

Research programme (appendix A)

Purpose and goal

The purpose of this research project is to develop a non-voyeuristic film aesthetics. In this context, non-voyeuristic refers to an audio-visual narrative which moves away from the visually sated film, where the viewer gets their voyeuristic desires fulfilled in a flow of moving images, and towards a visual silence, where sound is superior to image, and the story lies in *what is not visible*.

The project examines *the black image*, *the displaced image* and *the narrator* as three possible components of this type of narrative film structure. *The black image* could also be called *the visual silence*, because of its lack of visual representation. *The visual silence* is an image without an image. It can be portrayed with any colour, blue for example, as in Derek Jarman's film *Blue*, where a monochrome blue frame is projected throughout the film. But most often it is black, like the darkness of the movie theatre or the colour that is created by mixing all existing colours. *The displaced image* is an image that does not synchronically represent the sound. It can be an abstract image, a mute image, or an image that retells something other than what is heard. *The narrator* is a voice, which drives the story without being visible within the frame.

In the study I will use Laura Mulvey's feminist film theories about the male gaze and voyeuristic pleasure. Mulvey claims that narrative cinema throughout history has reproduced the patriarchal power structure of society, in which the man is the active seeing subject, and the woman is the passive object, exposed to satisfy the man's voyeuristic desire. Mulvey further claims that a radical new cinematic language is required to rescind and reformulate the cinematic conventions that maintain the voyeuristic gaze. The research project will also bring up post-colonial and queer film theory where similar queries navigate the liberation from, and the resistance against, the white male heterosexual gaze. Is it possible to use a language of power – film – that has traditionally objectified *the other* (the woman, the queer, the black man) to create something new, or must we revoke the gaze itself by creating a different type of film? Perhaps what is required is a non-voyeuristic film, which completely forgoes representation and strives for the visual silence?

The study *The Visual Silence* is a development of the research I began in the film and master thesis project *Belleville Baby* where I used the visual silence as a conscious cinematic technique for the first time. It began as a practical solution to protect an already socially vulnerable protagonist from visual exposure, but soon grew into something more substantial; a film which sided with the vulnerable in both form and content – against the normative and exploitive gaze which objectifies “the Other” in film. A form of countermovement to the documentary tradition – which I myself have contributed to with my films – to portray exposed persons visually for privileged persons to look at to get their voyeuristic needs satisfied. (This is a simplification. For the full discussion I refer to my book *Belleville Baby – anteckningar från en filmisk process*). The use of visual silence became a first step in a new direction, and went from being a practical choice to becoming a political aesthetic stand.

In this research project I want to deepen and develop this work and connect it to a wider feminist, queer and post-colonial cinematic tradition. In order to do this, I will use case studies of

three films as my starting point: Ousmane Sembene's *Borrom Sarret* (1963), where a non-realistic cinematic style with a narrator represents an anti-colonial stand in 1960s Senegal, Marguerite Duras's film *L'Homme Atlantique* (1981) which uses the black image to, in Duras's own words, "ruin the film", and Derek Jarman's *Blue* (1993) which portrays the AIDS-ridden Jarman's journey towards death through a single blue frame, and voices.

The research queries of the project are:

- 1) How is a cinematic story that **performs/creates/enacts** resistance towards the voyeuristic, objectifying gaze created?
- 2) How has the visual silence, the displaced image and the narrator been used in feminist, anti-colonial and queer cinematic aesthetics?
- 3) How do I develop a contemporary new cinematic language based on this tradition?

To examine these queries I combine a theoretical, analytical close reading of my chosen film examples with a cinematic practice, which includes artistically reflective filmmaking. The research project results in a number of cinematic experiments, a number of lectures at the Stockholm Academy of Dramatic Arts and Valand Academy – Film, as well as a longer text/book, which reflects upon and chronicles the research process and results. The method and aesthetics developed through the project will be the bases of my next feature film, with the working title *Lucky*, which will be produced in immediate conjunction with the conclusion of the research project.

The main goals of the project are:

- 1) To develop a cinematic aesthetics which challenges the voyeuristic cinematic tradition and creates a new cinematic language.
- 2) To make connections between feminist, queer, and post-colonial cinematic aesthetics through a study and use of the visual silence, the displaced image and the narrator.
- 3) To make a transcendent and novel contribution to queer, feminist and post-colonial artistic research in the shape of a book, and a series of cinematic experiments, as well as a number of lectures/workshops.

Outline of the field of study

The use of the black image has been given attention in certain studies in film theory, among others the master thesis *Beyond the black image: A liberating encounter between the spectator and sound* by Margaux Guillemard (MA Film, TV and Screen Media, London 2013). The study brings up the relationship between the black image and the viewer: "*When the image is silent, sound can finally attain maturity and become the first element of appreciation of the story for the spectator. Moreover, this choice of non-representation stimulates the spectator's intellectual capacities and visual creativity in particular, therefore allowing her to become the creator of her own images.*"

Guillemard claims that the use of visual silence in combination with sound creates active viewers, as opposed to the visually sated film, which fulfils the viewers' voyeuristic desires, and by extension creates an audience of passive consumers.

Another study that brings up the visual silence is José Moures's *Vers une esthétique du vide au cinéma*. (L'harmattan, Paris 2013). Among other things, it contains one of the most beautiful texts I have read about Duras's *L'Homme Atlantique*. The text acknowledges the story of loss in the film, and reads its blackness/darkness as a metaphor for death.

Many movements in film history have challenged the gaze of power. Within post-colonial studies, the movement called *Third Cinema* is worth mentioning. In Solanas's and Getino's "*Towards a Third Cinema*" (Argentine 1969) the struggle to create alternatives to the commercial, bourgeois cinema is formulated. They wanted to create a subversive cinema, which gave the audience the knowledge and power to fight the system.

The discussion about visibility and representation is also central to queer theory, and has been problematized by, among others, Peggy Phelan in *Unmarked*. She writes that there is an expectation among queers of being visible in contemporary visual art, as a sign of equality, while the visibility is problematic in and of itself as it means exposure to the normative gaze and creates an objectification of the deviant. Neither of these movements, however, makes use of the visual silence.

A few filmmakers have gone as far as the black film. Marguerite Duras is one of them. She did not belong to any specific movement, but rather worked alone within a conservative and male dominated French cultural climate. She formulated her goal, to "kill cinema", as a last resort on her constant collision course with the commercial film industry. There is an endless number of research works and popular science texts surrounding Duras's cinematic works. One of particular interest to me is the anthology *In the dark room – Marguerite Duras and Cinema* (Oxford 2009). This substantial study focuses on the aesthetic and political challenges in Duras's films from an inter-disciplinary perspective, including psychoanalysis, gender studies and post-colonial criticism. Her use of the black image and the narrator as a part of her deconstruction of the cinematic medium is specifically addressed.

The use of a narrator in combination with a displaced or abstract image narrative can also be ascribed to the essay film tradition. There are several interesting contemporary research projects within fine arts research that are examining the essayistic cinematic practices. Among others, Patrik Eriksson's current doctoral thesis work *The Anatomy of Melancholy* at Valand Academy – film, and Magnus Bårtå's research project *You Told Me*, Valand Academy – fine art.

Worth mentioning is also a study of Derek Jarman's films: *The Queer Cinema of Derek Jarman - Critical and Cultural Readings* by Niall Richardson (I.B.Tauris 2008). It is the first study to analyse Jarman's films from a queer theory perspective. Niall Richardson deals with the tensions between queer theory and practice and performs close readings of selected works by Jarman, among others the film *Blue*.

Project description

Theory:

I want to start by mentioning the cinematic works I have chosen to study closely. Even though film isn't traditionally called "theory" I would still like to argue that the films *in and of themselves* make up the most significant historical, ideological and aesthetical basis of my research work. The films all, each in their own way, examine the aesthetics and method of visual silence, and represent different eras and geographic contexts in a complementary way.

Ousmane Sembene's *Borrom Sarret* (1963) came to be groundbreaking for domestic film production in Senegal at a time when only French films were shown in theatres in Dakar. Instead of using the naturalistic narrative style of French cinema, where people said their lines in synch, Sembene used a narrator who read the film as a story over the lines of the actors. In this way, Sembene connected with an African storyteller tradition while simultaneously creating an alternative aesthetics to the colonial power's cinematic language, which often portrayed Africans as of lesser intelligence or importance.

Marguerite Duras's film *L'Homme Atlantique* consists of a black image which is occasionally interrupted by an image of a man and an image of an ocean, and that is all. The story is tied together by Duras's voice, reading a text to the man. The text works both as a sort of direction ("You walk to the right. You look at the ocean.") and a form of story about loss. It is a bold film, which places almost the entire visual story outside the screen, creating a new way to "see" film. Duras was acknowledged as an author, but sadly her filmography has been neglected in the writing of European history. A fate she shares with many of the female directors of the 20th century.

Derek Jarman's *Blue* from 1993 is a farewell and a requiem, not only over Jarman himself, but an entire generation of homosexual men who passed away in AIDS in this decade. Derek Jarman has been called "the Godfather" of the movement, which started in the 1990s, and which has been called "Queer Cinema", and his importance to European avant-garde cinema cannot be overstated. Sembene, Duras and Jarman in combination, constitute a miniature canon of the aesthetics of visual silence. They each create their own aesthetics, which turns away from the white heterosexual male gaze, and create cinematic narratives that reach the viewer – or perhaps better yet the listener – on their own terms. *You don't see me. But I exist.*

To a certain extent I will utilize the directors' own texts and reflections on their works. These can be found, for example, in *Ousmane Sembene: Interviews* (by Annett Busch, University Press of Mississippi 2008), *Green Eyes. Reflections on film by Marguerite Duras* (Columbia University Press 1990) and *Derek Jarman's Sketchbooks* (edited by Stephen Farthing and Ed Webb-Ingall Thames and Hudson Ltd 2013).

Laura Mulvey and voyeurism:

To define the terms voyeurism and the male gaze, I will use Laura Mulvey's feminist film theories, mainly from her standard works *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (Screen 16.3 1975) and *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1989). Newer feminist theories dealing with gaze and representation also exist, for example *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* by Vivian Sobchack (Princeton University Press, 1991) and Teresa de Lauretis's *Figures of Resistance. Essays in feminist theory*. (Illinois University Press, 2007).

Deleuze and Minor Cinema:

Another term, which may prove interesting to the study, is “minor cinema” which I will briefly account for here: philosopher Gilles Deleuze and psychoanalyst Félix Guattari introduced the term “the minor”. They used Franz Kafka’s authorship as an example, claiming that Kafka’s bizarre, surrealist world could be read as a product of the colonial situation he worked within. He was Jewish, living in Prague, but he wrote in German, the language of the colonial power. Kafka used the majority language and de-territorialized it, forced it to become something different. In this way he created minor literature.

Later, Deleuze connected the term with film, “minor cinema”. He compared Kafka to a number of globally marginalized directors, like Yilmaz Güney (Turkey), Glauber Rocha (Brazil) and Ousmane Sembene (Senegal). Their films existed outside the commercial film industry and created new identities and new cinematic expressions, which existed in opposition to the political power. In the same way, the term minor cinema can be applied to the films *Borrom Sarret*, *L’Homme Atlantique* and *Blue. Sembene*, *Duras* and *Jarman* all, in their own way, use the majority language, in this case the cinematic language, de-territorializing, making it their own, and creating minor cinema with its own gaze upon the world.

I will study Deleuze’s theories on minor cinema mainly through his works: “*Kafka. Pour une littérature mineure*” (Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari Les Éditions de Minuit 1975) *Cinema 1* and *Cinema 2* (Les Éditions de Minuit 1985) and also the lecture *Having an idea about film* (La Femis 17 March 1987).

Method / Execution

Part 1

In the first part of the project I will do close readings of the films I have chosen for my study: *Borrom Sarret*, *L’Homme Atlantique* and *Blue* and from a post-colonial, feminist and queer film theory perspective try and find common denominators and differences. The main focus will be on a filmmaker perspective, to make a detailed study of HOW the directors have created their cinematic works. In which ways they utilize the black image, how the narrator is used, how the images – to the extent they exist – relate to the sound, what is shown, what *isn’t* shown, and how the whole relates to the visual silence. In this way, I wish to study and build on the methods and aesthetics presented by these films.

Part 2

The second part of the project will be the cinematic experiments. I will use selected parts of the script for my upcoming film *Lucky* as a starting point, for example pieces of dialogue between the protagonist Victor and his daughter. The scenes will be recorded with actors in a studio, *without image*. I will also record different tests with myself as narrator.

The different sound scenes will then be combined with different images; the black image, the documentary image or the fictional image. The images will, however, not be linked to the sound, but rather be displaced in time, space or content. We may view the actors as they prepare for the scene or as they have their make-up applied. Or while in character, but at a different point of the story than the one we hear.

In this way, I aim to closely study the displacement that occurs between sound and image. The ambition is to find a gap between the expressed and the perceived, between the impressions of the ear and of the eye, and thereby create an in-between in the interpretation where voyeurism is

revealed, and the viewer is given the opportunity to create their own internal images. The over-all goal is to create and compile new methods for non-voyeuristic cinematic narrative, to develop the aesthetics of visual silence. The different film experiments will be presented to audiences in workshops and lectures. The most interesting parts will then be used in the film *Lucky*.

After the research

The feature film *Lucky* is not a part of this application, since it will be produced after the study has been completed, but since the research results, the method and aesthetics of visual silence, will be used in the feature film I would still like to write a few words about it here. *Lucky* is a feature film that moves in the borderland between documentary and fiction. It will be financed by the Swedish Film Institute and is an independent sequel to the film *Belleville Baby*. *Lucky* tells the story of Vincent, who works for the Sicilian mob in Paris. The story takes place during a few weeks in May, when Vincent unexpectedly and involuntarily gets the responsibility for his teenage daughter Adina. The new life as a parent presents Vincent with unexpected challenges and changes his life forever. The character Vincent is based on an actual person, who is also the protagonist of *Belleville Baby*.

The story of the film is created in several layers where *sound is the superior and connecting element*. Actors who speak French portray Vincent and his daughter, among the voices there is also Victor's Sicilian boss, who speaks Sicilian, an English-speaking young prostitute from Albania by the name of Lidija, and the Swedish narrator, which is my voice. All dialogue is recorded without image.

Exactly *how* the images will look, and how they will relate to the sound, is not known yet, as it will be determined by the results of my research. The black image will be used in some way. There will also be some type of documentary image narrative from the streets of Paris. (Images of the luxury hotels where Vincent delivers goods, the poor neighbourhood where he runs a different kind of errands, the boulevards, poverty, wealth, the beauty of Paris and the gloominess of Vincent's work.) There may also be a fictional image narrative, where the actors portraying Vincent, Adina and Lidija can be seen, but that is as of yet uncertain. There is also the possibility of the entire film being a black image with a revolutionary audio narrative! It all depends on the results of the research project.

The Book

Throughout the project, I will be writing a longer text, which I want to publish in a book. In this book I will further develop existing theories and studies of the black image. I will account for the close readings of *Borrom Sarret*, *L'Homme Atlantique* and *Blue*, and, aided by existing studies on the subject, describe how the black image, the displaced image, and the narrator works as part of a common aesthetic in these films and my films.

I will also write about my own pursuit of the visual silence, mainly in *Belleville Baby* and my upcoming project *Lucky*. The text will account for, and reflect on, the cinematic experiments and results in a way that contributes to the development of theory surrounding the visual silence and enters them into the anti-colonial, feminist and queer cinematic tradition, where other filmmakers have been the vanguard.

In conclusion there will also be a more descriptive text-section in the book, where I will account for the entire process, from idea to results, based on a type of project diary. I will place

great importance on doing this with honesty and in meticulous detail, as I believe that some parts of the artistic process cannot be analysed, but only described.

Participants:

Margaux Guillemard, a French film studies scholar based in London. Studying the visual silence from a film theory perspective. Will contribute research, theoretic knowledge, and access to French film archives and be a language consultant in the work with French actors.

Kalle Boman, professor at Valand Academy – film. Will be a supervisor and a mentor. We have collaborated on earlier projects, with good results.

Tobias Janson – producer. Will act as a co-creator of the cinematic experiments. Very knowledgeable within the field of essayistic cinema, and producer of *Belleville Baby*.

Michel Wenzer – composer and filmmaker, responsible for audio production for the cinematic experiments. He will also compose music.

Marius Dybwad Brandrud, photographer and director. Involved in research of “the listening image”. Will act as cinematographer for the cinematic experiments.

Two French actors will read the dialogues, which form the basis for the test scenes.

Schedule:

2015 Part 1 Analysis:

Close reading of selected films

Study of theories

Lectures at the Stockholm Academy of Dramatic Arts and Valand Academy - film

First development of text for the book

Development work for the film experiments

2016 Part 2: Cinematic experiments:

Testing new methods

Casting actors for audio recording

Recording dialogue in a sound studio

Recording different types of image materials

Editing a number of scenes with different combinations of image/sound/black

2017 Workshops where the experiments are presented and discussed

Reflection and evaluation of the results

Concluding work on the book

Publishing of the book

Presentation of results in screenings and lectures

Composition of some type of manifesto in preparation for upcoming film Lucky

Significance

The project contributes to the production of knowledge about, and the heightening of visibility for feminist, queer, and anti-colonial methods and aesthetics, at a time when the need for alternative images and methods for visual resistance is greater than ever. In this capacity, the project fills an important pedagogic function. By providing legitimacy and visibility to non-voyeuristic and non-normative expressions it can inspire contemporary filmmakers to new aesthetic and ethical approaches, and by extension create a more vivid Swedish cinematic climate and an audience of active viewers rather than passive consumers. The significance of the project as an artistic research project consists of the development of a new cinematic imagery, which enriches my own artistic practices, but also, hopefully, the contemporary cinematic art form. The project contributes to the artistic research field with creative, innovative approaches, where theory and practice cross-fertilise.

Preliminary results

The endeavour for, and examination of, an alternative aesthetics and methodology has been a common denominator in my film projects since my first short film *Les Enfants du Square* (Paris 1994). It was about children from Senegal and Mali, living in the Belleville neighbourhood of Paris. The children themselves were co-directors and we focused on what they wanted to show, rather than what the audience would want to see. *Parkside Girls* (New York 1996) portrays women who have come to New York to pursue an acting career. In this project I experimented with split-screen to point out the simultaneity of everything and the women's parallel stories. *The Stars We Are* (Stockholm 1997) tells the story of Kalle, skinhead, queer and HIV-positive. The film portrays a young homosexual man who nurtures his perversions and his alienation at a time when the term queer wasn't common knowledge and AIDS was still a non-issue. Kalle's poetry, recited by himself, is the core and the pulse of the film. *Kött är Mord* (Vänersborg 1997) portrays Anna, a young animal rights activist, and shows the world through her eyes. Strong images from the meat industry are mixed in with images of smiling, meat-eating people in a scenic part of western Sweden. *Manhood* (San Francisco 1999) is a short film about Mason who has transitioned from female to male. The film is, in form and content, a celebration of human courage and possibilities. *Selma & Sofie* (Stockholm 2001) is a love story where two young women portray themselves and *165 Hässelby* (Stockholm 2005) depicts my hometown neighbourhood from the perspective of local youths. *Dirty Diaries – 12 shorts of feminist porn* was completed in 2009 and is a short film compilation with the purpose of examining the notion of feminist porn. The project was a reaction to the male gaze and the stereotypical image of women and female sexuality, not only in porn, but also throughout art and film history. I initiated the project and produced it, asking twelve female filmmakers and artists each to make a short film on the subject feminist porn. For the DVD release a small book was published, where they all described their thoughts on the queer, feminist gaze. The project garnered a lot of attention in Sweden as well as internationally, and has been the subject of several academic essays in the fields of film studies and gender studies respectively, among others Ingrid Rydberg's doctoral thesis *"Imagining Safe Space: The Politics of Queer, Feminist and Lesbian Pornography"* and Anne G. Sabo's *After pornified. How women are transforming pornography & why it really matters* (Zero Books 2012).

Belleville Baby was created as a master thesis project in processes of filmmaking at the Valand Academy – film, and resulted in the book *Belleville Baby – anteckningar från en filmisk process* and the feature film *Belleville Baby*. In this project I examined the black image and the narrator as cinematic concepts for the first time. The project was based in my increasing hesitation for the documentary position where the filmmaker – that is to say, me – subjected socially vulnerable persons to visual exploitation. In *Belleville Baby* I had a protagonist who didn't want to be visually portrayed, and my ethical and aesthetic choices were made as much as a makeshift solution as a conscious cinematic aesthetics. I worked intuitively and practically, and it was only later that I came in contact with theories regarding the black image. I was inspired by French essay film, and specifically by Marguerite Duras's short film *Les Mains Negatives* (1979). *Belleville Baby* premiered at the Berlin Film Festival and met with great success. Among other things, it won a Swedish Guldbagge for best documentary 2013, it was elected Best documentary at the Tempo documentary film festival, and awarded the International Dox Award in Prizren, Kosovo.

I would say that *Belleville Baby* was the first of my films where I realized my ambition to create something new, a cinematic narrative I didn't know of before. One of the reasons for this may have been that the film was produced in a research context, where I had the opportunity to experiment, study, reflect and develop the aesthetics within an exploratory process. In my previous projects, I have been subject to the industry conditions, which, for economic reasons and with regards to time, encourages the conventional and normative cinematic narrative. *Creating that which already exists*. I hope that the project *The Visual Silence* will find its place in the artistic research environment, so that my upcoming film may also progress in an innovative direction.

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Summary (max 1500 char.)

The purpose of the project is to develop a non-voyeuristic film aesthetics, a cinematic narrative, which rather than satisfy the viewers' voyeuristic desires offers resistance and encourages the viewer to create their own internal images. The project examines the use of *the black image*, *the displaced image* and *the narrator* as three possible components of this cinematic narrative. The study is based in post-colonial, queer and feminist film theory regarding gaze and power, most significantly Laura Mulvey's theories on the male gaze and voyeurism. Three queries are used for this research: 1) How is a cinematic story that performs/creates/enacts resistance towards the voyeuristic, objectifying gaze created? 2) How has the visual silence, the displaced image and the narrator been used in feminist, anti-colonial and queer cinematic aesthetics? 3) How do I develop a contemporary new cinematic language based on this tradition? Three films will be subject to close reading: *Borrom Sarret* (1963) by Ousmane Sembene, *L'Homme Atlantique* (1981) by Marguerite Duras and *Blue* by Derek Jarman (1993). These films all, each in their own way, utilize this type of resistance. Based on this I wish to develop my own image narrative to be used in my next feature film *Lucky*. The completion of the project is

divided into two parts. 1) Study of theory and cinematic works. 2) Practical cinematic experiments. The research will be conducted over a period of three years and includes travel, close reading of film and theory, practical cinematic experiments, workshops and lectures, writing and publishing of a book. The project contributes to the development of a new cinematic language, the formation of theory regarding non-voyeuristic film, and innovative artistic research.