



Dear Camila Marambio, Imri Sandström, Joachim Koester, and Richard Julin, dear colleagues, comrades, companions and others.

This letter provides an introduction to my documented artistic research project (doctoral thesis) *Tidal Zones – Filming Between Life and Images*. It provides background and establishes the context of the research, describes the various artistic and written elements and introduces my methodology.

Image: *The Sea Monster*, oil on canvas, painted by Theodor Kittelsen in 1881. Height 28.3 cm x Width 25 cm. The painting belongs to Nasjonalmuseet for kunst, arkitektur og design, The Fine Art Collections. Photo: Nasjonalmuseet/Høstland, Børre

The intertidal zone

The research circles around the practice of filming and living near the ocean. I grew up on an island north of Gothenburg and was about ten years old when, in the 1980s, the cod fish 'disappeared' from the Swedish west coast. What had been our staple food and the livelihood of most inhabitants in this fishing community was gone, irrevocably altering the conditions of life on the island. Although most probably caused by a combination of the long-term effects of overfishing, off-shore industrial trawling, higher water temperatures and widespread algal blooms due to eutrophication, it was understood and communicated by the fishing industry, marine researchers, and people in the local community as well, as something that had just hit us, almost overnight – a sudden and mysterious event. At that time, the intertidal zone – what we could see with our human eyes – still looked the same as before. However, what had been taken for granted for centuries was no longer there due to some strange death or disappearance seemingly caused by forces beyond our control. As a child and while growing up, I was part of perpetuating this story of the sudden and mysterious event, covering the fact that the adult world lacked the understanding and imagination to address not only what was clearly affecting our lives in traumatic ways, but also the complex marine systems that had been dramatically affected and destroyed.

Tidal Zones – Filming Between Life and Images has arisen out of a need to consider filming and image-making practices from the position of the uncertain futures faced by the planet today: one of human generated climate change, its catastrophic consequences for the biosphere, and the political distress that follows. This involves a need to rethink our position as humans within the multiple and complex habitats that we as artists and filmmakers sometimes reductively refer to as 'landscapes'. What role does visual media play in the historical need to separate the human and the environmental? How do we contradict prevailing perceptions of film and photography as inexorably linked to ideas of progress and modernisation, to linear temporality, spatial separation, and to land-based thought? What alternatives do we have to inauspicious understandings of technology as the mere extension of human perception?

Within the specifically artistic scope of this research, I have followed some early and preindustrial photographic methods that involve seaweed as part of their chemical processes. Within the accounts of these processes, there is an understanding of the making of images as not only the product of human decision, but a procedure in which nature uses and demonstrates its ability to represent itself. As such, these methods and practices contain the potential for drawing together, rather than dividing, the human and more-than-human realms, revealing the possibility of a non-representational position in which all entities have non-hierarchical ontological significances.

One of the locations for this research has been the intertidal zone, within which I have roamed in various locations, from the Oslo fjord to the Atlantic coasts of Norway and Ireland, feeling the skin-like texture of bladderwrack, egg wrack and kelp against my hands. Because they are highly sensitive to the increased warming of oceanic

waters, seaweeds tell us how the climate is changing. Their bodies absorb iodine, as well as radioactive substances and heavy metals. There used to be egg wrack in the Oslo fjord, but, despite searching, I have not found any. There used to be sugar kelp and eelgrass too, but most of that is either overgrown or outcompeted by red and filamentous algae, with its beautiful furry dots shifting from bright green to deep dark red.

Seaweeds pull carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and produce most of the Earth's oxygen. They carry with them stories, such as how they protected parts of the population in Fukushima from the worst effects of radioactive radiation after the meltdown in 2011. In Lofoten, there are stories, like that related by the artist Signe Johannessen in her work *The Kelp Medal of Honour*, about how people escaped the German occupational forces by hiding under piles of seaweed at low tide.

Seaweeds have gained their ability to perform photosynthesis through entering into symbiosis with other organisms. The number of membranes around the chloroplasts is evidence of an evolutionary relatedness that disproves any previous beliefs about evolution as something that originates with a common point and then, from there, develops through competition. What drives evolution is rather (and literally) the ability to dwell within the body of another. To live inside another. To be open to the processes of endosymbiosis.

Macro-algae have specialised tissues and growth forms. Their cells are guided by moonlight and gravitational change. Their sexuality is very complex, with many different types of genitals. This involves a macroscopic neutrality that constitutes a fantastic critique of gender-based hegemony, just like the sex changes of some fishes or hermaphrodite sea snails.

Intertidal zones are real locations, the home of seaweeds and the habitat of multitudes of organisms. They are also places that are neither land nor sea, but instead constitute a zone with their own specific relationships and living conditions – places where complex systems meet, embrace, collide, and transform each other. It is where the elemental worlds meet. In the refusal to be either/or, the intertidal zone forms a non-binary temporal figuration between presence and absence, solid and liquid, life and death, dictated by the motions of circular time. It is also the chemical rockpool (the darkroom) out of which photography grew.

Research Elements

At this moment, as the conclusion of my research, I am sharing with you four film works that are all edited as loops, which means that they might be perceived as a bit abrupt in the beginning and at the end when watched outside of the exhibition space.

The first work, *The Etna Epigraph*, is a 4-second looped animation of an excerpt from Jean Epstein's film *Les Feux de la Mer* from 1948. The second film, called *Seaweed Film*, is a 28-minute loop with sound, filmed on 16 mm and developed with seaweed. The third work, *Coenaesthesia – It Is Not Even True That There Is Air Between Us*, is a 48-minute loop consisting of voices and archive films. The last work,

which is the film that was finished first, is called *The Spiral Dramaturgy* and consist of a 31-minute looped conversation with dramaturg, author, playwright, and theorist Ulla Ryum, filmed on video.

In addition to the films, I present two texts I have written. The first one is called *Filming with the Ocean*. It takes Epstein's film *Le Tempestaire* from 1947 as its starting point, and then follows some early photographic processes into the deep sea and back again. The second text, called *The Methodology of the Spiral*, considers Ulla Ryum's spiral dramaturgy as a configuration to think with, as well as a kind of methodology for keeping processes open and searching. As you will see, the texts do not directly address the processes of making the films. Instead, the texts and films form interactive relationships, that when combined consider some of the practices, discourses, experiences, and theories that have been particularly important for the processes of making the work.

I have made my films alongside Jean Epstein's affirmative films and lyrical writing, specifically a series of films made on the Atlantic coast of Brittany. Through these films he investigates potential in cinema for the convergence of the human and non-human. For Epstein, cinema has the ability to displace the human optics and to help us experience the world in unfamiliar ways, and hence, to embody it otherwise. This embodiment is one that shows our entangled relationships with a material world. As there is no such thing as an objective disembodied position through which we can observe and survey the world, the camera (what Epstein calls the 'intelligent machine') is not an external device, but a kind of companion object through which we are able to move away from human scales, liberating ourselves from any direct human point of view, and stretching out into more-than-human worlds, as well as into our own bodily sensory sensibilities.

The idea of seeing not just with one's eyes, but with one's entire body is addressed further in the film *Coenaesthesia – It Is Not Even True That There Is Air Between Us*. Through this work, I have had the privilege to listen, learn, and engage with personal stories and experiences, generously shared with me by a group of artists, researchers, scientists, and filmmakers, who in different ways live with a heightened sensitivity or environmental illness. Their stories emphasise our interconnectedness with the material world that we transform and are transformed by. They describe their bodies as registers, where things like environmental toxins and pollution form part of what they call 'bodily archives', which disclose the ways in which we are connected with the surrounding world. Their experiences show how, in the moment, it does not matter whether you can find the research or not, as just walking into a room will tell you to get out! As such, their stories become epistemological considerations of how thought emerges in relation to both body and environment.

Methodology

My work is informed by queer life practices – its theories, and affinities – and I draw from new-materialist and post-humanist discourse. I have made the films while considering feminist methodologies of listening and of thinking *with*, as is elaborated, for example, by Astrida Neimanis in relation to bodies of water. Trinh T. Minh-ha has conceptualised a strategy that involves thinking *nearby* as a way to emphasise a kind of proximity that keeps possibilities open; to manifest the *between*, as well as all the infinite ways that things come to oneself – in all their liveliness. In a similar manner, Ulla Ryum's work on non-linear storytelling seeks associative connections and unexpected openings between elements of the story, as well as between past, present, and future. This is examined in more detail in my essay *The Methodology of the Spiral*. When thinking *nearby* Ryum, the apparatus of film becomes a device that allows us to engage in reciprocal relationships with the world. One in which, as for Epstein, storytelling is a matter of being in touch. It is never *about* the human eye or the camera lens, but about what we are able to see.

Finally, my hope is that this research will contribute to awakening intertidal imaginaries while tapping into the many ongoing discourses and practices that aim at giving voice to the entangled relationships that we consider when we talk about images.

I look forward to seeing you on June 5!

Best wishes,
Kajsa

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