DARKNESS AS MATERIAL

Doctoral Project at Stockholm University of the Arts

Mia Engberg

And when you gaze long into an abyss
the abyss also gazes into you.

Friedrich Nietzsche

DARKNESS AS MATERIAL

Doctoral Project at Stockholm University of the Arts

By Mia Engberg

This text was written by Mia Engberg as a part of the doctoral project *Darkness as material* at Stockholm Uniarts.

Graphic design: Jacob Frössén
Translation from Swedish: Justina Bartoli
Supervisors: Rebecca Hilton, Elisabeth Hjorth
Proofreading: Camilla Carlqvist and Margaux Guillemard

STOCKHOLM UNIVERSITY OF THE ARTS | STOCKHOLMS KONSTNÄRLIGA HÖGSKOLA

Part of the publication series X Position no. 26
ISSN 2002-603X
ISBN **978-91-88407-46-7**

Introduction

In the doctoral project *Darkness as Material*, I examine darkness as material and its relationship to cinematic storytelling. The study addresses different kinds of darkness: darkness in the image, darkness in the cinema theatre, darkness in the spectator where films are received and the darkness in the filmmaker, where the world is reflected and ideas are born. The project is inspired by Marguerite Duras' idea to kill cinema, and it explores film's potential to approach the place she described as *the dark room, where we are deaf and blind and passion is possible*.[1]

The research has manifested in two full length films: *Hypermoon* and *Secrets of the Sun*. The films both share the exact same soundtrack, but *Hypermoon* is a film with images whilst *Secrets of the Sun* is a film without images, where darkness replaces image as a visual narrative element. The film *Hypermoon* premiered in Swedish cinemas and was broadcasted on Swedish public television in the autumn of 2023. It is intended for reference purposes only and is not included in the published Documented Artistic Research Project. *Secrets of the Sun* – the film without images – is the cinematic core of the doctoral project. The project also consists of various essays on darkness, which are gathered in the digital publication *Darkness as Material*.

In these writings, I use the terms *black frame* to refer to a dark screen without an image; *non-representational image* to refer to a moving image with an abstract motif; and *detached sound* to refer to audio recorded on a different occasion than the image, for example sound effects or additional atmospheres that don't 'belong to' the image.

This doctoral project is the final part of a three-part study:

1. *Aesthetics of Absence. Belleville Baby* – A documentary project on time, memory, and absence. (Master's at Akademin Valand Film, Gothenburg, 2013). This study explored the use of black frame, non-representational image, detached sound, and narrative voice as a way of depicting time and memory. It resulted in the essay film *Belleville Baby* and the book *Belleville Baby – anteckningar från en filmisk process* (English title: *Aesthetics of Absence*).

2. *The Visual Silence. Lucky One*, An experimental fiction film about forgiveness and silence. (Three-year research project with funding from the Swedish Research Council, 2015–2018). In this second study, the layering of multiple voices operated as a structural narrative element and the black frame had a stronger presence in the cinematic narrative. I also studied the work of other filmmakers, such as Derek Jarman, Marguerite Duras, Ousmane Sembène and Chantal Akerman. The project consisted of the full-length film *Lucky One* and the book *Den Visuella Tystnaden* (English title: *The Visual Silence*).

3. *Darkness as Material. Hypermoon and Secrets of the Sun* (Doctoral project at Stockholm University of the Arts, 2019–2023). Two films and one text have emerged from the final stages of this process, *Hypermoon* explores multiple, shifting relations between image, sound, voice and narrative. While *Secrets of the Sun*, uses the exact same soundtrack but uses darkness as visual material in cinematic narrative. In the context of the Documented Artistic Research Project, the collected texts will be published on the digital platform *DiVA*, under the title: *Darkness as Material*.

In the circuit of film festivals and cinema screenings the films *Belleville Baby, Lucky One* and *Hypermoon* have come to be known as 'The Belleville trilogy'. While I don't know where this name came from, for the sake of simplicity I'll also use it in this text to refer to the film series, even if technically it is a quartet of films, which includes the Doctoral Project film, *Secrets of the Sun*.

Method

In the first two projects, I study the filmmaking practice and the different processes and collaborations it entails. In *Darkness as Material*, I chose not to fix the process of creating films as my primary focus and have instead used my film practice as a way to explore various aspects of darkness.

I don't offer any single, categorical definition of "darkness" in the study, but instead move freely through different conceptual, existential and mythological aspects of that which is not light. Primarily I use the cinematic darkness I have worked with myself as a point of departure, that is, the absence of light and the absence of image.

I have used writing as a way to document the research as well as a method for thinking about darkness. I have been interested in myths related to the underground and the descending into darkness as a metaphor for the creative process. I have attempted to shape thoughts about how the imagination relates to our inner darkness, and how digital projection has eliminated the darkness that was once an integrated part of the cinema experience. I have studied various moving images to determine how they explore cinematic darkness, and finally I have attempted to understand and express something about personal darkness and desire through an imaginary dialogue with Marguerite Duras.

Working on a full-length film (in this case two) involves innumerable small and large processes related to technology and economy and logistics. Therefore, it's crucial that research documentation and reporting be based on subjective selection combined with a kind of interpretation of what has happened. A new narrative is created in the documentation process that is both rooted in reality, but also carries a reality of its own. In that respect, research is similar to autofiction; the narrative is based on lived experiences, but the fictive layer creates a detachment, another universe of its own.

In the cinematic process, I often work intuitively and without using words to formulate my ideas, and a lot of the significance of the completed film is in the in-between spaces and the unspoken. When doing research however I aim to be as precise and transparent as possible in order to contribute new knowledge to my field. Sometimes these two ways of working collide, and tension arises between the secrets of the art and the pedagogical aims of research. I think that is the place from which these texts came to be.

References / Inspiration

This research project has been in the making for many years, and I have seen films and read books, attended seminars and visited exhibitions, partaken in other researchers' projects, travelled, thought, surfed on social media, listened to podcasts, read articles and been influenced in so many different ways that it would be impossible to name them, let alone remember all of them. A few contemporary projects important for my work should be mentioned though: Lina Persson's research on worldbuilding and humans' role in the Anthropocene, Marcus Lindeen's studies on conversation as a basis for documentary narrative in theater and film, and Ester Martin Bergsmark's studies of queer listening and voice under. Elisabeth Hjorth's book *Mutant* and Mara Lee's doctoral thesis *När andra skriver* have both inspired my tentative attempts at performative writing. Patrik Eriksson's doctoral thesis *Melankoliska Fragment* was important, as were Sandra Praun's explorations of the color black and Aurore Berger Bjursell's studies of darkness in Swedish film. I have chosen to situate my research in relation to a community of artists and researchers working in and with various experimental artistic practices rather than in relation to the enormous field of research that is experimental film. I also choose not to position myself within genre-specific studies related to autofiction or essay film, as classifications of that kind haven't had any real bearing on my film creation. Some contemporary artists and filmmakers who have inspired me are Pipilotti Rist, Tehching Hsieh, Nan Goldin, Laurie Anderson, Arthur Jafa, Sharon Lockhart and Maryam Tafakory. Last but not least I'd like to mention my PhD supervisors Kalle Boman, Rolf Hughes, Trond Lossius, Elisabeth Hjorth and Rebecca Hilton, who have been sources of inspiration and direction in different research phases, and my producer Tobias Janson, without whose enormous efforts the film trilogy could never have been realized.

Darkness in the Belleville-trilogy – work story

Belleville Baby

In the film *Belleville Baby*, I used black frames and long shots with images seemingly devoid of content: a tree, a window, the sea, as an impromptu solution to a shortage of documentary material. The narrative was about desire, and the film's protagonist Vincent – the person I was desiring – didn't want to be in the film. The other protagonist I had in mind was Florence Rey, a young woman who had been involved in a police shooting in Paris at the time I was living there and whose destiny could be a kind of parallel story to my own, but she didn't want to be in my project either. The third potential protagonist of the film, my grandmother, who had concealed a desire her entire life, had just passed away. So, I had a documentary story, but no visual material. The film came into being during a long period of experimentation and doubt and writing. I read different sketches into a zoom-recorder and used my closet as a studio. I used stills and Super8 images and home videos from my archive and new images from Marseille that I filmed with my colleague Åsa Sandzén. The images were of skyscrapers, the sea and children playing soccer in the evening light. We even did scenes where the black frame was the image. Little by little something emerged that could be put together and become a film. The film was suffused with the aesthetics of absence, which was a new narrative idiom for me, and text and voice took precedence over image in the cinematic story. I drew inspiration from other films with essayistic and poetic narrative techniques, like Marguerite Duras' *Les Mains Négatives* a short film that consisted of the director's own narrative voice reading a text accompanied by images of Paris at dawn, and Michel Wenzer's short film trilogy *Three Poems by Spoon Jackson*, which is based on Super8-images and phone calls with the poet Spoon Jackson, an inmate serving a life sentence at New Folsom Prison.

Lucky One

In the film *Lucky One* I worked more consciously with a minimalistic aesthetic where the black frame and long shots were planned and more uniform. I collaborated with the cinematographer Daniel Takács and the director and researcher Margaux Guillemard, who had recently coined the term "visual silence" in her doctoral thesis *Beyond the Black Image* (Birkbeck University 2013)[2]. In the manuscript, we developed multiple levels of voices, where the narrator discusses the film with its main character, "imagine if you had a daughter" and also addresses the viewer "close your eyes, imagine that you are this man".

In this project we explored the possibilities of developing new, inclusive methods for filmmaking. We worked on the premise that a new cinematic aesthetic also demanded new cinematic working methods. We experimented with shorter workdays, fewer shooting sites, a smaller film team and an expanded number of filming sessions

to create a more inclusive, less hierarchical working situation. In this project, the non-representational images, the black frame and the detached audio served as a way to facilitate the actual making of the film, as we filmed fewer scenes and used less resources. Exploring the visual silence became a way of searching for the essence of a story, but also a way of trying to extend the potential of what a film can be and how it should be made.

The project was based on a wish to deconstruct traditional cinematic storytelling. We were inspired by Laura Mulvey's feminist theories on the male gaze and voyeurism, as well as Marguerite Duras' black film *L'Homme Atlantique* and her explicit wish to "kill cinema". We longed for darkness in a time of visual overstimulation and objectification, and we saw the darkness of the film and the cinema theatre as a radical act of resistance for creating new gazes and space for the imagination.

Hypermoon – Secrets of the Sun

Belleville Baby and *Lucky One* are linked by a telephone call between me and one of the film's main characters, Vincent. The film tells our shared story when we were young in Paris, but also his personal life story, where he ends up in prison and later gets recruited into organized crime. The story is part documentary and part fiction. For a long time, I thought that the final film in the trilogy would be some kind of resolution, probably a brutal ending connected to the criminal, dangerous-to-navigate world that Vincent lived in. Maybe the story would be circular and end where it had begun, with a prison sentence. Or maybe the character Vincent would die a premature death caused by the violence that had earned his daily bread. But before I had started work on the third film, I got sick. While working on *Lucky One* I was diagnosed with cancer, and it changed both how I was living as well as my work. And at that same time his life also changed direction, and it turned out that the final film, *Hypermoon*, wasn't about Vincent's possible death, but about my own. Somewhat unexpectedly, it also ended up being a film full of images.

Working with *Hypermoon*, I calculated that I might not have much time left, so I had to work effectively. Darkness was initially an instrument to gain time. I started out by making a black film, with just voices and no images, so the film without images could conclude the trilogy if I didn't have time to carry out a larger film project. The absence of visual material in the film could be compensated by the fact that it was an exit piece, my final film. The potential death and the complete black frame would be an effective and congenial way of uniting form and content. I would disappear along with my imagery.

But as time passed it became clear that the cancer treatment had been effective beyond expectations and that my chances of survival were gradually increasing. As time was added, new layers of visual material for the film emerged. Working with the cinematographer Milja Rossi, I filmed trees and clouds and curtains fluttering in the wind and other small things that had once been meaningless but

had now become signifiers of life. We filmed using 16mm negative film that we developed in the tiny lab Fokusfilm in Stockholm. I also used images from my now quite extensive image archive: old Super8-images from Paris, images from film school, the first images I filmed with a Bolex camera and even newer images of my children and my home shot with an iPhone.

In a way one could say that *Hypermoon*, the final part of the Belleville trilogy, ended up a celebration of film as a medium instead of the radical act of resistance I had imagined. (After all, I was aiming to kill cinema.) It was at some point in this process that I realized that the film was actually two films, and that *Hypermoon* – just like Inanna in the Sumerian myth – had a subterranean little sister: *Secrets of the Sun*. That the original version of the film, the film without images, the death-version, should exist as an alternative universe, a reminder of everything that could have happened and everything that will happen someday.

The title *Secrets of the Sun* is borrowed from the cosmic visionary and jazz poet Sun Ra, whose poems are quoted in the film and whose music and persona inspired the little astronaut that appears here and there in the film's narrative.[3]

Narrative voice

Duras called the narrative voice *la voix de la lecture intérieur*, something like the inner reading voice.[4] It sounds easy, but it is hard. A poorly written or poorly read voice can ruin an entire film. My method is to read slowly, without headphones, and to rewrite the text an infinite number of times. I edit the audio myself. I read my own voice alone at the editing table or in the closet. I also listen to others' narrative voices: Laurie Anderson's, Derek Jarman's, Tilda Swinton's, and try to let their tone and rhythm, their self-confidence inspire me. Marguerite Duras was a master at reading the narrative voice. Her reading was hoarse and slightly drawling, magnetic. She described her method like this:

> *I am not trying at all to develop the meaning of the text when I read it. (...) What I am looking for is the original state of the text, the way one tries to remember a distant event, not experienced but which one has heard about. The meaning will come later. It doesn't need me.*[5]

The voice is something more than the text. A conveyor of meaning. A movement from the inside to the outside. Roland Barthes calls this "writing out loud".

> *Its aim is not the clarity of the messages, the theatre of emotions; what it searches for (in a perspective of bliss) are the pulsional incidents, the language lined with flesh, a text where we can hear the grain of the throat, the patina of consonants, the voluptuousness of vowels, a whole carnal stereophony: the articulation of the body, of the tongue, not that of meaning, of language.*[6]

Images

Secrets of the Sun consists mainly of a narrative voice and a dark, monochrome image filmed on 16mm. The film isn't completely black; it has grains and dust and momentum, as negative film does. Some scenes even contain abstract elements like red flames and blue streaks. These are images generated in a video synthesizer by the film director and artist Göran Hugo Olsson. The images were originally created for *Hypermoon* as an attempt to destroy the image in some scenes and allow another visual tool to break into the documentary images of everyday life. This narrative layer was allowed to remain at the same point in both films.

In *Secrets of the Sun* there is also one single representational image. It's an image from the hospital Södersjukhuset depicting a downward journey in an elevator. The image shifts between the view of Årstaviken through the elevator windows and the darkness seen between the floors. The image comes 20 min and 43 seconds into the film.

Writing

Editing a film without images – or a film where the audio and voice take precedence over the image – is in many ways similar to a writing process. First come the words. The story needs to move in a rhythm guided by the text. I write in my native language, Swedish, and then have someone translate the passages that will be read in other languages. After translation the text changes character, and I rewrite it once more before the reading. The first reading is always a sketch. It can't take too long; everything should go quickly and with a light touch. When the readings are finished, I choose the best takes and bring everything to the editing room. Sometimes I put together lots of little snippets from many different takes.

I like to say that I wrote the manuscript for *Hypermoon* and *Secrets of the Sun* during the night David Bowie died. That I was at my most sick then and I was inspired by the way he ended his life's work with the album *Blackstar*, whose texts and accompanying video work depicted time and death in a congenial way. But I'm actually not sure if that's how it really was or if I came up with it after the fact. Writing is associated with a lot of agony and doubt for me. I'm fastidious and slow and I need to test the text out loud innumerable times before it is finished. I probably wrote most of the manuscript in the editing room over a long stretch of time while reading voices and test-editing scenes. One thing I'm certain of is that I wrote the first draft of the manuscript using Derek Jarman's film *Blue* as a departure point. *Blue* is one the most beautiful films in the history of cinema. The film consists of a single blue monochrome image and takes place during the final stage of Jarman's life, when he is dying of AIDS and slowly losing his eyesight. I often use it when teaching as an example of how content can be shaped into form. I did a close reading of *Blue*, minute by minute, and mimicked its structure: intro, waiting room scene, memories of love, music, etc. My initial thought was that my

film would be a tribute of sorts to *Blue*, and that the link would be an obvious one. Later in the writing process new ideas and narrative layers began to emerge, and Derek Jarman's model gradually disappeared from my film.
The first version was the story of my sickness, phone calls in French with Vincent and the voice of an astronaut drifting through space. In the beginning the astronaut's voice was going to be in English, but it was later changed to Swedish and read in a child's voice. Fairly late in the process I added the documentary story of Valentina Tereshkova, the first woman in space. She was also hovering between life and death, though for other reasons, and she became a link of sorts between my story and that of the little astronaut's.

Actresses and Actors

In *Hypermoon* and *Secrets of the Sun*, Vincent's voice is read by Louédé Anderson Djio; we recorded our dialogue on two occasions in Paris. After the first recording session I took everything into the editing room, where many of the dialogues were shortened, moved or rewritten, and then we recorded it once more. For a while I considered taking Vincent's character out of the film because it was hard to find his place in the story. Later I decided that he would tell me about film rolls he had found in the attic, and that those memory images would gradually be rolled out in the film as Super8-images from my archive. That way Vincent's role would be more about time and memory and less about love. Vincent's final line is also a commentary on image creation itself, as he points out that our images will remain long after we have gone and taken all of our memories with us.

The astronaut's voice was read by Tallulah Whitaker, a 13-year-old girl from Gothenburg. She was cast for the role because she is bilingual; her father is British and initially she was going to read in English. Later, when the text was rewritten for Swedish, we kept Tallulah because her hoarse and ambiguous voice had grown to become that of the astronaut; it was interwoven in the film and wasn't replaceable. She had a natural sense of rhythm and we had fun together.

Editing

Filmmaking is largely based on collaboration. Many aspects of the process demand technical expertise, but also different ways of thinking. In the editing process one sometimes need an editor who brings a fresh perspective and a new attitude to the narrative. As a director I sometimes get stuck in an idea about what a film should be instead of seeing it for what it is, what potential it has. It's then that an editor can both rescue and challenge you, saving a film with their knowledge and energy. When editing *Lucky One* I collaborated with the director and editor Neil Wigardt, who was an important asset for my most difficult-to-edit film.

Nonetheless, I decided to edit *Hypermoon/Secrets of the Sun* myself. This was in part because I needed a long period of experimentation to find the narrative form,

but also because the story was so personal that I wanted to do the work with my texts and readings on my own. I also edited *Belleville Baby* myself for those same reasons.

When I edit on my own, the process is like this: The process always takes a long time. I start editing on the same day I start shooting, so the film is in the editing room for several years. I have an editing room of my own and I also have a bed in there. I rest a lot. I have good quality loudspeakers.

The first phase of my work is like sketching, and I leave empty spaces in a structure that is about 75 minutes long. There are also black sections in the structure that slowly fill with images, new scenes, tests. Sometimes I add text frames that say for example: "There should be more here" or "something funny here". Sometimes I put in images from Youtube or music I know I'll take out later. With *Hypermoon/Secrets of the Sun* I had a beginning (*me sitting in a waiting room*) and an end (*and for a moment everything is totally silent*), but no middle.

The greatest challenge editing *Hypermoon/Secrets of the Sun* was finding the story's dynamics and complementing the somewhat conventional cancer narrative with other narrative elements that could make the story more complex and multifaceted. Images of my son, stills from my grandmother's life and archive material from Valentina Tereshkova's space journey were all like multicolored threads forming patterns on the base tone.

The new imagery was mainly trees, and images showing the shift of the seasons. A continuous stipulation as I worked was that the film should be able to carry the narrative even if there were no images; that is, nothing in the film would be expressed exclusively via images. Instead of following the classic rule of "show don't tell", I strove for a narrative based on the spoken word, not on imagery. Tell don't show.

I edit the film in separate chunks, like blocks that can be lifted in and out. When the voices are in place, the scenes are elaborated with audio atmospheres to create space and music sketches to generate momentum and breathe life into the story. After listening I take away everything that isn't any good – often more than half of it – and then I rewrite it and record it again. I'm very critical. It's a slow process. When I've edited an act or a longer section with multiple scenes I show the film to a small group of colleagues who can see things from an outside perspective. After that there's a long break in the work, dedicated to self-criticism and doubt.

Little by little I start working again, and hopefully the things that work and what needs to be reworked has become clear. A scene might be removed or redone for various reasons; maybe it comes at the wrong point in the story, or it isn't written well, the reading isn't good enough, or maybe an individual scene doesn't move in the same direction as the whole. The right evaluation is important, or the wrong parts might end up in the wastebasket. The craft itself consists only of this; making choices. It requires a large dose of concentration, an interaction of sorts between experience, musicality, and then a third thing that I have difficulty putting a name

on. Perhaps we can, like Duras, call it "the dark room where we are deaf and blind and passion is possible", or more vaguely, "inspiration". For me personally, it's only possible in the morning, so I never edit anything after lunch.

Listening

Janne Alvermark did the sound design and mixing. He has years of experience in sound design and filmmaking, and we've worked together before. With *Hypermoon/Secrets of the Sun*, the process took an unexpectedly long time, though. In the beginning of the sound design, for some reason I can't recall, I wanted everything to be very quiet. Because Janne is an empathetic colleague, we strove to achieve the silence I wanted, but at some point in the process the film was *too* quiet, lifeless almost. Maybe I was too attached to the version I had been working with in the editing room and needed time to get used to a louder version. Maybe I had gotten so used to working alone that I couldn't accept new elements that had been added by someone else. After listening to audio tests of the film in the cinema we decided to go back a step in the process and rethink things. We changed the balance between the different layers so the acoustic environments and audio effects had more presence in relation to the voices. It took an extra-long time, but the result was a dynamic mix with a rich and vibrant soundscape. This was especially pronounced in *Secrets of the Sun*, where the darkness of the cinema left room for each and every small detail in the audio. Working with such an experienced and skillful sound designer was extremely valuable for the film at this point.

Seeing

Assume this: When we watch a film, the actual story is created in the darkness within us. This is where the film meets our imagination, our memories, our experiences and our cultural references. That's why we experience a film differently depending on whether we're old or young, natives or born abroad, happy or in despair. That's also why the audience's interpretations of a film are just as relevant as the director's. Everyone owns the work. Or at least their own relationship to the work. When I make my films, I have to forget about the audience for a large part of the process; if I don't, I get anxious and conventional and try to echo things that have already been done rather than create something new. The energy leaks out. I need to have an intimate and exclusive relationship to the film, and no one else. The relationship to the audience comes later. When the film and I are finished with one another and the film becomes a product that reaches out in festivals and cinemas and I am the one marketing it. At that point a carefree sort of affection arises between me and the audience, something more about entertainment than art. I think. Drinks. Panel discussions. A kind of relational levity based on established viewing forms and spaces. With the black film it felt different.

Secrets of the Sun premiered at Tempo Documentary festival in Stockholm in

the spring of 2023. It was the first time I watched the film together with an audience and it was a surprisingly unpleasant experience. Of course I had seen it in the editing room many times before, but the decision to screen the film at the festival had been a hasty one and I wasn't prepared. The audience consisted of invitees, friends, and colleagues but also unknown festivalgoers. My sound designer Janne was there, and we had tested the audio beforehand. The festival catalogue described the film as "a cinematic narrative that meets the spectator on her own terms". I don't know what that was supposed to mean.

From the very beginning it was challenging. I can't recall the last time I sat upright without visual stimulation for such a long, consecutive period of time. (I meditate sometimes, but never for as long as 78 minutes). We sat there together staring into the darkness. Sometimes I felt pleased with the rich sound imagery. Sometimes my skin crawled with discomfort. Many times, my thoughts wandered off and left the film's narrative behind. I saw how the emergency exit signs glowed in the darkness. I saw the audience's heads as differently shaped silhouettes in the rows of seats. I thought about what the others were thinking. Sometimes everyone laughed at the same time and some people sniffled. In my row a woman was looking at her phone all the time. Her screen glowed like an aura around her and the people sitting closest to her. I considered saying something, but I held back because it would be wrong to influence the course of events in my own experiment. After a while a man sitting next to her told her though. I heard him say "That's really fucking annoying. You're disrupting my experience." Further in front two women laughed heartily and murmured empathetically at every opportunity. I think maybe it was because they are friends of mine, but maybe also because they are actresses. My 16-year-old son, who was sitting at my side, sat perfectly still during the entire screening and whispered questions now and again: "When did you film that?" or "Is that really true?" He seemed to see the film as a film with images and reflected more on the structure of the narrative than the fact that the screen was black.

Afterward there was a very long discussion session with the audience. I've never experienced such extremely diverging reactions to any of my films. Someone was crying. Someone said that the film's story reminded them of their own, similar experiences and the death of someone close. Someone thought the film was annoying. One woman said that she quickly forgot that the film didn't have any images and that she was simply whisked away by the story, without resistance. That same woman also admitted however that although she had been whisked away, she had also fallen asleep at some point and her mind had also begun to wander, but that "it didn't matter". One man who had seen *Hypermoon* several days earlier at the same festival found it hard to detach from the visual film he had already seen and found the experience was disrupted by the fact that he was trying to recreate the images he knew belonged to the story in his memory. A young man who had been sitting in the second row said that he had ended up at the screening by chance and didn't

know what he would be seeing. He didn't know who I was and he had never seen any of my films, he said. The film had surprised him at first but soon won him over. Of all of the films he had seen at the festival, it was the only one that truly moved him. A masterpiece, he said. The woman sitting next to him did not agree. She said that the only scene in the film that had moved her was the one with an image, the image of an elevator moving downward, and that she had tried to cling to that image as long as possible so she could bear the rest of the film. There were a lot of questions about aesthetic decisions and about the writing process itself. I answered as honestly as possible, the way I usually do, but I had the gnawing sensation that I had disappointed the audience, that I hadn't given them what was expected of me, no voyeuristic stimulation, no visual flow, no satisfaction, and that it had in some way damaged our long-term relationship.

In some way, there was a displacement toward something more conceptual, something that would have felt more comfortable in a gallery or an art space than in a cinema. There was also a friction in the relationship with the black image and the film's narrative, which was so direct and classic. And personal. As if the experience would have been easier to grasp if the film had been experimental in its entirety, with an edgy narrative and closer links to the experimental film tradition with its conventions and unspoken rules. My film and I were now free-floating between different worlds. It was uncomfortable and challenging.

Another reflection (my own): Without imagery, the film's protagonist, the narrator, that is "me", became less special. Without the archive images of Vincent and his gun, without the stills of my grandmother and grandfather in Stockholm in the 1940s, without the romantic images of Paris and the Soviet journal films and the funny images of my son, the story became less unique, more generalized. The film's "I" could have been any middle-aged woman at any hospital.

I told the audience that this was a "re-makable," influenced by Robert Rauschenberg's *White Paintings*, which he had presented together with information about the works' measurements and materials so that anyone who wanted could go home and make their own white paintings. I told them that anyone could add their images to the audio and that the film could potentially be re-used in an endless number of versions. Maybe it was because of that infinite number of versions that my unique story had to give way to a more general story about a regular woman, anyone and her memories, her teenager and her aging. (The festival's organizers later suggested that we announce a competition where participants could make the "best version" with their own imagery. I declined that though. The thought was better in theory than in reality.)

When the discussion was over the audience stayed in the cinema and continued talking as if the film wasn't over yet. I don't know why. In the end the personnel had to tell them it was time for another screening.

DARKNESS AS MATERIAL

Writings

Suppose that this is humans' last age on earth. Suppose that something has broken that never should have broken and that it can't be repaired. Suppose that our civilization as we know it will soon come to an end, just as all civilizations eventually come to an end. What, then, does it mean to create images in this era? What is a filmmaker to do? Should she hurl her body into the world and be consumed by the fall, the mass consumption, the insatiable hunger? Or should she allow her gaze to turn inwards and let it dissolve into abstraction, the serene emptiness that comes with acceptance?

Suppose that both alternatives go via darkness.

I read Marguerite Duras. I always do that when I need comfort or direction. She gives me secret advice against my own mediocracy. Duras knew about darkness. She not only lived it, she also wrote her way through it. She made films that dove right into darkness in a way that made her one of most audacious filmmakers in Europe, perhaps the world. Duras said she wanted to kill cinema. Her relationship to filmmaking was that of the murderer and she did nothing, absolutely nothing, to please or compromise or adapt to contemporary demands of entertainment and commercial currents. That's why her films survived everything.

When I was young I spent a long time in Paris. I lived with outlaws and 'marginals' and learned to make documentary films at a little school called Ateliers Varan. They taught according to the cinematic tradition usually called Cinema Direct or Cinema Verité – the "true" film. Filmmakers were meant to go out into the real world, camera on shoulder, and portray people in the most objective way possible, without adding music or narration, without planned interviews or other narrative elements that could distort reality. The film should be built around documentary scenes. Reality should play out in front of the camera, so to speak, and nothing should be added in the editing room. Preferably the scenes should be long and uninterrupted, separated by sharp cuts so that everything was visible and accountable. The method is based on an idea that objective truth exists, and that the film should depict something "authentic" rather than something "poetic". It suited me very well at the time as I had a vision that my films would change the world, and that somehow that would happen if I gave people a voice and showed their lives just as they were.

Later I did other film trainings and had other influences, but I continued working in the Cinema Direct tradition for a long time. Over time however, using other people's lives as material for my films became increasingly problematic. The documentary genre demands charismatic characters and compelling stories, and the film should preferably generate emotion in its audience by showing scenes of human vulnerability and harsh living situations. If one is cynical, one could say that documentary filmmakers are a sort of parasite that feeds off other people's problems. On top of that was the increasingly uncomfortable fact that as a filmmaker I had come to belong to a privileged middle class, while the people involved in the films often lived on the margins and didn't have the resources or the privilege of interpretation that I did. I felt that the "objective" eye of the camera registered people's vulnerability in a kind of documentary voyeurism but without changing their lives for the better.

I got to a point where I didn't want to go on.

So I started looking for new ways to make film. I explored whether narratives could come into being in the darkness, in the space between sound and image, between the spoken and the unspoken, between the seen and unseen.

I admit that I have been bored, that all these years of filmmaking left me feeling saturated. As if every image had already been made.

I might put it like this: Refraining from imagery is a way to find respite from the sensation of guilt linked to the visual exploitation of reality. To which you might respond: Then why make films at all? And I would answer: I don't know.

I could also answer that the black film is the best film I've made. But that I don't really know what I've done, and that I wrote these texts to look at darkness from different angles.

Questions for Marguerite Duras

- When you made that black film.
- Yes
- Were you never afraid?
- Of what?
- That people would be angry, that they wouldn't understand.
- The cinema industry never understood me. They hated my films.
- But wasn't it lonely?
- Of course, very lonely.
- Did you never doubt that what you were doing was good?
- No, I don't think so. I have always known that I am a genius.

- *L'Homme Atlantique* was called 'scandalous' when it came out.
- Yes. Because almost the entire film consists of a black image.
- And you discouraged the audience from watching it?
- I wrote an article in *Le Monde* where I discouraged them, yes. They would only be bored, anyway.
- That was radical.
- Only a small part of the audience could understand my films.
- But they watched it anyway?
- Even my friends tried to dissuade me from making the black film. People can't understand that you can do something even if it isn't worth it.
- But it was worth it.
- That depends on how you look at it.
- I've dedicated a whole trilogy of films trying to imitate you. Your black film has survived everything.
- Like I said. It depends on how you look at it.

- What did you do to protect yourself?
- What do you mean?
- How did you protect yourself from the outside world?
- I wrote. Nothing was more important than that.
- How did you write?
- I searched for the original state of my texts, in the same way one looks for a misplaced memory.
- Why did you do that?
- What else was I supposed to do?

- What did you do in the house by the sea?
- Drank mostly. And wrote. And there was Yann of course, my lover.
- How did you write?
- Like you're writing now.
- How should I start?
- Where do you want to start?
- In the darkness, I guess.
- Good.
- How should I write?
- You have to be very lonely.
- And what should I do with the pain?
- You should write it.
- How?
- You keep asking the same questions all the time.
- That's because I don't understand the answers.

1.

(Desire)

They say that only 5% of the universe is made out of matter known to us: things, bodies, cities, forests, planets, the kind of stuff we can see and touch and understand. The rest, the other 95%, is what science calls dark matter, dark energy. We can't see it and we can't touch it, and we can't even determine what it is made of. Just the same, it's what holds together the galaxies and the solar system and keeps regular matter where it's supposed to be so we can live.

This relationship is reminiscent of the balance in a creative process. Only a small portion of an artistic work can be quantified and described, and the greater processes of creation, the mechanisms behind the ideas that emerge from nothing and become something, are like dark matter. It is invisible and incomprehensible but also crucial for the presence of life and for communication to occur. That is the dark room where stories are born and ideas are brought forth.

When I make a film, that darkness is the most important part of my work. Here is where the energy that will carry the whole film project is found. Here is the fuel and the flux of ideas, the foundation for every choice that makes up cinema as an art. Sometimes the door is closed. Then I sit in my editing room and stare at the screen and nothing budges, no ideas emerge. On other days the darkness opens and flows thickly, and each idea sets the next in motion for stories and scenes and images. Time disappears and the "I" dissolves. I don't know why it happens or on which days it *won't* happen, but I know that this darkness is there like a parallel universe perpetually lying in wait. I've tried to grasp these processes in my artistic research, to measure them, describe them, capture them, but it's as if the darkness always slinks out of reach.

The filmmaker David Lynch described it like this:

> *Desire for an idea is like bait. When you're fishing, you have to have patience. You bait your hook, and then you wait. The desire is the bait that pulls those fish in – those ideas. The beautiful thing is that when you catch one fish that you love, even if it's a little fish – a fragment of an idea – that fish will draw in other fish, and they'll hook onto it. Then you're on your way. Soon there are more and more and more fragments, and the whole thing emerges. But it starts with desire.*[1]

Desire. What is this desire that makes us fish in the darkness?

I think about Andy Warhol, who used his recording equipment to shield himself from reality and his own emotions, whose films and audio recordings and paintings were a way to capture and possess the people he had around him. He filmed and painted people who were rich, beautiful, American, and who possessed everything he had never had. Andy Warhol came from a poor Slovakian family and was plagued all his life by a stutter, bad skin and poor self-confidence. His films and paintings, texts and audio recordings became a way for him to get close to beauty, to hold it tightly against him, although it could never really be his.

One could say that the writer Jean Genet did the same thing, but the exact opposite. He was compelled by what was ugly, broken and filthy. He had lived his life in various kinds of social exclusion and in abject poverty and his writing was permeated by a blatant desire, not for recognition or established or even for people to read his work (*I aim for oblivion*, he once said in an interview),[2] but rather a desire for bodies. The bodies of men, murderers, of those sentenced to death. Sweaty, filthy bodies in prison camps, muscular, violent, dangerous bodies with tattoos and scars. He wanted to own them, write them, be them and be fucked by them. His texts were scandalous. They expressed desire that was both destructive and forbidden.

Jean Genet made one film in his life, the erotic short film *Un Chant d'amour*. It depicts love and desire between men in a prison. The explicit content and the fact that it showed love between men meant that it was totally banned in France for many years. Much later, in the '70s, Jean Genet was granted an award by Centre National de la Cinématographie and offered an opportunity to have the film censor rated. He declined however, stating that he didn't want to accept anything from French society, which in his opinion stood for censorship and hypocrisy.[3]

In the film, we follow a prison guard who is spying on the inmates through the peepholes on their cell doors. There's something erotic going on in every cell. Someone lays on his cot touching himself. Another man is dancing with his genitals dangling outside his pants. The film's two protagonists are performing some sort of love act with a cell wall between them. One of them, a young, handsome man, is a murderer, as we see from a sign on his door. The other is older and appears to be of northern African descent. They knock on the cell wall, stroke it, kiss it and suck in each other's cigarette smoke through a hole in some sort of intercourse without touch. The film's story is told without dialogue. The audio consists of only music and atmospheric sounds.

Un Chant d'amour was filmed in 1950 at the nightclub *La Rose Rouge* in Paris. The ensemble is said to have been from the criminal underworld around Montmartre, and only a few of the actors are named in the credits. The young murderer was

played by Genet's boyfriend at the time, Lucien Sénémaud, and the prison guard was André Reybaz. The rest of the cast list is nicknames: "Coco from Martinique", "Bravo" and "Java". The older of the two men in the couple of lovers is said to have been played by a Tunisian pimp, an acquaintance of Genet's.[4]

Our gaze coincides with that of the guard in the film as he looks at the men through their cell doors. They are locked in, and he (we) have advantage via the camera's gaze, but the dynamics are complex. The prison guard holds the power, but he also has a disadvantage. His feelings for the men go unanswered, and he is left out. The inmates appear vital, erotic, powerful in their imprisonment. They dance and have romantic relationships; they have hard-ons and beautiful bodies and stylish prison clothes that accentuate their muscles and their swelling limbs. The guard however is awkward in his ugly uniform, alone with his desire, frustrated. In one scene he enters the cell and roughs up the older man in the lovemaking couple and puts his pistol into his mouth. A power demonstration that is also erotic. The inmate kneels before him with the gun in his mouth as if it were erect genitalia. Here, the film unfurls into a sexual fantasy where we see the prison guard having sex with an anonymous body in a dark room. (The body belongs to Jean Genet.) We also see another, more elaborate fantasy where the older and younger inmates are together in a forest, flirting and stroking each other. It's unclear who's having this fantasy, but at the end of the scene, when we're back in the prison, the prison guard retreats with his pistol. He will never be able to change the fact that the others, those for whom he longs and whom he spies on, who desire each other and not him, are united in their lawlessness, and he is excluded, cast firmly in the structure that will always make him a guard and the others criminals. At the end of the film he leaves the prison. Alone, unloved, undelivered.

Jean Genet spent the majority of his youth in prison. There was forced labor at French prisons at the time, and inmates were expected to make paper bags out of brown paper that was delivered to their cells. Jean Genet used the paper to write on instead, and prison was where he wrote his first book *Our Lady of the Flowers* (*Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs*). When the first draft was done a guard discovered the manuscript and the prison direction decided it should be burned. When the text was destroyed Jean Genet began writing the book again, and once again it was burned. Then he started over once more. I don't know how many times he rewrote it or how many versions were discovered and destroyed, but I can see him before my eyes, the slight man with the boyish face, raised in orphanages and juvenile detention centers, subjected to assaults and violence, abandoned and criminal, with no notions of ever becoming a "writer" or of getting his text published; all alone in his cell, writing because he had to write, with an imagination that could not be stopped, a text that surged out of him and onto that brown paper bag paper, burned

and rewritten. Imprisonment and isolation must have liberated some kind of explosive creativity in him. He wrote his longing and his love for the vulnerable and the violent. He transformed subjugation and pain into a fiery beatitude. In the book, he declares murderers and pimps saints in some sort of inverted moral hierarchy where evil becomes good and pain becomes pleasure.

The tension between isolation and desire is one of the driving erotic elements in *Un Chant d'amour*. The young murderer and his older lover can't see each other, they can't touch each other. This non-gaze and non-touch create the charged and imaginative scenes that play out in the film. I had never seen anyone have sex with a wall before, but it seems to work better than what one might imagine. The fact that we are spying on them and that the prison guard represents a continual threat of violence and repercussion heighten the erotic charge of the situation. The absence of touch also gives rise to a sexual creativity of a sort that is both intimate and voyeuristically appealing.

In Maryam Tafakory's film *Irani Bag*, a handbag unites and separates the lovers instead of a wall. What does one do in a culture where lovers are not permitted to touch each other? In her essay film – comprised of graphic texts and excerpts from Iranian films – Tafakory shows in a moving and humorous way how a simple prop, a handbag, can be a charged, erotic object when the lovers are both holding the bag instead of touching each other. In its very form the film is also a poem about unfulfilled desire, about longing that cannot be satisfied. The images are surrounded by a black frame and the text is represented graphically in small white letters.

the bag here has no other purpose
than touching
she holds on to it tightly
despite it being the only part of her body
that is attacked.
what happens without the bag
the few seconds in which
bodies hold each other.
tasting touch.
the touch
that emerges
in the can't touch[5]

Also in this film, violence is present as a danger, a surrounding, a society, but also a relational reality.

Jean Genet praised violence and raw masculinity at the same time as he was its

victim. For him, poetry arose in the darkest humiliation, and writing was a tribute to that violence as well as a way to survive it. Although he loved being on the margins, the pain and the prison camp – which he described as a holy place to which one longed – the desire to write was ultimately the greatest of all. The words written and rewritten on brown paper bags continued to flow throughout his life and his books and manuscripts were not only published and read, they also went down in history as unique and provokative masterpieces.

Another story about longing and impossible love is the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice. Orpheus travels to the underworld to get his beloved Eurydice, who is actually already dead. I return often to that story, and it opens the Belleville trilogy, as the intro to *Belleville Baby*. You have to sympathize with Orpheus' vanity and his longing, his desire to take darkness with him to the light, his level of ambition, his pretensions, his failure. The god of the underworld, Hades, promises that Orpheus can bring Eurydice back, but only if he can refrain from looking at her throughout the entire journey out of the underworld. Orpheus is a bard and an artist. He charmed the realm of the dead with his poems and songs, and he is confident that he will succeed: with his competence and his creativity he will suspend death and possess love. At first everything is going fine. Together, they walk up towards the light, him first and Eurydice behind him, but when they are almost there he can no longer stand it and he turns around to look at her face. At that moment he loses her forever. The contract is broken and he is forced to leave her in the darkness and continue back to life alone. No one can stop time. No one can rescue another person from the darkness.

In the Belleville trilogy, absence is constantly present as a shadow in the narrative. The story opens with me getting a phone call from a man I once loved and then lost. The man – whose name is Vincent in the films – calls to say that he has been in prison for many years and that he is still alive. The conversation confounds both him and me. He learns that in his absence I have become the mother of two children. I learn that he has been alive all of these years when I believed he was dead. For the blink of an eye, all of life's possibilities are laid bare, like a brief tear in existence through which a different light is cast. The conversation continues like a red thread through the three films, like a motor propelling them forward but also an anchor pulling back, the resounding of something that once was, something that now only exists in memory form.

Perhaps the recorded dialogues are something else as well: a tribute to precisely that moment in time when the conversation took place, and a testimony that it happened. Only we know what color the sky was that day and how the desire to stop time made everything tremble.

2.

(Memory)

Close your eyes and imagine the space inside your body. Not only the space in your head, but in your entire body – that vessel of blood, bones, skin and complex organic connections that is you. In here, thousands of processes keep you alive; oxygen is transported with the help of your lungs and heart, cells are continually renewed and energy is distributed to muscles, tissues and organs.

Feel the difference between the inside and the outside.

Now shift your attention to the darkness inside your eyelids.
Stay in the darkness for a moment. Think of a memory.
What do you see?
How do you see it?

In Chris Marker's film La Jetée, the future of humankind relies on one man's capacity to remember. The film consists almost exclusively of stills and the story is told by a narrative voice. The plot takes place in an imaginary future where the protagonist is subjected to experiments by scientists trying to save the world. Civilization has collapsed in some sort of nuclear catastrophe and they are trying to travel back in time, via the man's memories, to a time when it was still possible to save humanity. Again and again he is sent back to his past to retrieve information. In his memory he meets a woman and falls in love with her, or he possibly is remembering a woman he had been in love with. They walk in Jardin des Plantes and go to the natural history museum in Paris, where they look at taxidermized animals and other artifacts from the world that will soon be wiped out. The soft evening light glows in her hair, he looks at her in profile and everything is lovely and deeply melancholic because we know she is already gone and the moment is over. The image is nothing but a memory.

La Jetée is an experimental science fiction and the decision to put the entire film together out of stills reinforces the sensation of frozen moments and time past. The scenes that take place after the catastrophe are filmed in Paris' catacombs and the story is told in a documentary style, the props are minimal. As a viewer I am immersed in the rhythmic imagery and forget the absence of moving images. The film makes one think of archive images and fragments of memory, and it moves slowly, a little stiffly. But then suddenly something happens. In an image we see the woman asleep. The camera registers her relaxed face in a close-up shot from above and the light is soft, shadowless. And then, in a single long shot, the still becomes a moving picture. Slowly she turns her head and looks into the camera. Everything

stops. It's a magical film moment where the visual restraint suddenly allows an opening and leaves room for movement. The relationship between me as a viewer and the image as a communicator of the narrative intensifies in a moment of contact. My gaze on the woman as she awakens coincides with the subjective gaze of the protagonist. His longing to remain in that intimate moment becomes my longing. That which was a fragmented past up till now becomes a flowing present. But as we all know, travelling back in time is never without its price. The story moves relentlessly forward to the fateful and brutal ending, when time gets the better of itself and love must be sacrificed for the future of humankind.

In *La Jetée* Marker also uses a long black frame. Four minutes into the film, after images of the destroyed post-apocalyptic city, it goes dark and a voice says:

> *Many died. Some considered themselves victors. Others were taken prisoners. The survivors settled in underground passages beneath Chaillot.*[1]

The scene marks the transition from the prologue and underscores the suffering of war, and it heightens the attention in anticipation of the story that's about to come. The black frame is also a bridge connecting humans' time on earth and the dystopic future depicted in the film.

Marker was interested in cinematic darkness and its relationship to memory and the imagination. In the intro to another of his films, Sans Soleil, the narrator comments on the black image:

> *The first image he told me about is of three children on a road in Iceland, in 1965. He said that for him it was the image of happiness and that he had tried several times to link it to other images. He wrote me: one day I have to put it at the beginning of a film with a long piece of black leader. If they don't see happiness in the picture, at least they will see the black.*[2]

The word cinematography comes from the Greek and means 'writing with movement', and photography means 'writing with light'. When cinema was analogue, films were made up of numerous stills lined up one after the other on a celluloid strip that was rolled through a projector. Between every image the projector's shutter – where the strip of film is illuminated and projected onto the screen – closed before opening again, and for that moment the cinema was shrouded in darkness. The technique meant that almost half of the cinematic experience consisted of non-image. The shift between darkness and light created an illusion of movement, and one could say that the film's visual flow didn't actually take place on the screen, but instead in the viewer's imagination.

The combination of seeing and not-seeing in analogue film bears a certain

resemblance to the eye's own rhythm, which contains blinking but also sleep. While sleeping, humans – and animals – shut down their vision and the influx of stimuli from the outside world to recover and to create memories. According to sleep researchers, dreams and sleep are linked to our memory function.[3] Chris Marker believed that the link between darkness and memory could be translated to the cinematic experience:

> *Out of the two hours you spend in a movie theatre, you spend one of them in the dark. It's the nocturnal portion that stays with us, that fixes our memory of a film.*[4]

Marker was interested in the non-image, also privately. He wanted to be invisible to the world and he never posed for photos or took part in film festivals or other events where his films were shown. He wanted to work in seclusion and let his films speak for themselves. He also had his own "tag", a mysterious smiling cat that turned up here and there in French street art up until Marker's death at 91 years of age.

While working on *Belleville Baby* my colleague Åsa Sandzén and I were so inspired by Marker's films, his street art and his persona that we started writing quotes from his films in public places, in particular a line from the film *Le Jolie Mai* (1963): *Tant que les prisons existent, vous n'êtes pas libres* (*As long as there are prisons, you are not free*). One night our public scrawling got out of hand and ended with a police intervention followed by hefty fines. Shortly afterwards I travelled alone to Trouville to film the final scene of *Belleville Baby*. I stayed in a cheap hotel room overlooking a courtyard. And on the wall outside my window was an enormous mural with Chris Marker's cat.

Nowadays projectors use digital technology and the dark moments are no more; instead, films consist of millions of pixels that blink at different intervals to create colors and movement. The darkness of the cinema experience has been replaced by blinking lights. According to Sean Cubitt, the development is a manifestation of the never-sleeping market of late capitalism. In an illuminated world, we are all available as consumers and laborers.

> *For, with permanent illumination comes the possibility of permanent labor, greater productivity and thus greater profit potential.*[5]

Jonathan Crary draws similar conclusions in *24/7*, where he reflects on the perpetually connected humans of our time. In a society without darkness, he says, people stop dreaming and in doing so lose their capacity to imagine a life beyond capitalism.[6]

Darkness has not only disappeared from the cinematic image; the darkness of the cinema has also been replaced by brighter screening spaces. Today, audiences watch films more on screens in the light of day. Both in private spaces (computers and telephones) as well as in the public realm (advertisements, TV-screens). This in turn has led to more difficulty grasping images that aren't light. In the darkness of the cinema, the details of a nighttime scene are perceptible because there is no light competing with them. When a viewer sees a dark image on a digital screen in daylight, however, she sees only herself, as if in a black mirror. William Brown writes about the phenomenon in his essay "Cinema at the Speed of Darkness".

> *In this way the digital screen does not open up to us vistas of a world beyond us, helping us to think in a less- ego- and/or anthropocentric fashion; rather, it encloses us further within a world of self-absorption and solipsism.*[7]

He also points out that there is another gaze in that black mirror: the machine that looks back at the viewer and registers her preferences in order to offer her similar products in the future.

Our role as viewers has changed as darkness has gradually disappeared from our time. Earlier, in the cinema theatre, we were co-creators of the film. In the dark moments, our imaginations were filled with the images that weren't there in a kind of active participation in the cinematic narrative. As viewers on digital platforms however, we have been transformed into consumers of "content", and our gazes and the directions we choose to take in the virtual realm are registered as algorithms.

According to Jonathan Crary, sleep is our final chance at resisting the machine of late capitalist society and its gaze. Sleep is a place where the market cannot access us, and we can be free from demands to consume and produce. Instead, we can dream, rest, and process our memories. The thought that freedom can be attained anywhere and at any time with the help of our own bodies is a utopian one. For the sleepless among us it's more difficult. Unfortunately we often look at our phones at night instead of sleeping. But perhaps there are other options? Perhaps cinematic darkness can also be that kind of place. A sanctuary, a meeting place, a hiding spot. You don't even need a cinema or a film. You just need to close your eyes.

- How should people understand your films. Some of them are really complicated.
- Yes, they are very complicated. There needs to be something almost like love between the viewer and the film ...
- ... to be able to stand it?
- Yes

- There might also be a certain arrogance in telling stories about yourself all of the time..?
- Who do you mean is doing that?
- You did that.
- My life was totally unimportant. The story was the only thing that mattered. And the young body's journey over the Mekong River.
- But you also wrote about Yann and your experiences during the war. And in your last book *C'est tout* you wrote about your own death. You wrote about yourself over and over again.
- Not at all. As a person I have nothing to do with it.
- A little though.
- No.
- Some thought you were a narcissist, that it was too much.
- Yes. And?
- I don't know... sometimes I wish I was someone else. That I could hide.
- Are you afraid of criticism?
- Can you give me any advice about that?
- About what?
- About wanting to hide…
- Maybe you shouldn't take it so personally.
- How should I not take it personally? You mean the criticism? The audience?
- The only thing that matters…
- Yes?
- Is your relationship to the text.

3.

(The Underworld)

One of my favorite places on earth is the catacombs in Paris, that enormous network of subterranean tunnels that stretches out below the city and has a magnetic and shrouded presence in everything that happens above at the surface. I was invited to a party there once, by someone I didn't know. I don't remember how I got the invitation, but since I pasted it into my diary later I know exactly what it looked like: An address and a time jotted on a crumpled slip of paper pulled out of a notebook.

The descent was under a bridge. To get under the bridge you had to climb over a fence with barbed wire on it and walk a long, dark stretch alongside a train track. When we got there people were already standing in line to wriggle through the little hole in the ground. It was evening and on the bridge above people were on their way to bars and restaurants. Underneath the bridge we stood in darkness holding our bring-your-own bottles and flashlights. An arranger of sorts kept the line in order and said things to us in French. I had thought the way down would be a manhole with a ladder or a stone arch or at least some kind of sewer-like tunnel, but it was just a rabbit hole leading straight into the earth. It was narrow and scary and sand got in my eyes as I squirmed through. After what seemed like an eternity the hole began to widen and became a sloping path where you could gradually stand up straight. Someone had fixed torchlights along the walls to show the direction and after a while we came to some kind of chamber. There were a surprising large number of people there if you think about how difficult the descent was. Everywhere were people drinking, smoking pot, dancing or playing the drums. The subterranean chamber had a cathedral height ceiling, illuminated by fires. Here and there along the walls were dark holes, openings that led to other paths that led to innumerable catacombs without torches and people. The underworld.

Excavation of Paris' catacombs started during the Roman Empire, when they were breaking stone to build up the city. Later there were tunnels and the underground chambers were used for other purposes, like mass graves in the 1700s and hideouts for the resistance movement during WWII. Today many of the tunnels are filled with water and inaccessible. There are others you can get to if you know how to find them, but it's forbidden and perilous. People have gotten lost down there and died. Reports are frequent of youth or adventurers being found after days of wandering lost down there, turning up in a different part of the city than where they climbed down. Or of people who weren't found, disappearing forever in the darkness. Many people make their way to the catacombs all the same, arranging parties, making weird films or just living there when life in the light has become intolerable or impossible. Those who love the catacombs are called *cataphiles* in

French. A few tunnels are open to the public today. The opening is at Place Denfer-Rochereau, where tourists can pay an entrance fee to line up and walk down with a guide and look at skulls from the 1700s that are piled up along the walls.

Hélène Cixous describes the creative process as a descent into the underworld. Everyone who writes, she says, will have to climb down the ladder to explore the deepest and darkest levels of existence sooner or later. *To us this ladder has a descending movement, because the ascent, which evokes effort and difficulty, is toward the bottom. (...) The writers I love are descenders, explorers of the lowest and the deepest*.[1]

All mythologies and religions have their own stories about the underworld. One of the oldest preserved texts in the world is the story of Inanna and Erishkigal. Inanna was one of the Sumerians' most powerful goddesses and Erishkigal was her underground sister. The story is written in cuneiform on clay tablets; found in fragments and put together by archaeologists in modern times. Inanna was worshipped in many eras and was also known as Ishtar. She was not only the goddess of love and fertility, but also goddess of the battlefield.

At the beginning of the story Inanna approaches her grandfather Enki, ruler of heaven and earth, looking for greater knowledge and power. She is dissatisfied because he has given her too few powers. She says: *Why do you treat me, a woman, differently? Where are my* Me? (*Me* are more or less sacred knowledge and abilities, like superpowers). Enki defends himself, saying that he has given her a beautiful voice, he has allowed her to spin and have hair adornments and tassels in beautiful colors. But Inanna wants more. Enki invites her to sit as his table and together they get drunk on wine and beer and start to challenge one another. Somehow Inanna wins, either by being clever or by holding her liquor better, and before the night is over Enki has granted her almost everything worth having on this earth: valiance, strength, shrewdness and all kinds of secrets and ruling techinques.

When Enki wakes up the next day he's hungover and regrets what he has done, but it's too late. Inanna has already sailed away triumphantly in heaven's boat with all of her newly acquired power.

Later in the story Inanna marries the shepherd Dumuzi. She has longed for him impatiently. On their wedding night, they sleep together so many times that the desert is transformed into a garden in bloom, but unfortunately the marriage becomes a catastrophe. Shortly after the wedding, Dumuzi goes to the palace, where he dedicates himself to politics instead of remaining with his wife. Although Inanna pleads with him to stay, he chooses power over love and she is left alone. That's when she decides to visit her sister in the underworld.

It's a long downward journey into the darkness and on the way she must pass through the different gates of the realm of the dead. She is forced to shed all of her outer and inner possessions in order to proceed. At the first gate she has to leave the

crown of the steppe, a symbol of flora and sentience. At the next gate they demand her necklace, which symbolizes language. At the third gate they take her other necklaces, and at the fourth gate she must leave her breastplate, a symbol of sexuality. At the fifth gate they take her gold bracelet, and at the sixth gate they take the ruler in her hand, which represents order and civilization. Finally, at the seventh gate, the royal robes are taken from her body and she stands completely naked. She has surrendered everything to reach the deepest darkness.

In Hindu teachings humans consist of a number of chakras, spiritual levels in the body through which one passes on the journey to illumination. The last chakra is the crown chakra, and it is in contact with cosmic energy. To open this chakra, we have to surrender all links to the earthly. In that same way, Inanna must give up everything that ties her to her life on earth, little by little: her clothing and pearls, her wealth and identity, her love and her queenliness, even order and civilization itself. In the darkness of the underworld, everything is without value. Just as Odin sacrifices his eye to comprehend the world and the runes, Inanna must sacrifice everything secular to arrive at illumination.

Cixous says that this act of loss when we descend into darkness is a prerequisite, not only for writing but for existing at all, and the deepest expression of being human: *(..) to be human we need to experience the end of the world. We need to lose the world, and to discover that there is more than one world and that the world isn't what we think it is. (..) We don't know we're alive as long as we haven't encountered death*.[2]

And so, inside the final gate, Inanna meets her sister Erishkigal, ruler of darkness, with power over life and death. Erishkigal looks at her sister with death's gaze and without hesitation she cries out: *Guilty!* Then she kills Inanna and hangs her body from a hook on the wall. Yep, that's what the clay tablets say. The following verse is also recorded:

Erishkigal, the Queen of the Underworld,
is moaning with the cries of a woman about to give birth
No linen is spread on her body.
Her breasts are uncovered.
Her hair swirls about her head like leeks.
She cries: Oh! Oh! My inside!
Oh! Oh! My outside! [3]

It is unclear whether Erishkigal's suffering is grief and regret, self-pity or mental illness, but it's easy to relate to her state of misery and wretchedness. Erishkigal is the prototypical witch: unloved, violent, full of anger and despairing loneliness. Marguerite Duras often describes the writing process as painful and wretched and above all lonely.

Finding yourself in a hole, at the bottom of a hole, in almost total solitude, and discovering that only writing can save you. To be without the slightest subject for a book, the slightest idea for a book, is to find yourself, once again, before a book. A vast emptiness. A possible book. Before nothing. Before something like living, naked writing, like something terrible, terrible to overcome.[4]

I think that stories about the underworld are often about inside, outside and the movement between them. Inanna travels from the sunlight outside to the darkness inside to destroy the old and form something new, a new view, a new story, a new I. While down there she meets her sister, who is also her dark reflection, and the meeting is so painful for everyone involved that the old Inanna must die.

Instead of getting help from her sister she is suspended from the wall and hangs there for three days, just as Jesus did a few thousand years later. Tortured, killed and sentenced though innocent. After three days however, people on the surface begin to miss her. Inanna's servant Ninshubur understands that something has gone wrong and contacts Inanna's father, god of the moon. He's remarkably cold however and thinks Inanna has only herself to blame.

My daughter craved the Great Above.
Inanna craved the Great Below.
She who receives the Me of the underworld does not return.
She who goes to the Dark City stays there.[5]

Maybe he thinks she was greedy for wanting all the *Me*. Maybe he's even envious because Inanna got so many presents from her powerful grandfather Enki. Or maybe he's just a realist: when you're dead you're dead.

Ninshubur goes to Inanna's paternal grandfather, god of the air. He's also cold about rescuing Inanna. Finally, Ninshubur turns to the grandfather Enki, ruler of heaven and earth, who once gave Inanna all of her Me. He agrees to help. He solves the problem by creating *Kurragurra* and *Gulatur* from the dirt under his nails. The two creatures go the underworld to rescue Inanna.

With shrewdness and manipulation, they begin negotiations with Erishkigal. They listen to her laments and agree with everything she says and finally she agrees to release Inanna, but if Inanna is to return to life Ereshkigal wants something in return: Someone must be sent back in her place. The logic is in line with almost all of the tales of the underworld: No one ascends from it unnoticed. If you have been in the darkness of the underworld, you will always remain linked to it in some way. Nothing is for free.

Now Inanna ascends toward the light, and with her are two demons from the realm of the dead. They will see to it that she keeps her end of the bargain and gives them a replacement. When they get to the light, the first person they meet

is Ninshubur, Inanna's servant, who saved her life. The demons want to take her, but Inanna objects. Ninshubur is her best friend. They continue and meet both of Inanna's sons. The demons want to take one of them to the realm of the dead in her stead, but again she protests. Finally they arrive at Inanna's husband Dumuzi. Dumuzi, who abandoned her for power. Dumuzi, who would rather be in the palace than make love to his wife. He is dressed in dazzling royal garments and sits on a glittering throne. When he sees that Inanna has returned he doesn't bat an eyelash. Then Inanna fixes her gaze on him. It is the gaze of death, from the underworld, and just as her sister had cried out at her she cries out at her husband: *Guilty! Take him. Take Dumuzi with you*.

The demons of the underworld strike him with axes and take him with them, to force him to take Inanna's place among the dead. The king loses his throne and life in the light, and Inanna lives on with her friend and her sons.

A brutal revenge, one could say. What did Inanna actually retrieve from the underworld, and was that fair? The literary scholar Maria Bergom Larsson interprets the myth of Inanna as a story about balance:

> *With her descent, she reconciled life and death, opened channels between the conscious and the unconscious, and showed that no culture that represses the dark sides of existence can survive. A civilization based only on light, consciousness, intellect, logos, is doomed to someday be caught by the powers that it denies.*[6]

In this reading, then, light is intrinsically linked to intellect and the masculine, and darkness is the chaotic and feminine, and it must also be represented in a balanced world. Maybe the myth of Inanna can also be read as a tale of transcendence. That with the help of darkness, courage and willpower, humans can challenge their destiny and the relationships that limit them. A hero's journey of descent.

In the book *Underland*, the mountain climber and writer Robert Macfarlane does a passionate and very detailed study of the underworld. He visits and describes all of the dark spaces imaginable – both naturally occurring and human-made – found beneath the surface of the earth: caves, tunnels, sewage systems, rock shelters, graves. The most interesting texts are about urban landscapes and the world below them.

> *We think of cities as lateral but of course they are also vertical. Cities extend upwards into the air by means of buildings, elevators and controlled airspace, and they extend downwards by means of tunnels, escalators, basements, graveyards, wells, buried cabling and mine workings. Just as a mountain does not end at its summits or its foothills, but extends instead into the weather it creates in*

the air above it (..) so a city does not cease either at its foundations or the spires of its tallest buildings.[7]

My night in the catacombs was crazy and eventful, just like a real party should be. I got in a fight, fell in love and almost lost my friends, who drifted off on an adjacent path (they were found later). Even though I got a little drunk that evening I can still remember every detail from that night: how my black St Pauli sweatshirt got torn when I wrestled in the dust with a man I didn't know, how another man held me in his arms from behind the rest of that night and gave me a name, how the dust stung my eyes, how the darkness engulfed everything that wasn't close to the flames, how the drums sounded, how life on the surface – and the fear that had filled me as I was climbing down – slowly faded and became a far-away dream of another life, and how the darkness itself slowly became the only true reality.

When we came back up to the surface it was morning and the sun was shining. I was dazed, my clothes were torn and my face sooty, I was dazzled, renewed, in love and in some way forever changed.

I read that Walter Benjamin was also obsessed with the catacombs. In his enormous *Arcades Project (Passagenwerk)*, he mapped Paris' arcades and passages as a way to understand European history, but he was also interested in the cities' hidden paths and spaces, which he called 'the subterranean city', or the dream zone. He believed that the subterranean city was a shadow twin of the city above ground, just as dreams are shadows of our waking consciousness.

Our waking existence is a land which, at certain hidden points, leads down into the underworld, the realm from which dreams arise. All day long, suspecting nothing, we pass by these inconspicuous places, but no sooner has sleep come than we are eagerly groping our way back to lose ourselves in the dark corridors.[8]

Perhaps that's how it is; if one has been in the underworld, one will always carry it inside, just like the dreams one has dreamed and forgotten and the feelings one has repressed or not yet felt. Here on the surface we see the cherry blossoms in bloom in Jardin du Luxembourg, we are crowned as queens and betrayed by someone we love. All the while the underworld is there waiting like a dark mirror, silent and eternal, with its paths and chambers. Ready when we are, for parties, terror, death, and resurrection.

- When one makes a film like this, like you did, where the voice is so central, writing and filming are almost the same thing.
- Not at all.
- No?
- No. The writer draws her text from what I call the inner shadow. She takes her material from there and lets it move outward with the help of language.
- Isn't filming kind of the same thing?
- No.
- No?
- No. The writer creates something where there is nothing. In that darkness.
- And the filmmaker?
- The filmmaker uses something that is already there. There is always a text, an idea, a treatment when a film comes to be.
- Yes of course.
- And then the narrative makes the opposite movement. It leads the words back to silence.
- How do you mean?
- Films move into the viewer. Into our shared darkness, at the border between memory and forgetting.
- That sounds beautiful.
- And that's where words die: They are massacred.
- What?
- Words die. They are massacred by the image, forever.
- My god.
- What?
- Always so dramatic.

- Why is writing so hard?
- The painful part is that one must puncture the darkness inside until the energy extends over the side and transforms what is inside into what is outside.
- What a stiff work.
- Yes. That’s why I like to say that only the mad write fully.

4.

(Recycling)

We are always stealing from others. In *Secrets of the Sun* I reused the audio from *Hypermoon* and created a new film using old material, a kind of cinematic recycling. It was also a reuse of someone else's idea. Marguerite Duras had already done this in 1976 with the film *Son nom de Venise dans Calcutta Désert (Her Venetian Name in Deserted Calcutta)*, where she reused the audio from her best known film, *India Song*, made the previous year.

India Song is about the ambassador's wife Anne-Marie Stretter and her unhappy life at the embassy in Calcutta. The film is a criticism of colonialism as well as a depiction of mental illness and unmanageable desire. In *India Song* we see Anne-Marie Stretter, played by Delphine Seyrig, dancing with her lovers before the embassy's high mirrors, and we hear two voice-overs tell the story of her life, of the vice consul's impossible love and of the beggar woman who screams on the riverbank. The images are heavy with decadent tristesse and nothing is happening. In *Son nom de Venise dans Calcutta Désert* even less happens, if that's possible. The imagery consists of extended shots of a palace in ruin and there are no people to be seen. The narrative center of gravity here has been shifted from beauty to ugliness, from present to memory, from presence to absence, from movie stars to ruin.

Duras reused material in multiple projects. In the film *L'Homme Atlantique* she used imagery from her previous film, *Agatha et les lectures illimitées*, with a newly written narration that she herself read. She often referred to the lack of time and money as a motivation for her aesthetic decisions. Not as something strictly negative, but rather a way of making films despite the circumstances. In *L'Homme Atlantique*, the film consisted primarily of darkness. Duras treated darkness as a utopian place. She called it *the dark room where we are deaf and blind and passion is possible...* She rejected conventional film and maintained that imagery killed viewers' imagination. Words, on the other hand, had an infinite capacity to liberate, she claimed.

I don't know if Duras ever swiped things from others. Probably not. Nothing could beat her own ideas.

- Why does one start writing?
- I don’t know. Maybe because of a lonely childhood.
- Do you think?
- I’ve always wondered what people do if they don’t write. I admire those who manage to do that.
- You make writing sound like some kind of medical condition.
- A writer has two lives. One on the surface, where she talks and works and does the grocery shopping, day after day. And another, her real life, that follows her everywhere and gives her no peace.
- Tell me about your process.
- When I write?
- Yes.
- I write in fragments. One by one. Piece by piece. Then, later, I let the different timelines merge without me noticing it.
- That’s how I edit my films, too.
- Without control.
- Well... no. I try to have complete control. I put small notes on the wall, like a map. Nothing merges on its own.
- It’s all about understanding what’s already inside us. What I call the place of passion.
- Before you were calling it the inner shadow.
- Don’t mark words.

- You once said that the cinema audience were like big children.
- Yes.
- Big, spoiled children who wanted to be entertained.
- Exactly.
- And you said you would never make films for them.
- And?
- You don’t think that’s kind of elitist?
- I didn’t mean the entire audience, but a majority. I left them. Just as one leaves a lover when the
feelings are gone.
- Why?
- For them I was impossible to understand.
Impossible to love.
- It sounds more like they left you?
- Could be. We were eternally separated.
- I don’t like that way of thinking. I don’t want to be weird and difficult. Why does there have to be a separation?
- You shouldn’t succumb to the will to please.
- That’s what I used to think, but I think I’ve changed my mind. Maybe it isn’t a will to please. Maybe it’s just a will to reach out. To communicate.
- The film industry is driven by fear. Fear of not
being able to make more films. Fear of losing money and privileges. True art can’t be created that way.
- Maybe it’s not that simple?
- They come up with their concepts like a
money-calculator. We want this and that actor. This and that environment. And then they rake in the money.
I make films in a totally different way.
- You mean you don’t care about the audience?
- I mean my films address people who are receptive to them. Who don’t see films like a piece of meat.

- But you had stars in your films. Delphine Seyrig, Jeanne Moreau. And what's his name... in *Le Camion*?
- Gérard Depardieu.
- Yes. They were celebrities.
- They were great actors and actresses.
- You could admit that it was important to you after all... reaching an audience. Being at festivals.
- *India Song* was competing for the Palme d'Or.
- There you have it. Chantal Akerman said in an interview that you were rude to her in Cannes. That you were very competitive.
- Her film *Jeanne Dielman* was not that good, I think.

5.

(Body)

Most of Nan Goldin's pictures take place at night. People hang out in bars and clubs, in run-down apartments and hotel rooms. They're outstretched on all sorts of beds with smeared makeup. Everyone looks like they've either just had sex or are just about to. There's a picture of Nan Goldin with her face black and blue from one night in Berlin when her boyfriend tried to kill her. She's looking straight into the camera, a neutral expression on her face. She has two black eyes and red lipstick on her mouth. Nan Goldin's pictures are often full-frontal litten by a flash light. Darkness lurks at the edges of the images, ready to reclaim the space as soon as the flash has burned out. There is always fragility, a dormant violence, but there is also tenderness in the relationship between the camera's gaze and the bodies being photographed. I think the power of Nan Goldin's pictures is that she depicts a world of which she herself is a part, and in that way she's a participant and not a voyeur – or rather, she is a voyeur, but she is looking at her own life and not someone else's. When asked why she never used daylight in her photographs, she answered simply: I'm never awake in the daytime.

When I was a student at the Swedish Institute of Dramatic Art in the '90s we were taught to never make films about our friends or people close to us. Instead, documentary filmmakers should strive to be objective and keep a distance from their subject matter. At the time, the typical documentary filmmaker was a man with a heavy camera on his shoulder and years of experience in war zones and revolutions. Palestine was a popular destination, so was Nicaragua. The films should be about geopolitical issues, and the filmmaker should expose abuses, poverty, and injustice.

I was living in something like poverty at the time. I was the only one of my friends studying at college, and a lot of people I knew were living in various kinds of drug abuse. I felt uncomfortable at the film school, lonely and weird. I lied and said my boyfriend was a carpenter because I didn't want to tell the truth, that he was a criminal. I had nothing in common with anyone at the school and I had an overwhelmingly strong sense that I was in the wrong place and that I didn't have what it took to be a filmmaker. I didn't understand the codes. I felt bored, superior and inferior, all at the same time. I thought the other students didn't know anything about life and I doubted my own capacity to enter their light, smooth-running world. When we were doing our final projects in the last year of the program I decided – despite teachers advising me not to – to make a film about one of my best friends, Kalle Grogarn. My choice of subject matter – which was determined "dubious" – resulted in the school allocating fewer resources to my project. I had to film with video, not on 16mm film like the others, and I was doing it "at my own

risk". I must have had some self-confidence after all because I insisted on carrying it out. I wanted to depict what was my reality and try to make a film unlike any I had seen.

Kalle and I were together almost every day at that time. We used to take Ritalin and drink gin together in his apartment on Kocksgatan, which was where all of our friends met up. We crushed the Ritalin pills into a fine powder and used rolled-up bills to snort it. Sometimes there was cocaine, too. And valium, and marijuana.

Kalle was HIV-positive and had started showing the first signs of AIDS. He had thrush in his mouth that kept coming back and his immune system was getter increasingly weaker. I knew that he wouldn't live to see old age and I wanted to film him and his poems and his life before it was all gone. Kalle was the epicentrum of a large group of people. He had been a dancer and editor of the radical queer paper *Reporter*. He was an antifascist skinhead and a reluctant poet and someone that both women and men fell in love with. Kalle had been infected with HIV in San Francisco several years earlier and was one of the first generation of homosexual men with HIV in Sweden. At the time – in the early '90s – anti-retrovirals weren't very advanced, and people who were HIV-positive were guinea pigs, trying out different doses and combinations of drugs that had major side effects. Kalle got spinal damage as a result of one medication – it was called Crixivan – and ended up in a wheelchair. After that – when Kalle couldn't dance anymore – his view on life grew increasingly dark and his drug use intensified. A few years earlier he had also lost the love of his life – the Australian Don Carter, to AIDS. As time passed Kalle got worse, physically and mentally, and doctors prescribed more and more meds – anti-anxiety, uppers, downers, sleeping pills, pain meds – and we abused them all, taking them with alcohol. Over time the friends who couldn't deal with the destructiveness and Kalle's nihilistic view on life disappeared. The ones who stayed were those who could handle the darkness, or those who were drawn to it. I don't know if Kalle could have lived a long life even if he wanted to. If he had looked after the meds and his health, didn't smoke and drink so much, not taken all of the pills up his nose right away. At some point in those final years he decided he didn't want to live until he died of AIDS, and he was honest about wanting to take his own life.

My final project film was about Kalle's last year alive. The closing scene of the film is on Christmas Eve, and Kalle is sitting alone in his dark room, surrounded by his photos and his skulls, his pill bottles and his queer punk art. He's watching TV and eating kebab with a pocketknife. The audio is Kalle reading his own poem:

Now it no longer feels strange
I bear brothers' poison
And you live your last year so bull-headed and brutal
Drink HIV-spiked urine

Or chew white slips of paper
All that's hidden
All that's hidden
I rake blood-red leaves
Memories I never want to forget
That black hole
Forever the goal
Leaves always rot
Some before their time.

Kalle's death and illness were more than just a personal tragedy; they were part of something larger, an epidemic that affected an entire generation in the 1990s. Kalle's darkness, fury and desperation were shared by millions of people all over the world who didn't get proper healthcare, who were silenced and shamed and ignored by doctors and authorities and in many cases by their relatives, families who didn't allow boyfriends to come to funerals and lied about their sons' illness and sexual identity. The mass deaths also hit a whole underground scene as a generation of artists, musicians, and writers died before their time, expediting a gentrification process that wiped out a large part of the culture in the metropolises of the western world, maybe New York most of all.

Kalle made art out of everything; pill jars, blood-smeared photos, skulls, words and pictures he had cut out of newspapers. He even had two framed test tubes containing his cat's testicles. It was all bloody and carnal and had its roots in his own experience of being queer, "a disgust", an outcast, marginalized by an intolerant and hypocritical society and imprisoned in a dying body. When I see works by the insanely brilliant artist David Wojnarowicz, who died of AIDS in 1992, I often think of Kalle.

I am waking up every morning. I am waking up every morning in this killer machine called America and I am carrying this rage like a blood filled egg and there is a thin line between the inside and the outside a thin line between thought and action and that line is simply made up of muscles and skin and bones.[1]

Nan Goldin took lots of portraits of friends who were dying of AIDS. Including David Wojnarowicz. I'm not sure that I knew Nan Goldin's work back when I was filming Kalle, but when I encountered her photographs later the experience was overwhelming. I was living in San Francisco at the time and the Museum of Modern Art had a large solo exhibition of her photos. I walked around the exhibition for hours with a euphoric sense of being seen and of being allowed to exist. A sense of not being alone, or... maybe still alone, but for a moment free from the position as *the other*. I was the subject and the image and the story, all at the same time.

This winter, that is, as I'm writing this text, I've been seeing her work again at Moderna Museet in Stockholm. A lot of years have gone by and this time the exhibition consists of slideshows and films instead of photo stills hanging on the wall. It's like entering someone else's subconscious. The exhibition is made up of six black cubes in a black room. Everything is dark. I feel my way between the rooms, which are draped in thick fabric. It's hard to tell how big the rooms are or where I am in relation to the walls. I lose all sense of time and space, like I'm floating in the cosmos. The films touch on all of the themes Nan Goldin worked with in her art: the night, sexuality, death, drugs, love. The film *Memory Lost* portrays her own drug abuse, which lasted on and off throughout her entire life. The film is made up of series of stills and short film sequences. Different narrative voices are interwoven with music and snippets of phone calls.

> A man breathing fire. Pictures of the night. A message on an answering machine: a man's voice saying he's going to rehab in New Hampshire. Apparently it's an intensive program. He hopes it will work. A cat. Black windows facing the night. New voice, a woman: *No matter how fucked up I am, that's the thing, my whole life is based on memory so... I remember every word that's ever been said to me.* A dark mirror in a dark room. An image of a man sitting on a bed and cutting lines on a mirror. A man's voice compares his high to sleeping in his mother's arms. Another voice on the answering machine: *Wake up wake up. Nan, are you there?* A picture of the director herself with bleached blonde hair. A picture of the director with brown hair. Images of a dark city. People in beds. A filmed interview breaks up the series of stills; a woman talks about how many friends she has lost and how she used to write their names in a notebook but in the end she had to stop because it was too much. The answering machine again: Someone asks if Nan has slept, eaten. Landscape with a dark sky. Synth chords and opera. A man saying that his mother didn't hold him when he was an infant and that he was left alone in a crib for hours on end. That all his life he has tried not to feel anything. Abstract images of light and dark. A moving black-and-white image of flowers swaying unnaturally slowly in the wind. Man: *I was in the middle between monster and kid.* Other man: *The worst thing is if you have to talk to someone. It's all about the drug. It just takes over.* Empty beds. Hotel rooms. Squats. Nan Goldin with red hair in a mirror. A man's voice: *It gives you a sense of connection. It soothes the pain. Relieves the stress. Makes you feel less isolated. What the person looks for in an addiction is totally sane. Totally human. Moving pictures of a beach where people are laughing. Piano music.*[2]

The film is so intense that I have to return to the exhibition several times to watch the whole thing. It's the most honest thing I've seen about drug abuse. It's dark and absorbing and excruciating. I can't stop thinking that personal experience is a

precondition for this story, that Nan Goldin is telling the story from herself, based on how it feels and how it is to live through it and not on how it looks. I don't mean to say that an artist needs to have experienced everything she recounts (that would be unbearably extreme identity politics and a dismissal of our capacity to imagine other people's lives, a rejection of imagination and fiction and other such vital things), but there is something liberating about seeing just these topics – AIDS, drugs abuse and vulnerability – portrayed with a gaze from within, one that isn't based of the objectification of others. That isn't rooted in stereotypes, sympathy or voyeurism. Something about the darkness forms a barricade around the films in the exhibition as well. I don't see the others in the audience. I don't see who is speaking in the film. I don't even see my own hands when I want to take notes. All of the voices, all of the gazes merge and become a single person. Or two: You and I.

Talking about going clean from opiates, Nan Goldin says:

> *(...) You have no protection from any kind of pain. It is not just the physical part. It is like, the darkest you can go. It's the darkness of the soul.*[3]

Nan Goldin started her career as a photographer in New York in the '70s. For years she struggled with an art world that didn't understand her and that thought her photographs were too personal. The American art scene was dominated by the male gaze and steeped in the idea that art and artists should be separate.

> *It was really heavy resistance, especially from male artists and gallerists who said: This is not photography. Nobody photographs their own life.*[4]

Making one's life into a story can be a way of making life tolerable and taking control of a situation where one feels powerless. Having a camera or recording equipment in one's hand can also be a way of protecting oneself, from life and from oneself. I'm often asked if I make my personal films as a way to process feelings or things I've experienced, kind of like therapy, but film isn't therapy. Film is art and entertainment, and it is not healthy or healing or self-fulfilling by definition. Making films can effectively be a way of *not* feeling, filming instead of feeling. Or, as Andy Warhol put it when he bought his first recording equipment (which he called his "wife"):

> *The acquisition of my tape recorder really finished whatever emotional life I might have had, but I was glad to see it go. Nothing was ever a problem again, because a problem just meant a good tape and when a problem transforms itself into a good tape it's not a problem anymore.*[5]

In the film *All the Beauty* and the *Bloodshed*, Nan Goldin says:

> *It's easy to make your life into stories, but it's harder to sustain real memories. (...) Well, the difference between a story and a real memory... The real experience has a smell and is dirty and it's not wrapped up in simple endings.*

When my film about Kalle was done – I named it *The Stars We Are* after the Marc Almond song that plays in the end credits – it was shown in a little cinema in Stockholm. All the friends were there, except Kalle, who stayed home. He was too weak to go out and I think he was uncomfortable with the idea of rolling into that movie theater in his wheelchair with everyone's eyes on him. But he loved "that goddamn film" in his own willful way and he watched it over and over on VHS those weeks. He died a short time later. He was found in his room with his wrists slit, surrounded by his pill bottles and his cats and his own art.

- In your black film you say: At the end of the journey the camera is what decides what you'll have seen. See.
- Yes?
- Is the black film about death?
- Yes, I think that's clear.
- Yes.
- Isn't your black film about death?
- Yes, but... maybe not that directly.
- What could be more direct than death?
- Everything is about death. The death of film. My death. Your death.
- Why don't you say so then?
- Some things can also be left unsaid, I think. Death can also be a secret. Like a dangerous desire or something filthy that shouldn't be seen.
- Maybe you're just a bit of a coward?
- Yes, that too maybe.

- When I was younger I thought that film, my films, would change the world.
- Really?
- Yes. Or... that I had the responsibility to make films that *could* change the world. That it had to be my ambition.
- Why?
- I don't know. I think it had to do with my background.
- That's very naive.
- Could be.
- No one can change the world.
- In *Le Camion* you say: Let the world go to its ruin.
Let the world go to its ruin, that's the only form of politics.
- Yes.
- Did you mean it?
- Yes.

- Were you always that cocky?
- When I was put in the hospital for delirium I realized I was very scared. They said I would die if I drank another glass of wine.
- Wow.
- I was seized by a strange fear, the fear of a hunted animal.
- Then you weren't so cocky.
- I wrote *Lol V. Stein* during that time. I will always associate it with the fear of having to live without alcohol.
- I read that Lacan was really fond of that book. He wrote about you.
- Yes.
- Were you friends?
- I wouldn't say so.
- No?
- To be honest I didn't understand much of his writing.
- But he understood you?
- He did a very detailed analysis of *Lol V. Stein*.
- But?
- It's interesting, how intellectual men try to explain things to a woman.
- What did he try to explain?
- My book.

6.

(Violence)

Another artist whose art was based on her personal experiences was the Cuban artist Ana Mendieta. She came to the US from Cuba as a 12-year-old, together with 14 000 other Cuban children whose parents hoped they would find a better life there. She spent her teenage years in orphanages and foster homes, separated from her sister and revolting against the world around her. The sense of having been uprooted and displaced from her home and family became a recurring theme in Mendieta's art.

Her best-known work is her *Silhuetas* series. The *Silhuetas* are imprints of her own body in various places and with different materials. The imprints were made in clay earth, snow, and sand and filled with pigment, flowers and blood. Between 1973 and 1980 she made more than a hundred *Silhuetas* around Iowa as well as in Mexico. Most of the works were slowly reclaimed by nature, overgrown, washed away by waves, eroded, faded, disintegrated, dissolved by rain, and the only thing that remained was her documentation on film and photographs. Later Mendieta also made other silhouettes in Cuba, in the caves outside her childhood paradise, Varadero, in the series *Esculturas Rupestres*. Those silhouettes are still there in part, but they are also gradually being erased by time and nature's perpetual process of destruction.

Mendieta's silhouettes obviously lead the thoughts to death. Both their ephemerality and their form are reminiscent of graves and crime scenes, murder and sexual assault, but also something ritualistic, monumental and divine.

In an artist statement from 1981, Mendieta said: *I have been carrying out a dialogue between the landscape and the female body (based on my own silhouette). I believe this has been a direct result of my having been torn from my homeland (Cuba) during my adolescence. I am overwhelmed by the feeling of having been cast from the womb (nature).*[1]

While Ana Mendieta was studying art at Iowa University a young woman was brutally raped and murdered in her dormitory. The event had a strong effect on Mendieta and influenced her early works, which dealt with the vulnerability of the body and sexual violence. In the work the *Moffit Building Piece (Untitled Rape Scene. People looking at Blood Moffitt)* she and her sister Raquelin Mendieta documented how people walked past a simulated crime scene where blood is running out of a doorway and onto the sidewalk. In other works from that time she uses her

own body as the victim, laying naked and smeared in blood at different possible crime scenes. The images are sinister and a commentary on violence as well as on what we see and our will to look away. To not want to know. To not talk about it. She didn't know it at the time, but her own work chillingly foresaw her own brutal death.

After art school in Iowa Ana Mendieta moved to New York, where there was a vibrant art scene at the time. Mendieta was ambitious and wanted her art to be seen and recognized. In 1979 she had her first solo exhibition at A.I.R gallery in New York. She also met her future husband Carl André around that time. He was considered a forerunner in what's known as minimalism. Minimalism was dominant in the New York art scene at the time and most artists were white men. The works were frequently abstract and simple and expressed thought, not feeling.

Mendieta and André's marriage was tempestuous. She was young, fiery, and ambitious. He was older and already had a following, and he had a reputation for getting violent when he drank, which he did often and profusely. On the 8th of September 1985, Ana Mendieta died after falling from a window in their shared home on the 34th floor of a building in Manhattan. Carl André was in the apartment and was charged as an accessory to her murder. Many witness statements made during the long trial pointed to his guilt: neighbors had heard a woman's voice crying for help, Mendieta had told a friend the day before that she was worried, evidence had disappeared when no one but André had access to the apartment, etc. Nonetheless, the court acquitted him, citing insufficient evidence.[2]

After Ana Mendieta's death came silence. Carl André's career thrived as if nothing had ever happened. He was invited to hold solo exhibitions at eminent galleries all over the world. Nowhere was Ana Mendieta mentioned. Only a small group of feminist artists organized protests and demanded to know *Where is Ana Mendieta?* but the establishment, all of the artists, curators and gallerists who supported André, declined to comment. Many thought private life should be kept out of it. Even if Carl André was guilty, it had nothing to do with his art. Art was "objective" and shouldn't be conflated with personal issues. One must make a distinction between the artist and the work.

To which the obvious question is: Must one?

Carl André and Ana Mendieta were polar opposites in many ways. He was a minimalist and his art was cool, intellectual and philosophical. Mendieta's art was carnal, bloody, earthy and tied to nature and personal experience. She was a woman and an immigrant. He was white, male, wealthy. He represented "fine" art. She represented

“nature art” and folklore.

In the trial following her death, Ana Mendieta’s art was even used as evidence that she had been responsible for her own demise. Carl André’s lawyers pointed to her works as if they were Santería religious pieces, stating that they glorified death, that they had links to voodoo and witchcraft, and that they indicated that Ana Mendieta was actually mentally ill and suicidal. (Something her friends and relatives vehemently rejected; they said that she was vibrant and determined, difficult and ambitious, headstrong and charismatic, not even remotely suicidal). The trial was a kind of symbolic witch trial where the witch had already been executed and the executioner released by judiciaries and celebrated by the art world.

In a way it’s wrong to write so much about Carl André in a text about Ana Mendieta. Perhaps it does her injustice. She was first and foremost a great artist and not a victim. Still, it’s hard to be unfazed by her brutal fate, to not draw the lines between the power structures that continue to permeate the art- and film world. The personal is political.

> *47 black candles on a parquet floor. They form the shape of an outstretched body. The candleflames outline a silhouette of fire in the dark room. In the shadows surrounding the body are other bodies, people standing in silence watching the flames. Sometimes someone moves on, disappears from the picture. Someone whispers something to someone. The candles burn slowly and the black wax runs in droplets. The audience shifts and changes. Some stand there almost the whole time. When the last candle has burned out there is a silhouette in black wax that hardens into the floor. Like a smeared-out body that has been thrown from a 34th-floor window. Like a blackened mummy in the grave of a queen. Like a trace, a monument, a shadow, vomit, a lump of wax soon to be scraped away by the gallery cleaners only to be recreated the next day with new flames. New candles.*[3]

- Do you believe there is a female gaze that differs from the male one?
- I think there is a link between women and silence.
A link that has always been there, throughout the ages.
- Can you elaborate?
- The silence that gives her greater self-awareness and sensitivity. That she dares to be in the dark in- between.
- And men?
- Men's knowledge is linked with theory and ideology.
The male gaze will always be tied to power and authority.
- Sometimes I think it can be tricky to separate things into male and female.
- Why?
- It's so easy to end up in stereotypes. Besides, what's male and female changes over time. As society changes.
- The male gaze doesn't need to be linked to gender. Proust for example, he didn't write in a manly way.
He dared to throw himself into passion's writing.
- I don't know. I don't have the energy to read Proust.
- You don't ever have to admit that.

- You once said you thought Sartre was mentally retarded.
- I did not phrase it like that.
- What did you say then?
- I said that Sartre was the reason for France being culturally retarded.
- That’s pretty harsh.
- Yes, it’s deplorable.

- Can we talk a bit about desire?
- Desire?
- Yes.
- What do you want to know?
- Desire is very central in your books and films. Forbidden desire. Unbearable desire.
- Yes.
- Often there's someone howling out their desire.
Like the man in *Les Mains Négatives*. Like the vice consul in *India Song*. He's in the center of the story in a way, but he's also outside it. A beholder.
- Someone observing someone else's desire, yes.
Like Lol V. Stein.
- Lol V. Stein! I was going to come to her. She is watching her husband fall in love with Anne-Marie Stretter at that ball.
- And after the ball her entire life revolves around that moment.
- Lol V. Stein is almost like an ancestral character in your writing.
- Yes. All of the women in my books and films, whatever their age, are descendants of Lol V. Stein. They all have light eyes. They all make themselves unhappy.
- Might one say that character is you? The writer?
- Lol V. Stein?
- Yes. The beholder. And that the desire, the drive to see, to shout out your pain, to long for something unattainable, is what powers your writing.
- That's what powers all writing.

- You once said that in longing and in absence is where action is possible.
- Something like that, yes.
- Would you like to say anything else about that?
- Lol V. Stein goes so far as to spy on others' love.
In the evening she stands outside their window and watches them making love.
- You mean writing stems from voyeurism?
- Yes, voyeurism and desire.
- And filmmaking?
- It's the same thing.

- I've dedicated a lot of time specifically to resisting voyeurism in film.
- How did you do that?
- As a feminist act.
- In what way?
- I wanted to make films where the gaze is turned inward, to erase the boundary between subject and object in some way. Between the person watching and the person being seen. I think it's because film history is so dominated by the male gaze and I wanted to destroy it.
- Interesting. What did you do with your own voyeurism then?
- I don't really know.
- Voyeurism is not in the gaze, it's in the desire. The impossible longing to be one with another person. Without that desire you cannot make films.

- You wrote about your mother, how she only loved your older brother. The one who was violent.
- Yes?
- And you described how he sat at her deathbed and how they spoke so intimately and wept and no one noticed you there.
- Yes. They loved each other very intensely.
- But she was also your mother.
- Yes, but she loved only her first-born.
- Do you think that the family situation, that your childhood... do you think it affected your writing later... that it was why you became the spectator. The one who watches others' love but always remains outside?
- No.
- No?

- I dislike those kinds of explanations. My writing comes from a darkness that not even I can grasp. My mother is only a small piece of the puzzle. Or... there isn't any puzzle at all.
- Then what is it?
- You ask such strange questions.
- I really want to know.
- When one writes, it is as if by instinct. The writing is already there, in the night.
- That sounds wonderful.
- When I wrote *The Lover* I had the sense of discovering: it had been there before me, before everything. The writing came so easily that it reminded me of being drunk, you know when everything is so clear and easy.
- You mean that the text didn't come from you, but from somewhere outside of you?
- Yes, kind of like the visions one sometimes has after detox. Or dreams. They come from a central darkness at the core of the world. An absence of stories.
- I don't really get it.
- It's like the writing was happening outside oneself, in a blending of times: between writing and having written, between having written and being compelled to write more, between knowing and not knowing what it is, starting with total meaning, being inundated with meaning, and arriving at meaninglessness. The image of a black boulder in the middle of the world is not unintentional.
- A black boulder?
- Yes.
- In the middle of the world?
- Yes.

7.

(Fragments)

It's late evening in Kinshasa. Félicité is singing in the bar where she sings every night. She needs to raise money for her son's operation. He was injured in apaid visits to people around the city who have refused to help: the child's father, who lives with another woman, someone who owes her money, someone who has money and might be able to loan it to her. She doesn't give up. Félicité sings. She's in a dark forest. Now she's in a white dress and barefoot. Her son is there. His breathing is labored from the pain and his face gleams in the weak light. No one says anything. Félicité walks on in the forest and arrives at a stream. The only noise are the cicadas and the faint gurgling of water. She wades out slowly until the only part of her above the water is her head. On the other side, on the riverbank, an animal stands grazing. It's an okapi, the zebra-like animal often called Africa's unicorn. Félicité smiles. Maybe she can find guidance here. Maybe she can rest. *Félicité by Alain Gomis (Feature film 2017)*

You dig a tunnel below the earth. You go further and further into the darkness. The only thing you see in front of you is your pickaxe and the dark earthen walls and the rocks you chisel out in square blocks. The further down you get the more blocks you accumulate: cobblestone, coal. Soon you need to go back up to check where the sun is in the sky. When it sets in the west it will be night and the world will transform, and with it your chances of survival. Before that you need to build a house with windows and doors to protect you from the night. You need a bed to sleep in and a lamp to light and you have to be ready to meet the creatures that will come to kill you when night has fallen. They can eat you and suffocate you and club you to death. They can flatten everything you have built to the ground in just one second. You chisel and chisel to get stones for your house and coal for your fire. It's dark. Night is falling. *Minecraft (Digital game 2023)*

A microphone gleams in the dark. The walls are draped in dark blue curtains and there are no windows and no doors visible. On the podium in front of the curtains is Romance in a broad-shouldered pink suit together with a musician playing a golden horn. Romance has long silver hair framing the bald crown of his head and dances provocatively with jerking motions, gripping the microphone with thick, skin-colored rubber gloves and singing *All girls want Kandy*. The audience is just one single person in a gray suit and tie. Parted hair. It's Main, who works in an office and has a great longing. Main's eyes are glassy with expectation and arousal, hands clasping the armrests of the chair. Something thrilling and dangerous might happen. Romance leaves the stage and crawls toward the audience, like an animal

ready to attack. Straddles the victim and leans forward to whisper something, or to bite it in the throat. The bodies move against each other in the dark room. An offer and a predator, a desire and a satisfaction, an ego and its shadow. *Kandy by Fever Ray (Music video directed by Martin Falck. 2023)*

A young witch is performing a ceremony in her dark cellar. She has drawn a pentagram surrounded by symbols on the floor. She has a black peaked hat, round glasses and a magic wand that she moves in front her whilst uttering magical words. Suddenly the symbols on the floor begin to glow and the young witch is blinded by the bright light. A demon sitting on its haunches emerges from the stream of light. The demon is big and powerful and has dark, reddish-brown skin. It looks like a human with large, swelling breasts and an enormous penis. The witch looks enthralled as the demon rises and walks toward her. The breasts and penis swing gently as the demon moves. They immediately begin to have intercourse. The witch lies on her back and lets the demon penetrate her. Candles shimmer in the darkness. The demon's face is rigid like a Barbie's and its skin is shiny. It holds the witch's legs while it penetrates her. As they have intercourse the witch conjures with her magic wand again and the demon's member and breasts swell to double their size. They pick up speed and suddenly the witch drops her magic wand and it falls to the floor. As it falls new magic occurs and the demon swells larger still, so its member fills the witch's entire torso, which pitches and bulges in all directions. When the demon finally reaches its climax bodily fluids gush out of the witch's nose and mouth and suffocate her. *A young witch summoned a demon with a huge dick and he fucked her hard until he finished her. By Xart Hull HD (Animation Porn Hub 2023)*

A sliver of light and nothing more fall from the upper righthand corner of the image. In the sliver of light is the silhouette of a backlit soldier. He wears a helmet and khaki clothes and in his right hand is a long-handled shovel. Along the righthand edge of the image are other soldiers with green helmets, huddling under a low plank roof. There are also boards in the opening that faces the light, as if the space isn't completely built yet or it was complete but has been damaged by shooting. The man sitting in the light leans forward and digs out sand from the opening of the trench, the man sits quietly, watching. Suddenly there's a loud noise and the camera shakes and changes position. Something has exploded in the opening and for a moment everything is dark. The man with the shovel is hurled to the earth and screams. Now the person holding the camera is outside the shelter and calls out in Ukrainian: *"Where are they"*. The camera is probably mounted on his helmet because he is holding an automatic in his hands that's visible in the middle of the image. The sky is gray and naked trees stretch upward like ghostly fingers. A dark silhouette comes running a few hundred meters away and throws a grenade at the camera. Our cameraman ducks, but soon rises again and shoots his weapon. This

time the range of vision is better and we see three men in military gear crawling on the ground. The cameraman shoots several rounds at them and soon all of the bodies lie motionless. They are dead. *Ukrainian soldier fighting off Russians in battle of Bakhmut 'Orcs jumped into our trenches'. (YouTube 2023)*

Sun Ra is floating in the blackness of space, seemingly weightless. He lays with his arms akimbo over his chest and it looks like his body is swathed like a mummy's – a pharaoh in his grave. We hear his voice in a voice-over: *The endless wind. The bottomless pit surrounding you.* Then his jazz band The Arkestra emerges from the darkness of space and the singer June Tyson sings: *We sing this song to a great tomorrow.* They're on their way to earth to save their black brothers and sisters from the planet's imminent demise. They come bearing the message that there is a better future in outer space. *We sing this song to a great tomorrow.* Sun Ra the jazz musician and space traveler is at once an Egyptian god and a savior. He wants to take us with him into the darkness to liberate us. Or maybe there isn't any "we" at all. Sun Ra and his crew address the oppressed, the enslaved and persecuted, giving them a chance to abandon the planet, leave it to the white oppressors and its collapse. A better world awaits in the darkness. *Space is the Place with Sun Ra. (Feature film directed by Jon Coney 1974).*

- How do you come up with your ideas?
- They often come as images. Fragments. There were the child's golden shoes. There was the vice consul howling out his longing near the tennis courts. Images.
- There were often tennis courts.
- Yes.
- People who popped pills and drank drinks.
- Yes.
- How did it happen that you wanted to make films later? That you didn't stick to writing?
- I think it was loneliness.
- How do you mean?
- I wanted to get out of my room, out of my house. To do something together with other people.
- Yes, that's one reason to make films.
- There's always a reason.

- How do you feel about editing?
- Editing is a fundamental part of filmmaking.
- Yes, yes of course, but what else can you say about it?
- The editing process, loneliness, silence, the excruciating slowness of it is like the writing process. It's the same ritual.
- Yes, I agree with you there.
- The most important thing is cutting, taking away, until all that's left is what's necessary. Give the viewer as little to see as possible and as much as possible to understand and to hear.
- I'm wondering about the space between what is seen and what is omitted.
- Yes?
- It's like that's where your films reside.
- It's the study of the gap.
- The gap?
- Yes, those empty spaces that cannot be filled, the ones between word and action, between what is said and what is kept concealed.

8.

(The Night)

The city is never completely dark. There are always streetlights, billboards and shop windows lighting up the public spaces. Not even the night sky is dark; it is muted by the light that radiates from the city and blurs out the stars. And yet the darkness is there, a palpable presence, and at dusk it shrouds existence and transforms the city into the other. Other people emerge and move around in the artificial light. Other activities are pursued in the public sphere. Other forces power the city's machinery. At dawn the city changes shape again, and the two worlds meet, chafing against each other for a few short moments.

I was once on my way home at dawn from a party on Manhattan's Upper West Side. For a number of reasons my pockets were completely empty, and I had also fallen out with my guide; he had misunderstood our situation and thought that the guided tour was a date. When he realized that I intended to sleep alone in my hotel room, he demanded that I pay him back for everything we had consumed that evening, and I had to make my way back alone from the strange after-party where we had ended up. I gave him the last of my money – which I had been saving for a taxi – and then I had to go all the way back to lower Manhattan by foot. It was a long way, but the advantage with New York is that anyone can find their way there. All of the streets have numbers and letters; the system is tremendously logical. (Why aren't all cities organized like that?) I discovered that if I just walked south on Broadway I would get to the crosstown street with my number in an hour or two. I not only got to see the sun rise on that long walk; I also got to experience the transformation that New York undergoes every time the night turns to day. The city's other inhabitants: the transvestites, the sex workers, people who are high, people coming down, lonely people, the partiers and the people who only go out at night were slowly replaced by streetcleaners, commuters, bakers, nurses, café workers. Shutters were rolled up and outdoor tables were carried out and joggers passed by as the last queen of the night left a club and teetered into a taxi. In the end, I was the only one left who had watched New York becoming a different city. It left me feeling acutely vulnerable and I hurried along Broadway, looking straight ahead so I wouldn't be pulverized by the sun's rays like a vampire.

Another artist who depicted the city and the night was Louise Nevelson. Her black sculptures were all inspired by New York, where she lived and worked throughout her artistic career. One of her best-known works, *Sky Cathedral*, consists of a number of boxes and objects that have been joined and stacked vertically like a gigantic altar. The sculpture is coal black, three meters high and almost just as wide. It looks like a black map of the city with its grid of streets and façades. It could also be a big, black machine, just as the city is a machine, built by humans to

keep nature at bay and construct meaning where there is no meaning. An apparatus in constant operation with thousands of visible and invisible gears. And everything is black.

> *Black is the most aristocratic of all. The only aristocratic color. For me this is the ultimate. You can be quiet and it contains the whole thing. There is no other color that will give you the feeling of totality. Of peace. Of greatness. Of quietness. Of excitement.*[1]

If one looks closely, one sees that *Sky Cathedral* consists of many different objects, or parts of objects. The carved leg of chair, the bottom of a simple wooden box and a piece of an ornamental element, maybe from a veranda. They are simple everyday objects, but the black paint joins them together, making them a whole, and transforms their original meaning into something new, something big and secret and slightly frightening.

The sculpture is one of the black assemblages from the exhibition *Moon Garden + One*, which was first shown in New York in 1958. Another work in the exhibition is *Sky Garden*, a slightly smaller rectangular sculpture that also leans against a wall. Its upright rectangular shape makes it look like a door that opens into the wall, like a portal leading to the world of shadows. A chance to leave the white room of the gallery and go straight into the endless darkness. Objects can be discerned in this sculpture as well. Some of them look sharp, like they could harm someone. Could it be a gun safe? Or is it a reminder of the war that was raging in the years when Nevelson was getting on her feet as an artist in New York? Maybe it is an expression of the potential violence that surrounds every woman when she is walking home through the city at dawn. Louise Nevelson describes herself as an *architect of shadows*, and her black works were all depictions of *the in-between places of dawns and dusks*.[2]

Louise Nevelson was born in Kiev in 1899 and emigrated to the USA with her family in 1905. Her name was Leah Berliawsky at the time, and she was the oldest child in a family that owned woodland and dealt in lumber. With their Jewish lineage and their extravagant style, the family had a hard time fitting in where they settled in upper-middle-class New England. They spoke Yiddish and they were one of the town's few immigrant families. *They needed foreigners like I need ten holes in my head*, Nevelson said in an interview.[3] She decided then and there that she would not let her surroundings define who or what she could be. She decided to become an artist.

Being different and working from the feeling of being an outsider was something that would accompany Nevelson throughout her life, even in the art world. Being before her time. Being after her time. Being a woman among men. Being a Russian Jew among Americans. Being old among the young. Being a sculptor

among painters. Being eccentric, promiscuous, magnificent and creating continuously in a world that did not consider those characteristics to be valuable for a woman was the destiny Nevelson had to live with and the experience that she wove into her dark sculptural works.

> *Creating art is easy,* she said. *But creating art in this world is hard.*[4]

When she was 21 she married a wealthy Jewish businessman, Mr. Nevelson. It was a road out of the small town and into New York City's wealthy circles, where a new world opened up. Louise had expensive jewelry and furs and although she soon became a mother – the couple had a son two years after their wedding – she had the opportunity to go to art school – New York's Art Student League. It all went well at first, but her husband's family opposed her plan to dedicate herself to her art full-time, which was difficult to reconcile with the conventions of a Jewish mother's behavior. Louise felt increasingly confined and one day she took her son with her and left her marriage behind. Her son was eight at the time, and she left him with her parents and went to study Cubism with the teacher Hans Hofmann.

> *I can't afford to look back. Well because I destroyed so much. If I looked back I would have been destroyed myself.* [5]

In the 1940s, she was back in New York and started to develop her sculptures. Her son was an adult by then and had been drafted to the war as a marine soldier. Sometimes months passed where she didn't hear from him. Her relationship to motherhood was complicated, but her longing for her son was nonetheless overwhelming. She later commented that the war was one of the reasons that she only worked with black during that period.

> *It threw me in a great state of despair. And I recall that my work was black and it was all enclosed–all enclosed. I would use black velvet and close the boxes. In other words, this was a great place of secrecy within myself. I didn't even realize the motivation of it; it was all subconscious, it was the expression of a mood. But it isn't only one son. It's also that the world was at war and every son was at war...*[6]

There are a lot of different explanations for Nevelson's choice of the color black. She says different things in different interviews: it is the color of grief, it is an aristocratic color, it is the color of silence, and in another interview she doesn't want to talk about black as a color at all. And she doesn't want to call her work sculpture, either.

My work has never been black to me to begin with. I never think of it that way. I don't make sculpture and it isn't black and it isn't wood or anything, because I wanted something else. I wanted an essence.[7]

Critics can analyze, academics can theorize, curators can categorize, but spoken and written language can never master articulation of the essence of what a work is actually communicating. Nor can the words I'm writing now express what the darkness in Louise Nevelson's black sculptures really means to me, or to you, or to the world in which they exist. But I'll keep writing. If nothing else so you can discover her art and see it at MoMA next time you're in New York, or buy a book and look at pictures of them, like I did. Google. Read. Be amazed. Be engulfed in the darkness and inspired by the impossibly vast work that this human did in her lifetime.

Unlike many of her contemporary male colleagues, who worked in metal, Nevelson chose to work in wood. Not because she found the material particularly attractive or inspiring. She didn't even like forests or nature. She was inspired by the city and used wood because she was poor. It was lighter and cheaper and she didn't need a special workshop or expensive tools. Working alone with heavy materials like metal was hard, and she couldn't afford to hire assistants or rent a big studio. Instead, she gathered her material on the streets and worked at home. Milk cartons, old furniture, firewood and sticks. Anything free and manipulable she could get her hands on. In true DIY-spirit, she used what was available based on her circumstances then and there.

All the pieces of wood were painted black right away and stored in her studio, which was also her home. I can imagine how crowded and dirty it must have been with all of that wood waiting to become art. She collected other things that influenced her art as well, traditional African art and sculptures and Native American masks.

Just as she transformed her found objects into art, every day she transformed herself into a sculpture, regardless of how dire her circumstances were. She wore floor-length ensembles, fanciful headpieces, gigantic jewelry and multiple pairs of false eyelashes. Everything about Louise Nevelson was a work of art. Despite being so poor at times that she ate nothing but a tin of sardines a day, she was a queen, and her art pointed toward eternity.

The exhibition *Moon Garden + One* was originally meant to be one single work that would fill the entire gallery. Nevelson had all of the furniture removed; chairs, tables, benches. She also wanted the show to be completely in the dark, so even the surfaces of the gallery, floors and ceilings, would be perceived as black. For some reason that didn't happen, but if it had, the entire gallery would have been one single monochrome darkness that embraced the beholder upon entering. And only after some time, when the eyes had adjusted to the light, would different shapes

and forms begin to emerge among the shadows. The visitor would thus be a part of the sculpture and of the new reality.

Louise Nevelson worked for years without being recognized by the outside world. Later in her life, she had a big studio and many assistants. She was commissioned to do large public works and the critics unanimously sang her praises. But by that time she was already old, and it was the 1960s – an era that venerated youth. When she was young and making her black sculptures and junk, she was miserably poor, lonely and at times depressed, but she never slowed down and she never doubted her own ability.

I've never seen Louise Nevelson's sculptures in person. I've only seen them on film and in a book about her art that I bought and studied for hours on end. When I look at pictures of *Sky Cathedral* again, it strikes me that despite the monumental and sacral feel, there is also a playfulness to it. All of that junk from the streets that has been joined by hand, by her, in her home, makes me think of a homemade dollhouse. Something one furnishes oneself, arranges with what one has. To create a home. To enter into one's own world, the world of imagination and play, where one can live and everything is possible.

And I also remember a box I had as a child. My dad had built it and painted it dark blue and gave it to me for Christmas instead of the real dollhouse I had wished for. I don't remember if I was disappointed or happy, but I remember that I played a lot with that box. I stood it up on its short side and made my own doll furniture out of matchboxes and scraps of fabric. The top of the box was the dolls' rooftop terrace; they could reach it via a flight of stairs made of blocks. (It sounds like I grew up in the 1800s. I didn't, and I had real Barbie horses and all sorts of other plastic things that belonged to the 1970s, but that particular dollhouse happened to be wooden and homemade.) Louise Nevelson's *Sky Cathedral* could be a dollhouse like that, in a giant format. Homemade, painted and full of possibilities to play at a different reality. It's not just a shrine; it's also a piece of furniture that is part of a little girl's bedroom or some other part of the home. A newly built kitchen, maybe. A coal black alternative to today's generic IKEA furnishings.

In Louise Nevelson's art, darkness transports, it transforms. The monochrome black color brings the disparate elements together, makes them a whole. The city's leftovers; the carved spindle that belonged to a chair in an abandoned lot, the old sugar box found in a dumpster, scraps of wood from the junkyard, planks from a construction site, debris, refuse, trash: everything is cut free from its history and joined in the black entity. The material was transformed from fragments of something discarded to parts of something monumental, sacral and timeless. Nothing and no-one is too ragged or unimportant to be part of the great darkness.

9.

(Långbro)

When I was working as a psychiatric aid at Långbro Hospital there was a patient who always had a paper bag on her head. She explained to me that she had to hide her face because she was so hideous. It had begun the day her husband left her for a younger woman.
Darkness that ensues after abandonment.
A way to hide from the male gaze.
Paper bag darkness.

10.

(Agnes)

I think about Agnes Martin, who left the New York art scene and built herself a stone house out in the desert in New Mexico. There she stayed painting for the rest of her life, her back turned to the world. *Being detached and impersonal is related to freedom. That's the answer for inspiration. The untroubled mind.* [1]

She painted on square canvases that she stretched herself to get the right measurements. All of the paintings were of the world in grids – dots and planes and dashes. The whole world, free of images, reduced to rhythm. Like a meditation where in the end the only thing left in the consciousness is the breath.

11.

(The Gaze)

I follow someone on Instagram called Roman Trokhymets. He's a young blond man who used to sell real estate and is now a kind of military influencer, a soldier in the Ukrainian army. I see his everyday life, him eating energy bars, him shooting someone to death, his philosophical musings on life, him ending up in the military hospital. He's good-humored and has a way of taking selfies and talking into the camera typical of the generation born in the '90s. Every day I check in to see if he's still alive.

The images bring the war's presence closer. That could be my real estate agent trudging around in the mud. My nephew. My neighbor. At the same time, the feed generates a fictionalization of what's going on. There are a lot of clips where the Ukrainian soldiers call the Russians 'orcs', like they're in *Lord of the Rings*, and often the images are filmed in what the gaming world calls first-person-shooter perspective, that is, a subjective camera angle where the weapon is in the middle of the frame when the person holding the camera shoots the enemy, like in the game *Call of Duty*. There's also something about the Instagram-format itself that trivializes everything. Dead bodies move past in the flow alongside makeup tips and birthday reminders. Like the war doesn't actually matter. Like nothing on social media matters.

The camera's gaze detaches the meaning from experience to performance, from content to surface, from subject to object. Or maybe it just shifts back and forth? Maybe I'm like a spectator of the images of war, and also a participant and voyeur? As if I had a dual position even in my own life, where there are now two versions of myself: one real and one virtual.

The most violently objectifying aspects of the camera gaze are depictured with great precision and poetic poignancy in the film *There Will Be No More Night* by Éléonore Weber (2020). In it we follow the French pilot Pierre V., who recounts his experiences as a fighter pilot and mass-shooter in Afghanistan and Iraq. The films consist solely of military archive images filmed through a gunner's sight, and most of the footage was taken at night using an infrared camera that makes it possible to see in the dark. Anything warm: cars, humans, animals – appears as an illuminated object against the black background. A car approaches and stops by some houses. A person gets out of the car and runs into an alleyway. For a moment he is hidden by the trees. Then he reemerges.

The narrative voice is at once poetic and dry. Laconic, almost. She says that the helicopters are hundreds, sometimes thousands of meters from their targets and that the pilots never hear anything about what's happening on the ground. They're "cut off". They don't feel the wind, cold or heat. They don't know if their enemies

are talking, if they're shouting. The only sound that reaches their ears is the noise of their own weapons as they fire rounds. Pierre V. told her he can even take closeups with his camera, but that they make him uncomfortable. He doesn't like seeing his targets too close. He can see the quality and texture of their clothes. It makes him light-headed. It's like opening a door that should stay closed.

Many of the images in the film are beautiful and almost like abstract compositions. Watching the world from above in a different scale than what we're used to never ceases to fascinate. The effect is one of estrangement, like seeing the world for the first time in a new format, like a card or a pattern. There are numbers and letters at the edges of the images, graphic information about our altitude, what day it is and other things I can't decipher. Some images have less graphic information, but all of them have one thing in common: the cross hairs of the gunsight mid-picture, centered so the gunner can hit the targets. Everything we see is a target. The camera is literally a weapon.

In one scene we see children playing on a street. They bump into each other and play hide-and-seek. In another we see three kids kicking a soccer ball back and forth. On the audio, the American soldiers: *He has an object under his arm. They're moving across the bridge*. Always with the crosshairs in the middle of the image, framing the kids and their ball.

For someone like me who lives in a "rough neighborhood" outside Stockholm, seeing the world from the pilot's perspective is dizzying. There are often helicopters circling in the sky outside my bedroom at night, sometimes when there have been shootings, sometimes when they're looking for someone who's on the run or lost. I don't know how many arrests there have been in connection with police helicopter infrared surveillance, but I know that the sound is always slightly worrying, especially if my teenage son is out in the night with his friends. Are they out there? Did someone get hurt? Shot? I always see and hear the helicopters from below. Now I can see what the world looks like from up there. If I walk out the front door of my building at night, I'll be visible just like that, as a white figure, in their infrared camera, and if I was in Afghanistan or Iraq, they could also shoot me down with a single shot.

The pilots have to learn to never trust what they see. The gaze of doubt. At night it's hard to tell the difference between a road and a river. It's also hard to tell the difference between soldiers and civilians. A soldier carrying a Kalashnikov is indistinguishable from a farmer carrying a shovel. In Afghanistan locals have been killed in air strikes in the middle of the night when they're out watering their fields. Because of the attacks farmers now hide their shovels and tools when they hear helicopters, to avoid being mistaken for soldiers.

Night. Two vehicles have stopped on a small road between two fields. A small pickup and a larger truck. Two people are leaning against the little pickup truck and talking. One of them takes something from the back and puts it on the field. The other person also walks out on the field. The person has a way of moving that seems youthful. At one point the person does a little hop in the air, like teenagers or older kids sometimes do when they're excited.

The narrator says that Pierre V. has watched this several times. "Sometimes people make mistakes", he says. The hopping person stops near something that looks like agricultural machinery or a mill or an outdoor hearth, maybe a thresher. There is another figure. The person is wearing a long garment, a kaftan or a hijab. Maybe it's the person's mother. On the audio, the American soldiers comment on what they see:

- *What are these guys up to?*
- *They're looking around.*
- *Look on your left, the guy just stopped.*
- *He's coming out of his truck. Now he's running out to the field.*
- *Do you see this?*
- *Yeah*
- *Are you sure it is a weapon?*
- *Positive.*
- *Smoke him!*
- *I am engaging.*[1]

When the person who was hopping crosses back over the field, it's done. Powerful machine-gun fire hits the person, who seems almost to explode, disappear in smoke in a cloud of white heat. The veiled person crouches by the hearth, fabric fluttering behind. Bullets also rain on this person, who falls to the earth. In the end the third person, who tries to hide behind the big truck, is also killed.

No sound is heard from the ground. No screams. No motors. The only thing heard on the film is the American soldiers' com-radio and their weapons blasting.

Then everything goes black. Pressure in the chest.

Narrator: *When I point out that one of the men was jumping cheerfully Pierre V. doesn't answer. But he adds there is always a risk of making mistakes. When I ask if it's normal that the pilot continues to go after the man who hides under the truck, he replies that it's not very decent, but once you start shooting it's difficult to stop.*

Silence.

The black frame lasts a total of 1 minute and 3 seconds. It's the most powerful scene in the film. (26.11)

The narrator talks about how it feels to have killed someone. Pierre V. says you don't know when the feeling of guilt is going to come. Sometimes it never does. Sometimes it comes much later, when you're sitting in your living room watching TV with your family.

> *The anxiety is so hidden that it will surprise him when least expected. It is as hidden as these images. These scenes buried in the army archives. These films shot each day far away from home. It's a film without ending.*

Every moment is filmed, even when nothing is happening. Pierre V. says that the images aren't made to be looked at. We see a farm. The image is so clear that we see small chickens running around on the ground. Then it's all blown up. We don't even hear the detonation. There's just an eerie silence as the house is pulverized in a cloud of smoke.

> *I believe that one day they will come out again, they will haunt us, like images from childhood.*

Pierre V. says that the Afghans have a method where they hide under wet blankets at night so the infrared camera won't see them.

We fly over a city. A house with a big, beautiful domed roof, maybe a mosque. People walk across a town square. They're wearing civilian clothes, shirts and trousers. A few men walk leisurely, chatting with each other. In the audio we hear American soldiers saying that one of the men is armed. The entire group is shot down. This excerpt came out later and had an impact on public opinion. It turned out that the man was a journalist and had been carrying a camera and a tripod.

The conversations between the helicopter pilots are all alike. They talk about suspicious activity and encourage each other to shoot. They sound surprised and agitated each and every time. And the cries of joy when they hit their target. – *Holy shit! Holy crap dude!* It sounds just like when my son and his friends are playing video games.

Every helicopter has its own name. The French have christened their helicopters after predators: the Tiger, Puma, Lion. The American helicopters are named after North American indigenous populations they've wiped out: Apache, Kiowa, Cheyenne.

The film *There Will Be No More Night* consists of nothing but this military helicopter

footage. No interviews, no pictures taken on the ground. Just these monotone, dark landscape scenes. It's one of the most powerful films I've seen about the practice of war. Its visual simplicity amplifies the emotional effect of what the helicopter pilots bear witness to. I find myself with a kind of tunnel vision, where the context dissolves and everything becomes detached from everything else. The people on the ground are detached from their humanness. Their lives are detached from my life. Death is detached from tragedy and transformed into a kind of operative activity, like weeding a garden or pitting olives. I feel numb and dizzy all at once, just like our main character, the anonymized French soldier and mass shooter Pierre V. And just like it does for him, the angst comes later, in waves. I feel both complicit and victimized at the same time. Already that evening there's a helicopter droning over my suburb and I can't stop thinking about what I look like through their telescope from above and how it would feel if my son and I ran the risk of being blown up every day by that helicopter overhead. And how I would be at least a little invisible if I walked under the trees on the boulevard but not even that because maybe my body heat would glow through the branches and in that case it would be better underneath a cold, wet blanket.

Killing people at night from far away is called "targeted killing". It's a kind of warfare being used more and more in the 2000s, mostly by the US, but also by Israel. The term includes bomber commands, nocturnal raids by special forces and drone attacks that can be launched far from their targets. The targets can be in Afghanistan, but also in countries like Pakistan, Yemen or Somalia, where "adversaries" are killed without war ever being declared or any legal trials.

Sweden also has a role in the drone war. A lot of military operations depend on Swedish satellites for support and communication as well as surveillance and control of combat activities. Swedish satellite stations make it possible for the US to send control signals to remote-controlled attack drones.[2]

There are no public statistics about how many people have been killed in drone attacks. Human rights organizations report that in many cases the drones miss their intended targets, resulting in hundreds of dead civilians. Moreover, the method is counterproductive because it feeds anger and desperation among the people, which in turn strengthens the terrorist networks purportedly being fought.[3]

Two thirds of the way into the film, the narrator reads some kind of poem or manifesto with the title of the film in it:

There will be no more night
Nor need for a lamp or sunlight
There will be no more distance
Nothing far and nothing close

There will be neither shelter nor nooks
Nowhere to hide
No more resort nor escape
We will distinguish silhouettes
But we won't see peoples faces
There will be no more reciprocity
No more face to face

I can't help but think of Jonathan Crary's vision – that the dark hours of night should be a place where we can be free. It's a beautiful and comforting thought for those who find peaceful sleep at night. But for those in countries that have been designated as targets, there is nowhere to hide from the camera's gaze. The night is no longer dark, and you are not free.

- One can also hate the things one has done.
- How so?
- For me, just a few days or weeks after a film is done...
- Yes?
- ... and I can't even look at it anymore. Didn't you feel like that with your books?
- Never.
- Never?
- No, I often thought my books were the only thing readable. With a few exceptions. Proust, Musil.
- So you never hated yourself?
- Myself... I always hated myself. But not my books.
- And what did you do with the hate?
- I drank. I wrote. It was the only thing I was good at.

- I wrote my best books when I was drunk.
- I don’t believe that. Which ones then?
- *India Song, La Douleur. Lol V. Stein. Emely L*.
- Ok.
- For a while I was drinking eight liters of wine a day. I got up in the night. I drank in the morning. I started the day by vomiting, but I never stopped writing.
- Sometimes I wonder if you don’t lie a little.
- I don’t.
- As if your real life has gotten mixed up with the myth about you.
- It’s possible.
- Sometimes I think I should stop making films and get a regular job. Did you ever think things like that?
- Never. Can you imagine me at a regular job?
- No.

12.

(The darkness inside)

In the film *La Nuit des Rois* (*Night of the Kings*) by Phillippe Lacôte from 2020, the main character tells a story as an incantation against death. A new arrival at the Ivory Coast's infamous La Maca prison, he has been chosen as the prison's *Roman* – storyteller. In accordance with tradition, his story should last one entire night, the same night that the gangster boss will die and pass his power on to a younger inmate, and the story mustn't be too short; if it ends before dawn, he has to die, like the storyteller Scheherazade in the *One Thousand and One Nights*.

All of the prison inmates have gathered in the prison courtyard to hear Roman's story. The night is dark and the light of the red moon diffuses into the neon lights of the prison courtyard. The atmosphere is explosive and there are bodies everywhere, sweaty, muscular, scarred bodies glistening with sweat. The camera dances through the men gathered in a ring around the storyteller. They shout and goad and we feel our life, the narrator's life, hanging from a thin thread. Tentatively he begins his tale, and his light, quivering voice becomes the narrating voice of the story as the images begin to be presented.

The story is that of the gang leader Zama King, who has just been murdered by dwellers of the slum Quartier-sans-loi. We get to hear how his mother was murdered by the queen's soldiers, how he became a gangster and was later involved in the country's military coup. The story moves unhindered to and from different times and places. Sometimes we're in precolonial times, where the country's queen (played by the artist and activist Laetitia Ky, who wears brilliant costumes by Hanna Sjödin) is fighting to maintain power, and sometimes we're in contemporary times, with documentary images of political unrest woven into the story.

The depiction of the prison is enchantingly realistic and raw. Colors fluttering from the walls, inmates' sleeping mats rolled out tightly on the earth floor, the hot-blooded energy of the whole assemblage, the architecture, the dirt, the darkness – everything feels authentic and disquieting. Existence in here teems with masculinity and violence and suffering and the kinds of hierarchies that emerge in a space of confinement with no laws.

After a while we understand that the film's narratives – prison life and Roman's story of the world outside – mirror each other. Ivory Coast's violent history, its civil war and coups d'état are reflected in the small society within the prison, where fights for power rage between rival gangs. Who will be the next leader? When will the people's suffering come to an end?

One of the few details we're given about the narrator is that his grandmother was a *griot*, a professional storyteller. In West African tradition, a griot entertains others with stories and songs, and also has the important task of preserving and passing on the country's history by remembering and recounting it.
When I teach, I often meet young filmmakers battling self-doubt and the question of *why*. Why should I of all people make films? Why should I of all people tell this story? And I understand their doubt. Learning to distinguish between good and bad ideas is important. It's good to be able to look at oneself and one's work critically and not waste the audience's time. But it's even more important not to limit oneself with self-censorship and unnecessary rumination. If you've made your way to film school, that means you've already felt your need and your capacity to tell stories. And then you should do it.

When I was going to upper secondary school in Grimsta, a suburb of Stockholm, I had never met anyone who worked in the arts, and high school arts programs were pretty rare at the time. All the same, I had a sense that I would be a storyteller. When I mentioned that I wanted to work in the arts to the school's career counsellor, she responded simply: "Art is not a job". So they recommended that I do the high school's technology program, which I later quit. Then I unnecessarily wasted a long time before starting to make films in the end. Today, many years and a long and winding road later, I give my students this piece of advice: Don't think so much, just do. Make cheap film so you don't have to ask anyone for money or permission. Being able to live without money is good for independent filmmaking. Take out a camera and film. If you don't have a camera, make a black film. Record the voices. Record sounds. Ask yourself just one question: Why not?

When I google *griot* I find a list on Wikipedia. It describes the different functions that the storyteller had – and still has – in West African tradition: preserving society's collective memory, keeping society together, settling disputes, being a wandering library, negotiating between people and leaders, conveying news, as a musician and performer.[1]

In the film *Night of the Kings* we never find out how Roman comes up with his story or which parts of it are real or made up. But we do get an answer to the question of why.

If God says you'll be a thief,
you'll be a thief.
If God says you'll be a murderer,
you'll be a murderer.
If God says I am Roman, if God says I shall tell stories all night,
then I am a Roman.

If God says Yes,
no one can say no.[2]

Storytelling is the film's core and its dramaturgical motor and those listening – inmates, thieves, murderers, gang members – are just as important as the storyteller. They are all active participants, like in some kind of Greek choir. Sometimes they cheer in approval, sometimes they act out parts of the story as physical theater, dance or song. The storyteller and the audience, the storytelling and listening are one and the same.

The director and artist Agnès Varda, whose work was often explorative and moved freely across genres, described making films as a three-part process consisting of *Inspiration*: the ideas, motives, thoughts and desire that give rise to a film project; *Creation*: realization of ideas, aesthetic choices, resources, collaborations, skill, and finally *Sharing*: showing the film to others, letting it arrive at its spectator. According to Varda, all three phases are equally important when working with film.[3]

When I watch *Night of the Kings* and see how it depicts storytelling and listening as a collective activity, something that everyone does together, it strikes me that the darkness of storytelling and of listening are not separate, but very much united. If we see the movement of a story as circular rather than linear, the first step in Varda's three-part process, *inspiration*, is interwoven with the third, *sharing*: An idea is born and becomes a story, and through film it arrives to a viewer. Once there, it gives rise to new ideas and thoughts and then new stories are born and move outward to new recipients in a kind of eternally circulating collective energy. *Dark material*. Perhaps Duras' dark room is not only a room inside the storyteller but also inside the listener. A common space where we are deaf and blind together.

In *Night of the Kings*, the main character has inherited the gift and responsibility of storytelling from his grandmother, and he passes on the drama of the streets to his audience in the prison. And I am passing this on to you, the reader of this book. And gradually these words will sink in and become something new, something that's yours and that will be transformed once again and passed on to others in some way or another.

In *Night of the Kings*, we are part of a long night of stories, listening, singing, gossiping, dancing and drama about life and death. Many people die on the journey, but Roman manages to keep his story alive all night. His tale has no clear end. We and the audience both know that the battle for power will continue and the fate of the people is uncertain. And still we are left in a sliver of light. In the film's final scene, Roman stands alone in the prison courtyard and watches the sun rise. Exhausted, he leans against the prison wall and lifts his face toward the dawn. He has survived.

- You know that these questions are for a book I'm writing about film.
- Yes.
- Do you have any advice for other filmmakers?
- About what?
- About how to start. About how to find the energy to continue.
- Use your imagination. Create a language that is yours alone. Without fear. And don't look off to the side. Don't let the outside world devour you.
- Ok.
- And the most important thing:
- Yes?
- Don't waste other people's time.
- What do you mean?
- Just what I'm saying.

- Why did you want to kill cinema?
- For me, the words were always the most important thing. Literature.
- Your films were also important. I've watched some scenes over and over and over again. I cut out some scenes and put them on my clipboard. I made collages of your stills and texts, but you were impossible to replicate.
- What was it you didn't understand?
- I didn't understand how one could take one's darkness and lodge it in the spectator with one's film. Without dying oneself.
- I did die.
- And I'm alive.
- Step back. Look away from me. Let it flow through you like a stream of darkness.

Notes

And if you gaze long into the abyss the abyss also gazes into you.
Friedrich Nietzsche. *Beyond Good and Evil*. Translated by R.J. Hollingdale. Penguin Classics, 1973.

Introduction

1. *(...) the dark room, where we are deaf and blind, and passion is possible.*
José Moure. *Vers une esthétique du vide au cinema*. Editions L'Harmattan, 1997.

2. Margaux Guillemard, who coined the term "visual silence".
Margaux Guillemard. *Beyond the black image. A liberating encounter between the spectator and sound.* London. MA Film, TV and screen media, Birkbeck University, 2013.

3. The title is borrowed from the cosmic visionary and jazz poet Sun Ra.
Secrets of the Sun. Jazz album, Saturn Atavistic Records, 1965.

4. Duras called the narrative voice *la voix de la lecture interieur.* Rosanna Maule and Julie Beaulieu, ed. *In the Dark Room – Marguerite Duras and Cinema*. Peter Lang, 2009.

5. *I am not trying to develop the meaning of the text when I read it.*
Marguerite Duras. *Green Eyes*. Translated by Carol Barko. Columbia University Press, 1990.

6. Roland Barthes calls this "writing out loud".
Roland Barthes. *The Pleasure of the Text*. Translated by Richard Miller. New York Hill and Wang, 1975.

Chapter 1

1. *Desire for an idea is like bait.*
David Lynch. *Catching the Big Fish.* TarcherPerigee, 2006.

2. *I aim for oblivion*, he once said in an interview.
Jean-Marie Magnan, *Essai sur Jean Genet*. Pierre Seghers Éditeur, 1966.

3. Jean Genet was granted an award by Centre National de la Cinématographie.
Jane Giles. *Un Chant d'Amour par Jean Genet*. Article in ArtForum, 1988.

4. *Un Chant d'amour* was filmed in 1950 at the nightclub La Rose Rouge in Paris.
Jane Giles. *Un Chant d'Amour par Jean Genet*, 1988.

5. *the bag here has no other purpose than touching.*
Irani bag. Film by Maryam Tafakory, 2021.

Chapter 2

1. *Many died. Some considered themselves victors.*
La Jetée. Film by Chris Marker, 1962.

2. *If they don't see happiness in the picture, at least they will see the black.*
Sans Soleil. Film by Chris Marker, 1983.

3. Dreams and sleep are linked to our memory function.
William Brown. *Tachyons, tactility, drawing and withdrawing: cinema at the speed of darkness*. Panoptikum, 2021. Vol. 33 Issue 26.

4. *Out of the two hours you spend in a movie theatre, (...)*
Chris Marker quoted in Janet Harbord. *La Jetée.* AfterAll Books, 2009.

5. *For, with permanent illumination comes the possibility of permanent labor.*
Sean Cubitt. *The Practice of Light: A Genealogy of Visual Technologies from Prints to Pixels*. The MIT Press, 2004.

6. (...) lose their capacity to imagine a life beyond capitalism.
Jonathan Crary. 24/7 *Late capitalism and the Ends of sleep*. Verso, 2013.

7. *(...) it encloses us further within a world of self-absorption.*
Brown. *Tachyons, tactility, drawing and withdrawing: cinema at the speed of darkness,* 2021.

Chapter 3

1. *The writers I love are descenders. explorer of the lowest and the deepest.*
Hélène Cixous. *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing.* Translated by Sarah Cornell och Susan Sellers. Columbia University Press, 1993.

2. *We don't know we're alive as long as we haven't encountered death.*
Cixous. *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, 1993.

3. *She cries: Oh! Oh! My inside! Oh! Oh! My outside!*
Tania Kantola and Lennart Warring. *Inanna. Skymningens dotter.* Atlantis, 2011.

4. *Finding yourself in a hole, at the bottom of a hole.*
Marguerite Duras. *Writing.* Brookline Books, 1998.

5. *My daughter craved the Great Above.*
Kantola and Warring. *Inanna. Skymningens dotter.* 2011.

6. *A civilization based only on light, consciousness, intellect, logos, is doomed.*
Maria Bergom Larsson. *Nedstigning – Texter kring en myt.*
Åsak Sahlin & Dahlström, 1989.

7. *We think of cities as lateral but of course they are also vertical.*
Robert Macfarlane. *Underland. A deep time journey.* Penguin Books Ltd, 2019.

8. *(...) the underworld, the realm from which dreams arise.*
Walter Benjamin. *The Arcades Project.* Harvard University Press, 1999.

Chapter 5

1. *I am waking up every morning in this killer machine called America.*
David Wojnarowicz. *Tongues of flame.* D.A.P./ University Galleries, 1990.

2. *I was in the middle between monster and kid.*
Quote from the film *Memory Lost* by Nan Goldin, 2019–2021.

3. *It is like the darkest you can go. It's the darkness of the soul.*
Interview with Nan Goldin from the film *All the Beauty and the bloodshed* by Laura Poitras, 2022.

4. *Nobody photographs their own life.*
From the film *All the Beauty and the bloodshed* by Poitras, 2022.

5. *The acquisition of my tape recorder really finished (...)*
Andy Warhol. *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol; From A to B and back again.*
Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975.

Chapter 6

1. *I have been carrying out a dialogue between the landscape and the female body.* Artist statement by Ana Mendieta. Quoted in Petra Barreras del Rio and John Perreault. *Ana Mendieta: A Retrospective.* The New Museum of Contemporary Art. New York, 1988.

2. Nonetheless, the court acquitted him, citing insufficient evidence. Helen Molesworth. Podcast: *Death of an artist.* Pushkin Industries, 2023.

3. Like a trace, a monument, a shadow.
Ana Mendieta. Video documentation by the piece *Ñañigo Burial*, 1976.

Chapter 8

1. *Black is the most aristocratic of all. The only aristocratic color.*
Louise Nevelson quoted in Brooke Kamin Rapaport, ed. *The Sculpture of Louise Nevelson*. Yale University Press, 2009.

2. Louise Nevelson describes herself as an architect of shadows.
Elyse Deeb Speaks. *Louise Nevelson's Moon Garden.* Chicago Journals, 2007.

3. *They needed foreigners like I need ten holes in my head.*
Louise Nevelson quoted in Rapaport ed. *The Sculpture of Louise Nevelson*, 2009.

4. *Creating art is easy, sade hon. but creating art in this world is hard.*
From the film *Nevelson in Process* by Susan Fanshel and Jill Godmilow, 1977.

5. *I can't afford to look back.*
From the film *Nevelson in Process* by Fanshel and Godmilow, 1977.

6. *It's also that the world was at war and every son was at war...*
Louise Nevelson quoted in Diana MacKown, ed. *Dawns + Dusks.*
Charles Scribner's Sons, 1976.

7. *My work has never been black to me to begin with.*
Louise Nevelson quoted in Rapaport ed. *The Sculpture of Louise Nevelson*, 2009.

Chapter 10

1. *That's the answer for inspiration. The untroubled mind.*
Agnes Martin. *Writings.* Hatje Cantz, 1992.

Chapter 11

1. - *Smoke him! - I am engaging.*
From the film *There will be no more night.* Original title: *Il n'y aura plus de nuit* by Eleanor Weber, 2020.

2. Sweden also has a role in the drone war.
Stig Henriksson. *Sveriges och USAs drönarkrig.* Interpellation 2016/17:303. Sveriges Riksdag, 2016.

3. There are no public statistics about how many people have been killed.
Lars-Gunnar Liljestrand. *Obamas attacker var utomrättsligt dödande.* Artikel i Alliansfriheten.se, 2020.

Chapter 12

1. When I google *griot* I find this list.
https://sv.wikipedia.org/wiki/Griot

2. *If God says you'll be a thief, you'll be a thief.*
From the film *Night of the Kings.* Original title: *La nuit des Rois* by Philippe Lâcote, 2020.

3. According to Varda, all three phases are equally important.
Interview with Gabriela Pichler. *Agnès Varda har alltid en stringens och ett tydligt mål.* Kulturlivet med Gunnar Bolin. Sveriges Radio, 2023.

References:

Films:

Agatha et les lectures illimitées. Marguerite Duras. France, 1981.

All the beauty and the bloodshed. Laura Poitras, USA 2022.

Belleville Baby. Mia Engberg. France, 2013.

Blue. Derek Jarman. UK, 1993.

Dirty Diaries – 12 shorts of feminist porn. Collection of short films produced by Mia Engberg. Sweden, 2009.

Félicité. Alain Gomis. Senegal, 2017.

Hypermoon. Mia Engberg. France, 2023.

India Song. Marguerite Duras. France, 1975.

Irani Bag. Maryam Tafakory. Iran, 2021.

La Jetée, Chris Marker. France, 1962.

Le Joli Mai. Chris Marker. France, 1963.

Les mains négatives. Marguerite Duras. France, 1979.

L'Homme Atlantique. Marguerite Duras. France, 1981.

Lucky One. Mia Engberg. Sweden, 2019.

Memory Lost. Nan Goldin. USA, 2023.

Night of the Kings. Philippe Lacôte. Ivory Coast, 2020.

Sans Soleil. Chris Marker. France, 1983.

Secrets of the Sun. Mia Engberg. Sweden, 2023.

Son nom de Venise dans Calcutta désert. Marguerite Duras. France, 1976.

Space is the place. John Coney. USA, 1974.

The Stars We Are. Mia Engberg. Sweden, 1997.

There will be no more night. Éléonore Weber. France, 2020.

Three Poems by Spoon Jackson. Michel Wenzer. Sweden, 2003.

Un Chant d'Amour. Jean Genet. France, 1950.

Litterature:

Annas, Max and Annett Busch, ed. *Ousmane Sembène Interviews.* University Press of Mississippi/Jackson, 2008.

Baas, Jacquelynn and Jacob, Mary Jane ed. *Buddha Mind in Contemporary Art*. University of California Press, 2004.

Barthes, Roland. *The Pleasure of the Text.* Translated by Richard Miller. New York Hill and Wang, 1975.

Benjamin, Walter. *The Arcades Project.* Harvard University Press, 1999.

Berger, John. *Ways of seeing.* London: BBC/Penguin Books, 1972.

Bergom Larsson, Maria. *Nedstigning – Texter kring en myt.*
Åsak Sahlin & Dahlström, 1989.

Blocker, Jane. *Where is Ana Mendieta?. Identity, Performativity, and Exile.*
Duke University Press, 1999.

Bresson, Robert. *Notes sur le Cinématographie.* Gallimard, 1975.

Brinton Perera, Sylvia. *Descent to the Goddess.* Inner city books, 1981.

Brown, William. *Tachyons, tactility, drawing and withdrawing: cinema at the speed of darkness.* Panoptikum, 2021. Vol. 33. Issue 26.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the subversion of identity.*
Routledge, 1990.

Cage, John. *Silence: Lectures and writings.* Wesleyan University Press, 1961.

Cixous, Hélène. *Coming to writing and other essays.* Translated by Sarah Cornell, Deborah Jenson, Ann Liddle and Susan Sellers. Harvard University Press, 1991.

Cixous, Hélène. *Le Rire de la Méduse.* L'Arc. no 61, 1975.

Cixous, Hélène. *Three steps on the ladder of writing.* Translated by Sarah Cornell and Susan Sellers. Columbia University Press, 1993.

Clément, D'Alain and Thomas, Gilles. *Atlas du Paris Souterrain. La doublure sombre de la ville lumière.* Parigramme, 2021.

Crary, Jonathan. *24/7 Late capitalism and the Ends of sleep.* Verso, 2013.

Cubitt, Sean. (2004) *The Practice of Light: A Genealogy of Visual Technologies from Prints to Pixels.* MIT Press, 2004. Vol. 33 Issue 26.

Dea K. *Ana Mendieta.* Article in Widewalls - Modern & Contemporary Art Resource, 2016.

Deeb Speaks, Elyse. *Louise Nevelson's Moon Garden.* Chicago Journals, 2007.

Deleuze, Gilles. *Cinema 1 and Cinema 2.* Les Éditions de Minuit, 1985.

Duras, Marguerite. *Att skriva.* Translated by Kennet Klemets. Ellerströms, 2014.

Duras, Marguerite. *C'est tout.* POL, 1995.

Duras, Marguerite. *Green Eyes.* Translated by Carol Barko. Columbia University Press, 1995.

Duras, Marguerite. *India Song.* Gallimard, 1973.

Duras, Marguerite. *La Vie matérielle.* POL, 1965.

Duras, Marguerite. *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein.* Gallimard, 1964.

Duras, Marguerite. *Le Vice-Consul.* Gallimard, 1965.

Ellis, Jim. *Derek Jarman's Angelic Conversations.* University of Minnesota Press, 2009.

Eriksson, Patrik. *Melankoliska fragment. Om essäfilm and tänkande.* Akademin Valand, 2019.

Ford, Clyde W. *The hero with an African face.* Bantam Books, 1999.

Genet, Jean. *Essäer och artiklar.* Selected and translated by Kim West. SITE, 2006.

Genet, Jean. *Journal du voleur.* Gallimard, 1949.

Genet, Jean. *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs.* Marc Barbezat - L'Arbalete, 1943.

Genet, Jean. *Rosenmiraklet.* Translated by Bengt Söderbergh and Marc Ribes. Modernista, 2015.

Giles, Jane. *Un Chant d'Amour par Jean Genet.* Article in ArtForum, 1988.

Guillemard, Margaux. *Beyond the black image. A liberating encounter between the spectator and sound.* London. MA Film, TV and screen media, Birkbeck University, 2013.

Harbord, Janet. *La Jetée.* AfterAll Books, 2009.

Henriksson, Stig. *Swedens and USAs drönarkrig.* Interpellation 2016/17:303. Sveriges Riksdag, 2016.

Herbert, Martin. *Tell them I said no.* Sternberg Press, 2016.

Hjorth, Elisabeth. *Mutant.* Glänta Produktion, 2021.

hooks, bell. *Teaching to transgress. Education as the Practice of Freedom.* Routledge, 2014.

hooks, bell. *Feminist theory: From Margin to Center.* Taylor & Francis Group, 1994.

hooks, bell. *The oppositional gaze: Black female spectators, Black Looks: Race and Representation.* Boston, MA: South End Press, 1992.

Jafa, Arthur. Exhibition Catalogue. Serpentine Galleries. Koenig Books, 2018.

Jarman, Derek. *Chroma.* The Overlook Press, 1994.

Jarman, Derek. *Modern Nature – The Diaries of Derek Jarman.* Vintage Publishing, 2018.

Jones, Amelia, ed. *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader.* Routledge, 2010.

Jung, C. G. *Modern Man in search of a Soul.* Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner and Co, 1933.

Kantola, Tania and Warring, Lennart. *Inanna. Skymningens dotter.* Atlantis, 2011.

Kardos, Leah. *Blackstar Theory. The last works of David Bowie.* Bloomsbury, 2022.

Laing, Olivia. *Den ensamma staden.* Daidalos. Translated by Karin Andersson and Sofia Lindelöf, 2016.

Laing, Olivia. *Funny Weather. Art in an emergency.* W.W Norton & Company, 2020.

Lee, Mara. *När Andra Skriver. Skrivande som motstånd, ansvar och tid.* Munkedal: Glänta produktion, 2014.

Liljestrand, Lars-Gunnar. *Obamas attacker var utomrättsligt dödande.* Artikel i alliansfriheten.se, 2020.

Lindqvist, Sven. *Myten om Wu Tao-tzu.* Bonniers, 1967.

Lorde, Audre. *Your Silence Will Not Protect You.* Silver Press, 1978.

Lorde, Audre. *Sister Outsider. Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde.* Crossing Press Berkeley, 2007.

Lorde, Audre. *The Cancer Journals. Special Edition.* Aunt Lute Books, 1997.

Lynch, David. *Catching the Big Fish.* TarcherPerigee, 2006.

Macfarlane, Robert. *Underland. A deep time journey.* Penguin Books Ltd, 2019.

MacKown, Diana ed. *Dawns + Dusks.* Charles Scribner's Sons, 1976.

Magnan, Jean-Marie. *Essai sur Jean Genet.* Pierre Seghers Éditeur, 1966.

Martin, Agnes. *Writings.* Hatje Cantz, 1992.

Martin, Jean-Pierre. *Pourquoi tant de haine. - Une Vie, Une Œuvre. Marguerite Duras. La voix et la passion.* Le Monde Hors-Série, 2021.

Maule, Rosanna and Julie Beaulieu, ed. *In the dark room – Marguerite Duras and cinema.* Peter Lang, 2009.

Moure, José. *Vers une esthétique du vide au cinema*. Editions L'Harmattan, 1997.

Mulvey, Laura. *Visual pleasure and narrative cinema*. Screen. Reprinted in Visual and Other Pleasures. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975.

Murphy, David. *Sembène: Imagining Alternatives in Film and Fiction*. Africa World Press, 2001.

Nydahl, Mikael and Saghir, Kholod. *Under Ukrainas öppna himmel*. Ariel Förlag, 2022.

Nhat Hanh, Thich. *Silence: The Power of Quiet in a World Full of Noise*. Harper Collins Publishers, 2015.
Nelson, Maggie. *Bluets*. Wave Books, 2009.

Pallotta Della Torre, Leopoldina. *Samtal med Duras*. Translated by Kennet Klemets. Ellerströms, 2022.

Porte, Michelle and Duras, Marguerite. *Les Lieux de Marguerite Duras*. Éditions de Minuit, 1978.

Praun, Sandra. Noir. *A Serendipitous Encyclopedia Inspired by 1001 Names for the colour Black*. Praun & Guermoche, 2019.

Praun, Sandra & Stratimirovic, Aleksandra. *You say light I say shadow*. Art & Theory Publishing, 2014.

Rapaport, Brooke Kamin. *The Sculpture of Louise Nevelson*, Yale University Press, 2007.

Rascaroli, Laura. *The personal Camera. Subjective Cinema and the Essay Film*. Wallflower Press, 2009.

Roelstraete, Dieter and Kreuger, Anders Ed. *Chantal Akerman. Too far, Too close*. Ludion M HKA, 2012.

Ryberg, Ingrid. *Imagining Safe Space: The Politics of Queer, Feminist and Lesbian Pornography*. Acta, 2012.

Røed, Ellen. *Skyvelære*. Bergen Academy of Art and Design, 2015.

Sambhava, Padma. *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. Translated by Robert A. F. Thurman. Bantam Books, 1994.

Schulman, Sarah. *The gentrification of the mind*. University of California Press, 2013.

Sontag, Susan. *Aids and its metaphors*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1989.

Sontag, Susan. *Illness as metaphor*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1978.

Sontag, Susan. *On Photography*. Farrar. Penguin Books, 1971.

Sontag, Susan. *Styles of Radical Will*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969.

Solnit, Rebecca. *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*. Penguin Books, 2005.

Solnit, Rebecca. *The faraway nearby*. Penguin Books, 2014.

Stella, Frank. *The Black Paintings*. The Baltimore Museum of Art., 1976.

Sun Ra. *The Immeasurable Equation. The collected Poetry and Prose compiled and edited by James L. Wolf and Hartmut Geerken*. Waitawhile, 2005.

Suzuki, Shunryu. *Zen Mind Beginner's Mind*. John Weatherhill, Inc, 1970.

Tanizaki, Junichiro. *In Praise of shadows*. Leete's Island Books. Translated by Charles Moore and Edward Seidensticker, 1977.

Viso, Olga. *Unseen Mendieta*. Prestel, 2008.

Wahlberg, Malin. *Documentary Time. Film and Phenomenology*. University of Minnesota Press, 2008.

Warhol, Andy. *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol; From A to B and back again*. Penguin Books, 1975.

Watts, Alan. *The Way of Zen*. Pantheon, 1957.

Watts, Alan. *The Wisdom of insecurity. A message for an age of Anxiety*. Vintage, 1951.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Filosofiska Undersökningar.* Translated by Anders Wedberg. Bonniers, 1978.

Bell, Tiffany and Morris, Frances. *Agnes Martin.* Tate Publishing. 2015

Horn, Roni. *It's true that it's been a long time since I thought about turtles.* Hatje Cantz. 2006

Rist, Pipilotti. *Grattis!* Translation: Sofia Stenström, Astrid Trotzig. Richard Julin. Magasin 3. 2007.