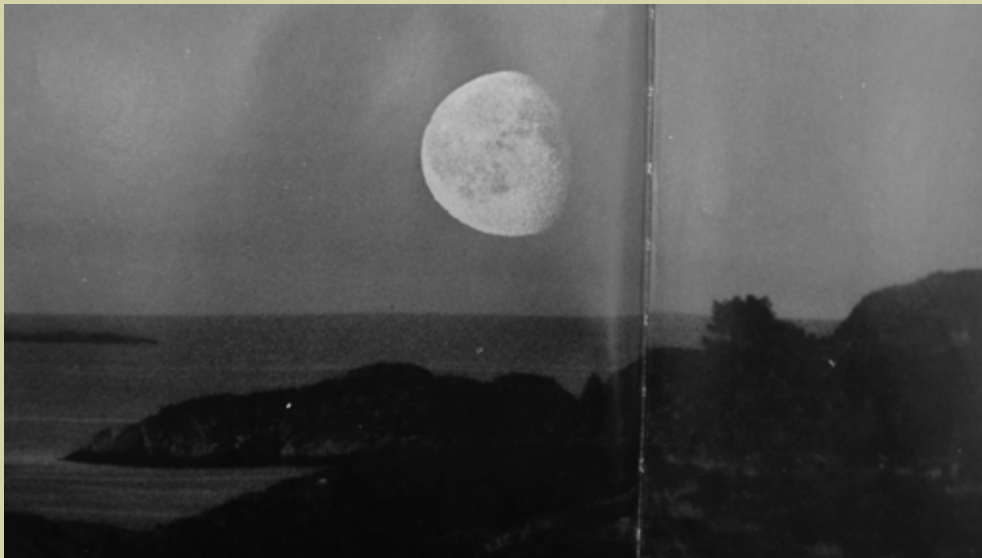


For a Time
Light Must Be Called
Darkness

Lina Selander | Oscar Mangione



Colophon

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For a Time
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zu der blühenden allmaterie

gustav sjöberg

according to a classic aesthetic model, the artist forms an already existent matter, turns nature into art, and gives matter form. the paradigmatic example in this context would be sculpture, but poetry too is ultimately understood in similar terms. for what, as it were, distinguishes a poem from a non-poem, poetry from that which is not poetry? as various historically conditioned attempts to provide poetry with an essential determination little by little have proved to be untenable, the one thing remaining is an implicit notion of human agency, the very idea that the poet in one sense or another organizes the non-poetic matter and turns it into poetry.

which particular methodological premises that are underpinning such an organization of matter is, in this particular light, of secondary importance. what it comes down to is, above all, the fundamental aristotelian distinction between form and matter, and its still strong influence on concepts such as ‘art’ and ‘poetry’.

bearing this in mind, it becomes one of the most crucial tasks for contemporary writing to subvert or dissolve the distinction between that which is produced by man and that which is produced by nature, or between the ‘universal artist’ (*universalis artifex*) and the ‘universal matter’ (*universalis materia*), to use the terminology of florentine neoplatonist 15th century philosopher marsilio ficino.¹

for this to be possible, another understanding of the relationship between form and matter seems to be required. which?

one alternative way of conceiving matter would, tentatively phrased, be as an infinite production of innumerable finite forms, in an incessant movement of decomposition and composition, disintegration and configuration. matter would, according to such an understanding, not be a passive substrate in need of formal reworking, but to the contrary coincide with the manifold of the forms themselves.

the consequences of this conceptual transformation are immense, and implicate that matter comprises both act and potency, the corporeal as well as the non-corporeal – something which, in turn, means that the concept does not depend upon a specific notion of nature’s essence. rather, ‘matter’ quite simply becomes a term for nature’s continuously differentiated self-generating process.

1. marsilio ficino, *teologia platonica* (v, 4), (ed. vitale), milano, bompiani, 2011.

in this transformation and activation of matter is already comprised, upon a closer look, the challenging of each single aesthetic ideal. perhaps a

destruction of art as an autonomous field, as a sphere separated from life or as a more elevated reflection upon existence, is only possible by virtue of such a radically different concept of form, of dissolving art in nature?

in fact, it seems apparent that the understanding of the concepts of form and matter described above is incompatible with the aesthetic model that has been and still remains prevalent in the western world, and accordingly carries far-reaching implications for the very concept of art such as it has been shaped and defined since greek antiquity and throughout the ages.

one way of making this discussion more concrete is by taking a closer look at the two paradigms that still, in a certain sense, define the horizon of poetry, in other words what we – with the help of the italian philologist gianfranco contini – might call petrarch's monolingualism and dante's plurilingualism. on the one hand the 'incessant experimentalism' and incredibly vast multitude of dialects, banter, idioms, plurality of lexical strata and *poliglottia degli stili* that are to be found in dante, on the other hand petrarch's extinction of all linguistic heterogeneity for the purpose of a single unisonant lyrical voice.²

contini notes that modern literature has conformed to the model of petrarch rather than dante (especially the dante of the *commedia*), despite regarding the latter as the greater mind and author. though widely held as one of the crown achievements of so called world literature, the anarchic splendour of the *commedia* has, in fact, played a much smaller role in shaping modern poetry than petrarch's unimaginative *canzoniere*.

interestingly, the linguistic universe of dante's *commedia* corresponds extremely well to the notion of a 'blühende allmaterie' or a 'bloom-ing all-matter'.³ in dante, language has not yet been fixed according to a coercive orthographic or grammatical convention, but, rather, in one single movement seems to emerge from, comprise, answer to and welcome all imaginable forms, low and high, liberated from every hierarchy and beyond the question whether they be legitimate or not.

ab initio petrarch's monolingualism is antithetical to this comic richness, and it is in his reactive gesture that modern poetry is born.

almost seven hundred year later, it is obvious that poetry still moves within the same monolingual paradigm. it is also against this background that modern poetry's many attempts to profane the poetic statement must be understood, its effort to renegotiate the delineation between that which is poetry and that which is not poetry.

the attempts to break with the monolingual paradigm have been many and commendable since the 14th century until today. nevertheless the paradigm has subsisted. one of the reasons for its perduring dominion is the fact that poetry's poetological dispositive remains intimately connected to the aristotelian distinction between 'form'

and ‘matter’ – that is, to a notion of language as a pure potency that eventually is conferred a specific form in the poetic statement.

this divide, bearing a great resemblance to the influential notion of nature and culture as ontologically distinct entities, is also the basis of the still today unthreatened fiction of the author.

against the backdrop of this rather dense conceptual situation, in which notions of matter, nature, art and man mutually condition and strengthen each other, one can get a glimpse of the scope of the problem. we are, in other words, by no means dealing with an exclusively poetological problematic that would be possible to circumvent by means of formal innovations or by insisting on alternative concepts of poetry. to the contrary! poetry is such a central ingredient in the prevalent right-wing culture’s ‘homogenised porridge’⁴ that each attempt to recuperate the concept *volens nolens* runs the risk of affirming poetry – art – with capital initial.

in this light it becomes clear why poetry, to begin with, must assume a destructive character, destroy the very foundation that at the same time constitutes its precondition.

what’s at stake is, more precisely, a destruction that simultaneously, in a parallel movement, allows for the possibility of a radical transformation of the relationship between poetry and nature, and that writes itself in the direction of what we might call a monadic naturephilological writing outside of poetry in the classical sense of the term.

which forms could a writing thus conceived take?

to be able to approach such a question it is, in the first instance, important to note that the ‘blooming’ concept of matter implicates the absolute lack of a common measure for the single forms. that is to say that there are not two identical things, not two numbers completely equivalent, and neither are there two homologous movements or parts of movements. man’s tendency to establish equivalence between, for instance, ten trees and ten other trees, obeys a logical criterion and does not take place in relation to the single object. things, grasped individually and as a whole, are what they are in different ways, and cannot at any level be subsumed under a common measure.

2. gianfranco contini, ‘preliminari sulla lingua del petrarca’ in: *varianti e altra linguistica: una raccolta di saggi (1938-1968)*, torino, einaudi, 1970.

3. ernst bloch, *avicenna und die aristotelische linke*, berlin, suhrkamp, 1963; enzo melandri, *la linea e il circolo. studio logico-filosofico sull’analogia*, bologna, il mulino, 1968.

4. furio jesi, *cultura di destra*, milano, garzanti, 1979.

applied to poetry, this insight does not only mean that each individual poem, text or work of art has its own immanent measure, but also that this measure, in turn, is subjected to constant change. each form is not only different than every other form, but also different than itself.

this does not result in the levelling of different linguistic strata. instead, the consequence is so to speak a de-valuation, a way of releasing them from

each central perspective. now, at the very latest, it also becomes obvious that this concept of form implicates a firm break with the very notion of artistic quality. all normative aesthetic criteria lose their legitimacy, as there is no organising principle which itself would escape from the intermittency and fundamental unsteadiness of the single forms.

perhaps poetry's separation from each selective measure also marks an opening for a plurilinguistic writing that no longer orients itself by or even accepts distinctions between own and other, legitimate and illegitimate, beautiful and ugly. neither does the ceaselessly transformed form, which ceaselessly transforms itself, appear to be compatible with a fixed grammar. instead, it requires a multiformed, structurally dynamic language, open to a potentially infinite plurality of stylistic and morphosyntactic strata, and to literally all available material

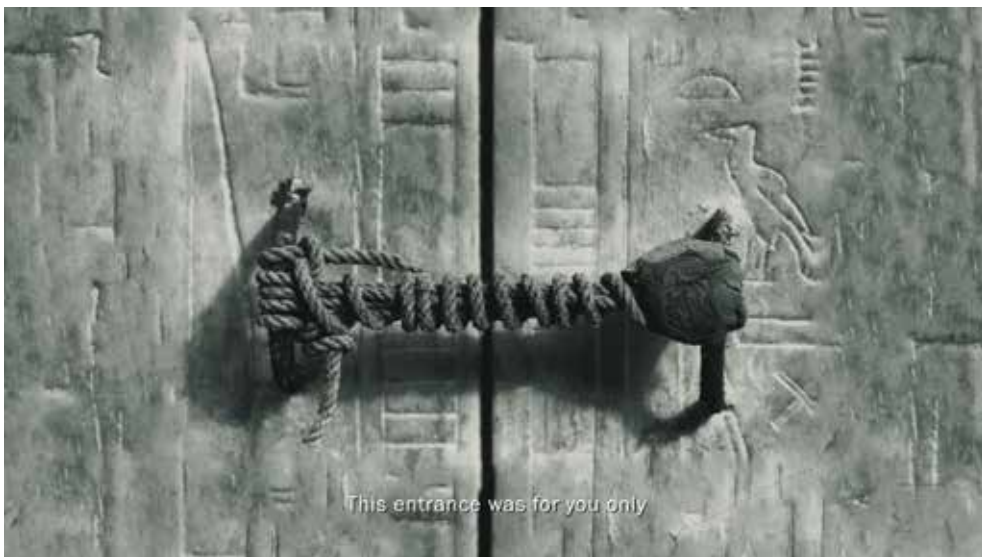
this plurilinguistic writing is naturephilological not by fixing its gaze on nature, but merely by virtue of being a part of nature's nature. and what's at stake for a contemporary monadic naturephilological writing is – with an expression borrowed by giovanni pico della mirandola – no less than the 'naturalis philosophiae absoluta consummatio',⁵ that is to say the absolute consummation of naturephilosophy. if this consummation marks the end of poetry conceived as an individual art form or literary genre, it also, by the same token,

5. giovanni pico della mirandola, *oratio de hominis dignitate*, (ed. e. garin), firenze, vallecchi, 1942.

designates the beginning of its afterlife as a material writing without an individual author and outside of the right-wing cultural conceptuality that has hitherto regulated its existence.

- I. The Ceremony, 2016
- II. Notes for a Film on Nature, 2016
- III. Silphium, 2014
- IV. Lenin's Lamp Glows in the Peasant's Hut, 2011
- V. Anteroom of the Real, 2011
- VI. Around the Cave of the Double Tombs, 2010

I. The Ceremony





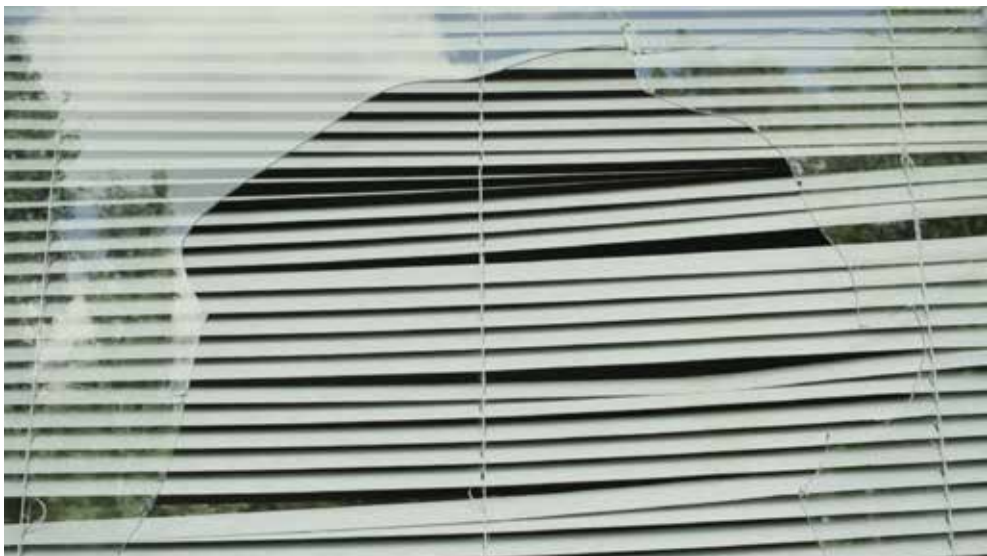




Rhythm is also the origin of writing.

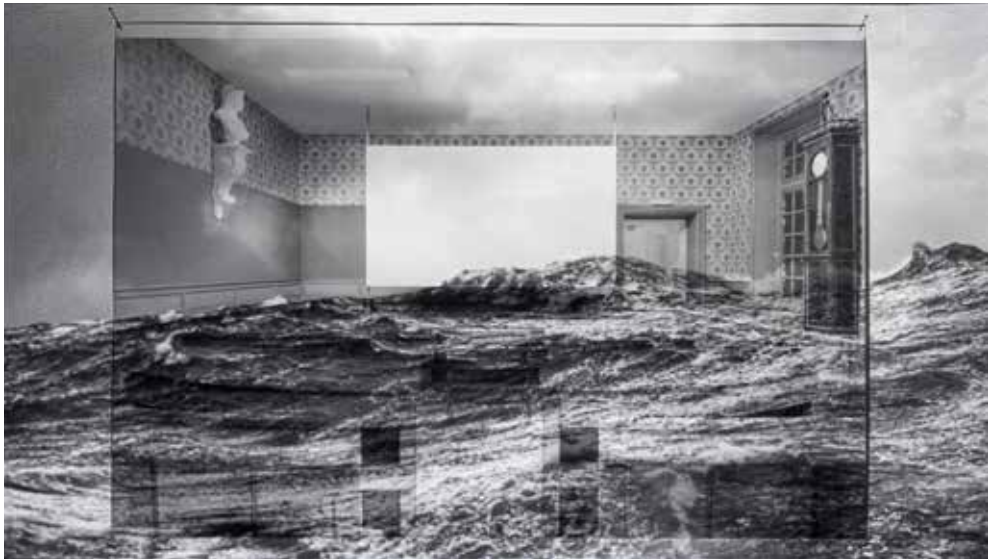


Description is vandalism



II. Notes for a Film on Nature





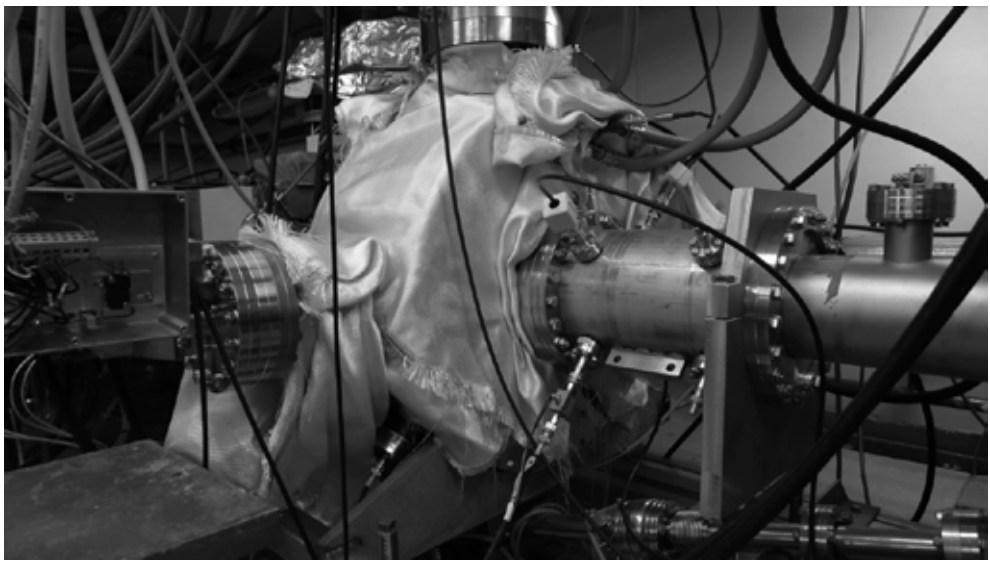


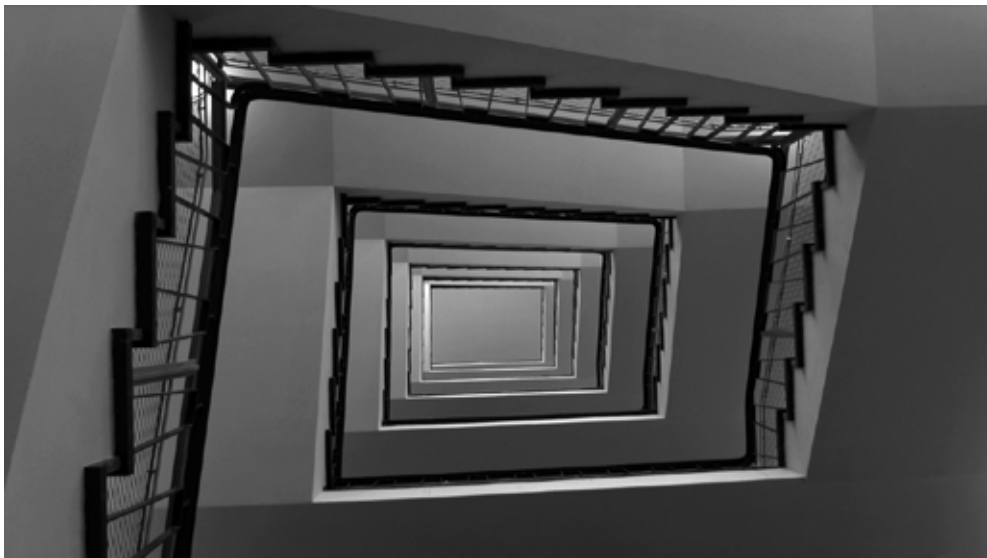
III. Silphium



A record of my capture, imprisonment and return to what later had become a museum; and the tentative escape.





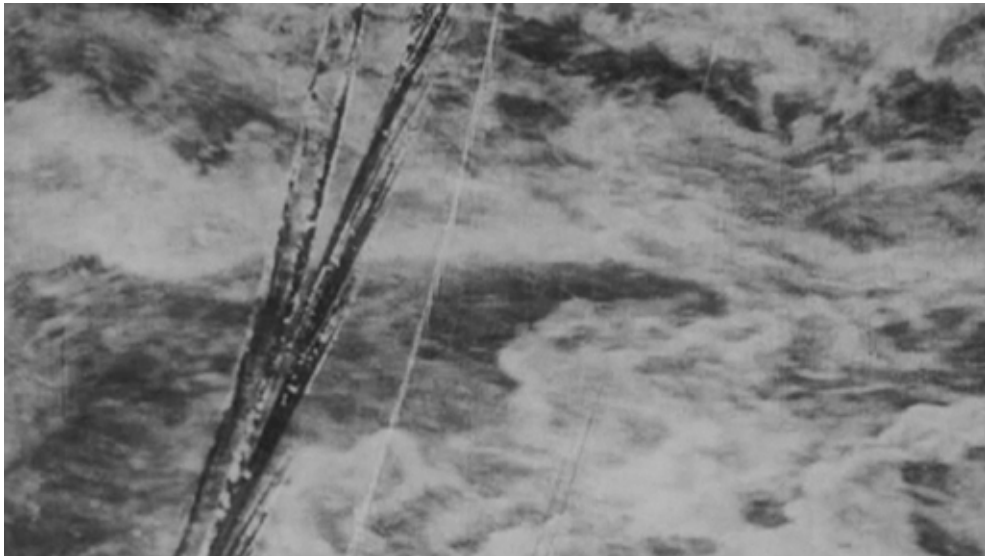


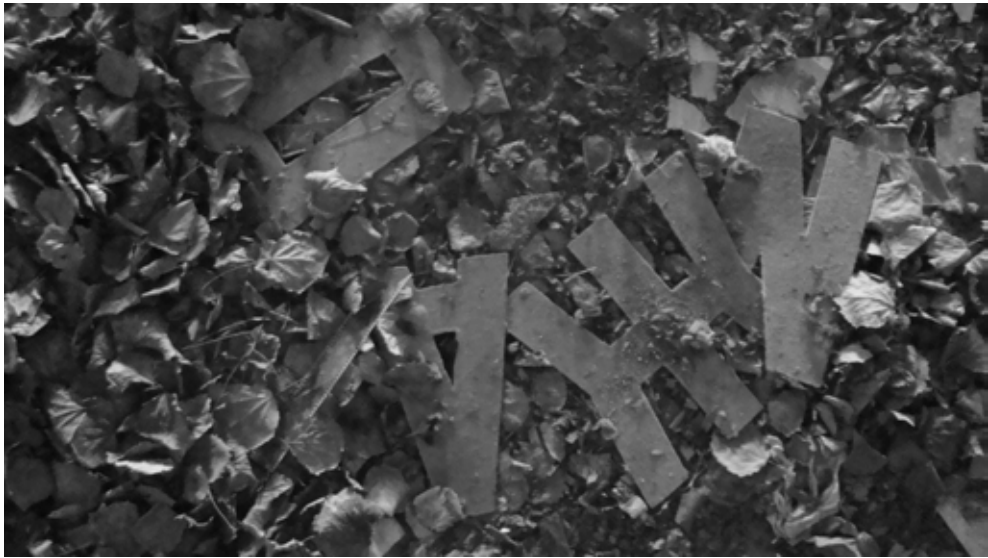


until they feel - ahead of them - a barrier.

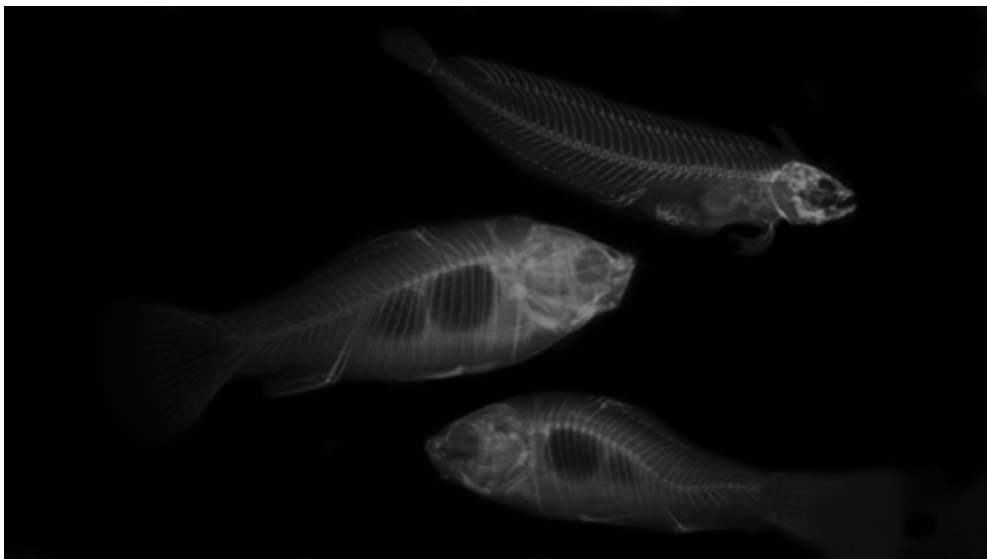


IV. Lenin's Lamp Glows in the Peasant's Hut





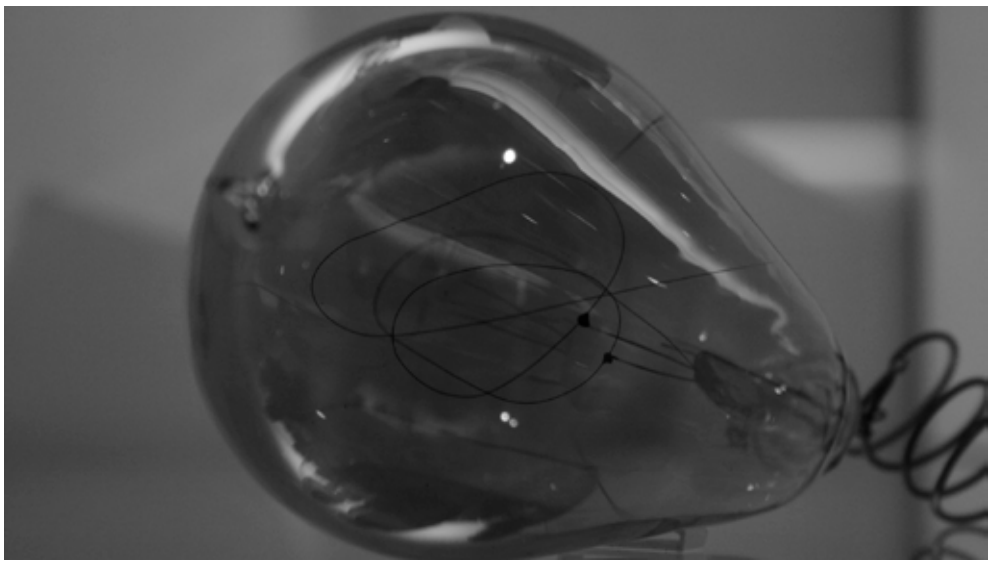




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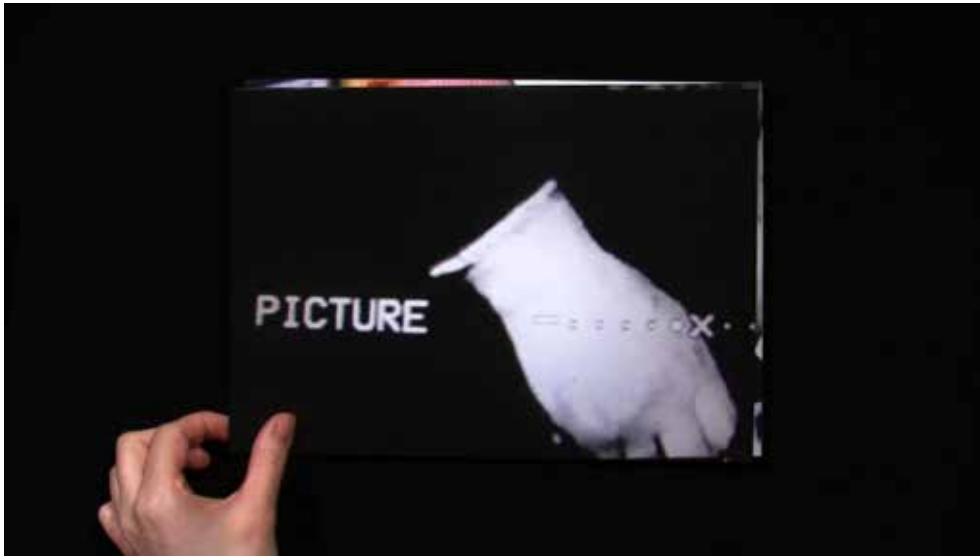
We construct



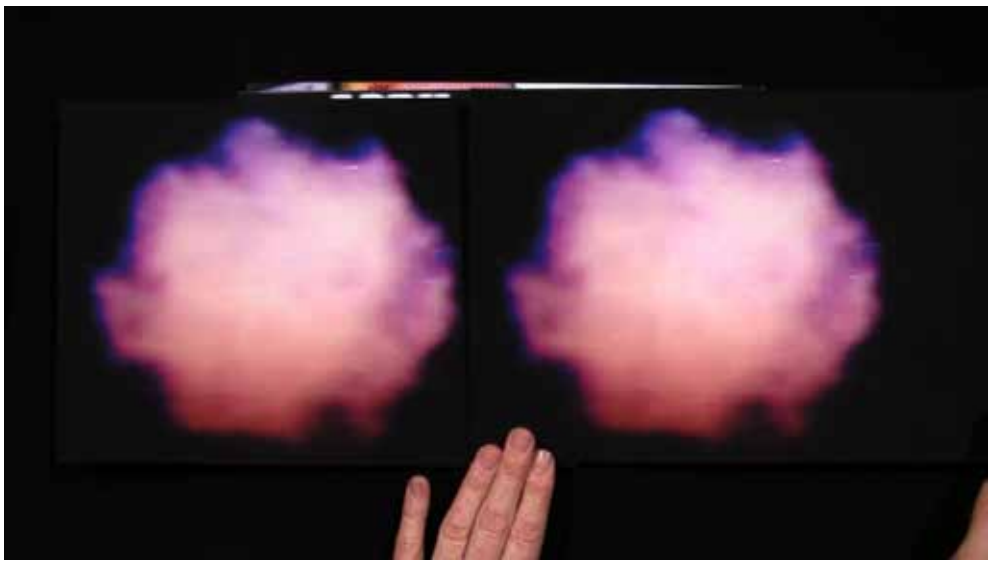
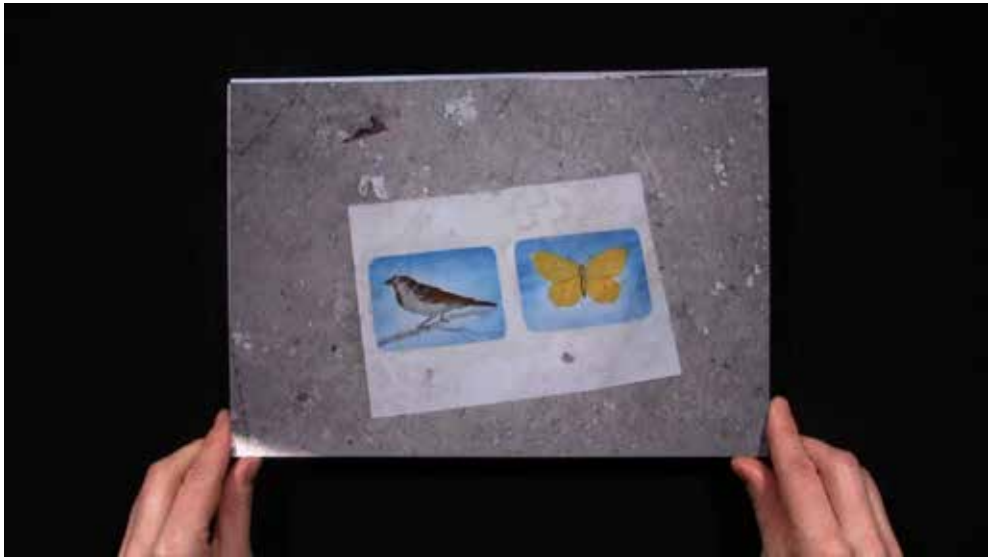




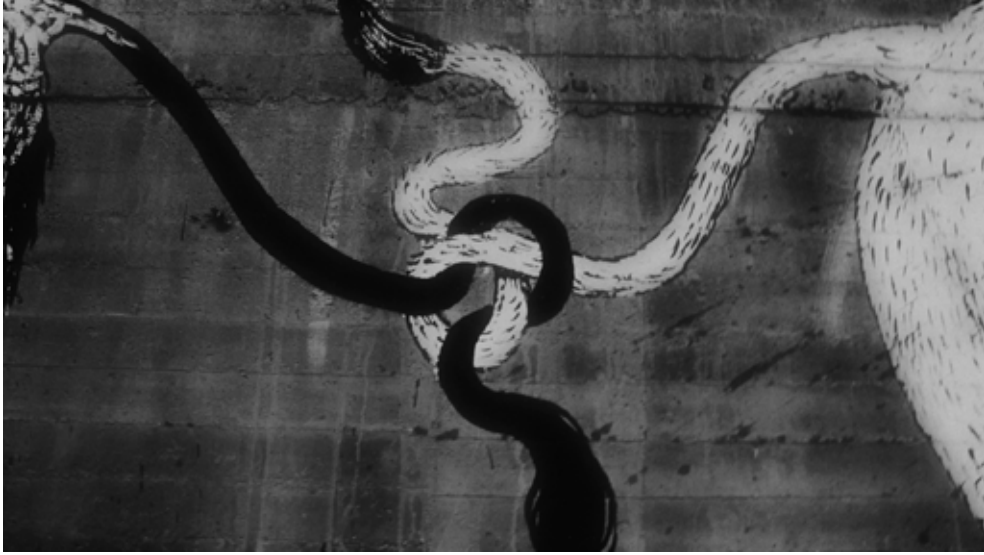
V. Anteroom of the Real







VI. Around the Cave of the Double Tombs

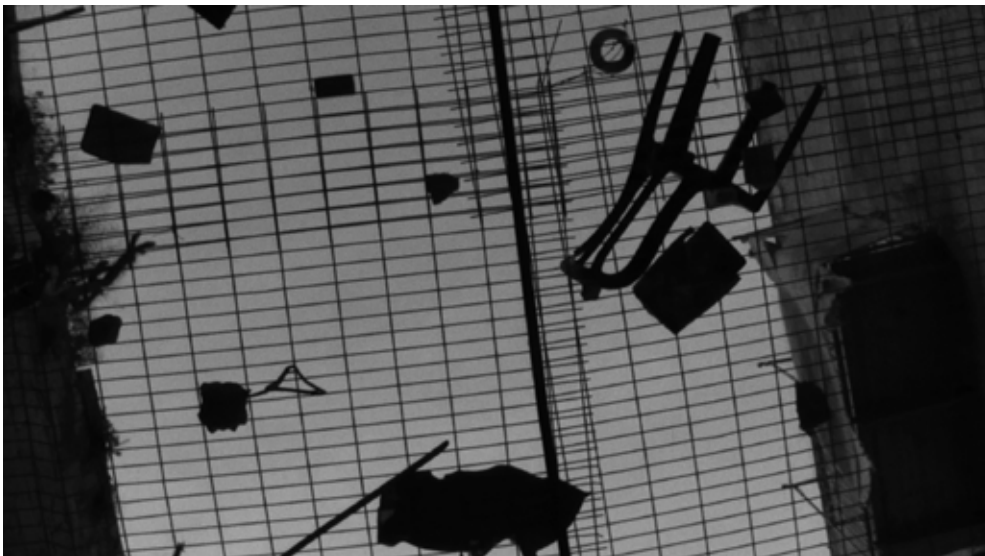


Lonely as emblems are lonely.

وحيدة مثلما الرموز وحيدة.

Exhausted seeing.

متعب مما رأيت.





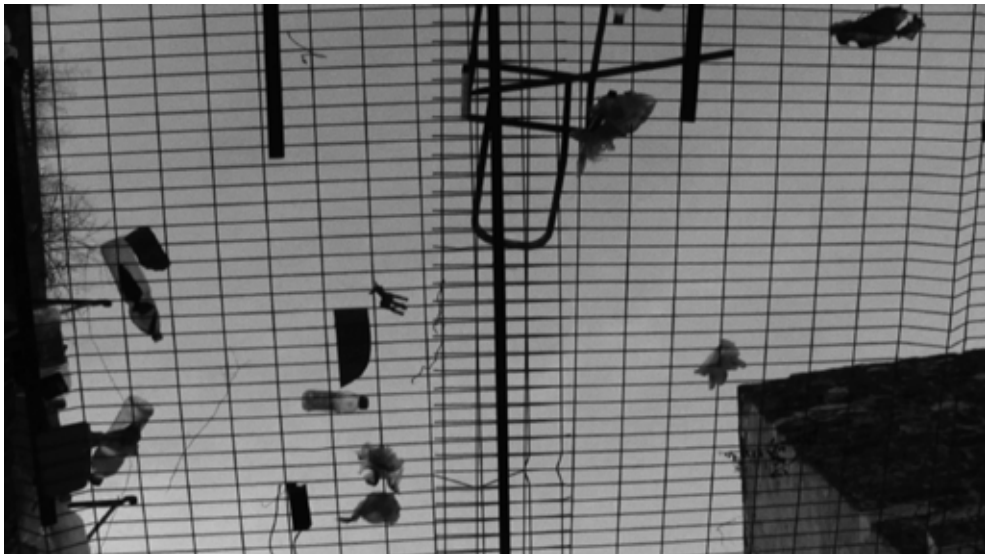
Cut out invisibility. Cut out reply.

اللامرئيات مقطوعة. الإجابات مبتورة.



The real is cut and re-assembled,
returning with a different origin.

الواقع مقطوع وأعيد تجميعه، انه عائد في أصل مختلف.



‘Description is vandalism.’ Reflections on Lina Selander’s Work

Andrea Cinel

I

‘What we most lack is a belief in the world, we’ve quite lost the world, it’s been taken from us. If you believe in the world you precipitate events, however inconspicuous, that elude control, you engender new space-times. [...] Our ability to resist control, or our submission to it, has to be assessed at the level of our every move. We need both creativity *and* a people.’¹

At the exhibition *For a Time Light Must Be Called Darkness*,² the Swedish artist Lina Selander presents six installations, four of which she made together with Oscar Mangione. What strikes us on first looking at these works is the almost complete absence of sound, and, in general, a measured use of words. To thwart the noise of everyday reality, Selander uses a sort of sound ‘ecology’, which for example in *Notes for a Film on Nature* appears as short soundscapes, or in *Silphium* as quotations, i.e. murmured sequences of German words, borrowed from Chris Marker’s *La Jetée* (1962).

Yet, it is not that something is lacking – this is actually an absence that serves the narrative and conceptual developments. While in *Around the Cave of the Double Tombs* the silence reinforces the dehumanizing aspect of confinement, in *Anteroom of the Real* the same silence unfolds a reflection on the documentary value

of the photographic image and on the status of the latter in comparison with the moving image. In other films, the introduction of a sound fragment emphasizes the moment something important is about to happen, or even a turning point, which the images alone cannot convey. That is the case in *Lenin’s Lamp Glows in the Peasant’s Hut*, where a dramatic fragment of music accompanies images of flames that precede a sequence of two scale models of the nuclear power station of Chernobyl. The models show the power station before and after the disaster that struck on 26 April 1986; they also symbolize the end of the Soviet dream.

Selander always makes a poetical use of sound inserts, but in two very distinct ways: on the one

1. Gilles Deleuze, ‘Control and Becoming’, in: *Negotiations*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1995, p. 176. Tr. Martin Joughin.
2. The exhibition (24.09.2017 – 17.12.2017, Argos, Brussels) presented the following works: *Notes for a Film on Nature* (2016), *The Ceremony* (2016), *Silphium* (2014), *Lenin’s Lamp Glows in the Peasant’s Hut* (2011), *Anteroom of the Real* (2011) and *Around the Cave of the Double Tombs* (2010). Apart from the two works made in 2011, all the others have been realized in collaboration with or co-directed with Oscar Mangione.

hand, the sound functions as a metonym; on the other, as a metaphor it takes us back to the real world. In the opening scene of *The Ceremony*, the sound of paper being torn to pieces anticipates the cover of Olof Rudbeck's book *Atlantis* (1679-1702), in which the author rips the crust of the Earth, only to discover that Atlantis is Sweden, and that consequently Sweden is the cradle of Western civilization. In this instance the sound does not illustrate the actions of the Swedish naturalist, but it conveys the idea that any nationalist undertaking is inextricably linked with the pair knowledge-power, the rewriting of history, and above all that such undertaking is always divisive and tears up society. On the other hand, in two other sequences of the film, the sounds we hear point to a possible outcome; like the images, they invite us to turn towards the outside world, to reappropriate the spaces shared by the community.

In this way, Selander leaves room for the word. Like sound, spoken or written words present themselves in a variety of forms, yet always in a very specific manner. Sometimes, in works such as *Around the Cave of the Double Tombs*, Selander and Mangione turn their reflections into dialogues in the intertitles, or, in *Silphium* they use text to contextualize the film and to intervene in the interpretation of the images. For example, in order to establish a link between the image and reality, subtitles are used like a mirroring device, to emphasize that what we see are photographs of 'actual tombs' and 'actual children'.

On other occasions, words are *found objects*, i.e. they are recycled and reused, such as for example Dziga Vertov's intertitles, the subtitles of a television broadcast or even a dialogue taken from Ingmar Bergman's *Persona* (1966). These minimalist reuses have a considerable influence on the interpretation of the images. We need only think for example of the legal notice³ at the start of *Anteroom of the Real*. The legal ban – which protects copyright, forbids making modifications of all kind and limits the use of the images exclusively to a private setting – is denied right away by the public status of the film. Yet, the message influences the way we watch the film and interpret the images that follow, because we start to ask ourselves questions about general interest as opposed to private interest, about the right to know or even about the imperatives of memory. In other words, is the manipulation of these images an act of resistance, a crime or a duty?

This discrete use of sound and verbal elements makes it possible for the public to focus on the meticulous choice of images and their sequencing. For Selander combines her own images with sequences she has borrowed from the cinema or television, but she also integrates photographs, drawings, paintings, reproductions from books or catalogues. In this way, she maximizes the evocative power of each image, and due to the fragmented editing, the artist brings about a dialogue between different times and places, documents and fiction, distant natural phenomena and contemporary historical events. In the exhibition context, the films acquire extra meanings, because their concomitance opens up the possibility of new relationships and interferences. This *synchronicity* – i.e. the simultaneous occurrence of events without causal connection – acquires a distinct meaning for each viewer, as the images convey symbols and

archetypes that belong to the collective subconscious. Furthermore, it is quite significant that Selander and Mangione use screens that are transparent to some extent; in this way, the films projected merge to become translucent assemblages.

II

‘Every day they brought the paper. [...] “Chernobyl – A Place of Achievement.” “The Reactor Has Been Defeated!” “Life Goes On.” [...] political officers [...] told that we had to win. Against whom? The atom? Physics? The universe? Victory is not an event for us, but a process. Life is a struggle. An overcoming. That’s why we have this love of floods and fires and other catastrophes.’⁴

Lenin’s Lamp Glows in the Peasant’s Hut started with a journey to Pripyat, a ghost town from which people fled after the accident in the Chernobyl power station. Selander made an abundance of photographs of the abandoned houses. She also studied documents at the National Chernobyl Museum in Kiev, which is entirely dedicated to the catastrophe and its consequences. Setting out from this research, her film essay combines her own images with sequences from two of Dziga Vertov’s films, as well as images she found at the Swedish Museum of Natural History and the Hagströmer Medico-Historical Library, both in Stockholm.

In this respect, Vertov’s influence is not limited to Selander quoting his films – it shapes her entire oeuvre. The idea of ‘bonds’ (in Russian *sviaz*) and ‘bonding’ (*sviazat*) between people, things and images is a constant in Vertov’s writings and films. We need only think of his definition of the ‘Cine-Eye’ as a ‘film-bond [*kino-sviaz*]’ between the peoples of the USSR and those of the entire world.⁵ In *The Eleventh Year* (1928), a film he made to celebrate the 1917 Bolshevik revolution, Vertov links the construction of the largest hydroelectric power plant in the world on the river Dnieper to the discovery of a 2000-year-old skeleton. At first sight, this association might evoke the ineluctable, linear progress emphasized by Soviet propaganda, but towards the middle of the film, the power station assumes a strange pyramidal form, as if to point out that *The Eleventh Year* contradicts this narrative of progress, instead suggesting that the past cannot ever be fully inhumed, indeed, that the path forward may at times even necessitate recursive maneuvers. As the film moves forward, the archaic and

3. *Anteroom of the Real* opens precisely with a disclaimer, stating ‘The material on this home video product, including videocassette and videodisc is protected by copyright. It is for private use only and any other use including copying, reproducing, or performing in public in whole or in part is prohibited by the law.’

4. Svetlana Alexievich, *Voices from Chernobyl: The Oral History of a Nuclear Disaster*, New York, Picador, 2005, p. 91. Tr. by Keith Gessen.
5. Dziga Vertov, ‘Kinokam iuga’, in: *Iz Naslediiia: Tom Vtoroi: Stat’i i Vystupleniia*, (eds. A.S. Deriabin and D.V. Kruzhkova), Moscow, Eizenshtein-Tsentr, 2008, p. 92, quoted by Devin Fore in: ‘The Metabiointic State: Dziga Vertov’s *The Eleventh Year*’, in *OCTOBER 145*, Summer 2013, p. 3.

the modern, seemingly so distinct at its beginnings, begin to reserve polarity and, in a physiognomic exchange of properties, come to resemble one another.⁶

Thus Selander does not limit herself to using fragments or certain sequences from *Enthusiasm* (1931) – a film that glorifies the workers and coal miners of the Donbass who are fulfilling the Five-Year Plan – but she also appropriates their symbolic universe. For Selander, ‘bonding’ means gathering images, persons, objects or even distant, seemingly unrelated events in order to create new meanings. To provide a first geographical clue with regard to the aerial views in the opening scene, Selander uses a title card from Vertov’s film that specifies ‘halfway between Dniepro-Petrovsk and Zaporozkie’, then another one that says ‘the Wild River rushes over the rocks’. Then, after citing the discovery of the skeleton, the foreground of Vertov’s film with a mine trolley that is pushed by miners disappears and is replaced with images of a trolley that is pushed by miners that have been brought in by the Soviet authorities from mines near Moscow and the Donbass to dig a tunnel under the reactor, with the aim to construct a cooling coil under the concrete slab of the reactor.

This is just a short passage, but it demonstrates the complexity of Selander’s editing. With ellipses and metaphors, the artist succeeds in bringing up issues such as the productivity race in the twentieth century, the electrification of the Soviet Union, the role of the individual in society, the ecological risks of the Chernobyl disaster, human finiteness with regard to the atom and geological epochs, the political and administrative management of the accident, the courage and recklessness of the workers who had to clean up the place. Like Vertov, Selander breaks up the linearity of the narrative and, by juxtaposing images that are at the same time pregnant with meaning and vague, she presents new hypotheses. Of course, a film made after the catastrophe, at the time of the end of utopias, can only provide a disillusioned view of the twentieth century and of our future – how else could we interpret the contrasting images of Vertov’s triumphant miners and the workers cleaning up the reactor? Why are their medals on view in the museum in Kiev? What is the link between the scientific research and the abandoned buildings in Pripyat? What about Vertov’s skeleton with regard to the fossils conserved in Stockholm? It is precisely in this multiplicity of questions and geographical, historical and symbolic references that the force of *Lenin’s Lamp Glows in the Peasant’s Hut* resides – and in a more general way, in Selander and Mangione’s work.

Following Vertov’s example, who ‘insisted on using identical footage in a number of different works, establishing an intertextual axis of associations that cuts across the composition of each individual film’⁷, Selander reuses in for example *Anteroom of the Real* images she had also used in *Lenin’s Lamp Glows in the Peasant’s Hut*, but because the latter film has a structure of its own, it does not confine itself to the same issues. What’s more, though it distances itself from the traditional characteristics of the genre, *Anteroom of the Real* is probably Selander’s film that comes closest to the documentary, even if it lacks explicit sound extras or commentaries. Indeed, Selander shows us a series of photographs that are piled up

on a table, a hand taking them one by one, till the last one. Every now and then, the pile needs to be readjusted and the gesture repeated is sometimes hesitant. The continuous, repetitive movements add the character of a performance to the film.

The appearance of the entirely black photographs marks a pause in the editing timeline and refers to the impossibility of seeing everything; yet, in the film ‘the multiplication and the conjunction of images, however lacunary and relative they may be, constitute just as many ways of showing *in spite of all* what cannot be seen.’⁸ All the same, every single photograph helps to lend rhythm to the film and their linking, to the tempo imposed by the hand that takes them, constitutes the true editing of the film. This *zero degree* of the cinema thus questions the concept of editing and of the documentary image, as in this instance the latter comprises photographs of abandoned places, clichés of geographical maps that illustrate how the radioactive cloud spreads, paused images from television broadcasts and documentaries, and documents from the National Chernobyl Museum.

III

‘We have become more civilized to come closer to the horror.’⁹

While the two films on Chernobyl help to outline the method and the strategies highlighted by Selander, the works created together with Oscar Mangione allow an in-depth analysis of the themes brought up.

At the basis of *Around the Cave of the Double Tombs* there was another journey. Selander visited the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron, where the biblical patriarch Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and their spouses Sarah, Rebecca and Leah are said to be buried. On the site there is a synagogue, which occupies the northwest part, and the Ibrahimi Mosque, the entrance of which is controlled by Israel and which extends towards the southwest. Since the thirteenth century, there have been numerous conflicts here – we need only think of the recent controversy over the site being listed by the UNESCO as a World Heritage Site on Palestinian Territory. There has also been violence within and between the communities there. As if to emphasize the ineluctable destiny of a site that heralds two irreconcil-

able truths, Selander notes in a title card that the sacred place is also the ‘cave of the double tombs, where Baruch Goldstein was beaten to death after having shot and killed 29 and wounded 125,’ with which she refers to the massacre perpetrated by the American-Israeli on 25 February 1994, on Purim day.

Selander films the sacred site and shows the division that cuts both horizontally and vertically through the city, as well as the security systems,

6. Devin Fore, *Op. cit.*, p. 8.

7. *Id.*, p. 13.

8. Georges Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of All. Four Photographs from Auschwitz*, Chicago, London, The University of Chicago Press, p. 133.

Tr. Shane B. Lillis.

9. ‘Entretien avec Jean Clair’, in: *Francis Bacon, Entretiens*, (with an introduction by Hervé Vanel), Paris, Editions Carré, 1996, p. 84.

checkpoints and video surveillance systems. She alternates her observations with intertitles and shots of the wire netting Palestinians have hung up to protect them from the waste the settler throw down. Picking up the distinction that was so dear to Michel Foucault, could it be that in Hebron we face a society that is paradoxically still *disciplinary* and at the same time already a society under *control*, since the population lives in *confinement* and at the same time under ‘continuous control [through] instant communication.’¹⁰ Through this web of images, texts and symbols, Selander delivers us to the *mechanism* – i.e. ‘the heterogeneous set of various discourses, institutions, architectural constructions, scientific claims, philosophical and moral assertions [...], that are either explicitly expressed or remain unspoken,’¹¹ that rule Hebron, as well as to its ‘prevailing strategic function.’¹²

Suddenly Hans Holbein’s painting *The Ambassadors* (1533) appears. This painting is particularly famous for its ambiguous celebration of humanist values and for an anamorphosis in the foreground, which makes us think of a ‘cuttle-fish bone’,¹³ but actually represents a human skull. These *vanitas* scenes are typical of the Renaissance. They are allegories that evoke the transience of life and the meaninglessness of human passions and actions. The image of the detail of the painting is followed by a title card in which Selander underlines that ‘the real is cut and re-assembled, returning with a different origin.’ Thus *The Ambassadors* makes it possible to evoke the humanist symbolism of the passage of time with regard to the Israeli-Palestinian context, but above all, the painting intimates that Selander, like Holbein, uses allegories in order to avoid the impossibility of truly representing a specific reality. *Silphium*, too, features Holbein the Younger’s painting, but in this instance the artist brings out the anamorphosis by rotating the reproduction. By showing the skull, she adds another element, as she explicitly refers to the duality that is inherent to our looking at the image and a historical reading.

Silphium was a highly valued plant that was used a lot in ancient days; having been overexploited, it completely disappeared in the fifth century. The plant serves as an allegory to refer to our time. According to mythology, the oracle of Delphi order a certain group to go into exile and found a colony in Cyrenaica, a green and fertile region, where silphium prospered to such an extent that its image featured on coins. The region, which is now part of Libya, was later left behind by other exiles, who wanted to try their luck elsewhere. Selander combines the story of silphium with other images she selected while she did her research in the Museum and archives of the Stasi in Berlin, as well as in the Museum of Natural History and Archaeology in Trondheim. Different eras (Greek and Roman antiquity, the recent past of the Cold War, the future perfect of Chris Marker’s *La Jetée*) and different places (Cyrenaica, the London of *The Ambassadors*, Trondheim) show us how humans manipulate nature, but as Holbein’s skull or the coins featuring silphium suggest, this undertaking is utopian and vain.

Finally, an element that appears in practically all of Selander’s films will allow us to conclude. The artist includes in the two films on Chernobyl images of the sarcophagus that covers the nuclear

power plant; in *Around the Cave of the Double Tombs*, the city of Hebron and the Tombs of the Patriarchs are rendered inaccessible with a cenotaph – a funerary monument that unlike a mausoleum does not contain any remains – that covers them; in *Silphium*, there are the ancient headquarters of the Stasi in Berlin; in *The Ceremony*, there is the crypt of Tutankhamen and the Attica prison that was the theatre of riots that were harshly quelled in 1971; the installation *Notes for a Film on Nature* presents itself as a film projected on a photograph of a former courtroom, which is now an exhibition space in which the screen is installed where the judges used to sit.

All of these places are, to different extents, sarcophagi¹⁴: the wasting away of the flesh, or in other words, the exhausted body and the shame with regard to history are latent themes in all of Selander's films. Yet, though the films denounce certain events and tragic moments in our history; they do not present a macabre universe without prospects. On the contrary, freed of the problem of the finiteness of human life – in *The Ceremony*, extraterrestrials quote Bergman's *Persona* and tell us 'no nothing, nothing, there ... that's it, that's how it should be ...' – Selander and Mangione commit themselves with 'reflected intractability'¹⁵ to *liberate life*.¹⁶ This vitalist force manifests itself in the refusal to reduce reality to an unambiguous representation – 'description is vandalism' the artists tell us in *The Ceremony* – and in the poetical composition of their images. In this respect, there is certainly the awareness that, by relying on the power of editing, it is possible to resist, though this never turns into a blind faith in images. As *The Ceremony* and *Notes for a Film on Nature* point out, 'history vanishes into time', but images will never pronounce the final verdict, because 'pictures are also mistakes'.

10. Gilles Deleuze, *Op. cit.*, p. 172.

11. 'Le jeu de Michel Foucault', in: Michel Foucault, *Dits et écrits II 1976-1988*, (eds. Daniel Defert and François Ewald), Paris, Gallimard, 2001, p. 299.

12. *Ibid.*

13. Jurgis Baltrušaitis, *Anamorphic Art*, New York, Harry N. Abrams Inc., 1977, p. 91. Tr. W.J. Strachan.

14. The word *sarcophagus* is derived from the Greek σάρξ (*sarx*) and φαγεῖν (*phagein*), which respectively refer to flesh and eating.

15. Michel Foucault, 'What is Critique? Critique and Enlightenment' in: *The Politics of Truth*, Los Angeles, Semiotext(e), 2007, p. 47. Tr. Lysa Hochroth & Catherine Porter.

16. See: *R comme Résistance*, in: Pierre-André Boutang, *L'Abécédaire de Gilles Deleuze*, DVD, Paris, Éditions Montparnasse, 2004.

