when he chooses his path in the end ("Let there be light, thinks the boy"), he pulls off the balaclava and everything becomes bright.

The idea is simple and the execution consistent, and Stefano's film was ultimately the strongest of the films. No politician or social worker could miss its point, and Save the Children was happy.

I was ashamed afterwards and I apologized to Stefano for having given him such bad advice. He had ignored me and my "knowledge" in an exceptional way and gone on to realize his idea with integrity and consistency. The episode made me consider the mechanisms involved in developing an idea. Why had I acted as I had, and what were Stefano's methods of resistance?

If I try to understand why I questioned his idea, I think that there were a number of reasons.

1. Fear. I felt a kind of vertical fear of my client and a horizontal fear of the audience, worrying that they would think that I had failed personally at carrying out my task if the film was too "arty." I was anxious for the film to be "good" and I believed that I needed to help in order for it to become better. Fear is no good for creative processes.

2. Lack of trust. I didn't trust Stefano's ability to make the best possible film, and I didn't trust the process.

3. I treated the film like a product – an It – that should be able to be used as a means to end and communicate with as many people as possible in the simplest possible way. Quite simply, I wanted people to like it.

4. I underestimated the audience and believed that they wouldn't be able to grasp that kind of film. I regarded the audience as a "them" and not as a "we."

What were Stefano's methods of resistance?

1. He didn't allow my points of view to disturb him in his work.

2. He didn't consider following my bad advice. He never abandoned his idea.

3. He didn't let the situation trouble him. He still can't understand what was remarkable or why I should want to write about that insignificant event in my book.

This anecdote might seem insignificant. Stefano isn't a "real" filmmaker and his resistance methods were in part unintentional, largely due to a naivety of sorts. He had nothing to lose with his resistance, and he wasn't dependent on my money or my approval to finish his film. BUT never underestimate the power of the pure and new. I believe that NAIVETY and INNOCENCE are good methods of resistance, being oblivious to the possible consequences of resistance, casting aside the laws that apply out there and following the rules one creates oneself. Creating is meaningful.

IT DOESN'T NEED TO BE GOOD, IT ONLY NEEDS TO BE DONE.

DOUBT

As I sit here writing this, a thought hits me: Is what I'm writing worth anything to anyone besides me? I am usually haunted by that very thought when I'm making a film. Why should I do this? Is there really any point in doing this? Self-doubt like that can be fatal. I have abandoned whole film projects because of that thought. That thought is one of my greatest obstacles.

Since protecting my idea is my single-most important task, I needed to find a way to manage that obstacle. I needed to stop evaluating my work with terms like good and bad. That's why I have a self-directing phrase, a mantra I repeat to myself when the doubt becomes too strong: "It doesn't need to be good, it only needs to be done." It sounds easy, and it is. This way, I can circumvent the obstacle by saying "Yes, maybe it will be bad. No, it certainly won't be interesting for anyone, but I'm going to do it anyway." That's important. That makes me invincible. (There are also bad ideas that one chooses not to carry out. But that's HEALTHY SELF-EXAMINATION. What I'm talking about here is a kind of irrational sickness, comparable with jealousy or obsessive thoughts.)

When I made the film The Stars We Are, my self-doubt was so strong that I got sick. In order to get on with the work (and my life), I decided that I would never let anyone would see the film – but I would finish it anyway. When I finished it, I agreed to show it, but I left on a trip during the premiere. Over time it became one the films I've made that I like the very best.

GUIDANCE

I wrote a manuscript, a kind of picture book with texts and images that I showed to the film consultant Tove Torbiörnsson at SFI. Some of the dialogues from the phone calls were included for the first time in that manuscript, as was the story about Florence Rey. Tove thought that the manuscript could be developed more, and she granted us additional funding. She also suggested that I apply to the master's class in independent filmmaking at the film school in Gothenburg (now the Valand Academy for Film) to further develop my work. That turned out to be a very good idea.

I found new influences there, and in part a new way of thinking about cinema. There is an active idea at the Valand Academy that that the cinema arts are important, and that making films can take time. That we, as filmmakers, have a responsibility to seek out new forms of expression and develop film as a media, reaching in different directions. The atmosphere there gave me new courage and inspiration.

I had been working in cinema in Stockholm and I was used to a more fearful atmosphere, one that was more about survival, being responsive to what "the public wants," adapting, being good (pleasing). Not a cultural climate that encouraged development or renewal.

My supervisor Kalle Boman became a mentor for me throughout the entire film project. He encouraged me to carry out my ideas without compromise. We watched the film together regularly throughout the whole process.

Since I had so few co-workers for the project, having a mentor was important.

I had no editor or photographer to discuss ideas with. Because I often worked intuitively and let ideas come to me, I sometimes lost my direction and didn't know what I was doing. Then it felt that I was being deceptive. But there was no deceiving Kalle Boman. He would say things like: "This is too neat. Go back to the last version and try to find what you lost." On such occasions I was sometimes (silently) angry at Kalle, because going back to search in earlier versions is the worst, and it's an easy thing to say if you're not the one who has to do it. But he was right. I went back to the earlier version and discovered that I had rounded the sharp edges that gave the film its nerve. He constantly encouraged me to make the film the way I had set my mind on making it.

By this time I had also started working with the producer Tobias Janson, who was an important sounding board throughout the whole process.

Although I had decided not to communicate about the film it was important to have someone on my side. I was not alone with my resistance.

THE SECOND JOURNEY: MARSEILLE

I developed and scanned everything we had filmed in Paris and cut some test scenes. They looked good, but there was something missing. I thought that the scenes imparted naive happiness and youth and... a kind of suffocating, romantic dream of a Paris that didn't feel honest for me. I felt that the material was missing part of the blackness that permeated my memories, and the images weren't specific enough.

I decided to take another trip to shoot more footage. This time in Marseille. I wanted footage of the sea to represent... no, I actually shouldn't write that. I wanted to film places that were more charged for me; my memories from there were stronger, their colors deeper and more vibrant, and I was hoping to capture that on film.

I had very little contact with the man who had once been close to me in that year. During our sporadic conversations I hadn't dared tell him that I had made a film in which he was a "character." He had already said no when I asked him to be in a film. Before travelling to Marseille however I told him that I would be doing "research for a film about memories." Suddenly he suggested that he could travel to Marseille and we could meet there. It came as a surprise. His role in my life had come to be about my film and I had grown used to the thought that he perhaps only existed in my imagination. Now he had become real. I got nervous, but I was also filled with expectations.

I rented an apartment near the harbor for Åsa and me and we borrowed an extra, more reliable Super 8 camera from Filmcentrum. It was a Beaulieu camera with Angénieux optics and it could film at different speeds. This time we didn't take a Super 16. It was too heavy to carry and developing the reels was too expensive. Besides that, I wanted all of the images from Marseille to have a coarser feel.

A few days before the trip the man who had once been close to me called and said that something had come up. He couldn't come to Marseille.

I was disappointed and got thrown out of balance. I could no longer remember why I was even making the film. It was a hard trip. On the first days in Marseille I didn't want to work. Åsa had to walk around the city on her own and wait for me to pull myself together. We were only supposed to stay for a week. Days passed. My behavior started to be annoying and stressful for both of us. I couldn't bear myself or the city or the thought of the film. I was ashamed of myself. I wanted to go home.

After three days, maybe four, I decided to do something anyway. We drank wine on the little square in front of the house where we were staying. There were some boys playing soccer on the street and I ran up and grabbed the Beaulieu camera. I took some back-lit footage of the boys as they played. It felt good and I wanted to keep filming them, but the oldest of the boys came up to me and said that I couldn't film them because I needed "written permission from their parents." I found that funny. It seemed precocious coming from someone I had taken for a street kid. It put me in a good mood. And then I got the idea that there could also a story about a boy from Marseille in the film.

In the days that followed, we worked. We rented a car and drove to a spot by the sea where I wanted to film. A particular cliff under the corniche where we always went swimming one summer. It was one of those sharp, dangerous cliffs and only the

bravest brave dared dive from it. On the south side was a concrete platform where you could sunbathe; a remnant from a hotel construction project that was never finished. Marseille is a poor city. From the platform you could see the coastline and the city, and the people walking on the boardwalk overhead. I was surprised that we had found the place so easily and that everything still looked the same. I asked Åsa to walk along the corniche so I could get a shot from below.

The sun hung low in the sky; it was September. Åsa walked along the edge of the corniche and I stood down by the water and filmed and as I stood there filming it felt like everything that I wanted to say with the entire film was in that very image. There was something about the trailing light and that spot and the feeling that everything was gone even though it was there. Åsa was just a black silhouette up there, you couldn't tell if she was a man or a woman. Further along there was someone else, a stranger walking in the same direction, but you could tell that the person wasn't important, that the closest person and that person's movements were what was important. The silhouette looked lonely and the sea glittered in a surreal way and everything was quiet.

Over the next few days we filmed other places in Marseille. The market, the harbor and the poor suburbs north of the city where the man who had once been close to me had perhaps grown up. I also took a shot through the window of a train that ended up in the film intro, together with a story from the prison.

I WANTED TO SHOW HOW DANGEROUS LIFE CAN BE IF YOU'RE BORN IN THE WRONG PLACE AND IN THE WRONG SOCIAL CLASS, LIKE VINCENT IN THE FILM.

THE LIST

During that same time we were also working with another theme that didn't end up in the film. It was the list of young men who had been killed by the French police. We came across it when we were looking for material in the French media archive. We were actually looking up a specific event that I remembered well from when I was living in France: a young man with an Algerian background had been killed while being questioned by the police, prompting violent riots in a number of places throughout the country. We discovered that there was a long list of all of the young men who had been killed by the police in France in the previous twenty years. The list had been compiled by a number of human rights organizations and its length was shocking. Most of the names of the list were of young men, even kids; almost all of the names were Arabic or African.

MORT POUR RIEN 1990 – 2009

Thomas CLAUDIO, 21 years old
killed when a police car drove into his motorbike, October 1990

Djamel CHEUTTOUH, 18 years old
unarmed, shot at arm's length by a security guard in a shopping mall, March 1991

Aïssa IHICH, 18 years old
died from an asthma attack while in custody, May 1991

Bamoro FOANNA, 17 years old
fell from 5th floor whilst alone with police officers in his apartment, May 1991

Patrick GERBER
fell from balcony during a police raid of his apartment, June 1991

Youssef KHAÏF, 23 years old
shot in the neck by a police officer while driving a stolen car, June 1991

Thibault COTTONI, 13 years old
shot three times and killed by policemen while hiding in a cave after a burglary, January 1992

Makomé M'BOLOWE, 17 years old
shot in the head while in custody, unarmed and handcuffed, April 1993

Rachid ARDJOUNI, 17 years old
shot in the back on the head while laying handcuffed on the ground, unarmed, April 1993

Fabrice OMONT, 15 years old
shot in the back while trying to escape from police in a stolen car, April 1993

Maftah BELKHAM, 19 years old
shot in the head after a burglary, July 1993

Franck MORET, 29 years old
shot by a police officer during a routine control; unarmed and sitting in car with girlfriend, July 1993

Romuald DURIEZ, 21 years old
shot by police after a burglary, unarmed, October 1993

Mourad TCHIER, 19 years old
shot in the back while trying to escape, unarmed, December 1993

Ibrahim SY, 18 years old
shot in the head while driving a stolen car, unarmed, January 1994

Eric SIMONTÉ, 18 years old
shot in the head while under arrest, unarmed, April 1994

Joël NEBOR, 25 years old and **Frédéric ADOM, 25 years old**
shot six times and killed by police during an attempted robbery at a boutique, June 1994

Jawad ZAOUIYA, 20 years old
died while in custody from fire during arrest, July 1996

Abdelkader BOUZIANE, 16 years old
shot in the neck while driving his aunt's car, unarmed, December 1997

Fabrice FERNANDEZ, 24 years old
shot in the head at the police station, December 1997

Eric BENFATIMA, 31 years old
shot three times while trying to escape police, unarmed, August 1998

Mohamed Ali SAOUD, 26 years old
beaten and suffocated to death by seven police officers in front of his family, November 1998

Habib OULD MOHAMMED, 17 years old
shot at arm's length after car theft, unarmed, December 1998

Sidney MANOKA NZEZA, 25 years old
suffocated to death while handcuffed and in police custody, November 1998

Ali REZGUI, 19 years old
shot in the stomach while trying to escape with a stolen truck, unarmed, September 2000

Ryad HAMLAOUI, 23 years old
shot by police while driving a stolen car, April 2000

Moussa BRADAÏ, 17 years old
shot in the head while driving a stolen car, January 2002

Mohamed BERRICHI, 28 years old
died in a motor scooter accident while being pursued by a police car, May 2002

Getu Hagos MARIAME, 25 years old
suffocated to death by police officer during deportation, handcuffed and unarmed, January 2003

Balé TRAORÉ, 19 years old
shot, unarmed, March 2005

Abou BAKARI TANDIA, 38 years old
died in a coma after being held in police custody, April 2005

Zyed BENNA, 17 years old and **Bouna TRAORÉ, 15 years old**
chased by police into a power plant where they were burned to death, October 2005

Samir ABBACHE, 26 years old
killed in the Mulhouse prison, October 2005

Eric BLAISE, 28 years old
died under mysterious circumstances while in isolation at Fleurys-Merongis, November 2005

Eric MOURIER, 28 years old
died while in isolation in Saint-Joseph, January 2006

Fethi TRAORÉ, 31 years old
pursued by police, drowned in La Marne in a Paris suburb, May 2006

Vilhelm COVACI, 20 years old
drowned in the Saint Denis Canal during altercation with police, June 2006

Taoufik EL-AMRI
drowned in a canal in Nantes after a police control, November 2006

Guillaume PERROT
found drowned in Corbeil-Essonnes after being left on the banks of the Seine by police officers, December 2006

Lamine DIENG, 25 years old
shot and killed in a police van in Paris, June 2007

Moushin, 15 years old, and **Larami, 16 years old**
killed after being hit by a police car while on their motorbike, November 2007

Jonathan, 24 years old, graffiti artist
died after falling from a roof while trying to escape police, February 2007

Louis MENDY, 34 years old
shot in the head by a police officer, May 2007

Nelson, 14 years old
died after being hit by police car at a pedestrian crossing, June 2007

Elmi MOHAMMED, 23 years old
drowned in the Saône after altercation with police, June 2007

Lu SEMEDO DA VEIGA, 28 years old
died in prison from lack of treatment, January 2008

Reda SEMMOUDI, 31 years old
thrown from a window, January 2008

Baba TRAORÉ, 29 years old
drowned in La Marne while trying to escape a police control, April 2008

Abdelakim AJIMI, 22 years old
died from "a mechanical asphyxiation caused by ribcage compression and an "arm key" performed too strongly and for too long by the policemen on the victim," May 2008

Joseph GUERDNER, 27 years old
shot seven times in the back while trying to escape in handcuffs, 2008

Mohamed, 39 years old
shot, June 2008

Salem ESSOULI
died from lacking treatment while in detention in Paris, 2008

Ilies, 16 years old
died during a police persecution in Romans sur Isére, September 2008

Artur HARUTYUNYAN, 25 years old
killed in police custody, October 2008

Elvis AKPA
died after falling from the 7th story when trying to escape police, October 2008

Naguib TOUBACHE, 20 years old
shot, November 2008

Yakou SANOGO, 18 years old
died during altercation with police, August 2009

Mohamed BOUKOUROU, 41 years old
died in a police van, November 2009

Sources: Amnesty International, L'Humanité, Le Monde Diplomatique, Indymedia.org

I wanted the list to be in the film. I wanted to show how dangerous life can be if you're born in the wrong place and in the wrong social class, like Vincent in the film. Maybe he had been lucky to "only" end up in prison?

My first idea was that we should go to all of the places where someone had been killed and paint a cross on the ground there. The scale was too large. We would have needed to travel all over France. Then we worked with the idea of painting crosses in places in Marseille where someone might get killed. A parking lot, a police station, an alleyway. This time we filmed it on video. Åsa and I took turns filming and painting. It turned out badly. We were too chicken to paint really big crosses that were visible on film. So it ended up being feeble marker-scrawled attempts and the images communicated... nothing at all.

Later I tried using just the list, with no images; both as a graphic text and then as a text read out loud, but nothing was any good. The list was so long and there was so much content that it was hard to listen to. On top of that, it took up too much space and in terms of narrative it was too far removed from the essence of the film. In the end I gave up the idea with the list.

The list idea is a good example of something that couldn't be integrated into the film. The story it was telling was a different one, too distant from the core of this film. It wanted to express something about poverty and racism and violence in French society. It was too general in terms of the story I was telling, which was a specific one. The goal was to tell A LOT about something SMALL, not the other way around; that is, to find a story that was simple on the surface but harbored many layers. I had to cut out a lot of things that were good, but just didn't belong.

WHEN MORNING COMES THE DIRT AND DEBRIS ARE GONE FROM THE STREETS.

MARGUERITE DURAS

The phone calls with the man who had once been close to me continued for nine months. I wrote them down in my diary. When the idea came to me on the stairs of the Bibliothèque Nationale, I decided to use the phone calls as dialogues in the film. Why? I felt they were important. I wanted to hold on to them and make them mine. I also thought that my voice in Swedish alternating with the phone call dialogues in French could create a good dynamic for the film. Another voice, and another language.

Our phone calls were about everyday things like mutual acquaintances and money woes. I left those things out. What was left was what I considered the quintessence of the film: the fact that he had been behind bars and I had been just fine, the memories from our shared past and the conversations that showed that we were living different lives now and had difficulty understanding each other.

Since I didn't record the conversations I don't know if the words I wrote were the very same words that were spoken. Probably not. Sometimes weeks passed before I wrote the conversations in my diary.

On top of that, the conversations were originally in French and I wrote them down in Swedish. Almost a year later, I translated them back to French when they were being written in the manuscript. When I wrote down the exchanges for the first time, in my diary, they had already been transformed into fiction.

In a lot of ways, the written dialogues have replaced my memories of the real conversations. They have become the memories, so to speak. Just like a photograph in an album can make someone remember something from their childhood that they don't really remember; they just remember the story that goes with the photograph. In that way, I had created my own memory by writing the text, by giving it form. I find that thought comforting. I am free to create my own history as I please. I am whoever I make myself.

So, my film stopped being a documentary about my life and became a piece of fiction that sourced material from my life in various ways. When working with the film, I often called the character Mia HER and not I. Conversations with financiers and potential co-producers sometimes got strange. They wanted to talk about the reality behind the film. "But where is he now?" "If he works for the mafia like you say, why don't you make a film about that?" or "How do YOU feel now?". It was hard to explain that MIA in the film isn't ME, but just a part of me that inspired a character in a film. Autofiction.

Autofiction is a well-established term in literature. A simple way to define it is as a work that combines two apparently paradoxical genres: autobiography and fiction. Some literary critics have also added the requirement that autofiction should include "stylistic and compositional experimentation;" that is, it should be a literary form that breaks with narrative and naturalistic narration in some way.

An author who is frequently associated with the term autofiction is Marguerite Duras. She lived from 1914–1996 and is one of France's most important authors. The main characters in Duras' novels often borrowed characteristics from the author herself. They were Duras. But at the same time, they weren't.

For example, Duras wrote many books that took place in Indochina, where she spent her childhood. Her novel The Lover is about a young woman who has an affair with an older Chinese man. This was probably taken from Marguerite's own

life (if one goes by what she said in interviews). At the same time, the story has been retold in various novels, for example as The North China Lover , and Wartime Notebooks (published posthumously), and the stories there differ. In one of them, the lover is beautiful and desirable and their love is forbidden. In another, he is ugly and repugnant and their affair is a monetary one. What actually happened in Duras' life is irrelevant. The fiction is what is most true.

Or as the protagonist of Marguerite Duras' novel *The Lover* puts it: "The story of my life does not exist."

That was Duras' point of view: that one is always constructing the story of one's life by recounting it. She never referred to her books as autobiographical.

In a cinematic context, Duras is best known for writing the manuscript for Hiroshima mon amour , directed by Alain Resnais, but she also directed films herself. Some can be hard to find, but they are well worth the trouble of locating them. The films often center on a literary narrative voice read by Duras herself and a cinematic image that corresponds only vaguely to the text/audio. My favorite is Les mains negatives – a 14-minute film from 1978 in which Duras reads a text written about a man who left handprints on the walls of a cave 30 000 years ago. The text refers to the real handprints found in the Madeleine caverns near the French Atlantic coast.

> *In front of the ocean / under the cliff / on the granite cave wall / these hands / wide open / blue / And black / blue like the water / black like the night / The man came alone into the grotto which faced the ocean / All the hands are the same size / he was alone*
> *The man alone in the grotto looked into the noise / into the noise of the ocean / the immensity of it*
>
> *And he cried out*
> *You who have a name who have identity I love you*
> *These hands / the blue like the water / black like the sky / Flat / Pressed and spread on the grey granite*
> *So that someone would see them*
> *I am the one who calls / I am the one who called who cried out thirty thousand years ago*
> *I love you*
> *I cry out that I want to love you, I love you*
> *I will love whoever will hear my cry*
> *On the empty earth these hands will remain / on the granite surface against the fracas of the ocean*
> *Unbearable*
> *No-one will hear anything / see anything*
> *Thirty thousand years / these hands, there, black*
> *The refraction of the light of the sea makes the stone wall Tremble*
>
> *I am someone I am the one who called who called who cried out in this white light*
> *Desire / the word has not yet been invented*
> *He looked at the immensity of it in the fracas of the waves, the immensity of its force / and then he cried out*
> *Above him the endless forests of Europe*
> *He stands amidst the rock / corridors / paths of stone / everywhere*

You who have a name who have been given identity I love you with an indefinite love
He had to climb down the cliff / conquer his fear / The wind blows from the continent pushing the waves back / The waves struggle against the wind / They advance, slowed by the force of the wind / and patiently reach the stone wall
Everything crashes
I love you more than you / I will love whoever hears that I cry out that I love you
Thirty thousand years
I call
I call for the one who will answer
I want to love you I love you
For thirty thousand years I have cried out in front of the sea the white spectre
I am the one who cried out that he loved you, you

The man is calling out his love to the person who has an identity. To the person who IS someone – you and me and Marguerite Duras. The text is also Duras' own crying out. Her writing is almost always about impossible love. Desire that cannot be satisfied. The lover one will never quite meet. Sometimes it is about distances in class or age differences (like in The Lover, where the woman is 16 and the man significantly older and of Chinese descent). In Les mains négatives, the distance cannot be bridged because the man calling out his love lived 30 000 years ago.

There is a filmed image that accompanies the text. I remember it as a single shot, but when I watch the film again now, I see that there are multiple clips. There is a car drive through Paris at dawn. Before the city has awoken. We see empty streets and the people who populate the city at night. A lonely homeless person (?), black men sweeping the streets. It was probably filmed from the roof of a car. There's no original production sound, only Marguerite Duras' voice and a cello.

Duras' work has been analyzed in countless dissertations and books. Without getting into cinema- or literary-theoretical aspects here, I want to try to understand what it was she did and why I find it so good.

Why do I love this film? Because it dives right in without using any conventional cinematic "tricks;" there's no sentimental music, no protagonist to identify with – or yes, the man in the cave, but we neither see nor hear him – we only meet him through Duras' text. My thoughts and I go into the film alone, and then return to me because there is no forward progression, no dramaturgy to grip me and not let go. The film sets me free. It is about me in relation to the work.

I think that in a concentrated way, or with PRECISION, without waste, the film expresses Time – Memory – Longing – What has been lost. That she is so PRECISE is key. She has identified the core of her story and found the most exact way to give it a form. And she has pared back everything else.

The text that Duras reads is full of imagery: the man standing in the cave and crying out his loneliness to the sea, the imprints of his hands like black and blue exclamation points on the walls, his cries, which have survived over 30 000 years to reach me. At the same time, we're seeing images that tell us another story altogether. Right? The images were taken in what we call "the blue hour." It's the time of day when most suicides take place. It's the hour when it's hardest to fall back asleep. It's also the hour when migrant workers from the former colonies clean the streets of Paris so the natives, the privileged, that is, WE, can walk along them without stepping in dirt. When morning comes, the dirt and debris are gone from the streets.

Indirectly, these images also speak of something related to the man in the cave. Something about distance. Something about loneliness and longing. Something about darkness and then dawn. The gaze can rest on these images for a long time. Nothing happens. What happens there happens in the text. In Duras' voice, with the man in the cave who is crying out his love.

What else do I observe? The literary quality of the text itself is high. The music is minimalistic. The film's imagery is simple. Or to put it more precisely: the images contain the same information the whole time. I don't need to make an effort to interpret new information; I can allow my gaze to rest on the image and follow the story being told in the audio.

The film does not invite the spectator to identify with it. The cinematic tools are so exposed that escapism is impossible. The spectator keeps returning to herself. It creates a large gap, in a manner of speaking, between what is said and what is understood. Sometimes one's thoughts wander off in another direction. I see the camera pan slowly over a Paris neighborhood that I know. I think: "Aha, so that's what it looked like in the 70s. It looks so poor. Almost as if it was the 1940s... I wonder how it looked after the war... when it was bombed... or did the Germans ever bomb Paris...?" And then I hear the phrase Je t'aime plus loin que toi and I return to the man in the cave who is me who is also Duras who knows what it means to dare to love. And later I see that day is breaking in the images and I think about love and daybreak, which always comes in the end and I don't understand all the French (the film isn't subtitled), but it doesn't matter because the very fact that the mind can wander freely is elating and I think that the film is a masterpiece and I would have liked to have watched 100 minutes more of it.

THE SEQUENCES COMMUNICATED A MONOTONY OF SORTS, THE KIND ONE EXPERIENCES WHEN CLEANING, BUT ALSO A KIND OF SECURITY; I REMEMBER MY MOTHER AND EVEN MY GRANDMOTHER ON HER KNEES CLEANING IN THAT VERY SAME WAY.

Duras was a celebrated author, but her films were seen as controversial and they received some harsh criticism. People thought that she had gone too far in her breaking of cinematic rules. That her films were too inaccessible. She was unaffected by the criticism. Or perhaps it did affect her, but she continued nonetheless to "destroy cinema," as she put it ("détruire le cinema"). In the last film she made, L'homme Atlantique, there are long, black sections with only a voice. This was because she didn't get enough funding to make the film as long as she had wanted to. She simply used all of the reels that her funds could buy and let a black screen accompany the remaining audio.

I'd like to quote the French film theorist Royer on Duras' films (the quote has been translated from the French):

Michelle Royer
L'Écran de la passion

> *"Through her subversion of the film medium, often iconoclastic... envisaged less to open the path to a counter-cinema than to make a film to her own use, to forge a personal tool apt to take her closer to this original place, where one is deaf and blind."*

POINT OF VIEW

After the trip to Marseille I had a natural break from the film project. I produced the short film collection Dirty Diaries, which took up almost all of my time. On top of that I was teaching at the Stockholm Academy of the Arts and doing the master's program in Gothenburg.

The break was good. When I came back to the film, I saw it with fresh eyes and it was clear that it needed other elements to create dynamism in the narrative. I worked with the film in separate tableaus all of the time, independent scenes that each told a story of their own. Like a series of short films that could be shown in any order.

The film now consisted of two elements: Memories recounted in my voice in Swedish and phone calls in French (read by me for the time being). Each memory was accompanied with images that we had filmed in Paris and Marseille. Sometimes the images could be interpreted as illustrations of the text. I didn't have a direct method of choosing images, but instead chose them by "feeling." Sometimes an image had no apparent connection to what was being said, and at other times an image could be understood as a more direct representation or commentary. For example, a place that could be linked to the memory I was recounting.

I had taken some footage in Stockholm with the photographer Albin Biblom, including some images of my son standing by an open window and trying to look outside. I tried pairing the images with a phone call and something new emerged. The film approximated the feeling of multiple things happening simultaneously – I was talking to someone from the past
whilst the image, my son in a diaper, pointed towards the future. That's when I got the idea for a new series of images that I called point-of-view.

- Are you there?
- Yeah
- What are you doing?
- I'm on the subway. You?
- I'm at home. My son is home sick.
- It's really hard for me to understand that you're a mother. That you have children.
- You were gone ten years...

- You'll always be the same for me. The person you were then.
- Yes, but...
- I could never have children, the way I live.
- Why not?
- Imagine kissing them goodbye in the morning and then going out to take care of someone.
- What do you mean "take care of someone?"
- What do you think?
- But you don't hurt people, do you? I thought you were just dealing, or...
- I only hurt people in the "business," and in a way they deserve it. I've never hurt anyone who was innocent.
- Everyone is innocent.
- Hardly.
- In that case one could say the same about you. That you deserved all of the bad things that have happened to you.

- That it's your own fault.
- Yes.

- Don't you think you deserved better?
- No.
- What a weird thing to say.
- You're really such a little idealist. Your documentaries, why do you make them. What should they be good for?

I thought that the point-of-view images should represent the present. That is, what was happening at the same time as the phone calls were taking place. What I saw. What he saw. The man who had once been close to me had no fixed home and was outside a lot. I had small children and spent a lot of time at home. He was poor. I was middle class. He was French. I was Swedish. The contrasts interested me.

female – male, public – private, security – vulnerability, freedom – bourgeois confinement

I considered how my point-of-view pictures should look. I wanted to film household chores, since they are something I spend a lot of time doing. I made a series of pictures with the photographer Ewa Cederstam of my hands while I vacuumed, did laundry, washed dishes, picked up toys from the floor. The sequences communicated a monotony of sorts, the kind one experiences when cleaning, but also a kind of security; I remember my mother and even my grandmother on their knees, cleaning in that very same way. The images were good but they didn't work in the film. They were too staged and too far from the tone I was seeking to strike. I tried filming images of exteriors in Stockholm, but they were too general and looked like postcards. In the end the scenes I chose to represent my point-of-view were images I had filmed of my son, where he is playing and we're talking to each other. The images impart a kind of simplicity and everyday well-being.

Then there were the pictures from France, his point-of-view. Åsa and I went back to Paris to film again. This time we filmed on video. I had come up with a number of "scenes" to represent his view of the world. Shabby hotel rooms. A staircase where he knocks on a door to pick up a bag. A weapon on a table. A laundromat where he is washing his clothes. A locker at Gare-du-Nord where I imagined that he stored his belongings. The images were no good. Laughably bad, actually. They were totally incongruent with the stylized, seemingly documentary material we had produced up till then. The images were so clearly staged that they made you lose faith in the film. I also lost faith in the whole idea of trying to portray his view of the world. The solution came from an unexpected place.

This time once again, I told the man who had once been close to me that I was coming to France to film. This time I told him that the film would be about real memories and that some of them had to do with him, but that it was fiction. His name and face would never be shown in the film. He accepted it, but he wasn't happy about it. He was somewhere else at the time, but was nonetheless troubled by my recurrent trips to Paris. He wondered why the film was taking such a long time to make (a common question from people who don't make films) and I said that I was still missing pictures of Paris.

- It can't be that hard, he said. I can do it.
- How? I said.
- I can take footage with my phone. What do you want me to film?
- Film what you see, I said.
- Then it will be a lonely man's view of the city, he said.

And that was how it was. The man who had once been close to me filmed his own point-of-view. He used his phone to film what he saw and emailed the images to me. I don't know if he did it to be helpful or to keep me from coming to Paris again.

In any case, the images lent the film a kind of authenticity. There were pictures of parking garages and alleyways, rooftops where he kept watch and cars where he sat waiting for someone. Images with no content that told a story nonetheless.

When I think about it now, these images are probably the ones that are closest to the expression in Marguerite Duras' *Les mains négatives.*

WHAT'S MORE IMPORTANT: THE FILM OR THE HUMAN BEING?

THE EXPLOITATION OF OTHERS

I got the idea of showing the material to the man who had once been close to me. I told him that I had test-edited some scenes and I wondered if he wanted to look at them. He said yes. He didn't know what to expect. Neither did I. I thought he would be flattered to be in my film; that it would be so good that he would change his mind about being involved. I sent him the 20 minutes I had shown to Filminstitutet.

He called me right away.

- *What is this? What have you done? You're telling my whole life story. There are things here that I've told only you and no one else.*
- *But I told you I was making a film, I showed you some of the clips beforehand...*
- *Yeah, but this is totally different. This is... I don't even know what to say.*

- And the Florence Rey story, how can you even compare yourself to her? You didn't know her. What does she have to do with you?
- But it affected me. I was living in Paris then and... I saw myself in her in a way.
- But why? She was just a little student who didn't know what she was doing... They killed four cops. It was a horrible tragedy in France. You can't just put it in your film like that. You're Swedish. You don't get it.
- But I can see myself in her anyway, can't I?
- And the thing about me having been in jail. Does that have to be in the film?
- Yes. That's pretty much what the film is about.
- Why do you always have to be so interested in misery?? Here I am trying to forget those years in prison, and you want to talk about them all the time. You even want to make a film about it.
- But one can't just forget. It's my story too, you know.
- And that thing with the bar in Belleville, it's not true. And the thing with the cat...
- No, I changed some things. But other things happened too...
- You can't show this film in France.
- Eh... but there will be an actor reading your voice and we can change all of the details that are too personal. No one will know it's you.
- What?! Some fucking faggot actor is going to read my voice and go to film festivals and take the cred for my life?!

It had been naive and foolish of me to show him the film at this point. When I thought about it, it was no surprise that he had gotten angry. He felt exploited and betrayed.

I'd like to return here to Martin Buber's terms I-You, You-It. When I'm working on a film, I have to love it and be filled with its energy, but what happens to my relationship with the people whose realities I'm depicting? The man who had once been close to me had become a character in my film, and as such he had become more real to me than the real person. My relationship to the film and its protagonist was I-You, but my loyalty was there and not with the real person.

The relationship had changed into I-It. This particular situation highlights the dilemma of the documentary filmmaker.

What's more important: the film or the human being? Whose gaze prevails?

- Why did they put you in jail?
- What?
- Why did you do time? What did you do?
- It's a long story.
- Tell me.
- Eh... we did a robbery and it all went wrong.
- In what way?
- It got out of control and I got caught at the airport.
- Had you killed someone?
- Excuse me?
- Did you kill someone?
- Why are you asking me all of these questions? Are you making a film about my life or something?
- Yeah, maybe.
- Do you always have to dwell on everything? Can't you just let it be?
- But if I tell your story... something good could come out of it.
- Like what?
- Conditions in French prisons could be improved, for example.
- Ah, you just want to tell the story because it's good and it suits your ideals perfectly.

The poor little boy from the outskirts who turns into a criminal and it's all society's fault.

- Do you always have to be so cynical? I just want to do it well. Do you think you have a better idea?

- At least I'm honest. I'm a criminal and I'm not ashamed of it.

- Oh God, how ridiculous. What, are you proud?

- No. Are you proud of what you do?

- Yeah, or... no, not if you put it like that. As if I was some kind of... colonizer.

- Ha ha, that's what you are. A colonizer. And I'm the little negroe who gets exploited.

- Vince!

- No, seriously. I don't want you to make a film about me and I don't want to talk about jail and all of that stuff anymore.

- But... sometimes I think... someday you'll be gone again and the only thing I'll have left is this film.

- But I'm already gone.

- Not for me.

I decided that I would shift the film, so its core was closer to me. And to try to look at myself with a clearer, more plundering gaze.

I'M NOT ATTRACTED TO CRIMINAL MEN BECAUSE I WANT TO HELP THEM. I WANT TO OWN THEM. DEVOUR THEM.

ORPHEUS

I have always been attracted to criminal men. They are above the rules that I'm constrained to follow. They do things I want to do but don't dare. Don't take any shit. Carry out violence. Go their own way. The ultimate in masculine, if you will – not living in adaptations. Not pleasing others. This is obviously a romanticized simplification that says more about my desire than about the reality of criminal men. But it is true for me.

The Vincent of the film works for the mafia and spent eight years behind bars. Mia – that is, "me" – has two kids and lives a safe life in Sweden. The Me in the film tries to convince Vincent that we should meet, but she is rejected. It is an impossible demand. Not because of the geographic distance or the imbalance of power in our relationship, but because of the time that has passed. Besides, for that kind of meeting to be possible – the real meeting – time would have to be turned back to before it was all too late. Ruined. The Vincent in the film knows that. Mia doesn't want to understand. She wants to achieve the impossible.

- *I've been thinking... maybe I can come visit you in Paris.*
- *No, that's not a good idea.*
- *Why not?*
- *No.*
- *We could take a walk. Go to our old haunts...*
- *No.*
- *Why not?*
- *Please stop it. You can't come here. Ok?*
- *Why not. I just want to hold your hand one more time. Then I'll go home and leave you alone.*
- *You can't visit me here in Paris. It's impossible. Don't you understand who I am? Who I've become?*
- *But it's not your fault. Life did that to you, but life can change again. So can you.*
- *No. I can't.*
- *You're the one who looked me up after all these years. And now you're going to leave me again. Is that how it is?*
- *I just wanted to see if you were ok. And then I wanted to know... if you were real or if you had just been a dream.*
- *And now that you know I'm real you're chickening out.*
- *But what do you want me to do?*
- *I just want to see you one more time! That's all.*
- *You can't always get what you want. Not this time.*

I saw the opera performance Orpheus and Eurydice on TV. The production was by Mats Ek and Marie-Louise Ekman had done the fantastic costumes and scenography. It struck me that the Greek myth dealt with a lot of the topics I was trying to develop in my film. Love – or lust – as fundamentally ephemeral, impossible. When we turn to the one we love to see her face, we lose her forever. Everything ends. Like my grandmother's life. Like the love of my youth. Like this film.

Orpheus was a musician and poet, the sun of the Greek god Apollo. One day he loses his beloved Eurydice. She dies after being bitten by a snake and disappears into the Underworld. Orpheus cannot bear losing her and sets off to Hades, the god of the dead, to retrieve her. With his beautiful music, Orpheus succeeds in charming even Hades, and Eurydice is given back to him on one condition: that he does not turn around to look at her face a single time before they are out of the Underworld. In the beginning everything is fine. Orpheus walks in front and Eurydice follows behind as they travel up towards the light, and they do not look at one another. But

when they are almost there he can no longer stand it: Orpheus turns around to look at Eurydice's face and immediately loses her forever.

The myth of Orpheus has been interpreted in many works. Like all classical myths, it is loaded with symbolism and offers itself to countless interpretations. In Mats Ek and Marie Louise Ekman's version, Orpheus is an old man. And Amor is wrapped in bandages like a mummy or someone who needed to be wrapped in gauze.

For me, Orpheus is the artist. He attempts to appeal against death with his music. Like all artists, he negotiates with death by creating works that live on. All acts of creation are a negotiation with time. Orpheus is also admired as an artist. Self-absorbed. He enters the Underworld self-assured and assumes that Eurydice WANTS to be saved, or perpetuated, if one prefers. Orpheus is so absorbed by his own will, his own creation, that the emotions of others and the logic of life cease to exist for him. That is why he is doomed to fail.

Perhaps we, as spectators, get some malicious pleasure out of seeing him lose his Eurydice. What did he think? That he was God? (Just as we love reading about celebrities splitting up, getting fat or drinking too much). Orpheus is ridiculous, with his naive longing and his self-absorbedness.

We are all Orpheus. The Mia in the film finds pleasure in the idea of helping Vincent. The idea of showing him "the light." She wants to visit him, hold his hand, get him to go to therapy and read books. To become a carpenter. She has a naive, contrived image of who he is and why he became a criminal. She dreams of being the one who shows him the path to a better life.

One can also interpret the character Orpheus as a person who has suffered loss. The symbol for every person who loves and reaches for the one he loves and loses her. Sooner or later everything comes to an end (...that time will come and take my love away).

I want Orpheus to be in my film. I started out very concrete by writing a text and retelling the myth. I made an audio recording and coupled it with images from art history that depicted Orpheus' journey in the Underworld. The text ends with a question: "What have we learned from this? Perhaps that no one can save another person with their love." The scene segued into another scene about codependence.

"In psychology, women who are attracted to destructive men are called codependent. A codependent person often wants to help the person she loves. To save him with her love, so to speak."

The idea was to continue on to a memory about me and my father. How I wanted to help him when I was little and how later in my life I found my way to other men I wanted to save with my love.

The scene didn't work at all. First of all, the link between the Orpheus myth and the term codependence was far too simple and clichéd.

There is such a wealth of symbols and ways to interpret the myth that explaining it in that oversimplified way would annihilate its innate power. I would be missing the chance to create a gap between what is said and what is understood, so to speak. On top of that, I strongly oppose the Freudian tradition of tracing back all adult behavior to till concrete events and relationships from childhood. Our desires arise from deeper depths than that.

I'm not attracted to criminal men because I want to help them. I want to own

them. Devour them.

The scene had taken me a long time to make because I had experimented with different cut-out animations. (Why? I don't know. It was fun. New. I was curious.) I cut pictures out of different magazines of women who were attracted to destructive men: Whitney Houston, Amy Winehouse, Märta Tikkanen, my grandmother, Florence Rey, Queen Silvia of Sweden. It was funny. But in my enthusiasm to learn a new technique I drifted in the wrong direction. I had to start over.

I took out the whole story of Orpheus and Eurydice. I thought it could be in the subtitles of the Story of the Boy instead (more on that later). I cut the whole scene about codependence, too. What remained was a story about my father and the red flag and a memory from a bar in Belleville.

A memory: My father and I painted banners together on May 1st. Solidarity. Solidarity and justice, we wrote. My dad said that you could change the world if you just tried hard enough. Everything will get better, he said. But nothing turned out like he said. The world didn't become better. And my dad turned into a sad man. Now you need to take over, he said. You are young and strong. But I couldn't save the world or my dad. And in some way that I can no longer remember, it had become me against everyone else.

- Then what happened?
- I went to Paris. I met you.
- ...You were lonely too. Against the rest of the world.

A memory: We used to drink in a bar in Belleville. One night there was a man there, a horrible man who tried to push his hand between my legs. I saw from afar that you had seen it and then you got that evil look in your eyes. You got it sometimes. Then it was as if you disappeared and became someone else. The man was tall and had a moustache. At first he thought you were kidding when you asked if he wanted to die. You grabbed him from behind and dragged him out to the street. You slammed his face into the curb. Blood splattered on our shoes. We ran away.

GRANDMOTHER'S STORY

That winter my grandmother died. She was 96 years old and she had Alzheimer's disease. Her name was Ruth Engberg and she had worked as a district nurse in Rönninge her whole life. At times she had supported the whole family because her husband – my grandfather – drank too much and spent all their money. My grandmother had a lot of things saved from her life; notes, letters, photo albums. Just like me. If my grandmother had lived at another time or been brought up differently, she would have been a filmmaker too. Or an author. Now her life was over, and we cleaned out everything that was left of her so some other old person could move into her room in the home where she lived in Blackeberg.

I scanned all of the pictures that were in my grandmother's photo album and made a timeline during editing. In the first picture my grandmother was six or seven years old. She stands poised with her parents and siblings in a family portrait. Her father was a sea captain and he was very strict. They lived in Södermalm in Stockholm. In the last picture, taken by me, she was sitting on the edge of a hospital bed. She was old and had lost her memory because of her sickness. She had returned to her childhood, an instinctive existence that consisted of eating, sleeping and going to the bathroom. She looked confused in the picture. The rows of photographs created a timeline of her life. Somewhere in the middle of the photos she was the same age as I am now. I made an audio recording of the text that follows and put it in the film with some of the photos.

The winter you left was I was in my first year of film school and Florence Rey spent her first year in prison. I was alone again and everything that had seemed so clear until now had become elusive memories. Memories about which to write, and to which to cling.

You wrote to me in your letters from Paris that I needed to stay in film school. That was my future, you wrote. You didn't write anything about your future. And I was back where I had started. In silence. And in the sense that my life was taking place somewhere else.

That winter I made my first short film. It was supposed to be about the loneliness of an old woman. My grandmother was the protagonist. Grandmother used to say that she never wanted to live without her memories. If I get senile and lose my memory, she said, then you have to kill me with a hammer, promise me that.

This is the last picture I took of my grandma. I took it almost 15 years later, just before she passed away. She had developed Alzheimer's and the only thing she remembered from her life were her the early years of her childhood in Stockholm, when she went to an all-girl's school and went sleigh-riding in Vitabergsparken.

In my grandmother's belongings I found a journal that I had given her once for Christmas. She had written things in it that she had never talked about. Secret memories that were hers alone. Forgive me, Grandmother, for reading this out loud now:

It's September, my month.
I remember the September of 1940, in Kroppefjäll.
Heather in blossom, wild apples and the trees a glorious red.
Poems I read when I left you.
A brief meeting, then nothing more.
Letters burned. Why did I do that?
You've been dead a long time now. Just picture of you and your name in your hand-

writing
in a tiny book. Soon the poems will be forgotten too.
I used to pray for you, who were my greatest joy
and the prayers came so easily
and they journeyed through the lands of the stars
and they were lit and shone,
but night after night the prayers drifted astray,
until finally there were none left.
You changed and thus I had to change
and I will nevermore be what I once was.
Yet there is something that can move my heart to prayer on this frigid earth
Then with ardency I pray the best for you.
But will my prayer pass through the realm of the stars,
will the stars hide from it?
For although I want to pray the best for you, I pray that I will see you again.

After the poem is written "In memory of," followed by a name that has been carefully crossed out and covered with red tape just in case, so we would never be able to figure out who that man was. Not even now, 70 years later, when both of them are dead. I wonder what my grandmother was thinking that day in the park. Now she's gone and I am reading her memories in her diary, just like my children and grandchildren will someday read what I wrote to you.

This sequence has a different, simpler structure than the film's other sequences. It's also the part of the film that could be called "documentary."

I tested other ways of integrating my grandmother's passing away into my work. When my father and I cleaned out my grandmother's apartment, I used my video camera to film. I wanted to capture how her life was there, among her things – the crocheted doilies, the framed photographs on top of the bureau, the porcelain figurines, and how strange it was that we could clean it all out in an afternoon to make place for another person's things. That's how dispensable we are. That's how fleeting our lives are. I set the camera on a tripod and filmed everything in a single shot. It was no good. The solemn and symbolic feeling didn't come through on film. It just looked grim. The rasping of the moving boxes was unsettling. Our voices echoed in the empty room. On top of that, only a small number of my grandmother's things were there, since she had been moved from her own home in Rönninge a few years earlier, and only a few of her possessions had come with her to the old-age home in Blackeberg. I felt sick when I watched what I had filmed and I decided that I would never film anything that private again. Slipshod. Sloppy. Irreverent. I threw away the tape.

Later that spring I filmed another scene with my father. He is sitting at his kitchen table and listening to an audio recording on a cassette player of my grandmother that he made in the 60s, when he was young and the cassette player was new. My grandmother was reading a poem about time and the fading of youth. Her voice sounds solemn and almost sing-song, in that way that actors and actresses articulated back then. I might use it in another film someday.

THE STORY OF THE BOY

I wanted to write a story about the man who was once close to me, about his background, his long journey from the city by the sea where he had spent his childhood to his life on the streets in Paris. The story about the boy would also be a story about all the boys who had been abandoned, become violent and ended up in our prisons. A creation myth of sorts. Archetypical in structure, like a fairy tale.

I worked on it as a separate short film with its own audio realm and a different iconography than the rest of the film. A French photographer called Christian Demare had contacted me earlier after seeing Dirty Diaries in Paris. His pictures were like nothing else I had seen. They were doctored with filters and layers and scratches so they looked damaged, sometimes painted over, often abstract. I thought that they fit well with the Story of the Boy so I translated the text to French and asked him to illustrate it. I had some requests, for example that I wanted images from one of Paris' main train stations and from Marseille. Besides that he could send me what he wanted. It was a smooth collaboration. He took pictures and sent them. I put them in the film.

Once upon a time there was a boy who grew up in a city by the sea.
His father was a fisherman, and so were his uncles.
The boy was very quiet as a child.
He often sat on the balcony and heard people's thoughts.
They were not good.
One day the boy's father travelled to the land he came from and never returned.
So the boy decided to forget his father.
Time passed, and the boy lived alone with his mother and his uncles.
One day his mother met a new man.
The boy could see that there was no longer any room for him
in his mother's heart.
He decided to forget his mother, too, and to go
off and try his luck somewhere else.
He went to the big city.

The boy had never been in the big city before.
For the first few weeks he didn't dare to leave the train station. He
slept in a corner by the lockers where people store luggage. One day
a police officer came and asked where the boy's mother was.
She's at the market buying fruit, the boy lied.
The police officer made a phone call and then let the boy go.
The boy understood that no one had reported him missing
and he decided to forget his uncles and
his whole childhood.
Now he was a boy with no past.

The third week, he travelled to the heart of the city, Les Halles.
He met the prostitutes there. They were kind to him
and gave him food.
They let him live with them in exchange for the underclothes and jewelry
he stole for them from expensive shops.
The boy learned to steal.
He soon met the other thieves and boys and dealers
who lived in the heart of the city.
He got a reputation for being fast and dependable.
They just called him the boy because nobody knew his real
name.

When the boy was seventeen years old he was put in juvenile detention.
He learned how to fight for his life there.
He would get a lot of use out of that.

After one year the boy was back out on the street
He started selling marijuana to artists and bohemians.
They liked him, but they were also afraid of him.
He could read their thoughts, and they were not good.
One day he met love.
She came from another country. Another planet.
Her thoughts were light and hard to read.
They fluttered around like colorful birds and the boy
became dizzy.
He wanted to hold on to the birds and make them his.
He took her with him under the earth.
He thought they would be safe there,
but it was not her home.
Take my hand, she said. Follow me into the light.

I WANT TO WRITE THE FILM LIKE A BOOK, WHERE THE DIFFERENT PARTS WERE CHAPTERS.

THE MUSIC

I talk continuously to Michel Wenzer. We live together and he is a filmmaker too, and a composer. When he made his feature film At Night I Fly we talked a lot about dramaturgy, about how to relate to one's material when putting it together in a film.

Michel worked with his film as if it was music. The scenes followed each other like parts of a musical composition and when he evaluated and placed scenes in the whole, he based his decisions on sound and rhythm rather than content. When I started working on Belleville Baby I wanted to work differently. I wanted to write the film like a book, where the different parts were chapters. The text, the written word, would be the film's backbone and give it its direction.

When I started cutting the film and recording texts, the material was completely silent because I had filmed with Super 8 and I hadn't recorded any of the original sound. At first I thought I would work with no music or audio until the film had been cut. But listening to my own voice all alone with the mute images became unbearable. The scenes felt dead. At this early editing stage, I sometimes felt discouraged and unsure if what I was doing could become a film at all. Michel offered to make music and audio for the first scenes, to make them more alive. It worked well and suddenly I could see the cinematic potential of the scenes and the whole idea. After that, Michel did the music and audio several times as the editing progressed.

Michel made music and sound that sought to move further from realism. One of the first scenes he added sound to was a scene filmed from a train, where Vincent is talking about the train ride back to Paris after he was released from the prison, which is in a town nearby. Instead of evocative music and train sounds, Michel created sounds based on a boat horn (one of those signals you hear when there's fog) and a surreal atmosphere that could perhaps be associated with a harbor. The effect was elevating and it disrupted the sense that we were on a train. The image changed into a memory, or perhaps a metaphor. The image became a journey.

What he wrote for other scenes was more similar to what we call music. But it didn't create atmosphere the way that conventional film music can when the object is to make the spectator feel something particular or identify with a character. This music was more abstract and harder to interpret, and in that way it broadened the gap between what was said and what lay beneath.

Michel cannot be controlled, so he got to work in his own way. Sometimes the music stopped being music and became humming and creaking. He kept encouraging me to dare to make the film my own way and to let go of my will to please. He was an enormous source of strength, especially in times when I felt alone with my film and doubted my abilities.

"Stop evaluating everything you do as good or bad," he used to say. *"The idea needs to be carried through. That's the important thing."*

EDITING

I started editing the film the same day I started filming. So the total editing time was 4.5 years. If I had known how much work awaited me perhaps I would have hesitated. Or maybe not.

First, I put the text/voice in as a backbone to build the film around. Then I put in the images I had where I thought they worked. They were only enough for small parts of the text and in the early cuts, large parts of the film were black. Parts of the final cuts are black, too. I added images gradually as I filmed.

The work was slow, but it continued to progress. During the very best periods my flow was good and everything was enrapturing and euphoric. During bad periods I doubted that there would be any film and was distressed that it was taking such a long time. I was worried that the film would be bad, that there wouldn't be enough money and that I would humiliate myself. All the normal stuff.

During the final post-production phase I was more concentrated when I worked. I didn't take any new footage, just worked with the existing material. I didn't even work with other film projects. That period ended up lasting a year.

As I mentioned earlier, Kalle Boman was my supervisor throughout the whole process, but his greatest and most important role came to be during the editing in that final year. We met regularly at Studio 24 and watched the film on a big screen. Our regular meetings served as a compass.

Kalle gave me a lot of good advice. Among other things he said: *"Don't make any decisions in the editing room."* In the beginning I thought that was a strange piece of advice, because when you're editing a film like this one, ALL of the decisions are made in the editing room. But after a while I started to follow his advice and it made a huge difference. I started doing all of my idea work outside the editing room. Sometimes ideas came at night when I was going to sleep. Or I took long walks and saw the film play before my eyes and made decisions like "that scene has to go, and we'll put the train images there instead." When I got to the editing room I made the changes I had decided on. Nothing more. That meant that my work in the editing room was concentrated and I didn't make any hasty decisions. I also bypassed the time-consuming circle of cutting, combining, cutting, getting exhausted, working too late, realizing that everything you did the night before was crap, redoing it, losing direction, feeling desperate, despising your editing room.

Up until this point, I had been working with the film as a series of unrelated short films, but after the first screening at Studio 24, Kalle said: "This isn't a collection of short films. I see this as ONE performance." Some interpretation is always necessary with Kalle. Sometimes you don't quite understand what he means. I took it to mean that it should be a long film and that I should be working on the whole. Maybe that wasn't what he meant, but that was what happened.

I had a system where I named each version of the film after I showed it to Kalle and my producer Tobias. The first long film version was called 1:1. After the first screening the versions were called 2:1, 2:2, a new version every day, until it was time for the next screening. After that I started 3:1. That way I could always go back to older versions and see what I had done before and after each screening. I could also go back and find things that had been lost during the working process.

Why did I choose to not work with an editor? I didn't want to communicate about my story. It's hard, if not impossible, for an editor to work with material if the di-

rector doesn't want to articulate what the film is about. I wanted the ideas to take shape at their own pace, without going through speech – like I imagine an author works. Besides that, there wasn't much material to work with. Just texts in my head that I had added to the film little by little and some blurry Super 8 images that weren't directly connected to the story.

Film editing is demanding work. Especially with films like this one that are kind of invented as they're being made. Sometimes I got desperate and the cutting room felt like a prison cell. I stopped telling friends that I was working on the film. I was ashamed that I hadn't finished it. I wanted to be good.

When I stopped thinking about my ultimate goal it got easier. It was allowed to be a process where every detail was important and the pleasure of working itself was the important part. That frame of mind has become increasingly true for me. When I was younger I thought that I was making films to change the world. As if the most important thing was that my films were received by an audience and influenced them in some obscure way, making them "better people." Today I feel like the real meaning of my work is the work itself. Creating something. The rest is not up to me.

DIALOGUES

It wasn't until the final stage of the production, when the editing was nearly finished, that I brought in an actor to read the dialogue. His name was Olivier Desautel and we had found him in Paris. I was working with a casting agent in Paris, Elsa Pharaon. I sent her a manuscript and described the characters and the project. She selected a number of actors that she found suitable for me. Some of them were great, but Olivier was best. He had a kind of natural aggression that was similar to Vincent's character. He was also well versed in the style of speech that Vincent uses, and he had a good voice.

We spent two days recording the audio together with the sound engineer Jan Alvermark. Janne later added the sound to the film. Working with Janne was a great pleasure. He was ambitious, interested and brought a lot to the project with his expertise and joyous energy. In the days before the recording sessions he had tested different microphones to find the best telephone audio. One of his ideas was that we use body mikes for the recordings and go into separate rooms and talk so that we could have both movement and distance. Just like if we were really talking on the phone. We also discussed the possibility of Olivier going outside and calling the studio from his cell phone, and us recording the conversation. In the end we decided to work with stationary mikes in the studio. That way we had a "clean" sound that we could disrupt with phone static afterward. And I could concentrate on directing.

THEORETICALLY IT WOULD BE POSSIBLE TO TAKE IN THE WHOLE STORY WITHOUT THE IMAGES.

I had never directed actors before. I had a notion that it would be difficult, almost impossible. Why? Maybe because documentary films have always had a lower status than feature films and working with fiction has always been shrouded in mystery in a way. I was afraid that I wouldn't be able to explain what I wanted to the actors. That they would be difficult and uncooperative and that I would have to

settle for something that was no good. During the casting process in Paris I discovered that actors are usually friendly, accommodating and eager to do a good job. My impatience was my weakest side during this part of the work. Sometimes I was satisfied before it was ready.

Olivier taught me to write a "titre" for every scene. A kind of summary of what the dialogue was actually about. A subtitle. The characters' directions in relation to one another. A lot of my work as a director was about bringing his energy down to a minimum to make the dialogues as simple as possible. Almost read, not acted. French is often spoken quickly and intensively. I wanted a slow rhythm that felt almost unrealistic when we were recording, but that was just right in the film.

Sometimes it was magical. When we both reached a high level of concentration and everything was right. The character Vincent took a new direction in the encounter with Olivier's personality. Vincent became a new character of his own, taking him another step further from the reality that had once preceded the film.

SOUND DESIGN

Since most of the story in the film is in the audio, the sound work was crucial. I could have sacrificed any image in the film, but none of the audio. When Janne Alvermark added sound to the film we played with the thought of making a version with only audio, a kind of audio book or radio drama to listen to in a movie theater. Theoretically it would be possible to take in the whole story without the images if you understood both French and Swedish.

At first we strove for realism. The atmosphere in the silent scenes almost seemed to belong to the image. Sounds from the street gave an image of an empty bed by an open window its atmosphere. Wind and far-off voices were added to a winter landscape. When we had integrated all of the audio for the film in that way, we had doubts. It didn't really work. The film became too concrete and the dream-like feeling was gone. The images were limited by the sound instead of expanded. So we started over.

This time, we looked instead for sound that could amplify a feeling in the image, not illustrate what the image portrayed. An image of Vincent shaving was accompanied by a filtered sound from a hydraulic turbine that sounded like a heart beating. The image of the bed by the window was almost completely silent, with a few stray vespa sounds, and at times there were sea sounds in places where they actually didn't belong.

The long series of images with my grandmother was a challenge. The only sounds were my voice and silence. We needed to bring the black and white stills to life so the sequence wouldn't be too static. I wanted Janne to look through his archive to find sounds from the 1940s, female voices, some old radio voice, some crackly old 78. Janne was reluctant. He thought that we should look for something more unique and suggested that we search through my father's old audio recordings.

It was a very time-consuming task. My father had made a lot of recordings with the cassette player in the 50s and 60s and there was a lot to listen to: my grandmother's solemn recitations of Karin Boye's and Nils Ferlin's poems, my grandfather singing drinking songs in his reverberating tenor, and recordings that lasted hours of various birthday parties where the Engberg family drank, played the accordion and sang in parts. It was nice and it was funny, but there was nothing that fit the

atmosphere behind my grandmother's stills. In the end I found a poor recording of my father hitting the keys of a piano that was out of tune. It fit perfectly. It sounded remote and faltering and amplified the sense of everyday life and of time that has passed.

It took time to go through all of my dad's cassettes and at first I thought that it was an unnecessary task. It was only a question of a few minutes of the film. But afterward I understood that Janne had been right. The home-recording feel lent a unique and personal atmosphere to the scene that we wouldn't have been able to create with sounds from the archive.

Janne put the same precision and energy into every detail of his work. He strove for the unique and the imperfect, which resulted in fantastic sound that reinforced the film's dream-like character.

THE LAST JOURNEY: TROUVILLE

I had no end for the film. I wanted to film the sea and accompany it with a concluding dialogue. I also wanted the film to open with the sea and I wanted to meet the man who had once been close to me.

I travelled to Trouville in Normandy. While I was there, I visited the house where Marguerite Duras spent the final summers of her life and where she wrote her last books.

The house is very beautiful. It's called Les Roches Noires (The black boulders) and it's a hotel from the 1800s with holiday residences where Marcel Proust also wrote for a while. Nowadays it's privately-owned and not open to the general public. For some reason the groundskeeper wasn't there on that particular afternoon. The doors were open; I walked into the magnificent entrance hall. It was like being transported back in time. The house looked like it had neither been renovated nor cleaned since 1910. I took footage of the corridors, where the wallpaper hung loose and torn on the walls, and I stood outside Marguerite Duras' apartment for a long time, wondering if there was anyone living there now. The house felt empty. Maybe people only lived there in the summer. Outside you could hear the sea and the gulls, but otherwise it was silent.

It was September 2011. Three years after my trip to Marseille. My film was almost finished. I wanted the film to have an open end that connected to the beginning. I wanted it to feel empty, like a holiday town when all of the tourists have gone home. At the same time there should be a sense of expectation. I thought about Marguerite Duras' last book, which she finished just three days before she died. It's a prose poem of sorts, where she says farewell to her lover Yann Andrea and to us, her readers, and to writing, which was her life. The book is called C'est tout.

Marguerite Duras
C'est tout

> *Maybe tomorrow I shall write you again.*
> *One can live on that.*
> *Laughing and then crying.*
> *I speak of the time that trickles out of the earth.*
> *(...)*
> *I no longer have the slightest notion about what I*
> *thought I knew or expected to see again.*
> *There it is, and no more.*

I filmed people walking along the beach and a seagull that looked straight in the

camera. It was chilly and the sea looked different than it did in Marseille. Colder. The images were put together with a newly written dialogue that concluded the film.

As the film's final image, a shot taken with his cell phone. It was filmed on a beach. First you see the sea and some seashells left behind by the tide. Then his white tennis shoes walking in the sand. They walk resolutely away from the sea. He raises the camera and far off in the distance you see the silhouette of a woman holding a film camera. It's me.

Then I changed my mind. It wasn't his gaze through the phone. That wasn't him on the beach. The film had to end in my loneliness; in my narcissism. I returned to Orpheus. I recorded the story of Orpheus again, changed somewhat, and put it at the beginning of the film. I also put in images of the sea that I had filmed in Normandy. The film's final scene mirrored this scene, and I put images of the sea at the end, too. He doesn't answer the phone and he isn't filming me.

There is only me.

EPILOGUE

It has been six years since I got the phone call from the man who was once close to me. It's early spring and Belleville Baby has premiered at the Berlinale, Gothenburg Film Festival and Tempo Documentary Festival in Stockholm.

The reception until now has far surpassed my expectations: great reviews, enthusiastic audience reactions, even awards.

In spite of the good reception, the film has been hard to sell. Folkets Bio is going to distribute it to cinemas in Sweden, but all of the international distribution and sales agents we've contacted say the same thing: "We love the film, but its appeal is too narrow."
The assumption is that the public has different taste than they do. The film is considered difficult to market because it doesn't belong to any clear genre and because it doesn't resemble anything else.

But the greatest recognition was a letter from a French film student who had seen the film in Berlin. I'd like to conclude with a citation from her letter, which gave me the feeling that it had all had meaning and that my work had come across:

> *I had "two hours to kill" on the second-to-last day of the festival, so I decided to watch the Swedish-French film with the name of my neighborhood, Belleville, in the title. I had seen almost 40 films at the festival, and I was rather disappointed by their uninteresting subject matter and unaesthetic attitude (...). So when I sat down to watch Belleville Baby I had no expectations.*
>
> *I didn't know anything about the film, but it turned out to be the film that affected me most at the festival, maybe more than any other film I had ever seen.*
>
> *So now I'd like to extend my profound thanks for the work. I want to avoid intellectualizing (although there is so much to be said about the film), because what happened inside me was so strong, so moving and so personal. I'd prefer not to put it in words and destroy the purity of the work. When I was in the cinema I cried literally from the fifth to the final minute, (...) After the film I decided to cancel the remainder of the day's program and I sat and drank coffee at an outdoor café (yes, even though Berlin is so cold!). I sat there and I let myself be carried off by my own thoughts, images, and memories.*
>
> *Sincerely,*
> *Margaux Guillemard*

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This book is a revised version of the thesis *Belleville Baby – Anteckningar från en filmisk process* that was part of Mia Engberg's master project at Akademin Valand. It was originally published in Swedish by Story in collaboration with Filmkonst, Gothenburg International Film Festival 2013.

Graphic design: Frans Enmark – Studio French
Translated to English by Justina Bartoli

Omslag: Jacob Frössén