

Lina Selander

The Space of

Memory

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LINA SELANDER The Space of Memory

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look

In Lina Selander's art, image, sound and text are united with cogent consistency: looking is interrogated through text, word through image, and image through text. The questions about how we look and how meaning is constructed through looking are posed over and over, often through a deliberate withholding of the image, in favor of the voice.

A red thread, seen from the reverse side: Is it possible to interrogate looking by staging the looking anew? How does one criticize looking with a new form of looking? And does this not result in the mere reproduction of structures of looking?

no apocalypse

The questions that Selander's work engages with are large and demand space: the depiction of rebellion (the public and private pictures from the 1968 movement in *When the Sun Sets It's All Red, Then It Disappears* (2008), of death in the work *Repetition* (2005), or the limit as topos in *The Hours That Hold the Form (A Couple of Days in Portbou)* (2007). But when looking at these

works, one is struck by the silence—they do not assume a loud or apocalyptic rhetoric, but are instead quiet and reflective. Rebellion, death and the limit are not presented with their apocalyptic potential (etymologically, apocalypse can be traced back to the Greek verb *apokalyptein*, which means demonstration, a visual un-covering, and thus the opposite of classical philosophy's notion of truth), which would have resulted in a visual power struggle with the work's powerful subject matter. On the contrary, the spectator experiences a pulling back, a restraining gesture. In *When the Sun Sets It's All Red, Then It Disappears*, the words question the images and the images question the preceding images (through montage). As a result, the work moves forward and generates its meaning through attacks and puncturings of the same meaning that is being generated.

No apocalypse, but neither a withdrawal to the white rhetoric of silence—the muteness of negativity.

Discussing the work of the author Marguerite Duras, the French psychoanalyst and linguist Julia Kristeva argues that the *film-*

maker Marguerite Duras is not as dangerous as the *writer* Marguerite Duras. Why? Because the filmmaker Duras “uses film to consume its spectacular force, submerging it in elliptical words and allusive sounds until the invisible becomes dazzling.”¹ In other words: she uses the film’s weapon against itself—directs the visual force inwards, towards its own burning core, putting it at risk of being consumed by its own charm—and getting stuck in its own fascination.

1. Julia Kristeva, “The Pain of Sorrow: The Works of Marguerite Duras,” 140.

The rebellion, death and the limit are topoi that could easily be staged according to the conventions of the immediate pleasure that governs the realms of the imaginary, but as I stated above—that would be too simple. Instead, like Duras in her films, Selander makes visible the act of looking itself. The camera movements in *Repetition* that imitates the eye’s movement, the montage in *The Hours That Hold the Form* that together with the narrator’s voice ceaselessly directs the attention to its own irregular rhythm: the meanings come out of the gaps—and in the blinks.

flash-bulbs stitches throat-clearings

The best way to sabotage the enchantment that results from resistance-less viewing is to destroy the imaginary identification—the dream level of film—that puts the spectator in a trance. Such sabotages reoccur throughout all of Selander’s oeuvre: the reflection of the camera flash that stubbornly sticks to the images in *When the Sun Sets It’s All Red, Then It Disappears*, the stitches that perforate 117 of 146 instamatic images, or simply the letters, text that refuses to give witness to the images.

We also have: the page-flipping and throat-clearing in *The Hours That Hold the Form*—interruptions in the authentic testimony that point us straight into artifice.

testimony

“I am going to tell you something,” says the narrator’s voice in *When the Sun Sets It’s All Red, Then It Disappears*. This is the beginning of a description in which testimony, violence and looking are rewritten in new constellations.

The testimony as speech act goes back to the classic tragedies in which bodily violence could not be presented directly on stage, but had to be mediated through a witness who told the audience what he had seen. The act is completed only when the testimony is accepted by the listeners—when the speech act has received its “answer” in the form of a reply from the human community. The narrator’s voice in *When the Sun Sets It’s All Red, Then It Disappears* offers something that at first resembles a testimony: “Look what the damned revisionists have done!” the Chinese protester shouts, and the Western reporters flock around him like flies. When it then turns out that the protester’s body is unharmed, the reporters get upset: “That Chinese guy is a joker, a fraud!” The narrator’s voice concludes: “He showed them what they had not seen, what they could not see.”

In addition to the obvious questioning of forms of knowledge that depend on the gaze and the domain of the visible, this sequence addresses a deeper problematic, a dilemma that Horace Engdahl has described like this:

In order to be understood and to appear trustworthy, a testimonial has to comply with soci-

ety's public sense of reality, common sense. At the same time, the testimony sometimes runs counter to all common sense. In the same way, one can view the artwork's form as a deviation from common perception and an attempt to make individual vision legitimate against the social contract we call "reality".²

2. Horace Engdahl, *Ärret efter drömmen*, 193 [my translation].

In other words, that which finally constitutes the testimony as a truthful testimony is the remainder of incomprehensibility and radical foreignness, that residue of an experience which is impossible to translate into the flat language of simple mediation, meaning that every making-visible implies a delegitimizing of the testimony as testimony. At the same time, the spectators/listeners and the social community demand visible evidence; the experience has to be translatable into flesh in the form of an injury, a scar or violence, or else it will be dismissed as a bluff. But true testimony is silent. "The greatest enemy of testimony is not silence but patented explanations."³ Because as soon as it is made visible as something comprehensible, its radical otherness is lost: "It is impossible to testify from the inside because the inside has no voice".⁴

3. *Ibid.*, 193.

4. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony. Crises of witnessing in literature, psychoanalysis and history*, 231.

The violence is displaced. Real violence can be found not just with "the damned revi-

sionists” but also with the spectator herself. The violence can be found in her desire to see, and in her simplistic connection between reality and seeing. To see is not to understand.

move

In Selander’s work, the pleasure of looking is merged with a questioning of the same pleasure. It is possible to approach the narrative act in the same way. Selander both narrates and destroys the narrative.

How can a work show the traces of both Walter Benjamin’s storyteller and Thomas Bernhard’s story-destroyer?

In order to enter the space of listening and to gain access to the experience that the storyteller communicates, uninterrupted attention is demanded, but an attention that can only be reached by the circuitous path of distraction. The listeners who sit down to listen to Benjamin’s storyteller occupy their hands with one or another form of monotonous labor: spinning, weaving, sewing.

The time that passes—the story that is developed—has its manifest correspondence in the fabrics that grow on the audience’s laps. The price the listener pays for getting lost in the garments of illusion is the necessary distraction that makes her hands ache afterwards.

But in our time both listening and watching takes place in stillness. I let my body rest during the watching of *The Hours That Hold the Form*. But my hands still ache afterwards. Something has been worked through, something has been woven, but what?

In Selander’s work, distraction is an inherent characteristic of storytelling. There is always something that sabotages the spectator’s ability to catch the entire image—a disturbance that blocks my desire to freefall down and lose myself in the magic of the voices. A distraction that both diverts and is attention. It is not sewing and weaving that causes one’s hands to ache, but also activities like tearing up and cutting.

To lose oneself and then be forced to meet one’s own gaze: the movement between these two poles is repeatedly activated in

Selander's work. It is also the basis for the feeling of being moved.

To be moved might be derived from the acute experience of the in-between space between my factual position in a space—I am here—and my position in the space that the narrative conjures—but I am also there. Thereness is established (for example in the form of identification, fiction, illusion etc) when hereness is established (consciousness, disturbance and negativity).

It is this double possibility—to be both here and there, both absent and present—that enables the work to move the viewer profoundly.

And the risk? What is at stake? What price must the listener/spectator pay to be moved?

Answer: The price is this split. The ache of my hands. The split is a necessary but sometimes painful practice.

poetic, performative, political

Linguistically, Selander's work functions on several levels and blend facts, quotes, infor-

mation and testimony with fiction and original written material. It is a complexity that both concentrates and expands. How else can one approach an utterance like: “A photography of a bruise can be taken whenever” (*The Hours That Hold the Form*). Read solely as an assertion to be judged on its informational potential, it is a very flat utterance. But as a poetic statement it immediately becomes more interesting. “A photograph of a bruise can be taken whenever” can mean simply that a photograph of a bruise can be taken at any time. But if a poetic interpretation is activated, it can also mean the diametric opposite: a photograph of a bruise *cannot* be taken whenever. It is a challenge to listen to the silence and absence, the omitted negative. It is in the absence that the drama is enacted, and in the thought of why silence/absence is a necessary response to language that makes suspect an all-too-transparent, functional usage.

We come across one of the most drastic utterances in *When the Sun Sets It's All Red, Then It Disappears*. The narrator's voice says: “I want to be blind.” If read as a normal, informative assertion, this statement would be incredibly provocative, almost immoral, and

judged based on the truthfulness, absurd. If given a poetic reading, the utterance becomes more sensible, if somewhat uninteresting in its reference to an Orphic poetic tradition that in the end has very little to do with Selander's work overall. However, if we try to approach "I want to be blind" as a performative utterance, something unexpected happens. "I want to be blind" is an utterance that cannot be interpreted based on truthfulness criteria, because the narrator obviously does not want to be blind. How then can the utterance be understood? By reading it as the response to a silent agreement, an implicit provocation, which assumes that the more one sees, the more one understands. "I want to be blind" becomes the radical and irrational answer that is halfway outside of the symbolic order's either/or logic.

When thinking about how a work with a poetic/performative language can deepen and illuminate the artwork's political implications, *When the Sun Sets It's All Red, Then It Disappears* is the work that takes us the farthest. By letting poetic and performative utterances blend in to and corrupt the largely informative and documentary discourse, *When the Sun Sets It's All Red, Then*

It Disappears succeeds at the feat of operating at a deeply absorbing, ravishing level while simultaneously the critical challenge is never more than a breath away.

translation: Johannes Göransson



When the Sun Sets It's All Red, Then It Disappears 2008. Continuous colour double video projection installation with sound, projection screens, bench. Video 1: 9'15 min, dimensions variable. Installation view: Nordin Gallery, Stockholm, 2008. Photo: Sofia Ekström.

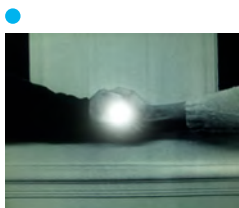


When the Sun Sets It's All Red, Then It Disappears 2008. Continuous colour double video projection installation with sound, projection screens, bench. Video 2: 1 h 31 min, dimensions variable. Installation view: Nordin Gallery, Stockholm, 2008. Photo: Sofia Ekström.

MEHR LICHT! On the Temporality of the Image and
the Word in Lina Selander's Work

Lina Selander's work is deeply engaged with the relation between word and image, and anyone taking on this issue also delves into the relation between stillness and movement. Verbal description of an image tends to arrest its movement; visual illustrations abstract a point in time from its duration. Selander analyses these media constellations with extraordinary complexity, without ever simply reaching a preference for one medium over the other, but rather shows how the image returns in the word, and how movement always exists in the still image.

Ultimately, her work asks “what is an image?” and “what are words?” and above all, “what is their relationship?”



When the Sun Sets It's All Red, Then It Disappears (2008) is an insistent work about the connections between word and image, which immediately reworks any apparent conclusions reached. The installation presents a soundtrack with a monologue about the intersections between the word and the visual interspersed with music, set to two moving images projected on opposite walls. One projection is a red-coloured, blurred image of sunlight through leaves moving in the wind. The other is a montage where moving images are frozen, and still images are mobilised. Film images from Godard's *La Chinoise* (1967) and from student revolts in the late 60s are shown as single frames, with their movement arrested. In a couple of cases closely connected to the word—a speech given by a student leader and a close-up of hands leafing through Mao's Red Book—movement is *decomposed* into a succession of frozen images.

These images are not stills, however. Any image in a time-based medium, like the video in this case, is given a set duration. It consists of a flow of light and will enter into the montage with the surrounding images through a technical device, which is most often the quick lap dissolve. This means that the arrested image receives another temporal dimension in projection. The many still photographs, like the famous images of Mao swimming in the Huang He, or posters and record sleeves, receive a movement through the montage, duration and projection. Consequently, the tension between movement and stillness is a central condition of the work.

This tension is further complicated by the fact that each image of the film is photographed with a flash reflected in the image. The first shot of this projection bares the device: A vinyl record reflects the image of the artist with a camera and a flash. This image of a technological device for arresting motion, the still camera, reflected in the temporal object of the LP record, displays the never-ending twists and turns in the relation between stillness and movement in Selander's work. The instantaneous flash of a camera is in turn submitted to the duration of the shot. The instant is given a temporal extension in the time-based image, while the flash etches into the image a marker of the instant, a point in time. This

relationship between the still and the moving demonstrates the complexities of the image once evoked by the film scholar Peter Wollen as “fire and ice”. The fire will melt the ice and make it evaporate, but ice puts out the fire as it melts. In Selander’s work, the movement of the image is arrested, but movement returns to give it a new temporality.

Following a strong tradition in the genre of films of arrested motion, as established by Chris Marker’s *La Jetée* (1962), Selander includes one image with a traditional cinematographic movement. Contrary to the case of *La Jetée*, this image is not one of subtle movement of an eye, but rather the release of bombs from a plane, capable of devastating movement. The monologue will retrospectively connect to this image in the discussion of the spoken and the ocular: bombs fall from the eyes.

Movement is of course strongly present in the voice-over, but the image also keeps referring to the sound technologies. The vinyl record keeps turning up in the image, as the sound technology historically so strongly allied with cinema as a temporal object, but its capacity for (almost) unlimited repetitions is also evoked by the repetitions of the same movement in Vivaldi’s Spring Concerto on the soundtrack. As an element in the images, the gramophone record is part of the arrested movement of the image, but returning on the soundtrack, the movement of the technology is released.

The opening lines of the monologue, giving the title to the installation, refer exactly to the ambiguities and the re-appropriations of the movement of the image. In linking a fixed position—*When the Sun Sets*—with a quality—*It’s All Red*—the title immediately adds movement to this constellation; *then It Disappears*. The connection between text and image are sometimes direct, at other times non-synchronous, appearing only in retrospect. The phrase ‘bombs fall from the eyes’ occurs long after the image of bombs falling from the plane, and serves to mobilise the image through the word. The slow fade-out at the end concludes the film with a black image, suggesting the blindness discussed in the voice-over. The idea of the mobilisation of thought through the word is a recurrent feature in the text, where blindness is called upon to allow for another way of speaking, another way of thought. This position seems to inscribe itself well onto the Western logocentric tradition, going back to Plato’s cave and the interdiction of images in the old testament, described as the “denigration of vision” by Martin Jay in his book *Downcast Eyes*.

It would, however, be reductive to understand the installation in such a traditional framework. Firstly, Selander’s installation relies on images at least as much as on text. More importantly, the words that could make us think differently are not the ones we hear, but unspoken words in the images. If “a word is what’s unsaid”, this is because what hasn’t been said is in the burnt-out white glare of the flash (“words that have left the image”),

or in the dark stain left by humidity in the image of Mao. The word is striving toward its material manifestation, and is never understood as the direct link to meaning, subjectivity, feelings or thinking, which is precisely what identifies much of logocentric metaphysics.

The final words uttered over the black image seem to search for the quality of the word as a purely sonorous material object, but as the work demonstrates on so many levels, the black image is not an absence of the visual. In neuro-physiological terms, darkness isn't the absence of light, but an activation of so-called visual off-impulses in the eye, and for this reason a fully visual dimension. A projected black image, with its material movement and light, also receives a signification within the system of the signs of the work. *When the Sun Sets It's All Red, Then It Disappears* depicts the black image as fully significant and visual, not as a gap or void. The dark passage between frames in the moving image—although obeying a different temporality in the electronic image than in cinema—is the very condition for movement. Movement in film and video is not to be understood as a succession of still images, but rather as the mobilisation of the black passages between frames, making the dark matter the condition for visual movement.

Rather than in the black image, the obscurity of vision lies in the white glare of the flash. The overexposure of the image, through the use of a device that usually renders the image readable but here eradicates visual information, is what obstructs vision. The idea that blindness belongs to an excess of light goes well with the ambition stated in the monologue, to show what one cannot see. If the white circles of the flash in the image are “words that have left the image”, the technique of the work is to evoke the absent words at a different level—within the materiality of the stain and the white flash. This is a technique of montage, showing what one cannot see.

The strong presence of the historical document in the images re-worked by Selander demonstrates a sort of ambivalence towards their relation to the past. The historical icons of the 1968 activists, so brilliantly prefigured in *La Chinoise*, and most typically in the images of Marx and Mao, are carved out of the image in the white stains of the flash. These images do not give a full account of a historical moment, they are always reflections of the revealing light of the present.

The historical properties of the image are contested, especially in the image of the Shoah. Subscribing to the idea that an image can only confuse and mislead, a group of writers and filmmakers (most notably Claude Lanzmann in *Shoah* (1965)) have claimed that no image—no visual imprint—can explain the ethical crisis that defines the extermination camps. The opposite position, argued by theorists and philosophers like Georges Didi-Huberman and Jacques Rancière, and filmmakers

like Jean-Luc Godard, is a belief that images are an element of montage, potential vehicles for understanding what one cannot see. The premise of the monotheistic interdiction of images in the Old Testament seems to endure in these debates, where the belief that the word is the road to understanding informs the interdiction of the image of the Shoah.

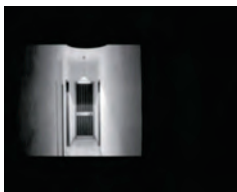
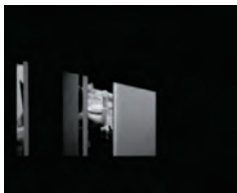
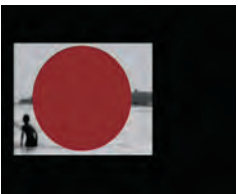
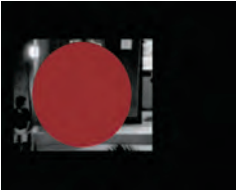
Another historical moment of contested imagery in an even more technological sense is the atom bombs dropped by the U.S. on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In the blinding white light of detonation, the city itself—the "Ground Zero", as the U.S. government named the hypocentre of their disaster site—becomes a photographic inscription of the bomb. The logic of the image as a historical document becomes reversed, as there is no image of the bomb itself, but only of the bomb as a photographic device. This coincidence between visual techniques and the war in the imprints of the city also displays the abundance of light as a blinding property. Where the victims of the bomb lost their eyesight, permanently or temporarily, due to the overexposure of light, the instant of the flash in the historical images carves out elements of their conventional explanatory powers. Instead, the image is invested with a reflection of, and on, technology and the relation of the image to history and the past, as well as to our social memory. The connections between media—the intermediary roles of the word and the image—are instead brought forward as the material conditions for the formation of social memory and the construction of a common past.

When the Sun Sets It's All Red, Then It Disappears inscribes itself on a set of questions that were central to the film theory of the 1970s, investigating the image as text. As Raymond Bellour has noted, the film is an "unattainable text", not to be found, because any kind of quotation of the image arrests it. The frame enlargement, the written description, the table and the chart invariably arrest the movement of the image. The notion of the still as a quote of the moving image is critiqued in the blind spot of the flash. If Selander returns to these issues today, just like Bellour does in his recent book *Le corps du cinéma* (2009), it is because the digital media has redefined the relationship between media, where the image and the word are stored in the same code. Just like the perception of darkness is secured through visual off-impulses, the movement of the image is always off in description. But what is off can give rise to new thoughts. This is what leads Bellour to form an alliance between the frozen image and the 'pensive' spectator, where the arrested movement can set off virtual images, where the logic of movement is short-circuited and left open. This is also the role of the word-image in Selander's work, where the stains of light obstruct historical assertion and the temporality of the arrested image serves to show what we cannot see.

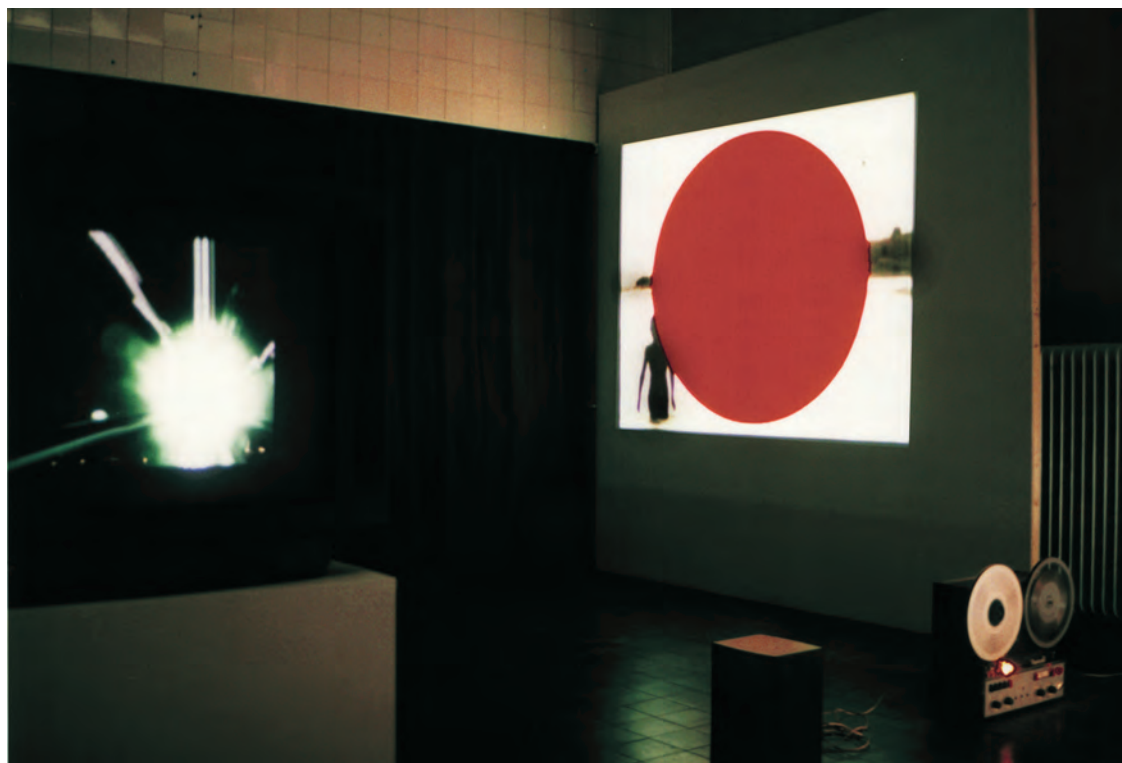
The intersections between words and images, movement and stillness in Selander's installation are highly complex and ephemeral. "Mehr Licht!",

Goethe's famous dying words, materialised by the white noise of the flash in every image, are followed by a fade to black in the end of the film, accompanied by single words as if testing their new dimensions as singular verbal utterance, only to end in the most conventional words of the monologue: "You know that I love you". Perhaps the alternative to this darkness of vision and muteness of words is in the forgotten image on the opposite wall. The vibrant movement of the sunlight streaming through the leaves moving in the wind connects directly to the 'reality effect' of cinema that astonished so many early commentators in the first years of the medium. But is such a rendezvous with the "originary" movement of cinema possible today, even in the reduced movement of the DV? Probably not. More importantly, as shown in the unresolved tension between stillness and movement in the works of Lina Selander, is the analysis of the temporality of the image, the word and the installation in an age of reconfigured media intersections.

Total Eclipse of the Heart,
2004. Two-channel
video-installation and
sound/ mini-DV transfer-
red to DVD and analog
tape. Description:
Video I: 4'20 min loop,
colour, sound. Video II:
8 min loop, colour, silent.
Audio: 19 min sound
loop on a reel-to-reel
tape recorder.



Installation view, Film-
form, Stockholm, 2004.



I move through dimly lit halls. It is October and I have not yet been asked to write a text about Lina Selander's work. That is still a few months away. When I receive the assignment, it takes me yet another couple of months before I can start writing. And then I only remember fragments: of dimly lit halls and a voice sounding through the rooms.

*Before I begin to work I read a review of the exhibition in one of the major daily papers. The critic dismisses *The Hours that Hold the Form (A Couple of Days in Portbou)* as incomprehensible, because the artist does not divulge important information about "whom the voice belongs to [or] what historical event the man is talking about." There is something about this text that I cannot let go: how it depicts an almost heart-rending scene, with the critic in the role of helpless observer awaiting the work to speak its truth to her, so that it may be savoured and adored. The critic waits in vain. The work will not be savoured, and does not commit to the representational logic at the heart of the review; it does not depict a narrative corresponding to an event in the world. The documentary form of *The Hours That Hold the Form*—the black-and-white imagery, the voice-over track—is precisely a form, a way to arrange disparate aural and visual elements. The work does not depict a specific event or experience, but insists on itself as experience. An experience of pain. What is pain?*

Every artwork constitutes a private experience, a singularity, at the same time as it assumes a plurality, a public, in whose name it is conceived. An artwork is a public utterance. It creates a link between singularity and plurality, but cannot itself define this relationship. The private sphere of experience does not let itself be represented as public concern. An artwork is a private experience. For Hannah Arendt, pain is the human being in his most definitive loneliness, a condition which eludes every testimony, every witness. In this sense, pain points to both what unites people and what separates us. It is unity and severance. The experience of pain is pain, but also to experience it from the outside, not being in pain but being severed by pain. Pain is in itself and outside itself: naked crying and helpless looking. Pain is the form spoken of here. A rupture; a suture.

What is an image? To ask what an image shows or what the image can show is to anticipate the answer by isolating a function. In Lina Selander's work the attention is directed toward the questioning as such. As if the image were inseparable from its own question; as if it directs its question to the artist instead of the other way around. The method can be described as interrogating a material, not by asking a question but by delaying its very utterance. The topic of this delay is far from obvious, and articulating it will be a simplification. Selander's work moves through a number of media and genres: She works with images but she is not a visual artist; she works with text but is not an author; she works with photography but is not a photographer. Perhaps one could describe



her work as film, as a cinematic experience. But that too would be a simplification overlooking the importance of sculptural operations and exhibition format. In other words, to classify Selander's practice you can choose: space, sound, text, installation, montage, film. Nevertheless, the work remains a question of the image.

The Hours That Hold the Form (A Couple of Days in Portbou), 2007

Over the past few years, Selander has produced a number of video works, sound compositions, texts and photographs united by the idea of a historically constituted and technologically mediated aesthetic material. This means that an image is not primarily identified by what it shows, but is treated as an artefact with certain material properties. It means that a text does not primarily create a narrative that complements the imagery, but is rather a result of the artist's interaction with a variety of technological equipment (hardware, software, recording devices). The question of image thus implies a physical and technical treatment of the image's materiality—a materiality that is inseparable from the image's physical manifestation as well as from the practices—or media—that enable the meeting between those mental and physical forms which constitute the image as object. To the extent that Selander's work produces

representations, these are also images of the technological conditions that determine the form of this meeting.

The Hours That Hold the Form consists of a video projection on a slide-projection screen, a reel-to-reel tape player, a couple of speakers and a few chairs. The work is a spatial montage, a combination of a digital image track and an analog soundtrack that remain radically separate on the material level. The two tracks are looped but of different length, leading to a variable constellation of sound, text and image with no stable form. The picture track shows black-and-white images from Portbou, the town on the border between France and Spain where Walter Benjamin committed suicide while fleeing the Third Reich. There are both motion pictures and stills depicting different places around the town (a restaurant, a train station), environments that in their mundanity are familiar, if unknown, to the spectator. Different speeds are positioned against each other as if the subject matter were motion itself, or the lack of motion. The wind in the leaves and a cloud slowly drifting by are interrupted by a train speeding past in the lower part of the screen. Swarming insects are positioned against the dusty, lifeless artefacts of Portbou's Benjamin museum. These images are put in relation to a man's voice, which calmly reports experiences of abuse, torture, violence and flight. The statements remain fragmented, never cohering into a comprehensive narrative. Text and image meet above a chasm. The combination is violent. Unbearable. The work remains broken-up.

What could such a work say about the fate of Walter Benjamin? What do we learn about the situation of the refugee? The answer is—nothing. What we already know about these matters overwhelms any possible knowledge which might be extracted from the work. It is quite clear that Selander's practice does not fit into a view on representation in which the image's autonomy is posited in relation to a perceived reality that is either reflected in the work or constitutes the material base from which it turns away or distances itself. This is of course nothing unusual. One can, for example, point to how already the Greek concept of plasma foregrounds the provisional aspect of the distinction between the fictional and the non-fictional. While the term fiction has often been associated with illusion, pure fabrication and fantasy—and posited as the opposite of the documentary ambition of offering a truthful depiction of reality—the concept of plasma calls attention to the plastic nature of narration itself, not as mimesis or illusion but as the shaping and arranging of existing material into new constellations. The artist's work becomes a matter of editing. Form becomes a question of montage.

In *What an Editing Room Is* Harun Farocki writes:

At the editing table you learn how little plans and intentions have to do with producing pictures. Nothing you have planned seems to work... You

prepare cuts and stage a movement so as to allow reediting, only to find at the editing table that the picture has a completely different movement, one which you have to follow... At the cutting table you discover that the shooting has established new subject matter. At the cutting table a second script is created, and it refers not to intentions, but to actual facts.¹

1. Harun Farocki, "What an Editing Room Is," 78–80.

How then describe the editorial practice of *The Hours That Hold the Form*? To begin with, an analogy is established on a formal level between text and image, as concise depictions or reports of the passage of time are recombined in different ways. The spectator quickly recognizes a modus that allows itself to be identified by what conventionally has been categorized as "documentary truthfulness". But it soon becomes apparent that image and text, whether together or apart, cannot be synthesized according to narrative conventions of continuity, coherence and progression. These concepts certainly have relevance here, but in a way closer to the form of a musical composition than to the aporetic fundamentals undeniably connected to the documentary: the idea of a self-identical assemblage in which the text is assumed to tell us what the image shows and the image to verify the text's assertions.

In *The Hours That Hold the Form*, the text does not domesticate—in Roland Barthes terminology—the polysemy of the image. And the image does not illustrate what the text describes. Rather, words and images make up separate tracks that run parallel to each other, and whose formal and compositional similarities primarily result in a strengthening of each other's disparate effects: While the image track does not show more than "a couple of days in Portbou," the soundtrack generates a wholly different set of images of violence and suffering. The fact that both text and image exist in the visual register—in which the former primarily consist of descriptive reports of definite moments—intensifies, and thus maintains rather than dissolves, their mutual tension. The assemblage of the two tracks creates a maximal contrast out of which the work's form grows as a provisional "joining of the unjoinable." The divide between experience and representation, between text and image, is staged as a "montage experience," a fundamental incompatibility that—to bring it back to Farocki does not allow itself to be planned, projected or predicted but which has to be performed, tested and, in an absolutely concrete way, experienced. Selander is obviously not interested in submitting the assemblage of image and text to an overarching model, nor is she interested in a critical questioning of such models or of the montage as such. What happens in *The Hours That Hold the Form* is rather a staging of montage itself as experience: dislocated, shattered and contradictory.

When the voice-over notes that "a picture of a bruise can be taken at any time," this is not just a demystifying criticism pointing to the limited value of the image as evidence. The statement also addresses its own ethical implications: Why and under what circumstances do we want to

believe an image? Are there situations when we are morally obligated to believe an image? And more fundamentally: Why do we feel that images speak to us and direct their desire toward us at all? As W. J. T. Mitchell has noted, it appears that despite realizing the irrationality of treating images as living subjects, we cannot help but imagine that they have a life of their own, that they indeed have their own voices and their own desires. It would seem that the iconoclast is just as seduced by the image as the iconophile. Both are caught under the spell of the image. This explains a great deal about why images do not allow themselves to be questioned directly, but have to be addressed as multiply, relational and shattered subjects. Here might be a lesson for someone who insists on extracting knowledge from a work of art: A truly critical practice cannot merely be a critique of images, but must also take into account what precedes this critique. Such work must address the image in its entirety—as concept, fantasy, object, material and practice—and most importantly ask: What in the image makes it impossible for us to shield ourselves from the image?

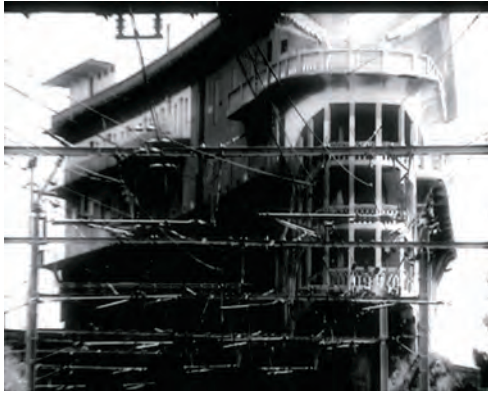
translation: Johannes Göransson

Juzgado municipal de Port - BCU
 DEBE:

Cta.	PERCIBO		PAGADO	
	Pagos	Cts.	Pagos	Cts.
Importe por una caja mortuoria para el difunto señor Benjamin Valtor ferrado de paño con varias aplicaciones y demas trabajos empleados la cantidad de Ptas.....				275.00
Por conducir el difunto al cementerio asia hombres.....				20.00
Por el trabajo del albañil de cerrar el nicho				8.00
Total.....				313.00

Preside
Enrique Espalala

The Hours That Hold the Form (A Couple of Days in Portbou), 2007.
 Continuous b/w and colour video projection with sound, projection screen, chairs, 15 min.
 Sound on a reel-to-reel tape recorder, 14 min.
 Dimensions variable.



Installation view from
Against Time, Bonniers
Konsthall, 2007.
Photo: Per Mannberg



How does one evoke the desire for storytelling, and how does one maintain this desire without allowing frustration over absent gratification pass into disappointment? Sheherazade, the great storyteller of *One Thousand and One Nights*, knew more than well: by ending just before the tale reached its climax, she could make the sultan's desire for a story greater than his thirst for blood. By extending, branching out, breaking up and resuming the story, Sheherazade finally wins both her own freedom and the sultan's love. The cliffhanger is born and so is the fractured and constantly deferred story, the pleasurable yearning.

1. Christian Salmon, *Storytelling: La machine à fabriquer des histoires et à formater les esprits*.

Stories can be deeply deceptive. Christian Salmon, in *Storytelling*¹, writes that humans have told stories since the dawn of time and that the art of storytelling is the driving force of social relations. In the 1990s, the art of storytelling and the power of imagination became increasingly colonized by the marketing machine of triumphant Neoliberalism. The story has become a way of formatting the consumer. She who wins the economic or geopolitical game is she who is the best at telling stories. It is tempting to merge Salmon's storytelling theory with Samuel P. Huntington's clash of civilizations and claim that our iconoclasm is built on "story-clasms". If one further examines how capital, surplus value, is produced and distributed, it is not difficult to regard the global economy as one big storytelling factory where everyone works in more or less well-written fictions. To tell a story within the Orwellian tale about globalization's and Capitalism's triumph leads necessarily to a situation *mise en abyme*, a "placing into infinity" or "placing into the abyss" as it is so poetically termed within literary theory.

2. Cf. Jean-François Lyotard, *La condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir*.

Jean-François Lyotard claims that the postmodern rupture destroys all metastories in favor of microfictions.² But the metastory lives on in the discourse on globalization's, Neoliberalism's and Capitalism's triumph. We must yet again step out of the large metastories and produce fictions that lead to friction. We must create histories that are satisfied not only with eliciting and sustaining the desire for stories, but which also enable us to think freely and offer us the possibility of creating our own narratives within the story. It is in Hamlet's spectacle within the spectacle that he manages to act and thereby change the state of things. It is in the representation of that life which he could no longer endure, and the action within the frame of this representation, that act and action come together. The large question surfacing today is in part how artists are to reveal the complex relationships of language, image and narrative to the ways in which reality is given shape, without simultaneously being caught in a Baudrillardian simulacra labyrinth which transports the intertextual games of language into an metalinguistic never ending myopia, in part how we as viewers can have space to continue to act within these narratives. An artist who has come far in his attempt to formulate a theory around the narrative functions of art is Magnus Bærtås, who points to the democratizing qualities of the "work story".³ There is something to that:

3. Cf. Magnus Bærtås, *You Told Me: Experiments with Biographies and Work Stories*.

a work of art without the surrounding story excludes us. But a work of art that reveals too much can also exclude, and there is nothing worse than educational art texts that try to guide the viewer in the correct direction. Instead, what is at stake is to invent new story forms and create narratives around the artworks' stories; stories that both envelop and expand each other and which also avoid the educational annexation's exclusion as that exclusion which follows from the withholding of the project's narrative.

Roland Barthes illustrates in "Éléments de sémiologie"⁴ how structural systems can become regressive when they rest on metalanguages that in their turn need to be explained by other metalanguages. Implicitly, he claims that even deconstruction risks becoming a hegemonic metalanguage that subordinates all other languages. Perhaps we need to leave deconstruction behind and invent systems that permit reconstructions between image, text and reality; perhaps we need to patch up that shattered mirror which postmodernism left behind. But is such a thing possible? What experiences can such an assemblage use to gain force?

Let us more closely examine Lina Selander's artworks. If there is one thing Selander has succeeded with, it is placing the image and the story in a mutual relation to reality without emptying this triangular mutuality of its mysteries. It is of course an art of seduction that is difficult to balance but which gives the image, the word and the stories they create or negate a dynamic that neither empties the image of words nor the words of images. Concerning the stories' contents, it is always difficult to know what they are actually concerned with, what is at stake and how we are supposed to react. It is exactly this uncertainty that evokes my desire for storytelling. Let us take *The Hours That Hold the Form (A Couple of Days in Portbou)*⁵ (2007) as an example. What really happened during these hours in Portbou? There is always a gap in the story, a hole in the image—the impossibility of determining whether or not the story is true or false. Against images of a train station, boats, mountain top, sidewalk cafés and signs of human migration, the calm and matter of fact voiceover tells of torture, speech that is overlapped by stories of drinking tea, a thrown ashtray hits someone in the head, wreckage laying like Christmas trees in the water, as well as stories of lost christening certificates. Here and there dubious claims appear: "A photo of a bruise can be taken anytime," and "A believable person is worth believing. You often believe people—it's often believable. Other times it isn't believable." If one does not know that the film is based on Benjamin's flight from the Nazis near the Spanish-French border, its polyphonic weave of stories appear all the more enigmatic. The narrative rebus takes us back to the fact that we actually do not know what happened in Portbou. Today opinions still diverge as to whether or not Benjamin died of a brain hemorrhage, a morphine overdose or if he committed suicide. The story also moves us forward, toward future tragedies and polyvalent histories.

4. Roland Barthes, "Éléments de sémiologie."

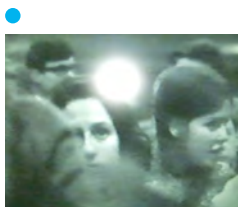


Selander's seductive "ebb and flow stories" are generated by a dialectic between subtracting and adding gestures, between on the one hand elipsis, negativity, reduction, and on the other montage, addition and appropriation. Unlike many other artists, she shows that, faced with a complex historical moment, one must interrogate both the visual narrative's potential to claim the truth as well as the interrogation itself. One must in other words reveal both the visual narrative's double nature as well as the dual relation of faith and doubt that people have to these stories.

Lacan claims that the unconscious is structured like a language, but we should not forget that language is also structured by our unconscious. Our symbols and metaphors most often refer to an experienced reality, not only to other metaphors and symbols. Concerning desire it is, in terms of language, metonymically constructed through chains of association. The analyst's task is to trace such chains back to their origins in order to discover what the patient is actually speaking about. Art history is filled with vulgar psychoanalytic readings where the condescending art historian attempts to uncover what the artist actually wanted to speak about, an act of violence excused by the fact that the psychoanalytic interpretation also is a psychosocial interpretation of an entire era's unconscious.

Since I do not believe in the possibility of any objective reading of works of art—such a thing cannot be done no matter how many interpretive keys I possessed, and no matter how much technical knowledge of their figurative process I have studied—and since I also do not think that a monogamous relationship to a single theory would qualify my interpretations or restrain that anxiety one initially feels when faced with a complex artistic practice, I here intend to weave a piece of my own history and braid it into this possible weave of work stories where Lina Selander's artistic practice appears.

I unfortunately do not remember when I first encountered Selander's work, but I recall our first meeting. It was in her studio near Slussen in Stockholm in the fall of 2008. She had just completed the film *When the Sun Sets It's All Red, Then It Disappears*.[●] I immediately fell in love with it, with its melancholic re-utilization of the visual language of the 68-movement, with her interweaving of individual and collective historiography. Her father had participated in many of the protest movements of the time and the film combines images from the movements' meetings with general documentary images from the same period. These images are in turn combined with excerpts taken from Jean-Luc Godard's Maoist cult film, the playful *La Chinoise* (1967)—a film that depicts a student movement's degeneration into terrorism and which moves between fact and fiction, between real revolutionaries and actors.



My fascination with Selander's work was based on the fact that I had just a few months earlier curated an exhibition at the Romanian Cultural Institute in Stockholm inspired by *La Chinoise*. The exhibition was titled *Playground Revolutions* and took as its point of departure this very meeting between play and gravity, between revolutions that turn out to be spectacles and spectacles that turn out to lead to revolutions. I had long dreamt of arranging an exhibition that in some way revolved around the sense of unreality that struck me when I was thirteen and, after having left Romania only two years earlier, saw the world I had blindly believed in literally collapse on the TV screen. The realization that I had lived in a lie made me for a long time thereafter doubt and question all systems I found myself in. Could I really trust images and words, when it turned out that all images and words that I had believed in during my first eleven years in Romania had been more or less untrue, that the Communism I had believed in was only a façade, a fool's personal game with people's lives and dreams? And hadn't the French Maoists also lived on a myth: they worshipped a dictator and lauded a cultural revolution that eventually led to an even tighter grip on the so-called masses?

What struck me and still strikes me about Lina Selander's deeply suggestive work *When the Sun Sets It's All Red, Then It Disappears* is a certain affinity between her and my own inherited doubt in both images and narrations, but also a fascination for this time that never became ours, these struggles that we were never allowed or had to fight. Does she, like me, share a longing for a political context where ideals do not let themselves be crushed by a seemingly severe and compact reality? I want to imagine that the answer can be found in the very first words of the voice-over: "When the sun sets, it's all red, then it disappears. But in my heart the sun never sets." What is this sun if not those ideals which shone over and united large parts of the 68-movement? Ideals that seem to have disappeared, but still might burn in some hearts?

The initial testimony bifurcates and creates a dialogue between an "I" and a "you" that unite in a "we". Thesis and antithesis create synthesis:

What is a word?

A word is what has not been said.

And you?

Me?

Both sides against the other...

Me...

No, you who try to tame what you do not forget.

My self. Now.

You: excuses and rejections.

And us?

We are the words of others...

5. Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualisme de l'autre*, 14.

This rhythmic and lapidarian passage captures the innocent joy that characterizes a longing to become absorbed in a collectivity and through it exclude everything else, but also the fear that this community—this “We”—will be controlled by someone else, that democratic forms will become totalitarian and petrified, or even worse, to realize that the struggle, the words one struggles with, are not one’s own but someone else’s. For as Derrida claims, we do not own language. Language owns us, it so to speak is “already here” when we are born, and remains “already here” when we die. When Derrida states: “I have only one language, yet it is not mine”⁵ he puts his finger on the de-centering mechanisms of linguistics, its alterity, the fact that one cannot appropriate or objectify language as if it was one’s property, but that one can be in it, get to know it, use it. Derrida grew up in Algeria, and it is tempting to regard deconstruction as a foreigner’s relationship to a language that literally isn’t his or her own.

I struggle with the feeling of existing in a linguistic homelessness, the feeling of not possessing my language, the fact that the Swedish I was thrown into when I was eleven years old is as little my language as the Romanian I was torn away from. When one is tossed or throws oneself into a new language one must confront the gaps that constantly appear between what one thinks and the linguistic costume one manages to give to one’s feelings or thoughts. The artificial and constructed character of language thereby becomes even more apparent. But perhaps everyone, regardless of whether or not they have left their mother tongue, experiences the constructed nature of language?

Selander appears to have a similar relationship to textual and visual language. A language that is both hers and not hers. Narratives that both haunt and let themselves be occupied. The post-produced material—images of a bathing Mao, demonstrations in Sweden, remote newspaper images—all possess the sign’s phantomlike quality of reappearing again and again like suppressed thoughts and memories in a language that belongs to no one. What recurs most powerfully is the suppressed Marxism. In *Spectres de Marx* Derrida utilizes the story of Hamlet’s father as the shadow that returns to cast light on what Hamlet has suppressed in order to create an analogy between the tragedy’s conditions and Communism’s constantly recurring ghosts in our time. Art becomes that darkroom which lets the real manifest itself in the imaginary. Something always remains which can appear in the lack of language or image.

Each image, each memory, real or fictive in Selander’s revival of the ghosts of Marxism, is punctured by a white sphere, the camera’s flash which creates an indexical relation between the post-produced images’ and Selander’s spatiotemporality. Can the white sphere of the camera flash engender reconciliation between then and now, between the past’s flat images and the living body? Or is the flash, this corroded sphere of

white, the blind spot that controls our desires? The obscure object of storytelling?

A corroded sphere of white.
The words that have left the image for a while.
That can return, not as strangers
Not as excuses, not as rejections.

Word and image.
Both sides against the other.
And you and I.
And the story of us told by others.

Bombs fall from the eyes.

lightning.
love.
sky.
White.
Red.
sun.

I want to be blind.
Look! Mao!

What does it mean to want to be blind? In this case a desire to not see in order to better understand. Also Godard sometimes separates sound and image so that we will think for ourselves when we see, and see for ourselves when we hear. Unlike Eisenstein's propagandistic montage technique which steers how the viewer should think by means of carefully selected clips, Godard wants us to piece together the story in our heads—for us and no one else to complete the production of meaning. That the class struggle won't just become a struggle between different images, but as in film a struggle between sound and image.⁶ That is the difference between a political film and a film that is filmed politically.⁷ How does one contend with this struggle? Selander returns to Godard's *La Chinoise* in order to reproduce that scene where one of the actors describes a Chinese demonstration in Moscow. He illustrates the story by letting the main character in the film bandage himself up in order to remove the bandage while he describes the young Chinese man's undressing of the bandage. If Godard works with resemblance, with the educational reenactment, Selander here works with difference, with the gap between word and image. We are allowed to see images from different demonstrations and times while we hear the woman's calm and methodical voice state:

I am going to tell you something. A few young Chinese students demonstrated in Moscow and of course they were beaten by the Russian police. The next day they gathered in front of their embassy to protest. A bunch of reporters from the West were there. People from *Life*, *France Soir* and

6. Jean-Luc Godard, *Godard par Godard: Des années Mao aux années 80*, 69.

7. *Ibid.*, 71.

so on. There was a student there. His face was covered in bandages. He started yelling. *Look what they have done to me! Look what those dirty revisionists did!* The reporters rushed over and started to take photos while he took off the bandage. They expected to see a damaged, cut-up face. Covered with blood or something... And he carefully removed his bandages as they took pictures. When they were all off, they saw that his face wasn't hurt at all. The reporters started to shout. This Chinese guy is a fake. He's a clown, a sham. What's going on? But they had not understood at all. They had not understood that it was theater. He showed them what they did not see and could not see. A reflection on reality. A reflection, a mirroring of their own expectations. One is replaced by the other. To see is not to understand. Maybe one does not understand when one sees and does not see when one understands.

Godard's *La Chinoise* reflects upon the logic of staged actions in scenes where revolutionary acts are imitated, and made ridiculous. As the protagonist in Godard's film claims, the Chinese protest in Moscow was a spectacle, but a real spectacle. The paradoxes exist everywhere, for example in one of the actor's lines: "I am not going to be honest simply because there is a camera in front of me." The statement is obviously contradictory, since he is honest about the fact that he is not intending to be honest.

The improbable also appears in the fact that Maoist and Marxist-Leninist students manage to live under the same roof and eat at the same table at the time when each of these groups conducted ideological trench warfare against the other. It's also strange that these leftist radical students choose to live in a bourgeois home and drive luxury cars. Perhaps one can see their decadent lifestyle as an attempt to avoid the dictatorship of political correctness, something that is also alluded to in one of the wall posters' slogans which constantly appears in the film: "A minority in a correct political revolutionary context is no longer a minority."

Godard's strength is his combination of theater, film and literature. His weakness is the exaggerated educationalization. Sometimes it sounds as though he has too much faith in the apparent veracity of photography and film. We remember all too well his thinly worn quote: "Photography is truth and film is truth twenty-four times a second." We more readily forget quotes like: "Film is the slickest fraud in the world," and "Photography is not a reflection of reality, it is this reflection's reality."

Perhaps it is also us Godard alluded to when he called the youth of his era "The Children of Marx and Coca-Cola." Perhaps we cannot choose between such diametrically opposed alternatives as poetry and truth, Marxism and Capitalism. *When the Sun Sets It Is All Red, Then It Disappears* ends with a wish to be blind. Blindness is commonly known as the domain of the sage (Homeros) and the destiny of the oracle (Pythia). In Selander's case, blindness appears as a condition for listening and for the unconditional conversation. Here is also a sensitivity to the fact that

the meaning of words changes over time and that it is about interpreting correctly, but also an awareness of the fact that interpretation can change the words of the future, undress them to the skin, liberate them from all hopeless connotations, reveal the fact that they are simply sounds and material. Building blocks for building a new common ground.

They sound like this:

I want to be blind.

Why?

To better speak with each other, we would listen more carefully.

How?

We would use language differently.

Words change meaning with time.

And?

And we would truly talk to each other, meaning would change words.

Yes...

Speak as though words were sound and matter.

– That's...

what...

they...

are...

On the riverbank.

Green and blue.

Tenderness.

Some desperation.

Day after tomorrow.

Perhaps.

Literary theory.

A film.

The Moscow...

trials

Red robin.

Rock...

and roll.

Et cetera.

Et cetera?

Et cetera.

You know that I love you.

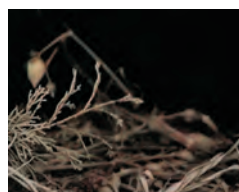
The text ends in a declaration of love to a “you”. What is this “you”? An individual? An era? An idea? When it comes down to it, this is perhaps the obscure object of storytelling: Just like Sheherezade, the desire to transform the other’s desire for stories into love and love into a story that evokes desire.

Time is the Wound, 2007.
Continuous colour video
projection, 1'34 min.
Sound on a 33 1/3 rpm
vinyl LP, 30 min. Dimen-
sions variable.

Installation view, Gävle
konstcentrum, 2007.



Repetition, 2005. Colour
video projection with
sound, 16 min.
Video still.





Instant, 1999. 1x1 m.
C-Print mounted on
aluminium.



Instant, 1999. 1x1 m.
C-Print mounted on
aluminium.

Now, it is in the very point where evidence is doubtful that artistic practice frequently turns up to offer its own answers. Hypothetical, fragile or paradoxical answers, of course. (Georges Didi-Huberman, "Emotion Does Not Say 'I', Ten Fragments on Aesthetic Freedom", in Alfredo Jaar: La Politique des Images.)

•

How do you remember? Under what circumstances do you remember? Photographs might prompt recall of an absent loved one, but we have all at some time searched our family albums and not recognized those we see within. Perhaps we know who they are and can identify them from a photograph or its caption—we might recognize them in this limited sense. But the photograph does not really prompt you to remember people the way you might otherwise remember them—the way they moved, the manner of their speech, the sound of their voice, the lift of an eyebrow when they made a joke, their smell, the rasp of their skin on yours, the emotions they stirred. (Can you ever really know someone from a photograph?) Think back to childhood. Can you remember it? Or do the images that come to mind resemble the photographs you have been shown of your childhood? Has photography quietly replaced your memories with its own? (Geoffrey Batchen, *Forget Me Not: Photography and Remembrance*, 15.)

In Lina Selander's work *117 of 146 Instamatic Images* (1999–2003) a series of photographic images is described. The texts are short, concrete, factual and numbered. For example: "47. Three men dressed in black on stairs. Staircase marked with white thread, railing perforated." The paragraphs bring to mind the short texts on local events in the daily paper, which are based on reports from the police: short sentences describing a scene, a place with (or without) figures. These reports are examples of some sort of involuntary concrete legal poetry and possess, with their highly compressed temporal length, a kind of photographic quality. The scene they report on can be contained within a photograph: "11:42: Three shop-walkers in Örebro stopped a suspected thief after a short chase from Stortorget to Tomtgränd, south of the library." No prehistory, no dissolution; they resemble snapshots taken without a camera, or instructions for scenes to reenact.

The texts in *117 of 146 Instamatic Images* alternate between descriptions of what the photographs depict and descriptions of the manual additions to the images; an oscillation between the three dimensional space of the depiction and the tangible surface of the image. Stitches hold objects in place, bind people together or to their physical environment. Perforations open the image and literally make it permeable.

16. 50-year anniversary party in lilac bower. Guests stitched around table.
[...]
23. Deserted office. Bookshelf with binders, desk with half-filled ashtray,

receiver stitched to phone.

[...]

58. Twenty-five perforations in white summer clouds.

117 of 146 Instamatic Images. This is an exact quantity, and a small collection. But of what kind of images? Is it a set of random images found at a flea market, or the documentation of a childhood? Do they refer to someone who possesses the memories and recollections that would make the images readable in a biographical sense? The name Lina occurs in the description of two different images, indicating a familiarity with them, but at the same time the text presents the images as if they were being viewed from a distance, making them seem strange.

When Kodak introduced a device at the end of the 19th century to visually document everyday life, it was marketed as a tool for archiving memories. "Photography is thus brought within reach of every human being who desires to preserve a record of what he sees. Such a photographic notebook is an enduring record of many things seen only once in a lifetime and enables the fortunate possessor to go back by the light of his own fireside to scenes which would otherwise fade from memory and be lost," George Eastman stated in 1900, referring to the Brownie camera. The threat of forgetting is as present as the promise of photography to materially carry one's memories, to remember in one's place.

In the 1960s, Kodak again significantly changed the conditions of amateur photography with the introduction of an easy-to-load Instamatic camera. The generations of the 60s and 70s documented their childhood with one of these cameras, or were at least subject to its images. If as an adult, you return to these small square pictures with their white borders and glossy surfaces in order to look at the shape of your former self, they seem, with their mild, pale colours and diffuse blurriness, to be a perfect medium for visualizing forgetfulness.

One day, some friends were talking about their childhood memories; they had had any number; but I, who had just been looking at my old photographs, had none left... The photograph is violent: not because it shows violent things, but because on each occasion it fills the sight by force, and because in it nothing can be refused or transformed. (Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, 91.)

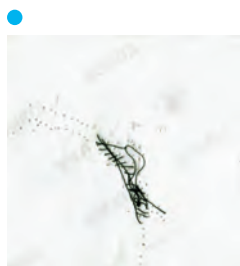
For Roland Barthes photography erases memory, substitutes the actual memory for a visual record, and in that way transforms memory into history. "Not only is the Photograph never, in essence, a memory (whose grammatical expression would be the perfect tense, whereas the tense of the Photograph is the aorist), but it actually blocks memory, quickly becomes a counter-memory." (Ibid.)

117 of 146 *Instamatic Images* offers 29 images without description.

Something is missing. The resemblance given by a photographic image is not enough, it seems. The fleeting, ephemeral borders of the transient phenomena in the natural world—the movement of water or clouds, for instance—are emphasized by means of a manual probing of the surface, which reminds us of the futility of our wish to remember by arresting time in a visual document. Photography seems to be inhabited by both the desire to “document”, to produce an artefact that registers space and forms and details at a certain time, and a desire to preserve the “picturesque”: to see what the world looks like as an image.

Spaces are stitched together—a railroad tunnel, a shower cabin or an entire floor in an apartment building—and thus block our access to them. Gestures are arrested in time by the joining of bodily limbs to space by means of thread. Clouds stitched together with a balcony parapet, or the perforated ripples of the Atlantic, seem to tell us something about the double view that is necessary to put into practise when looking at photographic images, at the same time as they are a reminder of the life and the movements that continue after the instant of exposure. The gesture of a person carried out to its end.

[P]hotography does not enhance memory—involuntarily, physically embracing and immediate memory—but rather replaces it with images—images that are historical, coherent, informational. To induce the full, sensorial experience of involuntary memory, a photograph must be transformed. Something must be done to the photograph to pull it (and us) out of the past and into the present. The subject of the photograph must be similarly transformed, from somebody merely seen to someone really felt, from an image viewed at a distance on the wall into an emotional exchange transacted in the heart. (Geoffrey Batchen, *Forget Me Not: Photography and Remembrance*, 94.)



In Selander’s *Instant* (1999) we see the traces of workings, manipulations and additions: stitches, tape, holes and thread. It is the reverse side of the images that are photographed. In addition to the traces of the artist’s interventions, we can read the signatures of the US and Japanese image-processing giants—a visualization of the compatibility between industrial image technologies and geopolitical aspirations. The private, or personal, is inscribed within a framework of industrial processing. In order to remember, one must take possession of the images, as Batchen shows us. But is the work of Selander only a private memory project? The manual additions to the photographs—the stitching together of people and objects; the perforations, the punctures—could be connected to the inability of photography to fulfill its promises. Instead of memory it gives us a blank space. The image turns its back on the spectator.

Enlarged, punctured. Images that have been denied the position of presenting a Barthesian temporal punctum—“this has been”—but yet seem to refer to precisely this unrealized potential. The holes in the flipside constitute perhaps a kind of literal punctum. From the photographic surface—the place of the image—through the photographic paper to the reverse, we literally see through the image. In Selander’s work *Reconstruction* (1999–2000) these holes become the material of the work. The traces of the manual additions and interventions—stitches, punctures—are forms that become a sound-track, made audible by a digital pick-up moving over the surface. A sonorous photogram? Here we are confronted with another reverse side. The negatives of the images in *Instant* are scanned and penetrated by light. The photographed object—the square paper—blocks the light, which only shines through at the sides and through the punctures. We are at the far side of the medium. The traces become sound, the sound becomes radiation, the radiation become image. The “zero” position of photography: photography as pure emission.



From the moment of its sesquicentennial in 1989 photography was dead—or, more precisely, radically and permanently displaced. (William J. Mitchell, *The Reconfigured Eye: Visual Truth in the Post-Photographic Era*, 20.)

Digital photographs separate the visual image from its material base, and make it plastic, mouldable, modifiable. William J. Mitchell regards the death of analogue photography as a moment of liberation, as a possibility to deconstruct the notion of photographic objectivity and closure. Objectivity, realism, witness: these notions are connected to the photographic document, the object that, for good or bad, has given photography its political force, its possibilities to make statements about the world. So the question seems to be: What does it imply to make photographic assertions about the state of things—political, historical, personal—when the status of the image as a document is questioned?

After Photoshop, realism is an effect, the result of a simple operation but based on complex computer mediation, on the hypercodification and normalization of the photographic sign. (Jorge Ribalta, “Molecular Documents: Photography in the Post-Photographic Era, or How Not to be Trapped into False Dilemmas,” 180.)

Photoshop was, according to Jorge Ribalta, only possible after the politicized critique of realism of the 60s and 70s. In such a genealogy Photoshop is the logical consequence of a “post-modern” photography. For Ribalta it is realism, rather than montage, that connects the visual image to social phenomena, that gives it power and guarantees the credence that the photo-document depends upon in order to be operative.

Photographs are a performative version of the real mediated by the medium. (Bernd Stiegler, "Photography as a Medium of Reflection," 194.)

According to Bernd Stiegler, it is of less importance whether the photographs are documentary or staged, analogue or digital. The meaning of photography is retrieved in the production and dissemination of the different modes by which reality is produced. These forms for interpretation are circulated by means of images and become manifest in these images: "The history of photography is a historical sediment of such visualizations of reality that seek to link the subjectivity of perception to the putative objectivity of the 'pencil of nature,' as photography was called by William Henry Fox Talbot" (*Ibid.*, 194.); "Photographs are the index fossils of historical reality and the history of photography is thus not only a complex history of interpretations of reality; it is also a history of perception. This function is exclusive to photography and gives the medium its meaning". (*Ibid.*, 195.)

If photographic meaning can be understood as sedimentation, and thus presents us with a visual "document" of our negotiations with the real through the history of photography, it is much like geology with its chronologically readable strata. Would these "documents" then be equivalent to fossils: forms and shapes of previously existing entities embedded in the deposits of organic life, which under a significant amount of pressure have been transformed into rock? (Notably, the first photographic surface was made of asphalt, a petroleum derivative.)

To convey any knowledge, the documents need to be put to work; they need to be activated by a viewer. As Molly Nesbit explains: "A document could not exist alone: it needed a viewer and a job. For a document was actually defined by an exchange, which is to say, by a viewer reading a certain kind of technical information from the picture and by the picture's ability to display just a technical sign. Both were needed for the document to become a document". (*Atget's Seven Albums*, 17.)

Consider the work of Lina Selander in terms of negotiations between the material (the documents; the fossils of other periods' negotiations with reality) and the form, the structure of the work. By creating a form that gives the viewer/reader a space to occupy that acknowledges the shifting, and sometimes incompatible, densities and historical contexts that the documents carry, her work allows for continuous negotiations. It is not a question of laying issues to rest; it is rather a matter of setting the material in motion, trusting the viewer with the task to look carefully. The relation between form and material concerns the ability of the form to carry a material, which does not imply a refinement of form (formalism), but concerns the shape that the form gives the material, a form that the material in its turn renegotiates, transforms.

What I am calling a dialectical document—after Walter Benjamin’s notion of the dialectical image—would be a work of art that adopts the form of the document and the strategies of the documentary, but that in so doing, would simultaneously—and self consciously—question their codes and conventions. (Sophie Berrebi, “Jean-Luc Moulènes Dialectical Documents.”)

A dialectical document is an ambiguous document, which in part confirms the existence of something (a representative function in relation to what is being depicted), at the same time as it gives evidence of the existence of something else (localized outside of the image itself). According to Sophie Berrebi, dialectical documents inhabit a space between neutrality and engagement, transparency and opacity, art and non-art. The question here is perhaps less about the realism of photography and the nature of its connection to what it depicts, than about the way in which images can function as an optics by means of which it is possible to observe different sets of relations—social, medial, geographical, historical. Dialectical documents are ambivalent documents, unstable objects that do not completely renounce their status as documents, even when they are a part of artworks. The instability of the documents is also a temporal instability; the dialectical documents open up for the possibility of different temporalities to co-exist. This temporal instability is, according to Georges Didi-Huberman, what makes it possible for the image to avoid becoming either only a “document of history” or “a work of art idealized as a monument of the absolute.” (Georges Didi-Huberman, *Devant le temps: histoire de l’art et anachronisme des images.*)

The first image in Selander’s film *When the Sun Sets It’s All Red, Then It Disappears* (2008) visualizes a poetics of layers. A photograph of the 1969 album *Tigerkaka* by Gunder Hägg (marking a beginning for the Swedish progressive music movement) is re-photographed. We see the inscriptions of the soundtracks in the vinyl record, then the dust and specks in the surface of the photograph of it. The surface is blank and the photographer is visible in the dark parts of the image in an unsharp reflection, as is the flash. The photographic images, the magazines, the objects, the film in the monitor, which constitute the visual material in the film, are photographed *en face* with a flash, resulting in circular reflections, burn outs in the surface of the image.



Re-photography, the act of re-photographing the same site with a difference in time between the two images, a “then and now” view of a specific place, was employed as a visual strategy to document changes in ecology as well as for documentary surveys. But what Selander is returning to is not the sites, but the images. Or maybe to the historical events via their

visual documentation. A recopy? To do again, to learn by copying, to administer an inheritance, to make something one's own.

When Yvonne, the country girl in Jean-Luc Godard's film *La Chinoise*, is asked by the director to define Marxism-leninism, her answer is: "When the sun sets it's all red, then it disappears. But in my heart the sun never sets."

La Chinoise was made the year preceding the student uprisings of May 1968, and much of the voice-over in *When the Sun Sets It's All Red, Then It Disappears* comes from the dialogues in this film. For Godard it is a question of inventing a new alphabet for the film. Still camera, the use of primary colours (which are isolated or refined), the presence of the director in the seemingly improvised interviews, visual accounts of the act of shooting the film,—these are a few of the Brechtian *verfremdungseffekte* which Godard employs in the film, "a film in the making," as it defines itself. *La Chinoise* looks into the political dynamics of its time, allowing different political positions to meet and interact. The film is all dialogue and argument. "All I had for *La Chinoise* were the details, lots of details I had to find how to fit together. I've got the structure for *Weekend*, but not the details" (Jean-Luc Godard, "Struggle on Two Fronts: A Conversation with Jean-Luc Godard," 25.) If *La Chinoise*, released in August 1967, could be viewed as an analysis of the coming revolts, *Weekend*, released in December 1967, seems to derive its revolutionary form from events that had not yet occurred.

In *When the Sun Sets It's All Red, Then It Disappears* we encounter black and white photographs from the Swedish student protests in 1968, mixed with the re-photographed scenes from *La Chinoise*, as well as images from magazines from the time. As the children of the '68-generation, heirs to our parents' progressive ideologies, we do not as Godard did in *La Chinoise* foretell a revolution of the political left, but instead consider these activities only after experiencing a neo-liberal revolution.

Selander's work may be regarded as a tentative experiment. Less an attempt to form a new program, analysis or historical record than an exercise in letting these two temporal layers establish points of conflation. It is a question of speaking the words of someone else (as the actors in *La Chinoise* speak the words of Godard), of saying someone else's statements out loud, and of exploring the unfulfilled potential of radical political aesthetics.

The flash marks the surface. It is an inscription by the artist, a gesture of appropriation that moves the material into the present. But it is also blinding: not only literally blocking the viewers' access to the entire image, but also blinding the document.

Godard formulates a sophisticated theory for photographic and filmic images in *La Chinoise*, acknowledging the structure and limitations of the documentary image in providing evidence of the “truth” of an event. As we know, lens-based media does not merely document a reality that already exists, but is also the technology by which we visually form, create and try to make sense of our contemporary condition, thereby creating the reality in question.

Something that becomes visible in Selander’s images is a materialization of the additional layers that the images inhabit, the space between event and image. When we look at the images from the end of the sixties, the interesting thing is less the access to events that have taken place, than the images produced since then and through which we look at the contemporary images. The document is not a given; it exists among a multiplicity of forces, and it cannot substitute for the event. This does not mean, however, that the event cannot be formulated. The two different layers, forty years apart, point to this act: the shaping of history, of the understanding of the event and of the historical understanding shaped by images, and the political investments in these images. What Selander seems to propose by re-photographing documentary images as the visual sources for the film is that it is not the photographic document that is at stake, but rather our desire to visually interpret and make sense of the world which we inhabit. And if we are to be able to do that, we need the fiction of the document. By pointing to the fact (maybe self-evident, but almost always neglected or hidden by a master narrative and singular voice) that photographic images continue to be uncertain documents, not fixed in time (not even after their fixation on paper), the work accentuates their possibility to continue to exert influence if they are again put into motion, activated by the gaze of the observer.

In photographs from the occupation of the Student Union’s building in Stockholm we see the light that made the images in 1968 shining through the window on bodies resting on the benches in this public space—literally occupying space. The reflection of the flash on the photographic surface adds another light, creating an extended time frame. The two sources of light, from different directions and from different times, are setting each other in motion, and with them the gaze of the viewer. The two sources of light at play in this film—the sun and the flash (the natural and the technical light)—at one point intersect in an interlaced movement, where they shift position between the separate images in the sequence and eventually take the form of the other. The sun becomes the flash, for a short time flattening time and space. This moment of temporal, punctual correspondence is not a final destination or a purpose, not a resolution. The positioning of the forms in the images between different lights reminds the viewer of his or her own position in relation to the images.

The gaze, then, has to be set in motion by the document. It is not so much a question of the education of the observer—or knowledge of the context of the visual documents—as of engaging with the form; that is, engaging with the way the documents relate and in the space they constitute. Lacking a fixed position, the document has to be challenged and constantly put to work:

A form with no gaze is a blind form. It requires a gaze, of course, but gazing is not simply seeing, nor even observing with greater or lesser ‘skill’: gazing assumes *involvement*, being affected that recognizes itself as a subject in that very involvement. Conversely, a gaze with no form and no formula remains a mute gaze. The form is required for the gaze to gain access to the language and the elaboration, the only way for the gaze to ‘deliver an experience and a lesson’, i. e. a chance for *explanation*, of knowledge, of ethical rapport: therefore we have to *involve ourselves* in if we are to have a chance—by giving form to our experience, by reformulating our language—of *coming to terms with*. (Georges Didi-Huberman, “Emotion Does Not Say ‘I’, Ten Fragments on Aesthetic Freedom,” 58.)

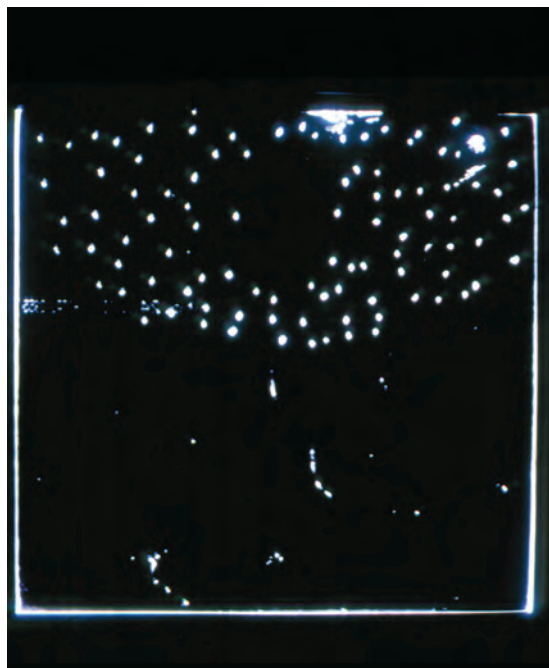
Selander’s work may be viewed as a specific kind of architecture. An architecture that is not built in order to provide answers, but in order to create a space for the viewer to integrate with specific questions, layers, statements and emotions, and to reflect upon the way our history and politics are shaped by our documents, reports and recollections. Well aware of the fact that criticism cannot exist without being complicit with what it criticizes and thereby resists, Selander invites the viewer to take a position *within*. Didi-Huberman writes: “Contemporary art is made up of multiple becomings. The ‘becoming document’ obviously occupies a significant place among them. Not only do artists *use* news documents—a way for them to adopt a stance ‘in the face of history’—but they even *produce* them at new expense, a way for them not only to look at the event, but to intervene and make contact with it [...]. [I]t is a question of re-engaging with the relevance of the ‘visual testimony’, both with regard to art (and the form it questions). It is then that ‘art-document dialectics’ take shape, and through the ‘crisis of uses’ of photography something like a ‘utopia’, or indeed a ‘documentary poetics’, is established”. (Ibid, 67–68.)


Selander’s work can be regarded as continual attempts to invent such a documentary poetics. By means of continuous negotiations with images, statements, conceptions and projections, Selander creates these places for re-engagement. If Selander creates documents, it is always in the light of other documents. This entails constant negotiations with media and memories and statements that constantly fall short of one’s expectations, which need to be reformulated and viewed from a different perspective. Perhaps it would also be possible to approach her work as a kind of performative criticism. Avoiding binary poles as document versus fiction,

unmediated versus mediated, Selander offers us a way to view these different discourses and take upon us the task, the political task, of mediating these statements, to “take them upon ourselves” (Didi-Huberman), to interact with them, to put the documents, history, in motion and to end up at a place both familiar and radically different, and, most importantly, where we did not know we were headed.

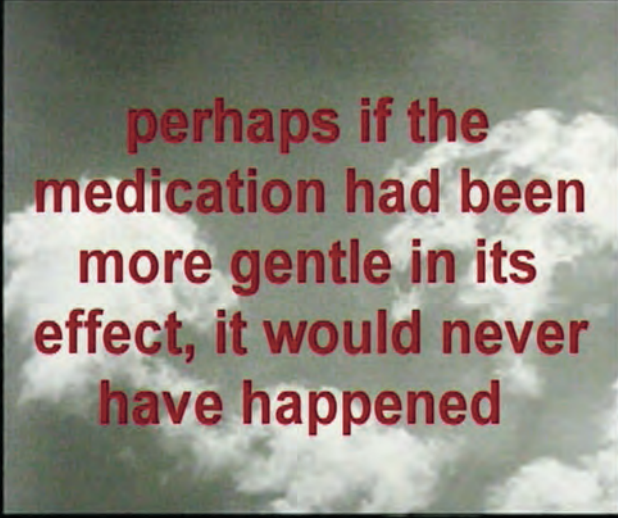
Reconstruction, 1999–
2000. Continuous video
and sound composition,
7'15 min, dimensions
variable.

Installation view, *Onedot-
zero*, Moderna Museet,
Stockholm, 2005.

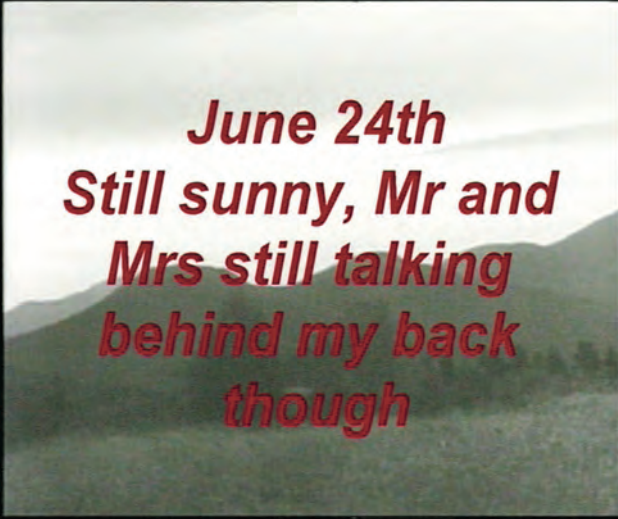




**of all the places this
is the one which is
best remembered
by me**

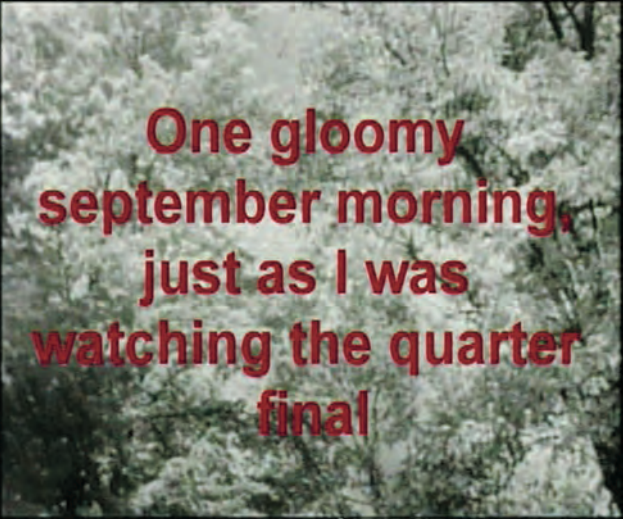


**perhaps if the
medication had been
more gentle in its
effect, it would never
have happened**




***June 24th
Still sunny, Mr and
Mrs still talking
behind my back
though***

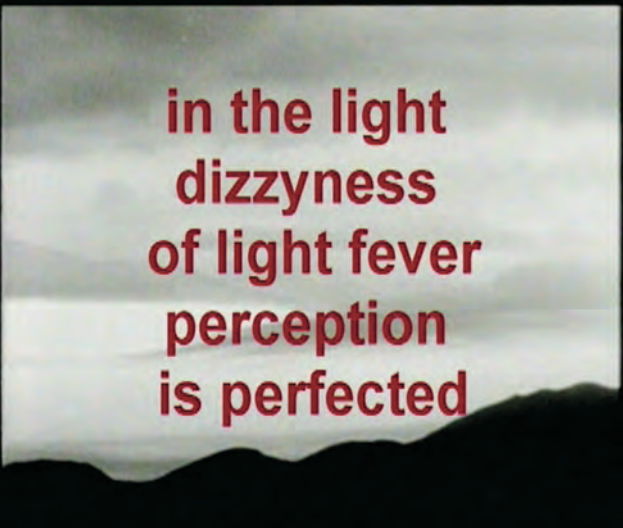
This is the Place, 2001.
Colour video projection
with sound, 5'30 min.
Video still.



**One gloomy
september morning,
just as I was
watching the quarter
final**



**I moved from one
city to another**



**in the light
dizzyness
of light fever
perception
is perfected**



1. I here refer to the installation of the work at Nordin Gallery in Stockholm October 2 – November 2, 2008.

2. See Trond Lundemo's conversation with Harun Farocki in Trond Lundemo, "The Image of History," 12.

"I want to be blind", says the voice on the sound track of Lina Selander's film installation *When the Sun Sets It's All Red, Then It Disappears* (2008).¹ At the same time, we see two images projected on two screens placed opposite one another in the exhibition space: a photograph of a desolate landscape, in which a small group of protesters brandishing a red flag walks along a country road towards the horizon; and a static shot of leaves that move in the wind, blurry and red, almost abstract.¹ These are the elements of the installation: one sound track, two image tracks. On the sound track, the voice reads a fragmented text about words and images, memories and histories, at times interrupted by a piece of classical music and disjointed noises. One of the image tracks shows a montage of still and moving images: photographs of activists, bombs falling, record covers, film stills. The other image track shows nothing but the red foliage, in a take without cuts. Between the three tracks, relations and associations, contrasts and oppositions appear. The sound track speaks of blindness; at the same time we see colours, landscapes, persons.

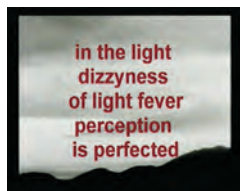
"To see is not to understand", says the voice at another occasion. "Maybe one does not understand when one sees and does not see when one understands." The "blindness" evoked in the text is here given a significance. It is not the lack of a human sense, but a condition for understanding. To see is not to understand, and therefore it is not sufficient to display, to expose the visual traces of something in order to make it comprehensible. An image does not explain what it shows. In order to understand what an image shows, one must become blind. Why does the image not explain what it shows? One can imagine a number of reasons. "Unlike dogs", Dziga Vertov supposedly said, "images do not have nametags".² Certainly, images are always, almost without exception, surrounded by words, texts, captions, paratexts, signatures, etc., which interpret them, accompany, name and legitimise them, and allot them roles and positions within institutional systems. Without its relationship to words, discourse analysis has taught us, the image is not "caught within the true", not comprehensible. However, the relationship between images and words is not obvious. It is never evident, never natural, necessary. The image does not prescribe, it has no nametag, it does not itself say what it shows, and does not point out its own position. The image does not explain what it shows, because it has no words of its own. Words must be added, and there is never any logically compelling reason to prefer some words to others. "Blindness", in this sense, is a precondition for understanding, because it is only by abandoning the purely visual and moving towards other sense registers and expressions—sounds, voices, texts—that an image can become comprehensible.

Another possible reason why an image does not explain what it shows would be the opposite: too many words. An image may already be surrounded by so many stories, anecdotes, texts, sentences, names, or slogans, that it is impossible to form an actual experience of this image

and establish a relationship to it that makes it possible to give meaning to the reality it displays. No matter how much one looks at images, one only ever hears others' stories. To be "blind" would in this case not signify that one is deprived of vision—perhaps for the benefit of some sort of higher seeing, a clarity, in accordance with the classical trope. But neither would it simply signify transcending the merely visual and establishing a relationship to words, on account of which the image can become comprehensible. To be "blind", here, would rather mean to break free from a visuality that is already overcoded—that is already weighed down by stories and names, that is already locked into image-text-patterns that point out its position and possibilities—in order, thereby, to reach a new access to the reality that it displays. It would mean rendering the images unrecognizable, establishing other relations between images and words, tearing the images away from patterns that allot defined significances and roles to them, consequently creating a space in which one can understand what they show and provide them with one's own stories and names. "Blindness" is the emancipation of images; it is to liberate the images from the others' stories to let them tell other stories.

The subject of *When the Sun Sets It's All Red, Then It Disappears* is the period around '68 and its politics and history, as well as Selander's father who at the time was a member of the infamous Swedish revolutionary group, The Rebel Movement. The photographs and the film images that are interconnected in one of the image tracks all in different ways constitute documents from this era and context. All the images have one thing in common: their centres are occupied by a sphere of light. There is a blind spot in the middle of them, a diffuse white point that resembles the reflection of a camera flash and that erases details of the image. "A corroded sphere of white", the voice in the soundtrack says. "The words that have left the image for a while / That can return, not as strangers." The sentences give an elliptic yet concise summary of Selander's complex, synaesthetic method. The "blind spot" is that on account of which the "words"—the others' words, the others' stories—may "leave the image for a while", in order then to "return", but now as one's own words, and "not as strangers". That is to say, it is the distortion which aims to render the images unrecognizable, to disconnect them from their given places and meanings, and make it possible to provide them with other words, according to other patterns, so that one may understand the reality that they show. In *When the Sun Sets It's All Red, Then It Disappears*, the work of memory and the work of historiography, Selander's personal history and the story about the era in question, are inseparable from one another. The work aims to create a spatial montage of images, sounds, and words, in which documents from an epoch that has been buried in myths can begin anew to tell of its reality, and in which the traces of a person whose history is intertwined with the myths of this epoch can be unravelled and turned into memories.

The problem of “blindness”, in its different dimensions—that images become comprehensible only when they are set in touch with other sensual expressions; that the relationship between words, sounds and images is never evident or necessary; that one can liberate images from the others’ stories and give them a power as documents and memories by rendering them unrecognizable and inserting them into other montages and other spatial arrangements—is essential and recurs throughout Selander’s work, from the subtle displacements of words and images, of the relations between the expressions of the senses in *This is the Place* (2001), and the more drastic distortions and translations in *Reconstruction* (1999–2000), to the advanced spatial dispositif, the dazzlements and contrast effects in *Total Eclipse of the Heart* (2004), and the methodical investigations into the recording capacities of a mnemotechnology in *Repetition* (2005). Selander’s works are ultimately all experiments with mnemotechnologies and historiographies, with documents and montages, with the modes and models according to which images, forms, sounds and words can be combined so that they are transformed into memories or produce other historical experiences. In this sense *When the Sun Sets It’s All Red, Then It Disappears* is an emblematic work. Personal memory and general historiography—the story about Selander’s father and the history of an era—are both active as separate levels in one and the same attempt to create a sensible and spatial montage that can give access to, tell of, and provide understanding regarding the past.



One could point out certain aspects in *When the Sun Sets It’s All Red, Then It Disappears* that return in Selander’s other works, and constitute central elements in her search for a “blindness” that transforms images and words into history and memory: the tendency to depict a reality that in an essential way engages the technology of reproduction that she employs; the attempt to distort images, sounds and words, and create other relations between them; the search to separate, multiply and spread out the elements of the cinematic “apparatus” onto separate sources, several screens, etc., rendering the space active as a significant component of the work. In *When the Sun Sets It’s All Red, Then It Disappears*, these aspects are present in different ways: while the static take of foliage in one of the image tracks does register a development that occurs at a certain place, it also constitutes an almost abstract examination of the registering technology, a way of engaging the temporal duration of the film and the optic field of the image surface; on the other image track the “blind spot” distorts the images which are contrasted and associated with the shot of the foliage and the events in the sound track; the two screens and the separate sound source activate the space and make the positions and movements of the spectator essential for the perception and understanding of the work. These aspects are varied throughout Selander’s other films and installations.

Lumière

A number of Selander's works include or consist exclusively of images that only seem to register a reality, the course of time at a certain location, but where the images' motifs—the objects and the events in front of the camera eye, but also conditions of light, camera angles, focus, etc.—at the same time seem to be chosen specifically because they engage the film technology in an essential way, force it to expose its qualities and limitations. The most important, even programmatic example of this would be the minute observations of the insides of different columbaria in *Repetition*. In less spectacular ways, however, one finds the same tendency in works such as *This is the Place*, *Total Eclipse of the Heart* and *The Hours That Hold the Form (A Couple of Days in Portbou)* (2007).[•] These films and film installations have their own topics, forms of composition and rhythms, yet each one of them shows phenomena which seem to aim in the first hand to expose the film's own temporal duration, or to engage the surface of the image in its entirety. We see trains that traverse the screen, but we also, perhaps above all, see the image track's own movement and time; we see a myriad of ants that crawl across the ground, swarms that fill the air and flocks of birds that are thrown across the sky, but we also see marks, points, contrasts, optical effects that spread over the surface of the image and activate its smallest elements. These images record a reality, but they do so because the image of this reality also exposes the abilities and capacities of the recording technology. One could call this aspect in Selander's work the Lumière aspect. For the Lumière brothers, cinematography was simply a technology that could inscribe time, history and life itself in its very movement, onto a material support, and whose scientific or spectacular use remained to be specified. And the choice of motifs for the films—the launch of a huge ship that fills the surface of the image, trains that traverse the screen, workers that leave the factory—also served to expose what people really came to see: the cinematograph.

Repetition is Selander's most important work in this regard. It does not only record a reality at the same time as it displays an acute awareness about the qualities of the recording technology. It also makes film's ability to preserve the traces of the past its explicit theme. December 30, 1895, two days after the Lumière brothers' first public screening of their invention in the basement of the Grand Café on Boulevard des Capucines, an anonymous critic wrote in the Paris daily *La Poste*: "When these devices become available for the public, when everyone will be able to photograph their loved ones, not only static objects but with their movements, their actions, with their familiar gestures and their words on their lips, then death will cease to be absolute"³ Half a century later, André Bazin makes the same idea the fundament of his film ontology and situates film



3. "La mort cessera d'être absolue," 41.



27 *Kilometer Drawing*,
2002. B/w video with
sound, 7'15 min.
Video still.

4. André Bazin, "Ontologie de l'image photographique," 11.

in a history that leads back past photography, painting and sculpture, all the way to the mummies and the Egyptian embalming techniques, which "tear away" the dead from the flow of time and "anchor him in life".⁴ That "death will cease to be absolute" is also the dream which is, in the final instance, at the basis for the small practices and rituals of which Selander records the traces in *Repetition*. The film consists of a sequence of takes of columbaria in the cemetery in the town Portbou, situated on the border between Spain and France. The sequences are shot with a handheld mini-DV camera, and the takes all move from a point just outside of the small columbaria, in towards their interiors, where they carefully explore the walls of the chambers and zoom in to extreme close-ups of burnt-out candles, old bouquets of flowers, crushed vases, overturned icons, etc. However, the takes show more than just desolate grave chambers and the remains after memorial rites. The film's subject is also the digital video camera itself, its treatment of light, its autofocus, and its image resolution. When the camera is placed outside of the columbaria, the aperture adjusts to the light conditions of the time of the day and the place, to the sunlight that blazes on the wall of the chambers. The columbaria are dark, they form an unarticulated, informationless blackness surrounded by the surface of the white wall. When the camera approaches the dark interiors of the columbaria, the aperture adjusts to the new light conditions and the chamber opens up to the image: we see the small space, its inner walls, the different objects, the weeds. The 16-minute film repeats again and again the same movement in towards the obscure chambers of the columbaria. One can point out two things regarding *Repetition*. First, that it establishes a parallel, an analogy between two radically different forms of mnemotechnology, two ways of preserving the traces of the

past: the columbarium (a monument to a person's life), and the digital video camera (a technology that records light and movement). When the camera penetrates into the interior of the chamber, the aperture opens towards the interior of the camera, which makes the chamber open itself up to the film and its viewers. Camera and columbarium seem to directly correspond to one another: the camera is a columbarium, the columbarium a camera (*camera obscura*: it has certainly not escaped Selander that "camera" and "chamber" are one and the same word). The second thing one can point out is that the film accounts for a sort of simple, indexical relationship. A relation of cause and effect is traced from a person and the columbarium that has been established to her memory, to the technology that records light's encounter with this chamber, and to the images that this recording process in turn results in. "Death ceases to be absolute": a causal chain links the life of the buried person to the spectator in front of Selander's film. *Repetition* seems to linger upon and return to the fascination for this banal yet vertiginous indexicality.

Another group of Selander's film works is based on the same basic self-reflexivity, the same idea of depicting a reality that at the same time makes the depicting technology expose itself, but here the technique becomes more abstract and stylised. *27 Kilometer Drawing* (2002), *A Thousand Sublime and Heroic Men* (2002), and *Inner Pond* (2003) are all in the most fundamental sense images of movement. The three works are based on the same footage: a continuous take of electric wires flashing by a train window. In *27 Kilometer Drawing*, this material is treated in the simplest way: the colours are inverted and all details, except for the wires, are deleted. What remain are white horizontal and diagonal lines that bounce up and down against a black background, accompanied by ethereal sounds on the sound track. The formal exercise is radicalised in *Inner Pond*, where Selander also replaces the traditional film dispositif with another spatial arrangement. The rectangle of the film screen is bent into a circle, transforming the bouncing horizontal and diagonal lines into circles and curves that move in towards and out from the circle's centre. This circle is then coloured in different hues and projected down from the ceiling onto the floor; on the sound track a piece by Tallis is played backwards. *A Thousand Sublime and Heroic Men*, Selander's only clearly feminist work, is a sculpture consisting of three video monitors piled onto one another. On each of the monitors, the same image track as in *27 Kilometer Drawing* is shown, with the difference that it now shifts in colour, the three monitors constantly forming different chromatic constellations. With its slightly sarcastic title, and ironic yet powerful visual rhetoric, the work alludes not only to Newman's painting, but also to a certain stylistic austerity that in many instances was characteristic for postminimalism's and early video art's examinations into the conditions of the "medium"—a tradition that Selander at the same time belongs to and distances herself from.



Installation view, Tbilisi History Museum, 2004.

Godard

27 Kilometer Drawing, *Inner Pond*, and *A Thousand Sublime and Heroic Men* all show a reality that in turn exposes the qualities of the recording technology. However, the distortions of the images in these works also point towards another central aspect of Selander's work: the problem of "blindness", the tendency to rework and distort images, words and sounds, and establish new relations between them, in order to have access to memories and tell other stories. One could call this the Godard aspect, not only because Selander directly quotes Godard, or because her treatment of screen texts sometimes resembles his, but also, in a more general fashion, because Godard is the "modern" filmmaker who, in his work, has pushed the exploration of the political and historiographic possibilities of cinematographic montage to the farthest, from *Les Carabiniers* and *Le Gai savoir* to *Histoire(s) du cinéma* and *Voyage(s) en utopie*. Perhaps one could say that what Selander seems to find in Godard is the fundamental idea that a film is a way of organizing the sense impressions and semiotic systems with which a person relates to and interprets reality—reality is a montage of images, sounds and words—and that, by disconnecting these sense impressions and signs from their given relations to each other and recombining them in other ways, one can learn to understand reality anew.

When the Sun Sets It's All Red, Then It Disappears is in significant parts a collage of elements from *La Chinoise*, Godard's film about Maoism, pedagogy and theatre from 1967: the title and almost the full text in the soundtrack are borrowed from the dialog of *La Chinoise*, and the image track contains a number of stills from the same film. However, *When the Sun Sets It's All Red, Then It Disappears* is not in the first hand a work about or a homage to Godard. *La Chinoise*, rather, has the role of a privileged document regarding the period and the context with which Selander's work deals, a document that belongs to and participates in the movements of the era, at the same time as it constitutes an advanced attempt at analyzing and reconstructing their logic. As Jacques Rancière has pointed out in his text on Godard's politics, *La Chinoise* has an interesting, even emblematic reception history: when it was released, it was accused of showing spoiled brats who played revolution in their parents' bourgeois apartment, out of touch with the reality of class struggle; ten years later it was celebrated for the clarity with which it predicted the student riots and the terrorist violence of the left wing extremists.

However, the five characters' "separation" from the "reality of class struggle" in *La Chinoise* is, in fact, inscribed into the film's Maoist program. The bourgeois apartment in which the protagonists are isolated becomes a place outside of everyday politics and its language, in which they are

forced to learn everything anew and reconstruct reality and its arrangement of images and words in accordance with a certain Maoist doctrine. Which does not entail that one can dismiss Godard's film as naive agit-prop, but on the contrary points out how sophisticated the aesthetic possibilities of this Maoism in fact were—something that Selander is highly aware of. In her work, Selander gives a prominent role to a famous sequence in Godard's film, where Jean-Pierre Léaud's character, the actor Guillaume, tells an anecdote about a Chinese protester in Moscow, who with a bandage around his head gets in front of the Western reporters' cameras proclaiming: "Look what those dirty revisionists did!". When the demonstrator takes off the bandage, everyone expects to see a bloody, cut-up face, but it turns out that he is completely unharmed, which causes a scandal: "This Chinese guy is a fake. He's a clown, a sham. What's going on?" What the reporters did not understand, explains Guillaume, was that this was theatre and not reality. "The political activist is like an actor", Rancière writes, "his work is not to show the horrors that can be seen, but to expose that which cannot be seen".⁵ In Godard, this anecdote has the function to account for the actor's, and, by extension, the film's political and pedagogical force to expose new relations and separations, to give the images new significances and make the words show a reality that does not yet exist. It testifies to an epoch's dream of a political art that, by rearranging signs and impressions, can educate a new experience of another common world. At the same time, Selander uses the anecdote against its own logic, in order to give expression to her own methodical "blindness": her disjunction between seeing and understanding, her search to liberate the images from the histories with which they are associated and activate their memorial powers.

When the Sun Sets It's All Red, Then It Disappears is the only work by Selander that directly quotes Godard. But a number of her other films, image series and installations seem to be involved in a silent dialog with Godard's montage experiments. "Si tu veut voir le monde, ferme tes yeux, Rosemonde", "If you want to see the world, shut your eyes, Rosemonde",⁶ says the character Patricia in the sister film of *La Chinoise*, *Le Gai savoir*, shot in the autumn of 1967 and edited on the other side of May, in the summer of 1968—a film in which Godard further radicalises his exploration of the film's analytic and pedagogical, political power, its ability to dismantle sensory experience into its elements and remount them according to new configurations. Patricia, isolated together with Léaud's Émile in a black space, a "zero point" from which they can study the relations of images and words, shuts her eyes and the film cuts to tracking shots of city streets. "I see it. I understand it", it is written in red on the screen in Selander's one-channel film *This Is the Place*, at the same time as the sound track, which was previously silent, starts to play a piece by Mahler. Seeing is connected to understanding in the screen text, the film's only discursive element, but while we simultaneously see brief shots of a tree in strong wind, it is the sound that is the film's

5. Jacques Rancière, "Le rouge de La Chinoise: politique de Godard," 195.

6. The phrase is a quotation from Jean Giraudoux's novel *Suzanne et le Pacifique* from 1921, but Godard has, characteristically, distorted the original, replacing Giraudoux's "Si tu veut *découvrir* le monde, ferme tes yeux" (which can be understood as a way of sharpening the perception of the other senses) with the direct contradiction "Si tu veut voir le monde, ferme tes yeux". [My italics.]

other prominent element. *This Is the Place* in many ways appears to be a formal exercise, where Selander searches for a form of composition that can separate and contrast the film's elements, but at the same time hold them together in a suggestive, emotional movement. Perhaps it would be possible to perform a careful reading of the text fragments shown on the screen (allusions of murder; memories of travels and a depression; diary notes speak of a monotonous everyday existence), and interpret the different images and sequences in the image track (whose material is sampled from Leo Hurwitz's semi-documentary emancipation drama *Native Land* from 1942). However, the significances of the single elements and the separate tracks are assimilated into and transgressed by the assembled, suggestive force of the juxtaposition of the images, the text fragments, and the sentimental thrust of the music. "In the light dizziness of light fever perception is perfected", says the final text fragment of the film. *This Is the Place* seems to aim for a subtle reorganization of the senses that creates an enhanced, "feverish" perception. It is Selander's most seductive work, at the same time as it is inscribed into her project to find a form of montage that can give access to other experiences of memories and histories. "A mix of method and sentiment", says Patricia in *Le Gai savoir*. "Yes", answers Émile, "I have finally found these words to define the images and the sounds".

"The eye must listen before it sees", says Patricia at another point, at the end of a dialog about sound, image and memory, about the difficulties in recreating a sound, since the image with which it is associated lays claim to the experience of recollection. In order to remember a sound, one must therefore displace, distort seeing. Selander's *Reconstruction* draws the most extreme, almost absurd consequences of the idea of the relationship between memory and synaesthetic displacements and translations. The work consists of a film that can be presented on one or several screens, showing white, abstract patterns—lines and points—against a black background. The only moving element in the images is a red spot that traces the upper edge of the screen, from left to right. The sound track plays ethereal sounds, digital howls from a wide frequency spectrum. The film has been produced according to an elaborate logic. Selander has taken images from her photo album and sewn in them, linking together motifs and elements. "Sewn man silhouette in front of villa." Red thread above the house walls. Twilight. "Sleepover in a wind shelter. Blond boy's jaw sewn onto sleeping bag", it says in "117 of 146 instamatic shots", a separate text that consists of descriptions of these images, and that will later be included in the sound track of *Total Eclipse of the Heart*. Selander has then scanned the backs of these photographs, which only show threads and perforations against a white background, inverted them, and subsequently inserted these abstract images into a sound program that translates the points and the lines into noises. The film shows these inverted images in sequence, the red spot visualizing which segment of the image is being "replayed" in the sound track.

Reconstruction appears in part to be a programmatic work, which in a demonstrative fashion accounts for Selander's method: one can only have access to the reality shown in the photo album's images by distorting these images and translating them into other sense registers, by intervening in the images' motifs and transforming the visible into sound. At the same time, it is a work that pushes this method to an extreme endpoint: the distortion is so drastic that all information is lost. To the extent that it is a question of a work of remembrance and not only of an elaborate, exaggerated technique for producing abstract images and sounds, this work of remembrance is exclusively personal. The spectator has no access to the images and their possible stories. The reconstruction of memory becomes the destruction of all communication.

The film installation *The Hours That Hold the Form* is situated between the poles of *This Is the Place* and *Reconstruction*. There is, in this work, an effort to make the elements of the film form a common, suggestive movement, but in the montage, the assembled emotional force does not supersede the singularity of the images and the sounds. And there is a search to break apart and distort the image-sound-relations, but this distortion never becomes so radical that the elements are emptied of information. "What one must find is free images and sounds", Patricia says in the beginning of *Le Gai savoir*, in a dialog where the protagonists present the film's three-stage method: to collect images and sounds; to dismantle, criticise, reduce and assemble them anew; to fabricate two or three models for their future use. *The Hours That Hold the Form* is based on two sources. The image material originates from Selander's visit to Portbou, the border town where Walter Benjamin took his life on escape from the Nazis on September 26, 1940. The images are, with one exception, black-and-white, both still and moving, and mostly show empty, desolate environments: a marshalling yard; trains that traverse the screen; clouds and mountains filmed from an airplane window; interiors from the abandoned, decayed Benjamin Museum; a swarm; bushes and trees shot with sharp lights during nighttime, etc. (It would not be impossible to establish a catalogue of recurring motifs in Selander's work.) In the sound track, a male voice reads a fragmentary text that relates more or less nightmarish scenes of persecution, border-passing and flight. The image track and the sound track are, in the installation, separated in a clear, demonstrative fashion. The sound comes from its own source, a reel-to-reel tape recorder placed in front of the screen in the exhibition space, and the image and sound tracks are of unequal length (14 and 15 minutes, respectively), and looped, so that all relations, encounters, or contrasts between events in the two tracks occur at random. This technique has a number of effects. On the one hand, it has a critical, expository function: it shows the elements of the cinematic "apparatus" rather than hiding them behind continuity montage and traditional projection arrangements. On the other hand, of course, it means that the artist has limited her proper control over the montage, over the composition of

the film: she cannot work with exact confrontations and correspondences between elements in the two tracks. At the same time, it entails a certain, relative freedom. The separate tracks are not dependent on each other; they can establish their proper flows, their own rhythms, pulses. However, this reciprocal semi-autonomy also forces the sequences of images and words to justify themselves, to carry their own development. In this open or free arrangement—the cinematic elements themselves are on display, and the film tracks are independent of each other and follow their own logics—*The Hours That Hold the Form* advances slowly, in a melancholic, at once shattered and concerted movement, in a relation which, since none of the film's constitutive elements can fall back on any other, is held together by the very force of its separation, its non-identity.

Syncinéma

In the earlier installation *Total Eclipse of the Heart*, this disjunction between the elements and the tracks of the cinematic apparatus is even more drastic. Here, however, this also leads to a more overt dispersion in the space that makes the spectator's positions and movements essential to the composition of the work. *Total Eclipse of the Heart* consists of two image tracks, one projected onto a large screen and one shown on a smaller monitor, as well as a sound track replayed from a reel-to-reel tape recorder.⁷ The image track shown on the monitor consists of a rather high-paced montage of images from *Native Land* (recycled a second time from *This Is the Place*); images that seem to be shot during different travels, from cars, airplanes, hotel rooms; as well as images of foliage, trains, ants that crawl across the ground. The image track projected onto the screen seems to consist mainly of materials from the same sources, with the difference that the screen is here to the largest part occupied by a red sphere covering the images' motifs. In the sound track a male voice reads the text "117 of 146 instamatic shots"—that is, short descriptions of the photographs which are at the basis of *Reconstruction*. Just as *Reconstruction* and *This Is the Place*, *Total Eclipse of the Heart* seems above all to treat a formal problematic. Here, however, the aim is to activate the space and set a constellation of dazzlements, separations and distances in play. There is no apparent thematic or narrative thread between the different elements in the image track and the sound track, no correspondences in motifs, no particularly significant juxtapositions. Contrary to *This is the Place*'s search for a subtle reorganization of sense registers that may give rise to a common, emotional movement and an enhanced, feverish perception, this installation seems rather to search for a form for the heterogeneous, where nothing is simultaneous, nothing corresponds, and where the elements are held together in a radical disjunction. The separation of the sources of the sound track and the image tracks, the "blind spot" in one of the image tracks, and the spatial arrangement, where the positions of the screens limit the spectator's abil-

7. I here refer to the installation of the work at Filmform in Stockholm April 17 – May 9, 2004.

ity to follow the different image tracks simultaneously, all indicate that Selander with this installation wants to create a system of exclusions—which is underlined *a contrario* by the almost shocking contrast effect of the work's sole moment of synchrony, when the image of a waterdrop hitting a puddle coincides with a shrill, piercing drop sound. This aspect of Selander's work, where the film is spread out onto several screens, the sources are separated, and the space itself is activated as a component of the work, is present since *Reconstruction* and *A Thousand Sublime and Heroic Men*, and returns in *When the Sun Sets It's All Red, Then It Disappears*. But it is with the elaborate asynchronies and distances in *Total Eclipse of the Heart* that it is brought to its most radical point. This aspect could, with a concept coined by Maurice Lemaître, be called the Syncinéma aspect, in reference to the different artists and filmmakers that in the 50s and 60s began to perceive the projection space as an active artistic component, something that was pliable, could be modified, experimented with, tested, criticised, rejected. "Syncinéma", and the somewhat later American equivalent "Expanded Cinema", are both extremely wide concepts, which have a long and complex prehistory,⁸ and refer to a sprawling multiplicity of cinematographic and artistic projects (Anthony McCall's and Ken Jacobs' search to reveal the spatial and historical conditions of the cinematic "medium"; Stan VanDerBeek's and the Eames brothers' dreams of an all-enclosing multimedia and interactive architecture for a new technological age; Isidore Isou's, Lemaître's, Gil J. Wolman's and Guy Debord's search to create avant-gardist situations that would destroy the spectacle's passivizing effects and emancipate man, etc.). The essential, however, is not only that this aspect in Selander's work actualises a rich tradition, but also that these artistic experiments together point towards a critical awareness about how the traditional cinematic apparatus, with its one-channel projection, fixed viewing positions, orthogonal organization, dark space, etc., is merely a contingent constellation of forms and elements, and that these forms and elements can be rearranged in an open multiplicity of configurations, in order to produce other aesthetic effects.

To summarize, one can speak of three general aspects in Selander's work: a Lumière aspect, where the works record a reality, but where the image of this reality aims, at the same time, to expose the abilities and limitations of the recording technology; a Godard aspect, where Selander disconnects images, sounds and words, and reassembles them according to other models, in a search for a montage form that can give access to memories or tell other stories; and a Syncinéma aspect, where this disjunction of the film's elements is rendered operative in the space, creating a critical awareness of the contingency of the traditional projection dispositif, and making the positions and the movements of the spectator essential to the work's composition. Selander's art is the combination of these three aspects, which occurs in different ways and with varying degrees of emphasis in her works: *Repetition* in an apparent way belongs

8. "The spectator's room becomes a part of the film room. The separation of the 'projection surface' is ended," writes De Stijl founder Theo van Doesburg in 1929. At this point, his dream already has a significant tradition, running back via pioneers (Abel Gance's triple-channel composition at the end of *Napoleon*, 1927) and the experiments of the futurists (Marinetti et al's manifesto for a futurist film, 1916), to the enthusiastic attempts of early cinema (Grimoin-Sanson's "Cinéorama" balloon with ten film projectors for the Paris Exposition in 1900). One can note that the critical aspect of Syncinéma/Expanded Cinema has a theoretical parallel in apparatus theory's investigations of the ideological effects of the projection dispositif (Baudry), whose genealogy Jonathan Cray has traced in his investigations of the transformations of the techniques of the observer.

to the Lumière category, but with its drastic separation between image track and sound track it is at the same time closely connected to *The Hours That Hold the Form*; the latter would, due to its fleeting reorganization of the relations between images and words, belong to the Godard category, however it also contains a number of images whose aim above all seems to be to engage the optic field of the image, and furthermore its disjunction of sound track sources produces an awareness regarding the projection space and the cinematic apparatus; *Total Eclipse of the Heart* can, with its several screens and advanced spatial arrangement, be placed in the Syncinéma category, but at the same time it contains images that would belong to the Lumière category and exclusions and distortions that would belong to the Godard category, etc. If one wanted to discern a development in Selander's practice—or at least in those parts of it I discuss here—one could note that, through her different works, there seems to exist a slow, almost methodical movement from abstraction, distortion and reduction, and towards reference, significance and history, or rather, a movement in which abstraction and distortion are gradually enriched with reference and history. Where films and installations such as *Reconstruction* and *27 Kilometer Drawing* seem above all to be formal exercises based on elements emptied of all information, and works such as *This Is the Place* and *Total Eclipse of the Heart* still seem in the first hand to search for forms of composition that can command the disjunction of the film's components and disrupt the relations of different sense registers, *The Hours That Hold the Form* and *When the Sun Sets It's All Red, Then It Disappears* approach narrative forms, where the models Selander develops are put to use in order to communicate memories or histories.

Intersections

Selander's art—these aspects of it—is based, then, on the interconnection of a number of tendencies: to engage the film technology in its essence; to disconnect and rearrange its constitutive elements; and to reorganize its spatial dispositif. What does this interconnection mean? What does it mean today, in our historical moment? And what is its ultimate purpose? “[T]hough a simple convergence is very unlikely, it is crucial that the two avant-gardes should be confronted and juxtaposed”, writes Peter Wollen in his classical text, “The Two Avant-Gardes” from 1975. The two avant-gardes he talks about are, on the one hand, a radically experimental film that operates completely outside of the commercial film industry and deals with purely formal problems, at the expense of all narrative and all positive (political, spectacular, etc.) reference; and on the other hand a film art that operates in the margins of the industry, and does not fully abandon narrative and reference, but despite that performs advanced formal experiments and actively explores the material and historical conditions of the cinematic medium. For Wollen, who writes from a Euro-

pean perspective, these tendencies are represented by the London Film-Makers' Co-op, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, "film-makers such as Godard, Straub and Huillet, Hanoun, Jancsó". Wollen points out different origins for these movements: for the former, modern painting's self-reflexivity and abstraction, and for the latter, early Soviet cinema's search for a popular film form that corresponds to a society's technological and ideological development. Even though no synthesis or "simple convergence" between these tendencies is likely, Wollen writes, film art should, due to its "multiple system", its multiplicity of possibilities—"the reciprocal interlocking and input between painting, writing, music, theatre"—become the place where these two tendencies, these two avant-gardes could approach each other. Through such a movement, film art should be able to uphold a distance to the illusions and exploitations of the movie industry, without getting stuck in modern visual art's "purist", "essentialist" dead end, and thereby "develop and elaborate the semiotic shifts that marked the origins of the avant-garde in a uniquely complex way, a dialectical montage within and between a complex of codes". This, he concludes, is at least "the fantasy I like to entertain".⁹

Three decades of technological and film historical development have passed since the publication of Wollen's text, and today a number of his concepts and analyses of course feel dated. The drastic transformations of distribution forms and visual technologies have made the traditional cinematic apparatus obsolete (which does not prevent it from living on as an anachronism with both aesthetic and economic potentials); the experimental moving image has become a ubiquitous and unproblematic presence in the spaces of contemporary art, in museums and galleries; and these thorough displacements of film art's institutional and technological landscape force us to search other origins and continuities, maybe even other historiographical models, for thinking its historical place and role.¹⁰ Compared to the situation Wollen departs from the differences are significant. However, perhaps these differences, these transformations and displacements, only make his fantasy even more essential today. Perhaps it is, in a situation where art and cinema seem to enter into a fundamentally unstable relationship, where the traditional cinematic apparatus appears to be nothing more than one possible configuration of elements among others, more necessary than ever to design aesthetic models for a film art within which institutionally and historically separate genres can approach, encounter and confront one another, in order to articulate both their common horizons and their inherited differences and specificities.

Confronted with such an idea of a film art for which the traditional projection dispositif is but one possible arrangement of components among others, the French film critic Jacques Aumont retreats to a conservative position. "There exists in the film dispositif", he says, "in what one so diligently calls the film 'aggregation', in fact something more than

9. Peter Wollen, "The Two Avant-Gardes," 181.

10. Two historians who work with questions in this vast field are Philippe-Alain Michaud, who combines the histories of art and cinema in for example *Sketches, cinéma et histoire de l'art*, and Branden Joseph, who studies Minimalism as an "audio-visual movement" in *Beyond the Dream Syndicate: Tony Conrad and the Arts After Cage*. Michaud, responsible for the film department at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, was also the curator of the important exhibition *Le Mouvement des images* in 2006.

11. Jacques Aumont, *Le cinéma a-t-il déjà été moderne? Comment le cinéma est devenu le plus singulier des arts*, 112. The analogy between the film dispositif and Christianity is striking, if somewhat strange. One wonders in how many respects Aumont's claim is a confession of faith, and what this implies regarding his conception of modern film.

12. One can note that today's gradual dissolution of the borders between different film genres and art forms only seems to increase the taxonomical urges of the more orthodox film scholars. See for example András Bálint Kovács's *Screening Modernism, European Art Cinema 1950–1980* and Jonathan Walley's "Modes of Film Practice in the Avant-Garde," two new texts that take as their starting point David Bordwell's concept of "mode of film practice,"

erecting detailed divisions between classic film (that is, Hollywood cinema), art film or modern film (the genre created by the European new waves), avant-garde film (work by experimental filmmakers, made for a classic projection apparatus), artist films and video (work made to be exhibited in the gallery), as well as potentially a new media art essentially separate from the other categories. All of these categories are supposed to define separate film genres, each with its own histories and its own institutions, production forms, spectator forms and aesthetic properties. These detailed descriptions of institutional borders and genre divisions are surely empirically valid and sociologically correct. However, despite their creators' irreproachable erudition, these categories essentialise historically and institutionally contingent, mobile concepts and forms, and the question is to what extent they contribute to an understanding of film art's critical and aesthetic possibilities.

13. Cf. e.g. Jean-Christophe Royoux's and Raymond Bellour's contributions in *Black Box Illuminated*, ed. Sara Arrhenius, Magdalena Malm and Cristina Ricupero. See also Royoux's "The Time of Re-departure: After Cinema, the Cinema of the Subject," in *Art and the Moving Image*, and Bellour's "The Double Helix," in *Passages de l'image*. Another indispensable reference in this context is Dominique Païni's *Le Temps exposé*.

the mere hazard of a stroke of luck. Film is perhaps nothing more than an aggregation that happened to succeed—but in the same way as one can say of Christianity that it is a sect that happened to succeed: that is, nevertheless, on account of something more fundamental than pure hazard."¹¹ A similar idea that the tradition of advanced film art can only be maintained by preserving the classical cinematic apparatus, that film art's migration to other spaces, institutions and channels robs this art of its singularity, its essence and possibilities, recurs among a number of film critics and historians.¹² The question, however, is whether an affirmation of the contemporary technological and institutional situation must necessarily preclude continuing to work within the parameters of—and developing the possibilities of—herited film genres.

Selander's art suggests that this does not have to be the case. The fact that the different aspects of her work actualise and hold together a number of different historical legacies (Lumière, Godard, Syncinéma; early cinema, modern film art, avant-garde), at the same time as they distort, disjoint and disperse the components of the cinematic apparatus, compels us to situate them within what some theorists call an "exhibition cinema" (Royoux), "an other cinema" (Bellour), or simply a "post-cinema", that is, a film art that exists in a continuity with cinema's own histories, but at the same time employs the openness for different spatial arrangements that is to be found in the institutions of contemporary art—something that also reconnects it with art's historical legacies.¹³ To situate Selander's work in such a context would not only serve to find a correct category for its historical and institutional location, to clarify exactly how it negotiates its complex of aesthetic genealogies. It would also serve to think its critical value. The situation of contemporary media technologies is characterised by a radical openness and ceaseless transformations of modes of viewing and spectator positions that constantly tear apart the relations of images, sounds and words, and reassemble them into new spatial configurations. The entertainment industry has no scruples, is not weighed down by any historical responsibilities when it comes to exploiting the potentials of this openness for generating always more powerful spectacular effects. Perhaps the critical capacities of film art, then, are not only to be found in a stubborn resistance, a maintaining of its tradition and classical institutional and technological forms, a consolidation of its historical space that preserves its singularity and essence. While the tradition and forms of the classical cinematic apparatus will no doubt live on and continue to generate complex and rich works even beyond its historical moment, critical values are also to be found in a film art that reaches back to historical resources, but sets them into operation in other institutional spaces and viewing arrangements. A film art, in short, that searches for other models for the use of the "openness" of contemporary media technologies in the virtualities of tradition: in early cinema's explorations of the capacities of the cinematograph; in the modern filmmakers—Godard, but also Debord, Duras, Resnais, etc.—and their

disjunctions between images, sounds and words; and in the avant-garde experiments with spatial arrangements and spectator positions. Perhaps it is in such a historical context one may understand Selander's interconnection of separate cinematographical and artistic tendencies.

14. Cf. Georges Didi-Huberman, "Expose the Nameless."

The Space of Memory

However, Selander can only unite and connect these different tendencies and legacies because for her they find their origins in the same fundamental capacity. For Selander, film art—in the widest possible sense of this term—is a space of memory. Film's abilities to inscribe the course of time at a certain location onto a material, technological support with certain qualities and limitations; to connect and separate, associate and contrast images, sounds and words; to spread this montage work out over several different sources, on screens, projections, monitors and tape recorders, in order to create other types of spaces—all of these aspects converge in the general search to produce a spatial mnemography that can generate other experiences of memories and histories, beyond fixed anecdotes, established narratives, or accepted historiography. The film installation *The Hours That Hold the Form*—the one shot in Portbou, Walter Benjamin's resting place—is, one could probably claim, Selander's most thorough and explicit reflection regarding this mnemographic capacity of film art, and the work which comes the closest to articulating the critical underpinnings of her project. The task of the historical materialist, Benjamin had famously claimed in one of his *Historico-Philosophical Theses*, was "to brush history against the grain". "Historical construction", he had said in a preparatory note to the theses (which was eventually to be inscribed on his tombstone in Portbou), "is devoted to the memory of the nameless". In a recent text, Georges Didi-Huberman finds traces of Benjamin's project in a certain tendency in contemporary art and cinema towards creating what he calls a "documentary montage", where images, texts and sounds are juxtaposed according to other historiographical models. "[A]re not today's artists", he asks, "decisively drawn to this resource of documentary montage as a means to expose the nameless?"¹⁴

The Hours That Hold the Form, of course, would seem clearly to confirm Didi-Huberman's suspicion. It is a film about Benjamin and his tragic destiny in a small border town, but its subject is also the nameless and the invisible, and film art's own capacity to record them. Returning to and lingering on this film, on the concerted separation of its elements and tracks, and its calm, its melancholy, it leads one's thoughts to certain of Marguerite Duras' shorts, to *Cesaree*, to *Les Mains négatives*. Hints of narrative can be discerned: the text in the sound track contains fragments of stories—about a shipwreck, about a family that is haunted by menacing men who enter their home and burn down their front door,

about a man who confesses his homosexuality but is set up, blackmailed, reported to the police, about flight across a border, exhaustion, resignation. In the image track one can, in accordance with the film's subtitle, "A Couple of Days in Portbou", distinguish a loosely constructed travelogue: in the first images we arrive in an airplane over the Pyrenees, as we reach the town we visit the Benjamin Memorial Museum, stroll along the railway tracks, the yards, enter the abandoned station house, as the night falls we see the trains passing through the dark, a ship in the harbour, searchlights, the morning after we get on the train and see the landscape pass by outside of the window.

There are, in short, hints, fragments of narrative. But the aim of the film's montage is not to tell an identifiable story, to link together images and sounds into narrative and plot. Instead, the montage of documents in *The Hours That Hold the Form* follows a movement of flight. Time, the minutes, the hours hold its form. Its theme, its content, its motif, its very figure is the fugitive: the nameless and the invisible by definition, he whose identity is suspended in a passage, he who lacks representation and whose name cannot be articulated or pronounced. The fugitive is present in the film in a number of ways. It is Benjamin, who decided not to get stuck on his passage through this town, and whose remains—documents, images, writing tools, an empty satchel—are put on display in the destitute museum. The fugitive is also the shapeless beings who float about in the sound track's scenes of persecution and flight, scenes that flow into and out of one another, that are interrupted and restart. And the fugitive is a figure operative in the materiality of the film itself, with its discrepancies and its asynchronies, its lack of definite identity, its suspended form. *The Hours That Hold the Form* is a movement, the transgression of a border, the passage through a non-space.

Selander's documentary montage, in other words, does not mean to produce a narrative, to explain what has happened, to show the past as a course of events with a rationality. She seeks something else: a montage of the monument, an epitaph in cinematography, a constellation of images and sounds that finds a permanent form for the movement of flight and that, in the distance between the conventions of storytelling and the muteness of historiography, creates a memory of something that, eluding representation, remains nameless.

Involuntary Autobiography, 2007. Mixed media: sculpture, sound.

Installation view, *Arts Birthday*, Moderna Museet, Stockholm 2008.



Making a book on Lina Selander's works is not a far-fetched idea. As writing and traces of writing are interspersed in most of her works, and as the tension between word and image is of crucial importance to them, they seem to stir the desire to write about them. Sometimes during the editing process I had the feeling that books (or at least texts) about Selander are virtual in her works, that books and texts move as potential replies on the indexical level (as thoroughly analysed by Trond Lundemo) where the unseen and unspoken come together in an expression by unfolding a new temporality, forced as they are to give evidence to the events of the works and simultaneously struggle with their own discursive abilities and disabilities. There is an affinity between Selander's works and writing and the textual medium, and as all affinities this implies similarities, but more than anything it implies negotiations about shared differences, negotiations that are here mainly pronounced through the composition of the essays, the editing and the graphic design of the book as interpretative but also figurative tasks—tasks that carry their own problems and obstacles. Interpretations, as well as translations between media, mean transfigurations of the translated and interpreted form, and in accordance with the logic of representation there is always the well known risk of the book and the discourse hollowing out an unfavourable distance between on the one hand the artworks and the artistic practice and on the other the book itself, the documental material that sample the works and the essays that delve into and materialise in writing a relation to them. Furthermore, in the last instance a book is also an object, taking up positions in spaces and contexts, and in the undertaking to say, to show and be something about something else, it can't completely escape representation.

When editing a book about an artistic practice I think it is of utmost importance to bear this fact in mind and to comprehend what the book can and cannot escape. But at the same time, when we think about how the book and discourse arrest movement and re-present, we must also consider that a book can remodel, even radically change the notions of object and representation and gain force through the projective movements of its becoming. It can bear witness to the experience of convening with the concept and composition of the artworks it presents, more than trying to fixate and repeat what cannot be fixated and repeated. If such a task were to succeed, this book would be close to what it is about; it would have become a new and different object

and constellation of ideas, involved in a critical dialogue between objects and ideas that do justice to both itself and the contributing essays and to the artistic practice in question.

Having said that, it is either an exaggeration to state that Lina Selander's practice exercises a certain force on discourse, evoking the desire for dialogue, storytelling and reflection or it is to assert that her own writing plays a crucial part in establishing this exchange. Presented in intersections between different layers of the installations, written material works in ways that escape writing's usual fate of becoming simply a straightforward commentary on images and installations as objects in space. The meaning of Selander's writing cannot be confined to the semantics of the statements as it is displaced and transformed through the assemblage or montage of different layers of expression and media. Put in the simplest of words, the space installed becomes a space of poetry, a space where meaning is produced by the sliding between the elements that articulate it and by the maybe fragile and heterogeneous but nevertheless singular composite of the installations. In these processes of transformation and translation, the writing, the image and the word as homogeneous entities are renounced and transferred to a more unstable logic as not-just-writing, not-just-image and not-just-words. The privative dynamics of transformation and displacement is induced upon the categories of space, sound, text, word, film and installation and unfolds that logic of poetry which the essayist has to keep up with when writing about Selander. This is the difficult task of the essayist that can explain how Selander's works uncover such a desire to be written about: her works prove that there can be a qualitatively different text than the one we contract when we usually write, the not-just-text that manages to challenge our notions on text and textuality.

I'm not going to plunge into any effort to close or try to conclude the arguments of the contributing essays; such a synthesising attempt would go against both the intentions of the book to fuel a critical but open dialogue and the spirit of Selander's works to make such dialogue possible in the space they invite the spectator to share. How the invitation is received can be scrutinised in the essays.

Cecilia Grönberg's montage essay is a performative reading of the photographic aspects of Selander's works;

Mara Lee uses the materiality of the text to signify the experience of literally being in touch with Selander's works and within this dimension of palpation she problematises the works in terms of gaze and otherness, distraction and desire; Frans Josef Peterson uncovers *The Hours That Hold the Form* as a work that insists on itself as singular experience, questioning itself as form and investigating its technological conditions; the essay of Sinziana Ravini, evoked by the desire for storytelling, braids a piece of her own story into the weave of stories in Selander's works and engages Selander's writing in a discourse on the economy of narratological desire along political and historiographical lines; Trond Lundemo's text is a meticulous reading of *When the Sun Sets It's All Red, Then It Disappears* in the intersection between images and words, stillness and movement; finally, Kim West's multifaceted and profound essay that has given this book its title which spells out the space evoked by Selander's works and installations (what I a moment ago called the space of poetry) as the space of memory, the works being all "experiments with mnemotechnologies and historiographies, with documents and montages, with the modes and models according to which images, forms, sounds and words can be combined so that they are transformed into memories or produce other historical experiences." At the point where the work of memory and historiography combine in the montages, histories are to be told anew, and Selander's works do this by engaging and exposing the film technology and the history of cinema, holding together a number of different historical legacies at the same time as they "distort, disjoint and disperse the components of the cinematic apparatus" and consequently contest their own history. This is where we find the film art as a space of memory, West tells us, which "produce a spatial mnemography that can generate other experiences of memories and histories, beyond fixed anecdotes, established narratives, or accepted historiography." Accordingly, this is where we also have the profound joy to meet Selander's work as perhaps one of the most thought-provoking there is today: amidst the many unresolved tensions between word and image, between storytelling and historiography, and between the use of the film technology and its history, these tensions are brought into play in a figuration that insists on itself as a productive and singular form of experiences, memories and histories. Hopefully this book will manage to team up with(in) this space of memory, awaiting those future books about Selander's work that seem to be virtual in her work.

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4

Mara Lee

look

In Lina Selander's art, image, sound and text are united with cogent consistency: looking is interrogated through text, word through image, and image through text. The questions about how we look and how meaning is constructed through looking are posed over and over, often through a deliberate withholding of the image, in favor of the voice.

A red thread, seen from the reverse side: Is it possible to interrogate looking by staging the looking anew? How does one criticize looking with a new form of looking? And does this not result in the mere reproduction of structures of looking?

no apocalypse

The questions that Selander's work engages with are large and demand space: the depiction of rebellion (the public and private pictures from the 1968 movement in *When the Sun Sets It's All Red, Then It Disappears* (2008), of death in the work *Repetition* (2005), or the limit as topos in *The Hours That Hold the Form (A Couple of Days in Portbou)* (2007). But when looking at these

works, one is struck by the silence—they do not assume a loud or apocalyptic rhetoric, but are instead quiet and reflective. Rebellion, death and the limit are not presented with their apocalyptic potential (etymologically, apocalypse can be traced back to the Greek verb *apokalyptein*, which means demonstration, a visual un-covering, and thus the opposite of classical philosophy's notion of truth), which would have resulted in a visual power struggle with the work's powerful subject matter. On the contrary, the spectator experiences a pulling back, a restraining gesture. In *When the Sun Sets It's All Red, Then It Disappears*, the words question the images and the images question the preceding images (through montage). As a result, the work moves forward and generates its meaning through attacks and puncturings of the same meaning that is being generated.

No apocalypse, but neither a withdrawal to the white rhetoric of silence—the muteness of negativity.

Discussing the work of the author Marguerite Duras, the French psychoanalyst and linguist Julia Kristeva argues that the *film-*

maker Marguerite Duras is not as dangerous as the *writer* Marguerite Duras. Why? Because the filmmaker Duras “uses film to consume its spectacular force, submerging it in elliptical words and allusive sounds until the invisible becomes dazzling.”¹ In other words: she uses the film’s weapon against itself—directs the visual force inwards, towards its own burning core, putting it at risk of being consumed by its own charm—and getting stuck in its own fascination.

1. Julia Kristeva, “The Pain of Sorrow: The Works of Marguerite Duras,” 140.

The rebellion, death and the limit are topoi that could easily be staged according to the conventions of the immediate pleasure that governs the realms of the imaginary, but as I stated above—that would be too simple. Instead, like Duras in her films, Selander makes visible the act of looking itself. The camera movements in *Repetition* that imitates the eye’s movement, the montage in *The Hours That Hold the Form* that together with the narrator’s voice ceaselessly directs the attention to its own irregular rhythm: the meanings come out of the gaps—and in the blinks.

flash-bulbs stitches throat-clearings

The best way to sabotage the enchantment that results from resistance-less viewing is to destroy the imaginary identification—the dream level of film—that puts the spectator in a trance. Such sabotages reoccur throughout all of Selander's oeuvre: the reflection of the camera flash that stubbornly sticks to the images in *When the Sun Sets It's All Red, Then It Disappears*, the stitches that perforate 117 of 146 instamatic images, or simply the letters, text that refuses to give witness to the images.

We also have: the page-flipping and throat-clearing in *The Hours That Hold the Form*—interruptions in the authentic testimony that point us straight into artifice.

testimony

“I am going to tell you something,” says the narrator's voice in *When the Sun Sets It's All Red, Then It Disappears*. This is the beginning of a description in which testimony, violence and looking are rewritten in new constellations.

The testimony as speech act goes back to the classic tragedies in which bodily violence could not be presented directly on stage, but had to be mediated through a witness who told the audience what he had seen. The act is completed only when the testimony is accepted by the listeners—when the speech act has received its “answer” in the form of a reply from the human community. The narrator’s voice in *When the Sun Sets It’s All Red, Then It Disappears* offers something that at first resembles a testimony: “Look what the damned revisionists have done!” the Chinese protester shouts, and the Western reporters flock around him like flies. When it then turns out that the protester’s body is unharmed, the reporters get upset: “That Chinese guy is a joker, a fraud!” The narrator’s voice concludes: “He showed them what they had not seen, what they could not see.”

In addition to the obvious questioning of forms of knowledge that depend on the gaze and the domain of the visible, this sequence addresses a deeper problematic, a dilemma that Horace Engdahl has described like this:

In order to be understood and to appear trustworthy, a testimonial has to comply with soci-

ety's public sense of reality, common sense. At the same time, the testimony sometimes runs counter to all common sense. In the same way, one can view the artwork's form as a deviation from common perception and an attempt to make individual vision legitimate against the social contract we call "reality".²

2. Horace Engdahl, *Ärret efter drömmen*, 193 [my translation].

In other words, that which finally constitutes the testimony as a truthful testimony is the remainder of incomprehensibility and radical foreignness, that residue of an experience which is impossible to translate into the flat language of simple mediation, meaning that every making-visible implies a delegitimizing of the testimony as testimony. At the same time, the spectators/listeners and the social community demand visible evidence; the experience has to be translatable into flesh in the form of an injury, a scar or violence, or else it will be dismissed as a bluff. But true testimony is silent. "The greatest enemy of testimony is not silence but patented explanations."³ Because as soon as it is made visible as something comprehensible, its radical otherness is lost: "It is impossible to testify from the inside because the inside has no voice".⁴

3. *Ibid.*, 193.

4. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony. Crises of witnessing in literature, psychoanalysis and history*, 231.

The violence is displaced. Real violence can be found not just with "the damned revi-

sionists” but also with the spectator herself. The violence can be found in her desire to see, and in her simplistic connection between reality and seeing. To see is not to understand.

move

In Selander’s work, the pleasure of looking is merged with a questioning of the same pleasure. It is possible to approach the narrative act in the same way. Selander both narrates and destroys the narrative.

How can a work show the traces of both Walter Benjamin’s storyteller and Thomas Bernhard’s story-destroyer?

In order to enter the space of listening and to gain access to the experience that the storyteller communicates, uninterrupted attention is demanded, but an attention that can only be reached by the circuitous path of distraction. The listeners who sit down to listen to Benjamin’s storyteller occupy their hands with one or another form of monotonous labor: spinning, weaving, sewing.

The time that passes—the story that is developed—has its manifest correspondence in the fabrics that grow on the audience’s laps. The price the listener pays for getting lost in the garments of illusion is the necessary distraction that makes her hands ache afterwards.

But in our time both listening and watching takes place in stillness. I let my body rest during the watching of *The Hours That Hold the Form*. But my hands still ache afterwards. Something has been worked through, something has been woven, but what?

In Selander’s work, distraction is an inherent characteristic of storytelling. There is always something that sabotages the spectator’s ability to catch the entire image—a disturbance that blocks my desire to freefall down and lose myself in the magic of the voices. A distraction that both diverts and is attention. It is not sewing and weaving that causes one’s hands to ache, but also activities like tearing up and cutting.

To lose oneself and then be forced to meet one’s own gaze: the movement between these two poles is repeatedly activated in

Selander's work. It is also the basis for the feeling of being moved.

To be moved might be derived from the acute experience of the in-between space between my factual position in a space—I am here—and my position in the space that the narrative conjures—but I am also there. Thereness is established (for example in the form of identification, fiction, illusion etc) when hereness is established (consciousness, disturbance and negativity).

It is this double possibility—to be both here and there, both absent and present—that enables the work to move the viewer profoundly.

And the risk? What is at stake? What price must the listener/spectator pay to be moved?

Answer: The price is this split. The ache of my hands. The split is a necessary but sometimes painful practice.

poetic, performative, political

Linguistically, Selander's work functions on several levels and blend facts, quotes, infor-

mation and testimony with fiction and original written material. It is a complexity that both concentrates and expands. How else can one approach an utterance like: “A photography of a bruise can be taken whenever” (*The Hours That Hold the Form*). Read solely as an assertion to be judged on its informational potential, it is a very flat utterance. But as a poetic statement it immediately becomes more interesting. “A photograph of a bruise can be taken whenever” can mean simply that a photograph of a bruise can be taken at any time. But if a poetic interpretation is activated, it can also mean the diametric opposite: a photograph of a bruise *cannot* be taken whenever. It is a challenge to listen to the silence and absence, the omitted negative. It is in the absence that the drama is enacted, and in the thought of why silence/absence is a necessary response to language that makes suspect an all-too-transparent, functional usage.

We come across one of the most drastic utterances in *When the Sun Sets It's All Red, Then It Disappears*. The narrator's voice says: “I want to be blind.” If read as a normal, informative assertion, this statement would be incredibly provocative, almost immoral, and

judged based on the truthfulness, absurd. If given a poetic reading, the utterance becomes more sensible, if somewhat uninteresting in its reference to an Orphic poetic tradition that in the end has very little to do with Selander's work overall. However, if we try to approach "I want to be blind" as a performative utterance, something unexpected happens. "I want to be blind" is an utterance that cannot be interpreted based on truthfulness criteria, because the narrator obviously does not want to be blind. How then can the utterance be understood? By reading it as the response to a silent agreement, an implicit provocation, which assumes that the more one sees, the more one understands. "I want to be blind" becomes the radical and irrational answer that is halfway outside of the symbolic order's either/or logic.

When thinking about how a work with a poetic/performative language can deepen and illuminate the artwork's political implications, *When the Sun Sets It's All Red, Then It Disappears* is the work that takes us the farthest. By letting poetic and performative utterances blend in to and corrupt the largely informative and documentary discourse, *When the Sun Sets It's All Red, Then*

It Disappears succeeds at the feat of operating at a deeply absorbing, ravishing level while simultaneously the critical challenge is never more than a breath away.

translation: Johannes Göransson



When the Sun Sets It's All Red, Then It Disappears 2008. Continuous colour double video projection installation with sound, projection screens, bench. Video 1: 9'15 min, dimensions variable. Installation view: Nordin Gallery, Stockholm, 2008 Photo: Sofia Ekström.



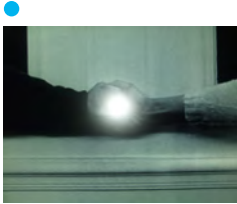
When the Sun Sets It's All Red, Then It Disappears 2008. Continuous colour double video projection installation with sound, projection screens, bench. Video 2: 1 h 31 min, dimensions variable. Installation view: Nordin Gallery, Stockholm, 2008. Photo: Sofia Ekström.

Trond Lundemo

MEHR LICHT! On the Temporality of the Image and
the Word in Lina Selander's Work

Lina Selander's work is deeply engaged with the relation between word and image, and anyone taking on this issue also delves into the relation between stillness and movement. Verbal description of an image tends to arrest its movement; visual illustrations abstract a point in time from its duration. Selander analyses these media constellations with extraordinary complexity, without ever simply reaching a preference for one medium over the other, but rather shows how the image returns in the word, and how movement always exists in the still image.

Ultimately, her work asks “what is an image?” and “what are words?” and above all, “what is their relationship?”



When the Sun Sets It's All Red, Then It Disappears (2008) is an insistent work about the connections between word and image, which immediately reworks any apparent conclusions reached. The installation presents a soundtrack with a monologue about the intersections between the word and the visual interspersed with music, set to two moving images projected on opposite walls. One projection is a red-coloured, blurred image of sunlight through leaves moving in the wind. The other is a montage where moving images are frozen, and still images are mobilised. Film images from Godard's *La Chinoise* (1967) and from student revolts in the late 60s are shown as single frames, with their movement arrested. In a couple of cases closely connected to the word—a speech given by a student leader and a close-up of hands leafing through Mao's Red Book—movement is *decomposed* into a succession of frozen images.

These images are not stills, however. Any image in a time-based medium, like the video in this case, is given a set duration. It consists of a flow of light and will enter into the montage with the surrounding images through a technical device, which is most often the quick lap dissolve. This means that the arrested image receives another temporal dimension in projection. The many still photographs, like the famous images of Mao swimming in the Huang He, or posters and record sleeves, receive a movement through the montage, duration and projection. Consequently, the tension between movement and stillness is a central condition of the work.

This tension is further complicated by the fact that each image of the film is photographed with a flash reflected in the image. The first shot of this projection bares the device: A vinyl record reflects the image of the artist with a camera and a flash. This image of a technological device for arresting motion, the still camera, reflected in the temporal object of the LP record, displays the never-ending twists and turns in the relation between stillness and movement in Selander's work. The instantaneous flash of a camera is in turn submitted to the duration of the shot. The instant is given a temporal extension in the time-based image, while the flash etches into the image a marker of the instant, a point in time. This

relationship between the still and the moving demonstrates the complexities of the image once evoked by the film scholar Peter Wollen as “fire and ice”. The fire will melt the ice and make it evaporate, but ice puts out the fire as it melts. In Selander’s work, the movement of the image is arrested, but movement returns to give it a new temporality.

Following a strong tradition in the genre of films of arrested motion, as established by Chris Marker’s *La Jetée* (1962), Selander includes one image with a traditional cinematographic movement. Contrary to the case of *La Jetée*, this image is not one of subtle movement of an eye, but rather the release of bombs from a plane, capable of devastating movement. The monologue will retrospectively connect to this image in the discussion of the spoken and the ocular: bombs fall from the eyes.

Movement is of course strongly present in the voice-over, but the image also keeps referring to the sound technologies. The vinyl record keeps turning up in the image, as the sound technology historically so strongly allied with cinema as a temporal object, but its capacity for (almost) unlimited repetitions is also evoked by the repetitions of the same movement in Vivaldi’s Spring Concerto on the soundtrack. As an element in the images, the gramophone record is part of the arrested movement of the image, but returning on the soundtrack, the movement of the technology is released.

The opening lines of the monologue, giving the title to the installation, refer exactly to the ambiguities and the re-appropriations of the movement of the image. In linking a fixed position—*When the Sun Sets*—with a quality—*It’s All Red*—the title immediately adds movement to this constellation; *then It Disappears*. The connection between text and image are sometimes direct, at other times non-synchronous, appearing only in retrospect. The phrase ‘bombs fall from the eyes’ occurs long after the image of bombs falling from the plane, and serves to mobilise the image through the word. The slow fade-out at the end concludes the film with a black image, suggesting the blindness discussed in the voice-over. The idea of the mobilisation of thought through the word is a recurrent feature in the text, where blindness is called upon to allow for another way of speaking, another way of thought. This position seems to inscribe itself well onto the Western logocentric tradition, going back to Plato’s cave and the interdiction of images in the old testament, described as the “denigration of vision” by Martin Jay in his book *Downcast Eyes*.

It would, however, be reductive to understand the installation in such a traditional framework. Firstly, Selander’s installation relies on images at least as much as on text. More importantly, the words that could make us think differently are not the ones we hear, but unspoken words in the images. If “a word is what’s unsaid”, this is because what hasn’t been said is in the burnt-out white glare of the flash (“words that have left the image”),

or in the dark stain left by humidity in the image of Mao. The word is striving toward its material manifestation, and is never understood as the direct link to meaning, subjectivity, feelings or thinking, which is precisely what identifies much of logocentric metaphysics.

The final words uttered over the black image seem to search for the quality of the word as a purely sonorous material object, but as the work demonstrates on so many levels, the black image is not an absence of the visual. In neuro-physiological terms, darkness isn't the absence of light, but an activation of so-called visual off-impulses in the eye, and for this reason a fully visual dimension. A projected black image, with its material movement and light, also receives a signification within the system of the signs of the work. *When the Sun Sets It's All Red, Then It Disappears* depicts the black image as fully significant and visual, not as a gap or void. The dark passage between frames in the moving image—although obeying a different temporality in the electronic image than in cinema—is the very condition for movement. Movement in film and video is not to be understood as a succession of still images, but rather as the mobilisation of the black passages between frames, making the dark matter the condition for visual movement.

Rather than in the black image, the obscurity of vision lies in the white glare of the flash. The overexposure of the image, through the use of a device that usually renders the image readable but here eradicates visual information, is what obstructs vision. The idea that blindness belongs to an excess of light goes well with the ambition stated in the monologue, to show what one cannot see. If the white circles of the flash in the image are “words that have left the image”, the technique of the work is to evoke the absent words at a different level—within the materiality of the stain and the white flash. This is a technique of montage, showing what one cannot see.

The strong presence of the historical document in the images re-worked by Selander demonstrates a sort of ambivalence towards their relation to the past. The historical icons of the 1968 activists, so brilliantly prefigured in *La Chinoise*, and most typically in the images of Marx and Mao, are carved out of the image in the white stains of the flash. These images do not give a full account of a historical moment, they are always reflections of the revealing light of the present.

The historical properties of the image are contested, especially in the image of the Shoah. Subscribing to the idea that an image can only confuse and mislead, a group of writers and filmmakers (most notably Claude Lanzmann in *Shoah* (1965)) have claimed that no image—no visual imprint—can explain the ethical crisis that defines the extermination camps. The opposite position, argued by theorists and philosophers like Georges Didi-Huberman and Jacques Rancière, and filmmakers

like Jean-Luc Godard, is a belief that images are an element of montage, potential vehicles for understanding what one cannot see. The premise of the monotheistic interdiction of images in the Old Testament seems to endure in these debates, where the belief that the word is the road to understanding informs the interdiction of the image of the Shoah.

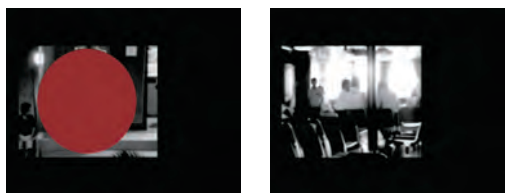
Another historical moment of contested imagery in an even more technological sense is the atom bombs dropped by the U.S. on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In the blinding white light of detonation, the city itself—the "Ground Zero", as the U.S. government named the hypocentre of their disaster site—becomes a photographic inscription of the bomb. The logic of the image as a historical document becomes reversed, as there is no image of the bomb itself, but only of the bomb as a photographic device. This coincidence between visual techniques and the war in the imprints of the city also displays the abundance of light as a blinding property. Where the victims of the bomb lost their eyesight, permanently or temporarily, due to the overexposure of light, the instant of the flash in the historical images carves out elements of their conventional explanatory powers. Instead, the image is invested with a reflection of, and on, technology and the relation of the image to history and the past, as well as to our social memory. The connections between media—the intermediary roles of the word and the image—are instead brought forward as the material conditions for the formation of social memory and the construction of a common past.

When the Sun Sets It's All Red, Then It Disappears inscribes itself on a set of questions that were central to the film theory of the 1970s, investigating the image as text. As Raymond Bellour has noted, the film is an "unattainable text", not to be found, because any kind of quotation of the image arrests it. The frame enlargement, the written description, the table and the chart invariably arrest the movement of the image. The notion of the still as a quote of the moving image is critiqued in the blind spot of the flash. If Selander returns to these issues today, just like Bellour does in his recent book *Le corps du cinéma* (2009), it is because the digital media has redefined the relationship between media, where the image and the word are stored in the same code. Just like the perception of darkness is secured through visual off-impulses, the movement of the image is always off in description. But what is off can give rise to new thoughts. This is what leads Bellour to form an alliance between the frozen image and the 'pensive' spectator, where the arrested movement can set off virtual images, where the logic of movement is short-circuited and left open. This is also the role of the word-image in Selander's work, where the stains of light obstruct historical assertion and the temporality of the arrested image serves to show what we cannot see.

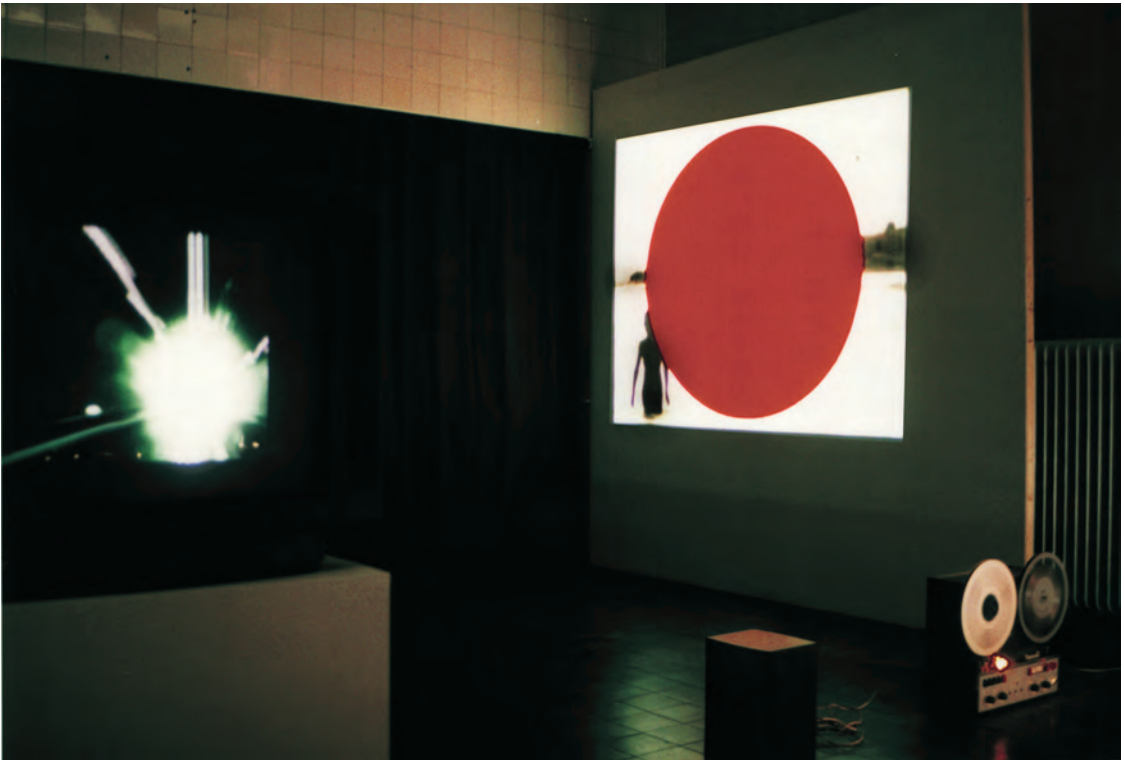
The intersections between words and images, movement and stillness in Selander's installation are highly complex and ephemeral. "Mehr Licht!",

Goethe's famous dying words, materialised by the white noise of the flash in every image, are followed by a fade to black in the end of the film, accompanied by single words as if testing their new dimensions as singular verbal utterance, only to end in the most conventional words of the monologue: "You know that I love you". Perhaps the alternative to this darkness of vision and muteness of words is in the forgotten image on the opposite wall. The vibrant movement of the sunlight streaming through the leaves moving in the wind connects directly to the 'reality effect' of cinema that astonished so many early commentators in the first years of the medium. But is such a rendezvous with the "originary" movement of cinema possible today, even in the reduced movement of the DV? Probably not. More importantly, as shown in the unresolved tension between stillness and movement in the works of Lina Selander, is the analysis of the temporality of the image, the word and the installation in an age of reconfigured media intersections.

Total Eclipse of the Heart,
2004. Two-channel
video-installation and
sound/ mini-DV transfer-
red to DVD and analog
tape. Description:
Video I: 4'20 min loop,
colour, sound. Video II:
8 min loop, colour, silent.
Audio: 19 min sound
loop on a reel-to-reel
tape recorder.



Installation view, Film-
form, Stockholm, 2004.



28

Frans Josef Petersson

THE HOURS THAT HOLD THE FORM (A COUPLE OF DAYS IN PORTBOU)

I move through dimly lit halls. It is October and I have not yet been asked to write a text about Lina Selander's work. That is still a few months away. When I receive the assignment, it takes me yet another couple of months before I can start writing. And then I only remember fragments: of dimly lit halls and a voice sounding through the rooms.

*Before I begin to work I read a review of the exhibition in one of the major daily papers. The critic dismisses *The Hours that Hold the Form (A Couple of Days in Portbou)* as incomprehensible, because the artist does not divulge important information about "whom the voice belongs to [or] what historical event the man is talking about." There is something about this text that I cannot let go: how it depicts an almost heart-rending scene, with the critic in the role of helpless observer awaiting the work to speak its truth to her, so that it may be savoured and adored. The critic waits in vain. The work will not be savoured, and does not commit to the representational logic at the heart of the review; it does not depict a narrative corresponding to an event in the world. The documentary form of *The Hours That Hold the Form*—the black-and-white imagery, the voice-over track—is precisely a form, a way to arrange disparate aural and visual elements. The work does not depict a specific event or experience, but insists on itself as experience. An experience of pain. What is pain?*

Every artwork constitutes a private experience, a singularity, at the same time as it assumes a plurality, a public, in whose name it is conceived. An artwork is a public utterance. It creates a link between singularity and plurality, but cannot itself define this relationship. The private sphere of experience does not let itself be represented as public concern. An artwork is a private experience. For Hannah Arendt, pain is the human being in his most definitive loneliness, a condition which eludes every testimony, every witness. In this sense, pain points to both what unites people and what separates us. It is unity and severance. The experience of pain is pain, but also to experience it from the outside, not being in pain but being severed by pain. Pain is in itself and outside itself: naked crying and helpless looking. Pain is the form spoken of here. A rupture; a suture.

What is an image? To ask what an image shows or what the image can show is to anticipate the answer by isolating a function. In Lina Selander's work the attention is directed toward the questioning as such. As if the image were inseparable from its own question; as if it directs its question to the artist instead of the other way around. The method can be described as interrogating a material, not by asking a question but by delaying its very utterance. The topic of this delay is far from obvious, and articulating it will be a simplification. Selander's work moves through a number of media and genres: She works with images but she is not a visual artist; she works with text but is not an author; she works with photography but is not a photographer. Perhaps one could describe



her work as film, as a cinematic experience. But that too would be a simplification overlooking the importance of sculptural operations and exhibition format. In other words, to classify Selander's practice you can choose: space, sound, text, installation, montage, film. Nevertheless, the work remains a question of the image.

The Hours That Hold the Form (A Couple of Days in Portbou), 2007

Over the past few years, Selander has produced a number of video works, sound compositions, texts and photographs united by the idea of a historically constituted and technologically mediated aesthetic material. This means that an image is not primarily identified by what it shows, but is treated as an artefact with certain material properties. It means that a text does not primarily create a narrative that complements the imagery, but is rather a result of the artist's interaction with a variety of technological equipment (hardware, software, recording devices). The question of image thus implies a physical and technical treatment of the image's materiality—a materiality that is inseparable from the image's physical manifestation as well as from the practices—or media—that enable the meeting between those mental and physical forms which constitute the image as object. To the extent that Selander's work produces

representations, these are also images of the technological conditions that determine the form of this meeting.

The Hours That Hold the Form consists of a video projection on a slide-projection screen, a reel-to-reel tape player, a couple of speakers and a few chairs. The work is a spatial montage, a combination of a digital image track and an analog soundtrack that remain radically separate on the material level. The two tracks are looped but of different length, leading to a variable constellation of sound, text and image with no stable form. The picture track shows black-and-white images from Portbou, the town on the border between France and Spain where Walter Benjamin committed suicide while fleeing the Third Reich. There are both motion pictures and stills depicting different places around the town (a restaurant, a train station), environments that in their mundanity are familiar, if unknown, to the spectator. Different speeds are positioned against each other as if the subject matter were motion itself, or the lack of motion. The wind in the leaves and a cloud slowly drifting by are interrupted by a train speeding past in the lower part of the screen. Swarming insects are positioned against the dusty, lifeless artefacts of Portbou's Benjamin museum. These images are put in relation to a man's voice, which calmly reports experiences of abuse, torture, violence and flight. The statements remain fragmented, never cohering into a comprehensive narrative. Text and image meet above a chasm. The combination is violent. Unbearable. The work remains broken-up.

What could such a work say about the fate of Walter Benjamin? What do we learn about the situation of the refugee? The answer is—nothing. What we already know about these matters overwhelms any possible knowledge which might be extracted from the work. It is quite clear that Selander's practice does not fit into a view on representation in which the image's autonomy is posited in relation to a perceived reality that is either reflected in the work or constitutes the material base from which it turns away or distances itself. This is of course nothing unusual. One can, for example, point to how already the Greek concept of plasma foregrounds the provisional aspect of the distinction between the fictional and the non-fictional. While the term fiction has often been associated with illusion, pure fabrication and fantasy—and posited as the opposite of the documentary ambition of offering a truthful depiction of reality—the concept of plasma calls attention to the plastic nature of narration itself, not as mimesis or illusion but as the shaping and arranging of existing material into new constellations. The artist's work becomes a matter of editing. Form becomes a question of montage.

In *What an Editing Room Is* Harun Farocki writes:

At the editing table you learn how little plans and intentions have to do with producing pictures. Nothing you have planned seems to work... You

prepare cuts and stage a movement so as to allow reediting, only to find at the editing table that the picture has a completely different movement, one which you have to follow... At the cutting table you discover that the shooting has established new subject matter. At the cutting table a second script is created, and it refers not to intentions, but to actual facts.¹

1. Harun Farocki, "What an Editing Room Is," 78–80.

How then describe the editorial practice of *The Hours That Hold the Form*? To begin with, an analogy is established on a formal level between text and image, as concise depictions or reports of the passage of time are recombined in different ways. The spectator quickly recognizes a modus that allows itself to be identified by what conventionally has been categorized as "documentary truthfulness". But it soon becomes apparent that image and text, whether together or apart, cannot be synthesized according to narrative conventions of continuity, coherence and progression. These concepts certainly have relevance here, but in a way closer to the form of a musical composition than to the aporetic fundamentals undeniably connected to the documentary: the idea of a self-identical assemblage in which the text is assumed to tell us what the image shows and the image to verify the text's assertions.

In *The Hours That Hold the Form*, the text does not domesticate—in Roland Barthes terminology—the polysemy of the image. And the image does not illustrate what the text describes. Rather, words and images make up separate tracks that run parallel to each other, and whose formal and compositional similarities primarily result in a strengthening of each other's disparate effects: While the image track does not show more than "a couple of days in Portbou," the soundtrack generates a wholly different set of images of violence and suffering. The fact that both text and image exist in the visual register—in which the former primarily consist of descriptive reports of definite moments—intensifies, and thus maintains rather than dissolves, their mutual tension. The assemblage of the two tracks creates a maximal contrast out of which the work's form grows as a provisional "joining of the unjoinable." The divide between experience and representation, between text and image, is staged as a "montage experience," a fundamental incompatibility that—to bring it back to Farocki does not allow itself to be planned, projected or predicted but which has to be performed, tested and, in an absolutely concrete way, experienced. Selander is obviously not interested in submitting the assemblage of image and text to an overarching model, nor is she interested in a critical questioning of such models or of the montage as such. What happens in *The Hours That Hold the Form* is rather a staging of montage itself as experience: dislocated, shattered and contradictory.

When the voice-over notes that "a picture of a bruise can be taken at any time," this is not just a demystifying criticism pointing to the limited value of the image as evidence. The statement also addresses its own ethical implications: Why and under what circumstances do we want to

believe an image? Are there situations when we are morally obligated to believe an image? And more fundamentally: Why do we feel that images speak to us and direct their desire toward us at all? As W. J. T. Mitchell has noted, it appears that despite realizing the irrationality of treating images as living subjects, we cannot help but imagine that they have a life of their own, that they indeed have their own voices and their own desires. It would seem that the iconoclast is just as seduced by the image as the iconophile. Both are caught under the spell of the image. This explains a great deal about why images do not allow themselves to be questioned directly, but have to be addressed as multiply, relational and shattered subjects. Here might be a lesson for someone who insists on extracting knowledge from a work of art: A truly critical practice cannot merely be a critique of images, but must also take into account what precedes this critique. Such work must address the image in its entirety—as concept, fantasy, object, material and practice—and most importantly ask: What in the image makes it impossible for us to shield ourselves from the image?

translation: Johannes Göransson

de la ciudad de Port-Bou

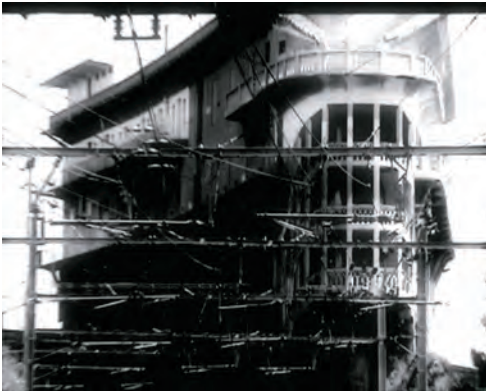
Juzgado municipal de Port - Bou

DEBE:

Da	PERCIBO		DEBE	
	Pesos	Cts	Pesos	Cts
Importa por una caja mortuoria para el difunto				
señor Benjamin Walter ferrado de palo con varias				
aplicaciones y demas trabajos empleados la				
cantidad de Ptas.....			275.00	
Por conducir el difunto al cementerio mesa				
debenes.....			20.00	
Por el trabajo del albañil de cerrar el nicho			8.00	
Total.....			303.00	

Preside
Enrique Espalala

The Hours That Hold the Form (A Couple of Days in Portbou), 2007. Continuous b/w and colour video projection with sound, projection screen, chairs, 15 min. Sound on a reel-to-reel tape recorder, 14 min. Dimensions variable.



Installation view from
Against Time, Bonniers
Konsthall, 2007.
Photo: Per Mannberg



36

Sinziana Ravini

THE OBSCURE OBJECT OF STORYTELLING

How does one evoke the desire for storytelling, and how does one maintain this desire without allowing frustration over absent gratification pass into disappointment? Sheherazade, the great storyteller of *One Thousand and One Nights*, knew more than well: by ending just before the tale reached its climax, she could make the sultan's desire for a story greater than his thirst for blood. By extending, branching out, breaking up and resuming the story, Sheherazade finally wins both her own freedom and the sultan's love. The cliffhanger is born and so is the fractured and constantly deferred story, the pleasurable yearning.

1. Christian Salmon, *Storytelling: La machine à fabriquer des histoires et à formater les esprits*.

Stories can be deeply deceptive. Christian Salmon, in *Storytelling*¹, writes that humans have told stories since the dawn of time and that the art of storytelling is the driving force of social relations. In the 1990s, the art of storytelling and the power of imagination became increasingly colonized by the marketing machine of triumphant Neoliberalism. The story has become a way of formatting the consumer. She who wins the economic or geopolitical game is she who is the best at telling stories. It is tempting to merge Salmon's storytelling theory with Samuel P. Huntington's clash of civilizations and claim that our iconoclasm is built on "story-clasms". If one further examines how capital, surplus value, is produced and distributed, it is not difficult to regard the global economy as one big storytelling factory where everyone works in more or less well-written fictions. To tell a story within the Orwellian tale about globalization's and Capitalism's triumph leads necessarily to a situation *mise en abyme*, a "placing into infinity" or "placing into the abyss" as it is so poetically termed within literary theory.

2. Cf. Jean-François Lyotard, *La condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir*.

Jean-François Lyotard claims that the postmodern rupture destroys all metastories in favor of microfictions.² But the metastory lives on in the discourse on globalization's, Neoliberalism's and Capitalism's triumph. We must yet again step out of the large metastories and produce fictions that lead to friction. We must create histories that are satisfied not only with eliciting and sustaining the desire for stories, but which also enable us to think freely and offer us the possibility of creating our own narratives within the story. It is in Hamlet's spectacle within the spectacle that he manages to act and thereby change the state of things. It is in the representation of that life which he could no longer endure, and the action within the frame of this representation, that act and action come together. The large question surfacing today is in part how artists are to reveal the complex relationships of language, image and narrative to the ways in which reality is given shape, without simultaneously being caught in a Baudrillardian simulacra labyrinth which transports the intertextual games of language into an metalinguistic never ending myopia, in part how we as viewers can have space to continue to act within these narratives. An artist who has come far in his attempt to formulate a theory around the narrative functions of art is Magnus Bærtås, who points to the democratizing qualities of the "work story".³ There is something to that:

3. Cf. Magnus Bærtås, *You Told Me: Experiments with Biographies and Work Stories*.

a work of art without the surrounding story excludes us. But a work of art that reveals too much can also exclude, and there is nothing worse than educational art texts that try to guide the viewer in the correct direction. Instead, what is at stake is to invent new story forms and create narratives around the artworks' stories; stories that both envelop and expand each other and which also avoid the educational annexation's exclusion as that exclusion which follows from the withholding of the project's narrative.

Roland Barthes illustrates in "Éléments de sémiologie"⁴ how structural systems can become regressive when they rest on metalanguages that in their turn need to be explained by other metalanguages. Implicitly, he claims that even deconstruction risks becoming a hegemonic metalanguage that subordinates all other languages. Perhaps we need to leave deconstruction behind and invent systems that permit reconstructions between image, text and reality; perhaps we need to patch up that shattered mirror which postmodernism left behind. But is such a thing possible? What experiences can such an assemblage use to gain force?

4. Roland Barthes, "Éléments de sémiologie."

Let us more closely examine Lina Selander's artworks. If there is one thing Selander has succeeded with, it is placing the image and the story in a mutual relation to reality without emptying this triangular mutuality of its mysteries. It is of course an art of seduction that is difficult to balance but which gives the image, the word and the stories they create or negate a dynamic that neither empties the image of words nor the words of images. Concerning the stories' contents, it is always difficult to know what they are actually concerned with, what is at stake and how we are supposed to react. It is exactly this uncertainty that evokes my desire for storytelling. Let us take *The Hours That Hold the Form (A Couple of Days in Portbou)*⁵ (2007) as an example. What really happened during these hours in Portbou? There is always a gap in the story, a hole in the image—the impossibility of determining whether or not the story is true or false. Against images of a train station, boats, mountain top, sidewalk cafés and signs of human migration, the calm and matter of fact voiceover tells of torture, speech that is overlapped by stories of drinking tea, a thrown ashtray hits someone in the head, wreckage laying like Christmas trees in the water, as well as stories of lost christening certificates. Here and there dubious claims appear: "A photo of a bruise can be taken anytime," and "A believable person is worth believing. You often believe people—it's often believable. Other times it isn't believable." If one does not know that the film is based on Benjamin's flight from the Nazis near the Spanish-French border, its polyphonic weave of stories appear all the more enigmatic. The narrative rebus takes us back to the fact that we actually do not know what happened in Portbou. Today opinions still diverge as to whether or not Benjamin died of a brain hemorrhage, a morphine overdose or if he committed suicide. The story also moves us forward, toward future tragedies and polyvalent histories.



Selander's seductive "ebb and flow stories" are generated by a dialectic between subtracting and adding gestures, between on the one hand ellipsis, negativity, reduction, and on the other montage, addition and appropriation. Unlike many other artists, she shows that, faced with a complex historical moment, one must interrogate both the visual narrative's potential to claim the truth as well as the interrogation itself. One must in other words reveal both the visual narrative's double nature as well as the dual relation of faith and doubt that people have to these stories.

Lacan claims that the unconscious is structured like a language, but we should not forget that language is also structured by our unconscious. Our symbols and metaphors most often refer to an experienced reality, not only to other metaphors and symbols. Concerning desire it is, in terms of language, metonymically constructed through chains of association. The analyst's task is to trace such chains back to their origins in order to discover what the patient is actually speaking about. Art history is filled with vulgar psychoanalytic readings where the condescending art historian attempts to uncover what the artist actually wanted to speak about, an act of violence excused by the fact that the psychoanalytic interpretation also is a psychosocial interpretation of an entire era's unconscious.

Since I do not believe in the possibility of any objective reading of works of art—such a thing cannot be done no matter how many interpretive keys I possessed, and no matter how much technical knowledge of their figurative process I have studied—and since I also do not think that a monogamous relationship to a single theory would qualify my interpretations or restrain that anxiety one initially feels when faced with a complex artistic practice, I here intend to weave a piece of my own history and braid it into this possible weave of work stories where Lina Selander's artistic practice appears.

I unfortunately do not remember when I first encountered Selander's work, but I recall our first meeting. It was in her studio near Slussen in Stockholm in the fall of 2008. She had just completed the film *When the Sun Sets It's All Red, Then It Disappears*.[•] I immediately fell in love with it, with its melancholic re-utilization of the visual language of the 68-movement, with her interweaving of individual and collective historiography. Her father had participated in many of the protest movements of the time and the film combines images from the movements' meetings with general documentary images from the same period. These images are in turn combined with excerpts taken from Jean-Luc Godard's Maoist cult film, the playful *La Chinoise* (1967)—a film that depicts a student movement's degeneration into terrorism and which moves between fact and fiction, between real revolutionaries and actors.



My fascination with Selander's work was based on the fact that I had just a few months earlier curated an exhibition at the Romanian Cultural Institute in Stockholm inspired by *La Chinoise*. The exhibition was titled *Playground Revolutions* and took as its point of departure this very meeting between play and gravity, between revolutions that turn out to be spectacles and spectacles that turn out to lead to revolutions. I had long dreamt of arranging an exhibition that in some way revolved around the sense of unreality that struck me when I was thirteen and, after having left Romania only two years earlier, saw the world I had blindly believed in literally collapse on the TV screen. The realization that I had lived in a lie made me for a long time thereafter doubt and question all systems I found myself in. Could I really trust images and words, when it turned out that all images and words that I had believed in during my first eleven years in Romania had been more or less untrue, that the Communism I had believed in was only a façade, a fool's personal game with people's lives and dreams? And hadn't the French Maoists also lived on a myth: they worshipped a dictator and lauded a cultural revolution that eventually led to an even tighter grip on the so-called masses?

What struck me and still strikes me about Lina Selander's deeply suggestive work *When the Sun Sets It's All Red, Then It Disappears* is a certain affinity between her and my own inherited doubt in both images and narrations, but also a fascination for this time that never became ours, these struggles that we were never allowed or had to fight. Does she, like me, share a longing for a political context where ideals do not let themselves be crushed by a seemingly severe and compact reality? I want to imagine that the answer can be found in the very first words of the voice-over: "When the sun sets, it's all red, then it disappears. But in my heart the sun never sets." What is this sun if not those ideals which shone over and united large parts of the 68-movement? Ideals that seem to have disappeared, but still might burn in some hearts?

The initial testimony bifurcates and creates a dialogue between an "I" and a "you" that unite in a "we". Thesis and antithesis create synthesis:

What is a word?

A word is what has not been said.

And you?

Me?

Both sides against the other...

Me...

No, you who try to tame what you do not forget.

My self. Now.

You: excuses and rejections.

And us?

We are the words of others...

5. Jacques Derrida, *Monolinguisme de l'autre*, 14.

This rhythmic and lapidarian passage captures the innocent joy that characterizes a longing to become absorbed in a collectivity and through it exclude everything else, but also the fear that this community—this “We”—will be controlled by someone else, that democratic forms will become totalitarian and petrified, or even worse, to realize that the struggle, the words one struggles with, are not one’s own but someone else’s. For as Derrida claims, we do not own language. Language owns us, it so to speak is “already here” when we are born, and remains “already here” when we die. When Derrida states: “I have only one language, yet it is not mine”⁵ he puts his finger on the de-centering mechanisms of linguistics, its alterity, the fact that one cannot appropriate or objectify language as if it was one’s property, but that one can be in it, get to know it, use it. Derrida grew up in Algeria, and it is tempting to regard deconstruction as a foreigner’s relationship to a language that literally isn’t his or her own.

I struggle with the feeling of existing in a linguistic homelessness, the feeling of not possessing my language, the fact that the Swedish I was thrown into when I was eleven years old is as little my language as the Romanian I was torn away from. When one is tossed or throws oneself into a new language one must confront the gaps that constantly appear between what one thinks and the linguistic costume one manages to give to one’s feelings or thoughts. The artificial and constructed character of language thereby becomes even more apparent. But perhaps everyone, regardless of whether or not they have left their mother tongue, experiences the constructed nature of language?

Selander appears to have a similar relationship to textual and visual language. A language that is both hers and not hers. Narratives that both haunt and let themselves be occupied. The post-produced material—images of a bathing Mao, demonstrations in Sweden, remote newspaper images—all possess the sign’s phantomlike quality of reappearing again and again like suppressed thoughts and memories in a language that belongs to no one. What recurs most powerfully is the suppressed Marxism. In *Spectres de Marx* Derrida utilizes the story of Hamlet’s father as the shadow that returns to cast light on what Hamlet has suppressed in order to create an analogy between the tragedy’s conditions and Communism’s constantly recurring ghosts in our time. Art becomes that darkroom which lets the real manifest itself in the imaginary. Something always remains which can appear in the lack of language or image.

Each image, each memory, real or fictive in Selander’s revival of the ghosts of Marxism, is punctured by a white sphere, the camera’s flash which creates an indexical relation between the post-produced images’ and Selander’s spatiotemporality. Can the white sphere of the camera flash engender reconciliation between then and now, between the past’s flat images and the living body? Or is the flash, this corroded sphere of

white, the blind spot that controls our desires? The obscure object of storytelling?

A corroded sphere of white.
The words that have left the image for a while.
That can return, not as strangers
Not as excuses, not as rejections.

Word and image.
Both sides against the other.
And you and I.
And the story of us told by others.

Bombs fall from the eyes.

lightning.
love.
sky.
White.
Red.
sun.

I want to be blind.
Look! Mao!

What does it mean to want to be blind? In this case a desire to not see in order to better understand. Also Godard sometimes separates sound and image so that we will think for ourselves when we see, and see for ourselves when we hear. Unlike Eisenstein's propagandistic montage technique which steers how the viewer should think by means of carefully selected clips, Godard wants us to piece together the story in our heads—for us and no one else to complete the production of meaning. That the class struggle won't just become a struggle between different images, but as in film a struggle between sound and image.⁶ That is the difference between a political film and a film that is filmed politically.⁷ How does one contend with this struggle? Selander returns to Godard's *La Chinoise* in order to reproduce that scene where one of the actors describes a Chinese demonstration in Moscow. He illustrates the story by letting the main character in the film bandage himself up in order to remove the bandage while he describes the young Chinese man's undressing of the bandage. If Godard works with resemblance, with the educational reenactment, Selander here works with difference, with the gap between word and image. We are allowed to see images from different demonstrations and times while we hear the woman's calm and methodical voice state:

I am going to tell you something. A few young Chinese students demonstrated in Moscow and of course they were beaten by the Russian police. The next day they gathered in front of their embassy to protest. A bunch of reporters from the West were there. People from *Life*, *France Soir* and

6. Jean-Luc Godard, *Godard par Godard: Des années Mao aux années 80*, 69.

7. *Ibid.*, 71.

so on. There was a student there. His face was covered in bandages. He started yelling. *Look what they have done to me! Look what those dirty revisionists did!* The reporters rushed over and started to take photos while he took off the bandage. They expected to see a damaged, cut-up face. Covered with blood or something... And he carefully removed his bandages as they took pictures. When they were all off, they saw that his face wasn't hurt at all. The reporters started to shout. This Chinese guy is a fake. He's a clown, a sham. What's going on? But they had not understood at all. They had not understood that it was theater. He showed them what they did not see and could not see. A reflection on reality. A reflection, a mirroring of their own expectations. One is replaced by the other. To see is not to understand. Maybe one does not understand when one sees and does not see when one understands.

Godard's *La Chinoise* reflects upon the logic of staged actions in scenes where revolutionary acts are imitated, and made ridiculous. As the protagonist in Godard's film claims, the Chinese protest in Moscow was a spectacle, but a real spectacle. The paradoxes exist everywhere, for example in one of the actor's lines: "I am not going to be honest simply because there is a camera in front of me." The statement is obviously contradictory, since he is honest about the fact that he is not intending to be honest.

The improbable also appears in the fact that Maoist and Marxist-Leninist students manage to live under the same roof and eat at the same table at the time when each of these groups conducted ideological trench warfare against the other. It's also strange that these leftist radical students choose to live in a bourgeois home and drive luxury cars. Perhaps one can see their decadent lifestyle as an attempt to avoid the dictatorship of political correctness, something that is also alluded to in one of the wall posters' slogans which constantly appears in the film: "A minority in a correct political revolutionary context is no longer a minority."

Godard's strength is his combination of theater, film and literature. His weakness is the exaggerated educationalization. Sometimes it sounds as though he has too much faith in the apparent veracity of photography and film. We remember all too well his thinly worn quote: "Photography is truth and film is truth twenty-four times a second." We more readily forget quotes like: "Film is the slickest fraud in the world," and "Photography is not a reflection of reality, it is this reflection's reality."

Perhaps it is also us Godard alluded to when he called the youth of his era "The Children of Marx and Coca-Cola." Perhaps we cannot choose between such diametrically opposed alternatives as poetry and truth, Marxism and Capitalism. *When the Sun Sets It Is All Red, Then It Disappears* ends with a wish to be blind. Blindness is commonly known as the domain of the sage (Homeros) and the destiny of the oracle (Pythia). In Selander's case, blindness appears as a condition for listening and for the unconditional conversation. Here is also a sensitivity to the fact that

the meaning of words changes over time and that it is about interpreting correctly, but also an awareness of the fact that interpretation can change the words of the future, undress them to the skin, liberate them from all hopeless connotations, reveal the fact that they are simply sounds and material. Building blocks for building a new common ground.

They sound like this:

I want to be blind.

Why?

To better speak with each other, we would listen more carefully.

How?

We would use language differently.

Words change meaning with time.

And?

And we would truly talk to each other, meaning would change words.

Yes...

Speak as though words were sound and matter.

– That's...

what...

they...

are...

On the riverbank.

Green and blue.

Tenderness.

Some desperation.

Day after tomorrow.

Perhaps.

Literary theory.

A film.

The Moscow...

trials

Red robin.

Rock...

and roll.

Et cetera.

Et cetera?

Et cetera.

You know that I love you.

The text ends in a declaration of love to a “you”. What is this “you”? An individual? An era? An idea? When it comes down to it, this is perhaps the obscure object of storytelling: Just like Sheherezade, the desire to transform the other’s desire for stories into love and love into a story that evokes desire.

Time is the Wound, 2007.
Continuous colour video
projection, 1'34 min.
Sound on a 33 1/3 rpm
vinyl LP, 30 min. Dimen-
sions variable.

Installation view, Gävle
konstcentrum, 2007.



Repetition, 2005. Colour
video projection with
sound, 16 min.
Video still.





Instant, 1999. 1x1 m.
C-Print mounted on
aluminium.



Instant, 1999. 1x1 m.
C-Print mounted on
aluminium.

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Cecilia Grönberg

STRAY NOTES ON LINA SELANDER'S WORK

Now, it is in the very point where evidence is doubtful that artistic practice frequently turns up to offer its own answers. Hypothetical, fragile or paradoxical answers, of course. (Georges Didi-Huberman, "Emotion Does Not Say 'I', Ten Fragments on Aesthetic Freedom", in *Alfredo Jaar: La Politique des Images*.)

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How do you remember? Under what circumstances do you remember? Photographs might prompt recall of an absent loved one, but we have all at some time searched our family albums and not recognized those we see within. Perhaps we know who they are and can identify them from a photograph or its caption—we might recognize them in this limited sense. But the photograph does not really prompt you to remember people the way you might otherwise remember them—the way they moved, the manner of their speech, the sound of their voice, the lift of an eyebrow when they made a joke, their smell, the rasp of their skin on yours, the emotions they stirred. (Can you ever really know someone from a photograph?) Think back to childhood. Can you remember it? Or do the images that come to mind resemble the photographs you have been shown of your childhood? Has photography quietly replaced your memories with its own? (Geoffrey Batchen, *Forget Me Not: Photography and Remembrance*, 15.)

In Lina Selander's work *117 of 146 Instamatic Images* (1999–2003) a series of photographic images is described. The texts are short, concrete, factual and numbered. For example: "47. Three men dressed in black on stairs. Staircase marked with white thread, railing perforated." The paragraphs bring to mind the short texts on local events in the daily paper, which are based on reports from the police: short sentences describing a scene, a place with (or without) figures. These reports are examples of some sort of involuntary concrete legal poetry and possess, with their highly compressed temporal length, a kind of photographic quality. The scene they report on can be contained within a photograph: "11:42: Three shop-walkers in Örebro stopped a suspected thief after a short chase from Stortorget to Tomtgränd, south of the library." No prehistory, no dissolution; they resemble snapshots taken without a camera, or instructions for scenes to reenact.

The texts in *117 of 146 Instamatic Images* alternate between descriptions of what the photographs depict and descriptions of the manual additions to the images; an oscillation between the three dimensional space of the depiction and the tangible surface of the image. Stitches hold objects in place, bind people together or to their physical environment. Perforations open the image and literally make it permeable.

16. 50-year anniversary party in lilac bower. Guests stitched around table.
[...]

23. Deserted office. Bookshelf with binders, desk with half-filled ashtray,

receiver stitched to phone.

[...]

58. Twenty-five perforations in white summer clouds.

117 of 146 Instamatic Images. This is an exact quantity, and a small collection. But of what kind of images? Is it a set of random images found at a flea market, or the documentation of a childhood? Do they refer to someone who possesses the memories and recollections that would make the images readable in a biographical sense? The name Lina occurs in the description of two different images, indicating a familiarity with them, but at the same time the text presents the images as if they were being viewed from a distance, making them seem strange.

When Kodak introduced a device at the end of the 19th century to visually document everyday life, it was marketed as a tool for archiving memories. "Photography is thus brought within reach of every human being who desires to preserve a record of what he sees. Such a photographic notebook is an enduring record of many things seen only once in a lifetime and enables the fortunate possessor to go back by the light of his own fireside to scenes which would otherwise fade from memory and be lost," George Eastman stated in 1900, referring to the Brownie camera. The threat of forgetting is as present as the promise of photography to materially carry one's memories, to remember in one's place.

In the 1960s, Kodak again significantly changed the conditions of amateur photography with the introduction of an easy-to-load Instamatic camera. The generations of the 60s and 70s documented their childhood with one of these cameras, or were at least subject to its images. If as an adult, you return to these small square pictures with their white borders and glossy surfaces in order to look at the shape of your former self, they seem, with their mild, pale colours and diffuse blurriness, to be a perfect medium for visualizing forgetfulness.

One day, some friends were talking about their childhood memories; they had had any number; but I, who had just been looking at my old photographs, had none left... The photograph is violent: not because it shows violent things, but because on each occasion it fills the sight by force, and because in it nothing can be refused or transformed. (Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, 91.)

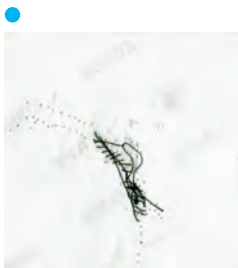
For Roland Barthes photography erases memory, substitutes the actual memory for a visual record, and in that way transforms memory into history. "Not only is the Photograph never, in essence, a memory (whose grammatical expression would be the perfect tense, whereas the tense of the Photograph is the aorist), but it actually blocks memory, quickly becomes a counter-memory." (ibid.)

117 of 146 *Instamatic Images* offers 29 images without description.

Something is missing. The resemblance given by a photographic image is not enough, it seems. The fleeting, ephemeral borders of the transient phenomena in the natural world—the movement of water or clouds, for instance—are emphasized by means of a manual probing of the surface, which reminds us of the futility of our wish to remember by arresting time in a visual document. Photography seems to be inhabited by both the desire to “document”, to produce an artefact that registers space and forms and details at a certain time, and a desire to preserve the “picturesque”: to see what the world looks like as an image.

Spaces are stitched together—a railroad tunnel, a shower cabin or an entire floor in an apartment building—and thus block our access to them. Gestures are arrested in time by the joining of bodily limbs to space by means of thread. Clouds stitched together with a balcony parapet, or the perforated ripples of the Atlantic, seem to tell us something about the double view that is necessary to put into practise when looking at photographic images, at the same time as they are a reminder of the life and the movements that continue after the instant of exposure. The gesture of a person carried out to its end.

[P]hotography does not enhance memory—involuntarily, physically embracing and immediate memory—but rather replaces it with images—images that are historical, coherent, informational. To induce the full, sensorial experience of involuntary memory, a photograph must be transformed. Something must be done to the photograph to pull it (and us) out of the past and into the present. The subject of the photograph must be similarly transformed, from somebody merely seen to someone really felt, from an image viewed at a distance on the wall into an emotional exchange transacted in the heart. (Geoffrey Batchen, *Forget Me Not: Photography and Remembrance*, 94.)



In Selander’s *Instant* (1999) we see the traces of workings, manipulations and additions: stitches, tape, holes and thread. It is the reverse side of the images that are photographed. In addition to the traces of the artist’s interventions, we can read the signatures of the US and Japanese image-processing giants—a visualization of the compatibility between industrial image technologies and geopolitical aspirations. The private, or personal, is inscribed within a framework of industrial processing. In order to remember, one must take possession of the images, as Batchen shows us. But is the work of Selander only a private memory project? The manual additions to the photographs—the stitching together of people and objects; the perforations, the punctures—could be connected to the inability of photography to fulfill its promises. Instead of memory it gives us a blank space. The image turns its back on the spectator.

Enlarged, punctured. Images that have been denied the position of presenting a Barthesian temporal punctum—“this has been”—but yet seem to refer to precisely this unrealized potential. The holes in the flipside constitute perhaps a kind of literal punctum. From the photographic surface—the place of the image—through the photographic paper to the reverse, we literally see through the image. In Selander’s work *Reconstruction* (1999–2000) ● these holes become the material of the work. The traces of the manual additions and interventions—stitches, punctures—are forms that become a sound-track, made audible by a digital pick-up moving over the surface. A sonorous photogram? Here we are confronted with another reverse side. The negatives of the images in *Instant* are scanned and penetrated by light. The photographed object—the square paper—blocks the light, which only shines through at the sides and through the punctures. We are at the far side of the medium. The traces become sound, the sound becomes radiation, the radiation become image. The “zero” position of photography: photography as pure emission.



From the moment of its sesquicentennial in 1989 photography was dead—or, more precisely, radically and permanently displaced. (William J. Mitchell, *The Reconfigured Eye: Visual Truth in the Post-Photographic Era*, 20.)

Digital photographs separate the visual image from its material base, and make it plastic, mouldable, modifiable. William J. Mitchell regards the death of analogue photography as a moment of liberation, as a possibility to deconstruct the notion of photographic objectivity and closure. Objectivity, realism, witness: these notions are connected to the photographic document, the object that, for good or bad, has given photography its political force, its possibilities to make statements about the world. So the question seems to be: What does it imply to make photographic assertions about the state of things—political, historical, personal—when the status of the image as a document is questioned?

After Photoshop, realism is an effect, the result of a simple operation but based on complex computer mediation, on the hypercodification and normalization of the photographic sign. (Jorge Ribalta, “Molecular Documents: Photography in the Post-Photographic Era, or How Not to be Trapped into False Dilemmas,” 180.)

Photoshop was, according to Jorge Ribalta, only possible after the politicized critique of realism of the 60s and 70s. In such a genealogy Photoshop is the logical consequence of a “post-modern” photography. For Ribalta it is realism, rather than montage, that connects the visual image to social phenomena, that gives it power and guarantees the credence that the photo-document depends upon in order to be operative.

Photographs are a performative version of the real mediated by the medium. (Bernd Stiegler, "Photography as a Medium of Reflection," 194.)

According to Bernd Stiegler, it is of less importance whether the photographs are documentary or staged, analogue or digital. The meaning of photography is retrieved in the production and dissemination of the different modes by which reality is produced. These forms for interpretation are circulated by means of images and become manifest in these images: "The history of photography is a historical sediment of such visualizations of reality that seek to link the subjectivity of perception to the putative objectivity of the 'pencil of nature', as photography was called by William Henry Fox Talbot" (ibid., 194.); "Photographs are the index fossils of historical reality and the history of photography is thus not only a complex history of interpretations of reality; it is also a history of perception. This function is exclusive to photography and gives the medium its meaning". (ibid., 195.)

If photographic meaning can be understood as sedimentation, and thus presents us with a visual "document" of our negotiations with the real through the history of photography, it is much like geology with its chronologically readable strata. Would these "documents" then be equivalent to fossils: forms and shapes of previously existing entities embedded in the deposits of organic life, which under a significant amount of pressure have been transformed into rock? (Notably, the first photographic surface was made of asphalt, a petroleum derivative.)

To convey any knowledge, the documents need to be put to work; they need to be activated by a viewer. As Molly Nesbit explains: "A document could not exist alone: it needed a viewer and a job. For a document was actually defined by an exchange, which is to say, by a viewer reading a certain kind of technical information from the picture and by the picture's ability to display just a technical sign. Both were needed for the document to become a document". (*Atget's Seven Albums*, 17.)

Consider the work of Lina Selander in terms of negotiations between the material (the documents; the fossils of other periods' negotiations with reality) and the form, the structure of the work. By creating a form that gives the viewer/reader a space to occupy that acknowledges the shifting, and sometimes incompatible, densities and historical contexts that the documents carry, her work allows for continuous negotiations. It is not a question of laying issues to rest; it is rather a matter of setting the material in motion, trusting the viewer with the task to look carefully. The relation between form and material concerns the ability of the form to carry a material, which does not imply a refinement of form (formalism), but concerns the shape that the form gives the material, a form that the material in its turn renegotiates, transforms.

What I am calling a dialectical document—after Walter Benjamin’s notion of the dialectical image—would be a work of art that adopts the form of the document and the strategies of the documentary, but that in so doing, would simultaneously—and self consciously—question their codes and conventions. (Sophie Berrebi, “Jean-Luc Moulènes Dialectical Documents.”)

A dialectical document is an ambiguous document, which in part confirms the existence of something (a representative function in relation to what is being depicted), at the same time as it gives evidence of the existence of something else (localized outside of the image itself). According to Sophie Berrebi, dialectical documents inhabit a space between neutrality and engagement, transparency and opacity, art and non-art. The question here is perhaps less about the realism of photography and the nature of its connection to what it depicts, than about the way in which images can function as an optics by means of which it is possible to observe different sets of relations—social, medial, geographical, historical. Dialectical documents are ambivalent documents, unstable objects that do not completely renounce their status as documents, even when they are a part of artworks. The instability of the documents is also a temporal instability; the dialectical documents open up for the possibility of different temporalities to co-exist. This temporal instability is, according to Georges Didi-Huberman, what makes it possible for the image to avoid becoming either only a “document of history” or “a work of art idealized as a monument of the absolute.” (Georges Didi-Huberman, *Devant le temps: histoire de l’art et anachronisme des images.*)

The first image in Selander’s film *When the Sun Sets It’s All Red, Then It Disappears* (2008) visualizes a poetics of layers. A photograph of the 1969 album *Tigerkaka* by Gunder Hägg (marking a beginning for the Swedish progressive music movement) is re-photographed. We see the inscriptions of the soundtracks in the vinyl record, then the dust and specks in the surface of the photograph of it. The surface is blank and the photographer is visible in the dark parts of the image in an unsharp reflection, as is the flash. The photographic images, the magazines, the objects, the film in the monitor, which constitute the visual material in the film, are photographed *en face* with a flash, resulting in circular reflections, burn outs in the surface of the image.



Re-photography, the act of re-photographing the same site with a difference in time between the two images, a “then and now” view of a specific place, was employed as a visual strategy to document changes in ecology as well as for documentary surveys. But what Selander is returning to is not the sites, but the images. Or maybe to the historical events via their

visual documentation. A recopy? To do again, to learn by copying, to administer an inheritance, to make something one's own.

When Yvonne, the country girl in Jean-Luc Godard's film *La Chinoise*, is asked by the director to define Marxism-leninism, her answer is: "When the sun sets it's all red, then it disappears. But in my heart the sun never sets."

La Chinoise was made the year preceding the student uprisings of May 1968, and much of the voice-over in *When the Sun Sets It's All Red, Then It Disappears* comes from the dialogues in this film. For Godard it is a question of inventing a new alphabet for the film. Still camera, the use of primary colours (which are isolated or refined), the presence of the director in the seemingly improvised interviews, visual accounts of the act of shooting the film,—these are a few of the Brechtian *verfremdungseffekte* which Godard employs in the film, "a film in the making," as it defines itself. *La Chinoise* looks into the political dynamics of its time, allowing different political positions to meet and interact. The film is all dialogue and argument. "All I had for *La Chinoise* were the details, lots of details I had to find how to fit together. I've got the structure for *Weekend*, but not the details" (Jean-Luc Godard, "Struggle on Two Fronts: A Conversation with Jean-Luc Godard," 25.) If *La Chinoise*, released in August 1967, could be viewed as an analysis of the coming revolts, *Weekend*, released in December 1967, seems to derive its revolutionary form from events that had not yet occurred.

In *When the Sun Sets It's All Red, Then It Disappears* we encounter black and white photographs from the Swedish student protests in 1968, mixed with the re-photographed scenes from *La Chinoise*, as well as images from magazines from the time. As the children of the '68-generation, heirs to our parents' progressive ideologies, we do not as Godard did in *La Chinoise* foretell a revolution of the political left, but instead consider these activities only after experiencing a neo-liberal revolution.

Selander's work may be regarded as a tentative experiment. Less an attempt to form a new program, analysis or historical record than an exercise in letting these two temporal layers establish points of conflation. It is a question of speaking the words of someone else (as the actors in *La Chinoise* speak the words of Godard), of saying someone else's statements out loud, and of exploring the unfulfilled potential of radical political aesthetics.

The flash marks the surface. It is an inscription by the artist, a gesture of appropriation that moves the material into the present. But it is also blinding: not only literally blocking the viewers' access to the entire image, but also blinding the document.

Godard formulates a sophisticated theory for photographic and filmic images in *La Chinoise*, acknowledging the structure and limitations of the documentary image in providing evidence of the “truth” of an event. As we know, lens-based media does not merely document a reality that already exists, but is also the technology by which we visually form, create and try to make sense of our contemporary condition, thereby creating the reality in question.

Something that becomes visible in Selander’s images is a materialization of the additional layers that the images inhabit, the space between event and image. When we look at the images from the end of the sixties, the interesting thing is less the access to events that have taken place, than the images produced since then and through which we look at the contemporary images. The document is not a given; it exists among a multiplicity of forces, and it cannot substitute for the event. This does not mean, however, that the event cannot be formulated. The two different layers, forty years apart, point to this act: the shaping of history, of the understanding of the event and of the historical understanding shaped by images, and the political investments in these images. What Selander seems to propose by re-photographing documentary images as the visual sources for the film is that it is not the photographic document that is at stake, but rather our desire to visually interpret and make sense of the world which we inhabit. And if we are to be able to do that, we need the fiction of the document. By pointing to the fact (maybe self-evident, but almost always neglected or hidden by a master narrative and singular voice) that photographic images continue to be uncertain documents, not fixed in time (not even after their fixation on paper), the work accentuates their possibility to continue to exert influence if they are again put into motion, activated by the gaze of the observer.

In photographs from the occupation of the Student Union’s building in Stockholm we see the light that made the images in 1968 shining through the window on bodies resting on the benches in this public space—literally occupying space. The reflection of the flash on the photographic surface adds another light, creating an extended time frame. The two sources of light, from different directions and from different times, are setting each other in motion, and with them the gaze of the viewer. The two sources of light at play in this film—the sun and the flash (the natural and the technical light)—at one point intersect in an interlaced movement, where they shift position between the separate images in the sequence and eventually take the form of the other. The sun becomes the flash, for a short time flattening time and space. This moment of temporal, punctual correspondence is not a final destination or a purpose, not a resolution. The positioning of the forms in the images between different lights reminds the viewer of his or her own position in relation to the images.

The gaze, then, has to be set in motion by the document. It is not so much a question of the education of the observer—or knowledge of the context of the visual documents—as of engaging with the form; that is, engaging with the way the documents relate and in the space they constitute. Lacking a fixed position, the document has to be challenged and constantly put to work:

A form with no gaze is a blind form. It requires a gaze, of course, but gazing is not simply seeing, nor even observing with greater or lesser 'skill': gazing assumes *involvement*, being affected that recognizes itself as a subject in that very involvement. Conversely, a gaze with no form and no formula remains a mute gaze. The form is required for the gaze to gain access to the language and the elaboration, the only way for the gaze to 'deliver an experience and a lesson', i. e. a chance for *explanation*, of knowledge, of ethical rapport: therefore we have to *involve ourselves* in if we are to have a chance—by giving form to our experience, by reformulating our language—of *coming to terms with*. (Georges Didi-Huberman, "Emotion Does Not Say 'I', Ten Fragments on Aesthetic Freedom," 58.)

Selander's work may be viewed as a specific kind of architecture. An architecture that is not built in order to provide answers, but in order to create a space for the viewer to integrate with specific questions, layers, statements and emotions, and to reflect upon the way our history and politics are shaped by our documents, reports and recollections. Well aware of the fact that criticism cannot exist without being complicit with what it criticizes and thereby resists, Selander invites the viewer to take a position *within*. Didi-Huberman writes: "Contemporary art is made up of multiple becomings. The 'becoming document' obviously occupies a significant place among them. Not only do artists *use* news documents—a way for them to adopt a stance 'in the face of history'—but they even *produce* them at new expense, a way for them not only to look at the event, but to intervene and make contact with it [...]. [I]t is a question of re-engaging with the relevance of the 'visual testimony', both with regard to art (and the form it questions). It is then that 'art-document dialectics' take shape, and through the 'crisis of uses' of photography something like a 'utopia', or indeed a 'documentary poetics', is established". (Ibid, 67–68.)

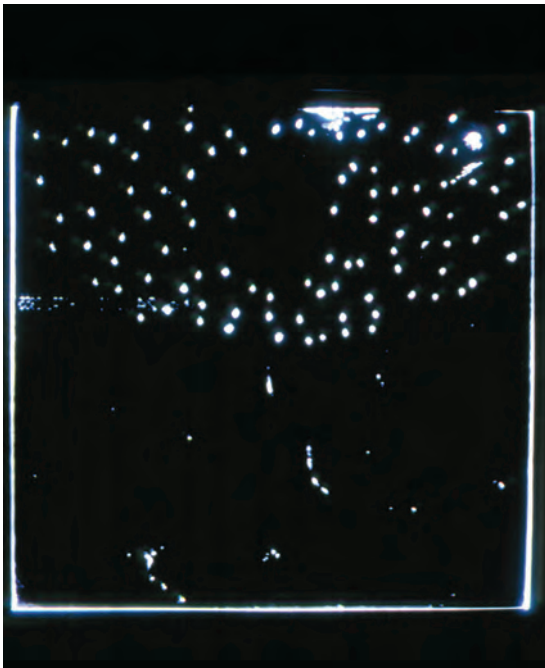
Selander's work can be regarded as continual attempts to invent such a documentary poetics. By means of continuous negotiations with images, statements, conceptions and projections, Selander creates these places for re-engagement. If Selander creates documents, it is always in the light of other documents. This entails constant negotiations with media and memories and statements that constantly fall short of one's expectations, which need to be reformulated and viewed from a different perspective. Perhaps it would also be possible to approach her work as a kind of performative criticism. Avoiding binary poles as document versus fiction,


unmediated versus mediated, Selander offers us a way to view these different discourses and take upon us the task, the political task, of mediating these statements, to “take them upon ourselves” (Didi-Huberman), to interact with them, to put the documents, history, in motion and to end up at a place both familiar and radically different, and, most importantly, where we did not know we were headed.

Reconstruction, 1999–
2000. Continuous video
and sound composition,
7'15 min, dimensions
variable.

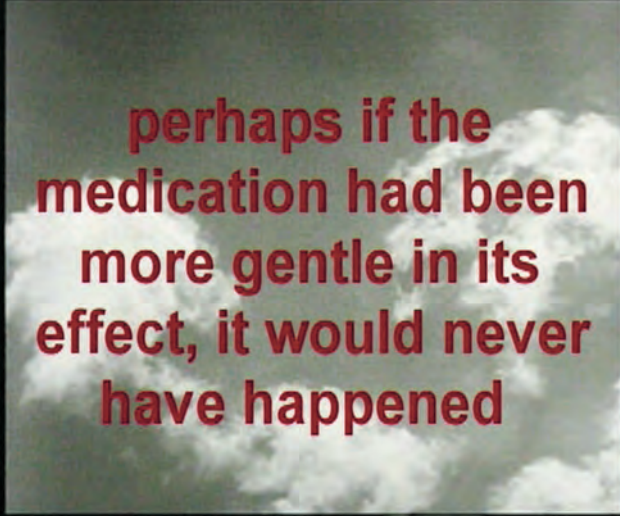


Installation view, *Onedot-zero*, Moderna Museet,
Stockholm, 2005.

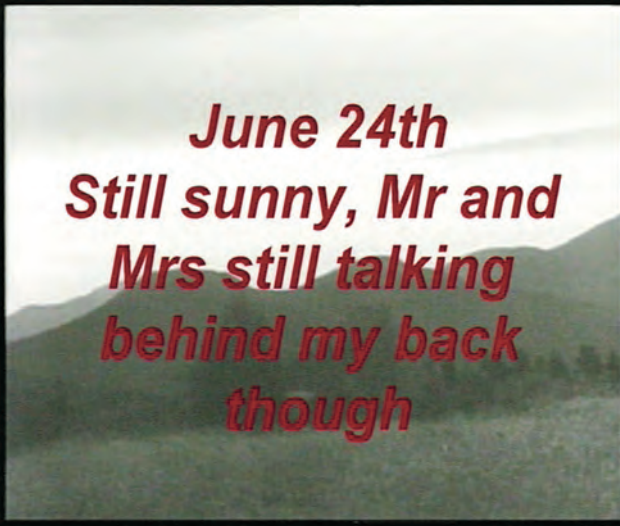




**of all the places this
is the one which is
best remembered
by me**

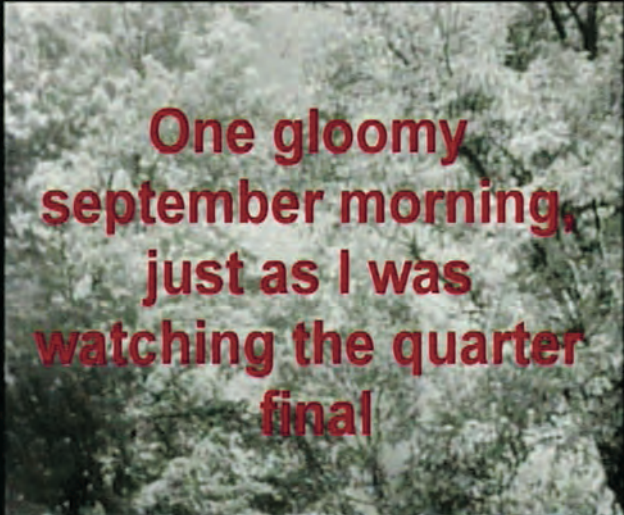


**perhaps if the
medication had been
more gentle in its
effect, it would never
have happened**




***June 24th
Still sunny, Mr and
Mrs still talking
behind my back
though***

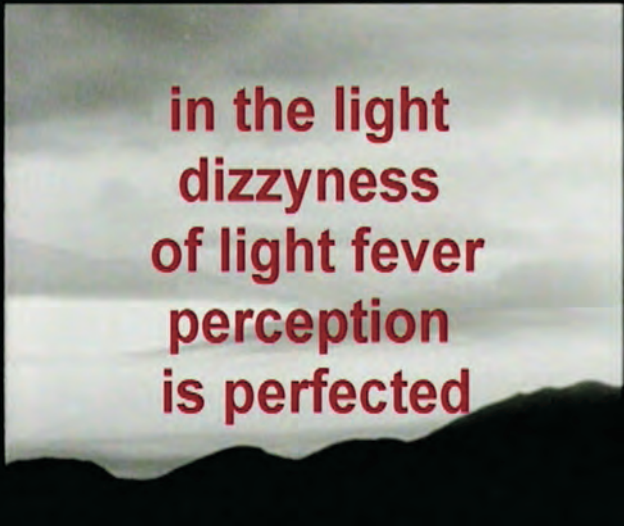
This is the Place, 2001.
Colour video projection
with sound, 5'30 min.
Video still.



**One gloomy
september morning,
just as I was
watching the quarter
final**



**I moved from one
city to another**



**in the light
dizzyness
of light fever
perception
is perfected**

64

Kim West

THE SPACE OF MEMORY



1. I here refer to the installation of the work at Nordin Gallery in Stockholm October 2 – November 2, 2008.

2. See Trond Lundemo's conversation with Harun Farocki in Trond Lundemo, "The Image of History," 12.

"I want to be blind", says the voice on the sound track of Lina Selander's film installation *When the Sun Sets It's All Red, Then It Disappears* (2008).¹ At the same time, we see two images projected on two screens placed opposite one another in the exhibition space: a photograph of a desolate landscape, in which a small group of protesters brandishing a red flag walks along a country road towards the horizon; and a static shot of leaves that move in the wind, blurry and red, almost abstract.¹ These are the elements of the installation: one sound track, two image tracks. On the sound track, the voice reads a fragmented text about words and images, memories and histories, at times interrupted by a piece of classical music and disjointed noises. One of the image tracks shows a montage of still and moving images: photographs of activists, bombs falling, record covers, film stills. The other image track shows nothing but the red foliage, in a take without cuts. Between the three tracks, relations and associations, contrasts and oppositions appear. The sound track speaks of blindness; at the same time we see colours, landscapes, persons.

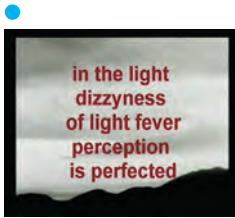
"To see is not to understand", says the voice at another occasion. "Maybe one does not understand when one sees and does not see when one understands." The "blindness" evoked in the text is here given a significance. It is not the lack of a human sense, but a condition for understanding. To see is not to understand, and therefore it is not sufficient to display, to expose the visual traces of something in order to make it comprehensible. An image does not explain what it shows. In order to understand what an image shows, one must become blind. Why does the image not explain what it shows? One can imagine a number of reasons. "Unlike dogs", Dziga Vertov supposedly said, "images do not have nametags"?² Certainly, images are always, almost without exception, surrounded by words, texts, captions, paratexts, signatures, etc., which interpret them, accompany, name and legitimise them, and allot them roles and positions within institutional systems. Without its relationship to words, discourse analysis has taught us, the image is not "caught within the true", not comprehensible. However, the relationship between images and words is not obvious. It is never evident, never natural, necessary. The image does not prescribe, it has no nametag, it does not itself say what it shows, and does not point out its own position. The image does not explain what it shows, because it has no words of its own. Words must be added, and there is never any logically compelling reason to prefer some words to others. "Blindness", in this sense, is a precondition for understanding, because it is only by abandoning the purely visual and moving towards other sense registers and expressions—sounds, voices, texts—that an image can become comprehensible.

Another possible reason why an image does not explain what it shows would be the opposite: too many words. An image may already be surrounded by so many stories, anecdotes, texts, sentences, names, or slogans, that it is impossible to form an actual experience of this image

and establish a relationship to it that makes it possible to give meaning to the reality it displays. No matter how much one looks at images, one only ever hears others' stories. To be "blind" would in this case not signify that one is deprived of vision—perhaps for the benefit of some sort of higher seeing, a clarity, in accordance with the classical trope. But neither would it simply signify transcending the merely visual and establishing a relationship to words, on account of which the image can become comprehensible. To be "blind", here, would rather mean to break free from a visuality that is already overcoded—that is already weighed down by stories and names, that is already locked into image-text-patterns that point out its position and possibilities—in order, thereby, to reach a new access to the reality that it displays. It would mean rendering the images unrecognizable, establishing other relations between images and words, tearing the images away from patterns that allot defined significances and roles to them, consequently creating a space in which one can understand what they show and provide them with one's own stories and names. "Blindness" is the emancipation of images; it is to liberate the images from the others' stories to let them tell other stories.

The subject of *When the Sun Sets It's All Red, Then It Disappears* is the period around '68 and its politics and history, as well as Selander's father who at the time was a member of the infamous Swedish revolutionary group, The Rebel Movement. The photographs and the film images that are interconnected in one of the image tracks all in different ways constitute documents from this era and context. All the images have one thing in common: their centres are occupied by a sphere of light. There is a blind spot in the middle of them, a diffuse white point that resembles the reflection of a camera flash and that erases details of the image. "A corroded sphere of white", the voice in the soundtrack says. "The words that have left the image for a while / That can return, not as strangers." The sentences give an elliptic yet concise summary of Selander's complex, synaesthetic method. The "blind spot" is that on account of which the "words"—the others' words, the others' stories—may "leave the image for a while", in order then to "return", but now as one's own words, and "not as strangers". That is to say, it is the distortion which aims to render the images unrecognizable, to disconnect them from their given places and meanings, and make it possible to provide them with other words, according to other patterns, so that one may understand the reality that they show. In *When the Sun Sets It's All Red, Then It Disappears*, the work of memory and the work of historiography, Selander's personal history and the story about the era in question, are inseparable from one another. The work aims to create a spatial montage of images, sounds, and words, in which documents from an epoch that has been buried in myths can begin anew to tell of its reality, and in which the traces of a person whose history is intertwined with the myths of this epoch can be unravelled and turned into memories.

The problem of “blindness”, in its different dimensions—that images become comprehensible only when they are set in touch with other sensual expressions; that the relationship between words, sounds and images is never evident or necessary; that one can liberate images from the others’ stories and give them a power as documents and memories by rendering them unrecognizable and inserting them into other montages and other spatial arrangements—is essential and recurs throughout Selander’s work, from the subtle displacements of words and images, of the relations between the expressions of the senses in *This is the Place* (2001), and the more drastic distortions and translations in *Reconstruction* (1999–2000), to the advanced spatial dispositif, the dazzlements and contrast effects in *Total Eclipse of the Heart* (2004), and the methodical investigations into the recording capacities of a mnemotechnology in *Repetition* (2005). Selander’s works are ultimately all experiments with mnemotechnologies and historiographies, with documents and montages, with the modes and models according to which images, forms, sounds and words can be combined so that they are transformed into memories or produce other historical experiences. In this sense *When the Sun Sets It’s All Red, Then It Disappears* is an emblematic work. Personal memory and general historiography—the story about Selander’s father and the history of an era—are both active as separate levels in one and the same attempt to create a sensible and spatial montage that can give access to, tell of, and provide understanding regarding the past.



One could point out certain aspects in *When the Sun Sets It’s All Red, Then It Disappears* that return in Selander’s other works, and constitute central elements in her search for a “blindness” that transforms images and words into history and memory: the tendency to depict a reality that in an essential way engages the technology of reproduction that she employs; the attempt to distort images, sounds and words, and create other relations between them; the search to separate, multiply and spread out the elements of the cinematic “apparatus” onto separate sources, several screens, etc., rendering the space active as a significant component of the work. In *When the Sun Sets It’s All Red, Then It Disappears*, these aspects are present in different ways: while the static take of foliage in one of the image tracks does register a development that occurs at a certain place, it also constitutes an almost abstract examination of the registering technology, a way of engaging the temporal duration of the film and the optic field of the image surface; on the other image track the “blind spot” distorts the images which are contrasted and associated with the shot of the foliage and the events in the sound track; the two screens and the separate sound source activate the space and make the positions and movements of the spectator essential for the perception and understanding of the work. These aspects are varied throughout Selander’s other films and installations.

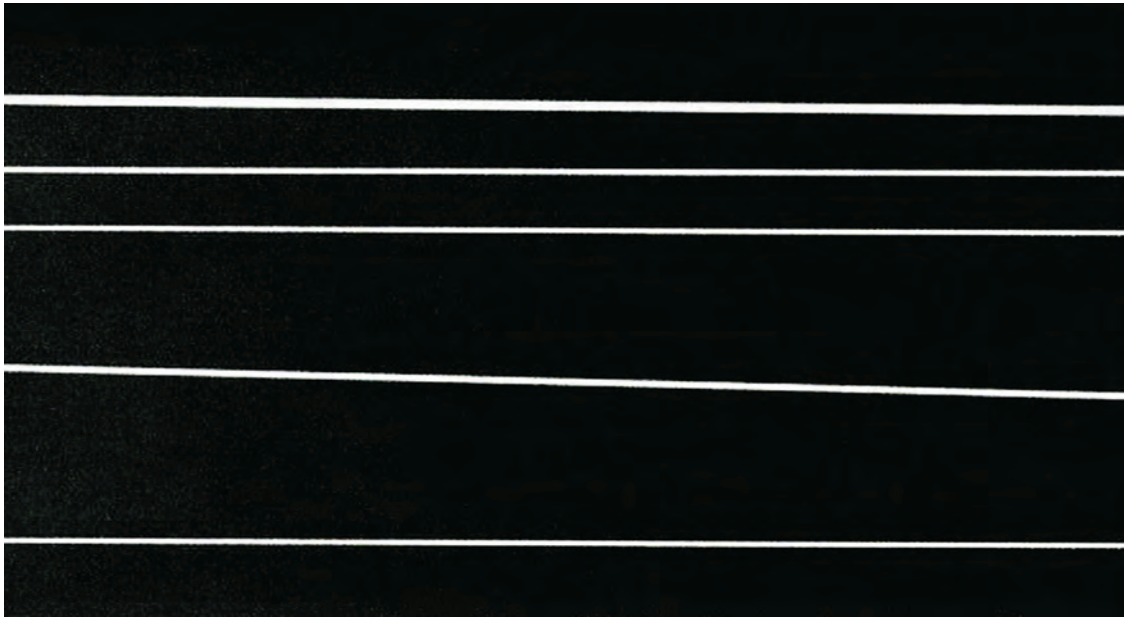
Lumière

A number of Selander's works include or consist exclusively of images that only seem to register a reality, the course of time at a certain location, but where the images' motifs—the objects and the events in front of the camera eye, but also conditions of light, camera angles, focus, etc.—at the same time seem to be chosen specifically because they engage the film technology in an essential way, force it to expose its qualities and limitations. The most important, even programmatic example of this would be the minute observations of the insides of different columbaria in *Repetition*. In less spectacular ways, however, one finds the same tendency in works such as *This is the Place*, *Total Eclipse of the Heart* and *The Hours That Hold the Form (A Couple of Days in Portbou)* (2007).³ These films and film installations have their own topics, forms of composition and rhythms, yet each one of them shows phenomena which seem to aim in the first hand to expose the film's own temporal duration, or to engage the surface of the image in its entirety. We see trains that traverse the screen, but we also, perhaps above all, see the image track's own movement and time; we see a myriad of ants that crawl across the ground, swarms that fill the air and flocks of birds that are thrown across the sky, but we also see marks, points, contrasts, optical effects that spread over the surface of the image and activate its smallest elements. These images record a reality, but they do so because the image of this reality also exposes the abilities and capacities of the recording technology. One could call this aspect in Selander's work the Lumière aspect. For the Lumière brothers, cinematography was simply a technology that could inscribe time, history and life itself in its very movement, onto a material support, and whose scientific or spectacular use remained to be specified. And the choice of motifs for the films—the launch of a huge ship that fills the surface of the image, trains that traverse the screen, workers that leave the factory—also served to expose what people really came to see: the cinematograph.

Repetition is Selander's most important work in this regard. It does not only record a reality at the same time as it displays an acute awareness about the qualities of the recording technology. It also makes film's ability to preserve the traces of the past its explicit theme. December 30, 1895, two days after the Lumière brothers' first public screening of their invention in the basement of the Grand Café on Boulevard des Capucines, an anonymous critic wrote in the Paris daily *La Poste*: "When these devices become available for the public, when everyone will be able to photograph their loved ones, not only static objects but with their movements, their actions, with their familiar gestures and their words on their lips, then death will cease to be absolute"³ Half a century later, André Bazin makes the same idea the fundament of his film ontology and situates film



3. "La mort cessera d'être absolue," 41.



27 Kilometer Drawing,
2002. B/w video with
sound, 7'15 min.
Video still.

4. André Bazin, "Ontologie de l'image photographique," 11.

in a history that leads back past photography, painting and sculpture, all the way to the mummies and the Egyptian embalming techniques, which "tear away" the dead from the flow of time and "anchor him in life".⁴ That "death will cease to be absolute" is also the dream which is, in the final instance, at the basis for the small practices and rituals of which Selander records the traces in *Repetition*. The film consists of a sequence of takes of columbaria in the cemetery in the town Portbou, situated on the border between Spain and France. The sequences are shot with a handheld mini-DV camera, and the takes all move from a point just outside of the small columbaria, in towards their interiors, where they carefully explore the walls of the chambers and zoom in to extreme close-ups of burnt-out candles, old bouquets of flowers, crushed vases, overturned icons, etc. However, the takes show more than just desolate grave chambers and the remains after memorial rites. The film's subject is also the digital video camera itself, its treatment of light, its autofocus, and its image resolution. When the camera is placed outside of the columbaria, the aperture adjusts to the light conditions of the time of the day and the place, to the sunlight that blazes on the wall of the chambers. The columbaria are dark, they form an unarticulated, informationless blackness surrounded by the surface of the white wall. When the camera approaches the dark interiors of the columbaria, the aperture adjusts to the new light conditions and the chamber opens up to the image: we see the small space, its inner walls, the different objects, the weeds. The 16-minute film repeats again and again the same movement in towards the obscure chambers of the columbaria. One can point out two things regarding *Repetition*. First, that it establishes a parallel, an analogy between two radically different forms of mnemotechnology, two ways of preserving the traces of the

past: the columbarium (a monument to a person's life), and the digital video camera (a technology that records light and movement). When the camera penetrates into the interior of the chamber, the aperture opens towards the interior of the camera, which makes the chamber open itself up to the film and its viewers. Camera and columbarium seem to directly correspond to one another: the camera is a columbarium, the columbarium a camera (*camera obscura*: it has certainly not escaped Selander that "camera" and "chamber" are one and the same word). The second thing one can point out is that the film accounts for a sort of simple, indexical relationship. A relation of cause and effect is traced from a person and the columbarium that has been established to her memory, to the technology that records light's encounter with this chamber, and to the images that this recording process in turn results in. "Death ceases to be absolute": a causal chain links the life of the buried person to the spectator in front of Selander's film. *Repetition* seems to linger upon and return to the fascination for this banal yet vertiginous indexicality.

Another group of Selander's film works is based on the same basic self-reflexivity, the same idea of depicting a reality that at the same time makes the depicting technology expose itself, but here the technique becomes more abstract and stylised. *27 Kilometer Drawing* (2002), *A Thousand Sublime and Heroic Men* (2002), and *Inner Pond* (2003) are all in the most fundamental sense images of movement. The three works are based on the same footage: a continuous take of electric wires flashing by a train window. In *27 Kilometer Drawing*, this material is treated in the simplest way: the colours are inverted and all details, except for the wires, are deleted. What remain are white horizontal and diagonal lines that bounce up and down against a black background, accompanied by ethereal sounds on the sound track. The formal exercise is radicalised in *Inner Pond*, where Selander also replaces the traditional film dispositif with another spatial arrangement. The rectangle of the film screen is bent into a circle, transforming the bouncing horizontal and diagonal lines into circles and curves that move in towards and out from the circle's centre. This circle is then coloured in different hues and projected down from the ceiling onto the floor; on the sound track a piece by Tallis is played backwards. *A Thousand Sublime and Heroic Men*, Selander's only clearly feminist work, is a sculpture consisting of three video monitors piled onto one another. On each of the monitors, the same image track as in *27 Kilometer Drawing* is shown, with the difference that it now shifts in colour, the three monitors constantly forming different chromatic constellations. With its slightly sarcastic title, and ironic yet powerful visual rhetoric, the work alludes not only to Newman's painting, but also to a certain stylistic austerity that in many instances was characteristic for postminimalism's and early video art's examinations into the conditions of the "medium"—a tradition that Selander at the same time belongs to and distances herself from.



Installation view, Tbilisi History Museum, 2004.

Godard

27 Kilometer Drawing, *Inner Pond*, and *A Thousand Sublime and Heroic Men* all show a reality that in turn exposes the qualities of the recording technology. However, the distortions of the images in these works also point towards another central aspect of Selander's work: the problem of "blindness", the tendency to rework and distort images, words and sounds, and establish new relations between them, in order to have access to memories and tell other stories. One could call this the Godard aspect, not only because Selander directly quotes Godard, or because her treatment of screen texts sometimes resembles his, but also, in a more general fashion, because Godard is the "modern" filmmaker who, in his work, has pushed the exploration of the political and historiographic possibilities of cinematographic montage to the farthest, from *Les Carabiniers* and *Le Gai savoir* to *Histoire(s) du cinéma* and *Voyage(s) en utopie*. Perhaps one could say that what Selander seems to find in Godard is the fundamental idea that a film is a way of organizing the sense impressions and semiotic systems with which a person relates to and interprets reality—reality is a montage of images, sounds and words—and that, by disconnecting these sense impressions and signs from their given relations to each other and recombining them in other ways, one can learn to understand reality anew.

When the Sun Sets It's All Red, Then It Disappears is in significant parts a collage of elements from *La Chinoise*, Godard's film about Maoism, pedagogy and theatre from 1967: the title and almost the full text in the soundtrack are borrowed from the dialog of *La Chinoise*, and the image track contains a number of stills from the same film. However, *When the Sun Sets It's All Red, Then It Disappears* is not in the first hand a work about or a homage to Godard. *La Chinoise*, rather, has the role of a privileged document regarding the period and the context with which Selander's work deals, a document that belongs to and participates in the movements of the era, at the same time as it constitutes an advanced attempt at analyzing and reconstructing their logic. As Jacques Rancière has pointed out in his text on Godard's politics, *La Chinoise* has an interesting, even emblematic reception history: when it was released, it was accused of showing spoiled brats who played revolution in their parents' bourgeois apartment, out of touch with the reality of class struggle; ten years later it was celebrated for the clarity with which it predicted the student riots and the terrorist violence of the left wing extremists.

However, the five characters' "separation" from the "reality of class struggle" in *La Chinoise* is, in fact, inscribed into the film's Maoist program. The bourgeois apartment in which the protagonists are isolated becomes a place outside of everyday politics and its language, in which they are

forced to learn everything anew and reconstruct reality and its arrangement of images and words in accordance with a certain Maoist doctrine. Which does not entail that one can dismiss Godard's film as naive agit-prop, but on the contrary points out how sophisticated the aesthetic possibilities of this Maoism in fact were—something that Selander is highly aware of. In her work, Selander gives a prominent role to a famous sequence in Godard's film, where Jean-Pierre Léaud's character, the actor Guillaume, tells an anecdote about a Chinese protester in Moscow, who with a bandage around his head gets in front of the Western reporters' cameras proclaiming: "Look what those dirty revisionists did!" When the demonstrator takes off the bandage, everyone expects to see a bloody, cut-up face, but it turns out that he is completely unharmed, which causes a scandal: "This Chinese guy is a fake. He's a clown, a sham. What's going on?" What the reporters did not understand, explains Guillaume, was that this was theatre and not reality. "The political activist is like an actor", Rancière writes, "his work is not to show the horrors that can be seen, but to expose that which cannot be seen".⁵ In Godard, this anecdote has the function to account for the actor's, and, by extension, the film's political and pedagogical force to expose new relations and separations, to give the images new significances and make the words show a reality that does not yet exist. It testifies to an epoch's dream of a political art that, by rearranging signs and impressions, can educate a new experience of another common world. At the same time, Selander uses the anecdote against its own logic, in order to give expression to her own methodical "blindness": her disjunction between seeing and understanding, her search to liberate the images from the histories with which they are associated and activate their memorial powers.

When the Sun Sets It's All Red, Then It Disappears is the only work by Selander that directly quotes Godard. But a number of her other films, image series and installations seem to be involved in a silent dialog with Godard's montage experiments. "Si tu veut voir le monde, ferme tes yeux, Rosemonde", "If you want to see the world, shut your eyes, Rosemonde",⁶ says the character Patricia in the sister film of *La Chinoise*, *Le Gai savoir*, shot in the autumn of 1967 and edited on the other side of May, in the summer of 1968—a film in which Godard further radicalises his exploration of the film's analytic and pedagogical, political power, its ability to dismantle sensory experience into its elements and remount them according to new configurations. Patricia, isolated together with Léaud's Émile in a black space, a "zero point" from which they can study the relations of images and words, shuts her eyes and the film cuts to tracking shots of city streets. "I see it. I understand it", it is written in red on the screen in Selander's one-channel film *This Is the Place*, at the same time as the sound track, which was previously silent, starts to play a piece by Mahler. Seeing is connected to understanding in the screen text, the film's only discursive element, but while we simultaneously see brief shots of a tree in strong wind, it is the sound that is the film's

5. Jacques Rancière, "Le rouge de La Chinoise: politique de Godard," 195.

6. The phrase is a quotation from Jean Giraudoux's novel *Suzanne et le Pacifique* from 1921, but Godard has, characteristically, distorted the original, replacing Giraudoux's "Si tu veut *découvrir* le monde, ferme tes yeux" (which can be understood as a way of sharpening the perception of the other senses) with the direct contradiction "Si tu veut voir le monde, ferme tes yeux". [My italics.]

other prominent element. *This Is the Place* in many ways appears to be a formal exercise, where Selander searches for a form of composition that can separate and contrast the film's elements, but at the same time hold them together in a suggestive, emotional movement. Perhaps it would be possible to perform a careful reading of the text fragments shown on the screen (allusions of murder; memories of travels and a depression; diary notes speak of a monotonous everyday existence), and interpret the different images and sequences in the image track (whose material is sampled from Leo Hurwitz's semi-documentary emancipation drama *Native Land* from 1942). However, the significances of the single elements and the separate tracks are assimilated into and transgressed by the assembled, suggestive force of the juxtaposition of the images, the text fragments, and the sentimental thrust of the music. "In the light dizziness of light fever perception is perfected", says the final text fragment of the film. *This Is the Place* seems to aim for a subtle reorganization of the senses that creates an enhanced, "feverish" perception. It is Selander's most seductive work, at the same time as it is inscribed into her project to find a form of montage that can give access to other experiences of memories and histories. "A mix of method and sentiment", says Patricia in *Le Gai savoir*. "Yes", answers Émile, "I have finally found these words to define the images and the sounds".

"The eye must listen before it sees", says Patricia at another point, at the end of a dialog about sound, image and memory, about the difficulties in recreating a sound, since the image with which it is associated lays claim to the experience of recollection. In order to remember a sound, one must therefore displace, distort seeing. Selander's *Reconstruction* draws the most extreme, almost absurd consequences of the idea of the relationship between memory and synaesthetic displacements and translations. The work consists of a film that can be presented on one or several screens, showing white, abstract patterns—lines and points—against a black background. The only moving element in the images is a red spot that traces the upper edge of the screen, from left to right. The sound track plays ethereal sounds, digital howls from a wide frequency spectrum. The film has been produced according to an elaborate logic. Selander has taken images from her photo album and sewn in them, linking together motifs and elements. "Sewn man silhouette in front of villa." Red thread above the house walls. Twilight. "Sleepover in a wind shelter. Blond boy's jaw sewn onto sleeping bag", it says in "117 of 146 instamatic shots", a separate text that consists of descriptions of these images, and that will later be included in the sound track of *Total Eclipse of the Heart*. Selander has then scanned the backs of these photographs, which only show threads and perforations against a white background, inverted them, and subsequently inserted these abstract images into a sound program that translates the points and the lines into noises. The film shows these inverted images in sequence, the red spot visualizing which segment of the image is being "replayed" in the sound track.

Reconstruction appears in part to be a programmatic work, which in a demonstrative fashion accounts for Selander's method: one can only have access to the reality shown in the photo album's images by distorting these images and translating them into other sense registers, by intervening in the images' motifs and transforming the visible into sound. At the same time, it is a work that pushes this method to an extreme endpoint: the distortion is so drastic that all information is lost. To the extent that it is a question of a work of remembrance and not only of an elaborate, exaggerated technique for producing abstract images and sounds, this work of remembrance is exclusively personal. The spectator has no access to the images and their possible stories. The reconstruction of memory becomes the destruction of all communication.

The film installation *The Hours That Hold the Form* is situated between the poles of *This Is the Place* and *Reconstruction*. There is, in this work, an effort to make the elements of the film form a common, suggestive movement, but in the montage, the assembled emotional force does not supersede the singularity of the images and the sounds. And there is a search to break apart and distort the image-sound-relations, but this distortion never becomes so radical that the elements are emptied of information. "What one must find is free images and sounds", Patricia says in the beginning of *Le Gai savoir*, in a dialog where the protagonists present the film's three-stage method: to collect images and sounds; to dismantle, criticise, reduce and assemble them anew; to fabricate two or three models for their future use. *The Hours That Hold the Form* is based on two sources. The image material originates from Selander's visit to Portbou, the border town where Walter Benjamin took his life on escape from the Nazis on September 26, 1940. The images are, with one exception, black-and-white, both still and moving, and mostly show empty, desolate environments: a marshalling yard; trains that traverse the screen; clouds and mountains filmed from an airplane window; interiors from the abandoned, decayed Benjamin Museum; a swarm; bushes and trees shot with sharp lights during nighttime, etc. (It would not be impossible to establish a catalogue of recurring motifs in Selander's work.) In the sound track, a male voice reads a fragmentary text that relates more or less nightmarish scenes of persecution, border-passing and flight. The image track and the sound track are, in the installation, separated in a clear, demonstrative fashion. The sound comes from its own source, a reel-to-reel tape recorder placed in front of the screen in the exhibition space, and the image and sound tracks are of unequal length (14 and 15 minutes, respectively), and looped, so that all relations, encounters, or contrasts between events in the two tracks occur at random. This technique has a number of effects. On the one hand, it has a critical, expository function: it shows the elements of the cinematic "apparatus" rather than hiding them behind continuity montage and traditional projection arrangements. On the other hand, of course, it means that the artist has limited her proper control over the montage, over the composition of

the film: she cannot work with exact confrontations and correspondences between elements in the two tracks. At the same time, it entails a certain, relative freedom. The separate tracks are not dependent on each other; they can establish their proper flows, their own rhythms, pulses. However, this reciprocal semi-autonomy also forces the sequences of images and words to justify themselves, to carry their own development. In this open or free arrangement—the cinematic elements themselves are on display, and the film tracks are independent of each other and follow their own logics—*The Hours That Hold the Form* advances slowly, in a melancholic, at once shattered and concerted movement, in a relation which, since none of the film's constitutive elements can fall back on any other, is held together by the very force of its separation, its non-identity.

Syncinéma

In the earlier installation *Total Eclipse of the Heart*, this disjunction between the elements and the tracks of the cinematic apparatus is even more drastic. Here, however, this also leads to a more overt dispersion in the space that makes the spectator's positions and movements essential to the composition of the work. *Total Eclipse of the Heart* consists of two image tracks, one projected onto a large screen and one shown on a smaller monitor, as well as a sound track replayed from a reel-to-reel tape recorder.⁷ The image track shown on the monitor consists of a rather high-paced montage of images from *Native Land* (recycled a second time from *This Is the Place*); images that seem to be shot during different travels, from cars, airplanes, hotel rooms; as well as images of foliage, trains, ants that crawl across the ground. The image track projected onto the screen seems to consist mainly of materials from the same sources, with the difference that the screen is here to the largest part occupied by a red sphere covering the images' motifs. In the sound track a male voice reads the text "117 of 146 instamatic shots"—that is, short descriptions of the photographs which are at the basis of *Reconstruction*. Just as *Reconstruction* and *This Is the Place*, *Total Eclipse of the Heart* seems above all to treat a formal problematic. Here, however, the aim is to activate the space and set a constellation of dazzlements, separations and distances in play. There is no apparent thematic or narrative thread between the different elements in the image track and the sound track, no correspondences in motifs, no particularly significant juxtapositions. Contrary to *This is the Place's* search for a subtle reorganization of sense registers that may give rise to a common, emotional movement and an enhanced, feverish perception, this installation seems rather to search for a form for the heterogeneous, where nothing is simultaneous, nothing corresponds, and where the elements are held together in a radical disjunction. The separation of the sources of the sound track and the image tracks, the "blind spot" in one of the image tracks, and the spatial arrangement, where the positions of the screens limit the spectator's abil-

7. I here refer to the installation of the work at Filmform in Stockholm April 17 – May 9, 2004.

ity to follow the different image tracks simultaneously, all indicate that Selander with this installation wants to create a system of exclusions—which is underlined *a contrario* by the almost shocking contrast effect of the work's sole moment of synchrony, when the image of a waterdrop hitting a puddle coincides with a shrill, piercing drop sound. This aspect of Selander's work, where the film is spread out onto several screens, the sources are separated, and the space itself is activated as a component of the work, is present since *Reconstruction* and *A Thousand Sublime and Heroic Men*, and returns in *When the Sun Sets It's All Red, Then It Disappears*. But it is with the elaborate asynchronies and distances in *Total Eclipse of the Heart* that it is brought to its most radical point. This aspect could, with a concept coined by Maurice Lemaître, be called the Syncinéma aspect, in reference to the different artists and filmmakers that in the 50s and 60s began to perceive the projection space as an active artistic component, something that was pliable, could be modified, experimented with, tested, criticised, rejected. "Syncinéma," and the somewhat later American equivalent "Expanded Cinema," are both extremely wide concepts, which have a long and complex prehistory,⁸ and refer to a sprawling multiplicity of cinematographic and artistic projects (Anthony McCall's and Ken Jacobs' search to reveal the spatial and historical conditions of the cinematic "medium"; Stan VanDerBeek's and the Eames brothers' dreams of an all-enclosing multimedia and interactive architecture for a new technological age; Isidore Isou's, Lemaître's, Gil J. Wolman's and Guy Debord's search to create avant-gardist situations that would destroy the spectacle's passivizing effects and emancipate man, etc.). The essential, however, is not only that this aspect in Selander's work actualises a rich tradition, but also that these artistic experiments together point towards a critical awareness about how the traditional cinematic apparatus, with its one-channel projection, fixed viewing positions, orthogonal organization, dark space, etc., is merely a contingent constellation of forms and elements, and that these forms and elements can be rearranged in an open multiplicity of configurations, in order to produce other aesthetic effects.

To summarize, one can speak of three general aspects in Selander's work: a Lumière aspect, where the works record a reality, but where the image of this reality aims, at the same time, to expose the abilities and limitations of the recording technology; a Godard aspect, where Selander disconnects images, sounds and words, and reassembles them according to other models, in a search for a montage form that can give access to memories or tell other stories; and a Syncinéma aspect, where this disjunction of the film's elements is rendered operative in the space, creating a critical awareness of the contingency of the traditional projection dispositif, and making the positions and the movements of the spectator essential to the work's composition. Selander's art is the combination of these three aspects, which occurs in different ways and with varying degrees of emphasis in her works: *Repetition* in an apparent way belongs

8. "The spectator's room becomes a part of the film room. The separation of the 'projection surface' is ended," writes De Stijl founder Theo van Doesburg in 1929. At this point, his dream already has a significant tradition, running back via pioneers (Abel Gance's triple-channel composition at the end of *Napoleon*, 1927) and the experiments of the futurists (Marinetti et al's manifesto for a futurist film, 1916), to the enthusiastic attempts of early cinema (Grimoin-Sanson's "Cinéorama" balloon with ten film projectors for the Paris Exposition in 1900). One can note that the critical aspect of Syncinéma/Expanded Cinema has a theoretical parallel in apparatus theory's investigations of the ideological effects of the projection dispositif (Baudry), whose genealogy Jonathan Crary has traced in his investigations of the transformations of the techniques of the observer.

to the Lumière category, but with its drastic separation between image track and sound track it is at the same time closely connected to *The Hours That Hold the Form*; the latter would, due to its fleeting reorganization of the relations between images and words, belong to the Godard category, however it also contains a number of images whose aim above all seems to be to engage the optic field of the image, and furthermore its disjunction of sound track sources produces an awareness regarding the projection space and the cinematic apparatus; *Total Eclipse of the Heart* can, with its several screens and advanced spatial arrangement, be placed in the Syncinéma category, but at the same time it contains images that would belong to the Lumière category and exclusions and distortions that would belong to the Godard category, etc. If one wanted to discern a development in Selander's practice—or at least in those parts of it I discuss here—one could note that, through her different works, there seems to exist a slow, almost methodical movement from abstraction, distortion and reduction, and towards reference, significance and history, or rather, a movement in which abstraction and distortion are gradually enriched with reference and history. Where films and installations such as *Reconstruction* and *27 Kilometer Drawing* seem above all to be formal exercises based on elements emptied of all information, and works such as *This Is the Place* and *Total Eclipse of the Heart* still seem in the first hand to search for forms of composition that can command the disjunction of the film's components and disrupt the relations of different sense registers, *The Hours That Hold the Form* and *When the Sun Sets It's All Red, Then It Disappears* approach narrative forms, where the models Selander develops are put to use in order to communicate memories or histories.

Intersections

Selander's art—these aspects of it—is based, then, on the interconnection of a number of tendencies: to engage the film technology in its essence; to disconnect and rearrange its constitutive elements; and to reorganize its spatial dispositif. What does this interconnection mean? What does it mean today, in our historical moment? And what is its ultimate purpose? “[T]hough a simple convergence is very unlikely, it is crucial that the two avant-gardes should be confronted and juxtaposed”, writes Peter Wollen in his classical text, “The Two Avant-Gardes” from 1975. The two avant-gardes he talks about are, on the one hand, a radically experimental film that operates completely outside of the commercial film industry and deals with purely formal problems, at the expense of all narrative and all positive (political, spectacular, etc.) reference; and on the other hand a film art that operates in the margins of the industry, and does not fully abandon narrative and reference, but despite that performs advanced formal experiments and actively explores the material and historical conditions of the cinematic medium. For Wollen, who writes from a Euro-

pean perspective, these tendencies are represented by the London Film-Makers' Co-op, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, "film-makers such as Godard, Straub and Huillet, Hanoun, Jancsó". Wollen points out different origins for these movements: for the former, modern painting's self-reflexivity and abstraction, and for the latter, early Soviet cinema's search for a popular film form that corresponds to a society's technological and ideological development. Even though no synthesis or "simple convergence" between these tendencies is likely, Wollen writes, film art should, due to its "multiple system", its multiplicity of possibilities—"the reciprocal interlocking and input between painting, writing, music, theatre"—become the place where these two tendencies, these two avant-gardes could approach each other. Through such a movement, film art should be able to uphold a distance to the illusions and exploitations of the movie industry, without getting stuck in modern visual art's "purist", "essentialist" dead end, and thereby "develop and elaborate the semiotic shifts that marked the origins of the avant-garde in a uniquely complex way, a dialectical montage within and between a complex of codes". This, he concludes, is at least "the fantasy I like to entertain".⁹

Three decades of technological and film historical development have passed since the publication of Wollen's text, and today a number of his concepts and analyses of course feel dated. The drastic transformations of distribution forms and visual technologies have made the traditional cinematic apparatus obsolete (which does not prevent it from living on as an anachronism with both aesthetic and economic potentials); the experimental moving image has become a ubiquitous and unproblematic presence in the spaces of contemporary art, in museums and galleries; and these thorough displacements of film art's institutional and technological landscape force us to search other origins and continuities, maybe even other historiographical models, for thinking its historical place and role.¹⁰ Compared to the situation Wollen departs from the differences are significant. However, perhaps these differences, these transformations and displacements, only make his fantasy even more essential today. Perhaps it is, in a situation where art and cinema seem to enter into a fundamentally unstable relationship, where the traditional cinematic apparatus appears to be nothing more than one possible configuration of elements among others, more necessary than ever to design aesthetic models for a film art within which institutionally and historically separate genres can approach, encounter and confront one another, in order to articulate both their common horizons and their inherited differences and specificities.

Confronted with such an idea of a film art for which the traditional projection dispositif is but one possible arrangement of components among others, the French film critic Jacques Aumont retreats to a conservative position. "There exists in the film dispositif", he says, "in what one so diligently calls the film 'aggregation', in fact something more than

9. Peter Wollen, "The Two Avant-Gardes," 181.

10. Two historians who work with questions in this vast field are Philippe-Alain Michaud, who combines the histories of art and cinema in for example *Sketches, cinéma et histoire de l'art*, and Branden Joseph, who studies Minimalism as an "audio-visual movement" in *Beyond the Dream Syndicate: Tony Conrad and the Arts After Cage*. Michaud, responsible for the film department at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, was also the curator of the important exhibition *Le Mouvement des images* in 2006.

11. Jacques Aumont, *Le cinéma a-t-il déjà été moderne? Comment le cinéma est devenu le plus singulier des arts*, 112. The analogy between the film dispositif and Christianity is striking, if somewhat strange. One wonders in how many respects Aumont's claim is a confession of faith, and what this implies regarding his conception of modern film.

12. One can note that today's gradual dissolution of the borders between different film genres and art forms only seems to increase the taxonomical urges of the more orthodox film scholars. See for example András Bálint Kovács's *Screening Modernism, European Art Cinema 1950–1980* and Jonathan Walley's "Modes of Film Practice in the Avant-Garde," two new texts that take as their starting point David Bordwell's concept of "mode of film practice,"

erecting detailed divisions between classic film (that is, Hollywood cinema), art film or modern film (the genre created by the European new waves), avant-garde film (work by experimental filmmakers, made for a classic projection apparatus), artist films and video (work made to be exhibited in the gallery), as well as potentially a new media art essentially separate from the other categories. All of these categories are supposed to define separate film genres, each with its own histories and its own institutions, production forms, spectator forms and aesthetic properties. These detailed descriptions of institutional borders and genre divisions are surely empirically valid and sociologically correct. However, despite their creators' irreproachable erudition, these categories essentialise historically and institutionally contingent, mobile concepts and forms, and the question is to what extent they contribute to an understanding of film art's critical and aesthetic possibilities.

13. Cf. e.g. Jean-Christophe Royoux's and Raymond Bellour's contributions in *Black Box Illuminated*, ed. Sara Arrhenius, Magdalena Malm and Cristina Ricupero. See also Royoux's "The Time of Re-departure: After Cinema, the Cinema of the Subject," in *Art and the Moving Image*, and Bellour's "The Double Helix," in *Passages de l'image*. Another indispensable reference in this context is Dominique Païni's *Le Temps exposé*.

the mere hazard of a stroke of luck. Film is perhaps nothing more than an aggregation that happened to succeed—but in the same way as one can say of Christianity that it is a sect that happened to succeed: that is, nevertheless, on account of something more fundamental than pure hazard.¹¹ A similar idea that the tradition of advanced film art can only be maintained by preserving the classical cinematic apparatus, that film art's migration to other spaces, institutions and channels robs this art of its singularity, its essence and possibilities, recurs among a number of film critics and historians.¹² The question, however, is whether an affirmation of the contemporary technological and institutional situation must necessarily preclude continuing to work within the parameters of—and developing the possibilities of—herited film genres.

Selander's art suggests that this does not have to be the case. The fact that the different aspects of her work actualise and hold together a number of different historical legacies (Lumière, Godard, Syncinéma; early cinema, modern film art, avant-garde), at the same time as they distort, disjoint and disperse the components of the cinematic apparatus, compels us to situate them within what some theorists call an "exhibition cinema" (Royoux), "an other cinema" (Bellour), or simply a "post-cinema", that is, a film art that exists in a continuity with cinema's own histories, but at the same time employs the openness for different spatial arrangements that is to be found in the institutions of contemporary art—something that also reconnects it with art's historical legacies.¹³ To situate Selander's work in such a context would not only serve to find a correct category for its historical and institutional location, to clarify exactly how it negotiates its complex of aesthetic genealogies. It would also serve to think its critical value. The situation of contemporary media technologies is characterised by a radical openness and ceaseless transformations of modes of viewing and spectator positions that constantly tear apart the relations of images, sounds and words, and reassemble them into new spatial configurations. The entertainment industry has no scruples, is not weighed down by any historical responsibilities when it comes to exploiting the potentials of this openness for generating always more powerful spectacular effects. Perhaps the critical capacities of film art, then, are not only to be found in a stubborn resistance, a maintaining of its tradition and classical institutional and technological forms, a consolidation of its historical space that preserves its singularity and essence. While the tradition and forms of the classical cinematic apparatus will no doubt live on and continue to generate complex and rich works even beyond its historical moment, critical values are also to be found in a film art that reaches back to historical resources, but sets them into operation in other institutional spaces and viewing arrangements. A film art, in short, that searches for other models for the use of the "openness" of contemporary media technologies in the virtualities of tradition: in early cinema's explorations of the capacities of the cinematograph; in the modern filmmakers—Godard, but also Debord, Duras, Resnais, etc.—and their

disjunctions between images, sounds and words; and in the avant-garde experiments with spatial arrangements and spectator positions. Perhaps it is in such a historical context one may understand Selander's interconnection of separate cinematographical and artistic tendencies.

14. Cf. Georges Didi-Huberman, "Expose the Nameless."

The Space of Memory

However, Selander can only unite and connect these different tendencies and legacies because for her they find their origins in the same fundamental capacity. For Selander, film art—in the widest possible sense of this term—is a space of memory. Film's abilities to inscribe the course of time at a certain location onto a material, technological support with certain qualities and limitations; to connect and separate, associate and contrast images, sounds and words; to spread this montage work out over several different sources, on screens, projections, monitors and tape recorders, in order to create other types of spaces—all of these aspects converge in the general search to produce a spatial mnemography that can generate other experiences of memories and histories, beyond fixed anecdotes, established narratives, or accepted historiography. The film installation *The Hours That Hold the Form*—the one shot in Portbou, Walter Benjamin's resting place—is, one could probably claim, Selander's most thorough and explicit reflection regarding this mnemographic capacity of film art, and the work which comes the closest to articulating the critical underpinnings of her project. The task of the historical materialist, Benjamin had famously claimed in one of his *Historico-Philosophical Theses*, was "to brush history against the grain". "Historical construction", he had said in a preparatory note to the theses (which was eventually to be inscribed on his tombstone in Portbou), "is devoted to the memory of the nameless". In a recent text, Georges Didi-Huberman finds traces of Benjamin's project in a certain tendency in contemporary art and cinema towards creating what he calls a "documentary montage", where images, texts and sounds are juxtaposed according to other historiographical models. "[A]re not today's artists", he asks, "decisively drawn to this resource of documentary montage as a means to expose the nameless?"¹⁴

The Hours That Hold the Form, of course, would seem clearly to confirm Didi-Huberman's suspicion. It is a film about Benjamin and his tragic destiny in a small border town, but its subject is also the nameless and the invisible, and film art's own capacity to record them. Returning to and lingering on this film, on the concerted separation of its elements and tracks, and its calm, its melancholy, it leads one's thoughts to certain of Marguerite Duras' shorts, to *Cesaree*, to *Les Mains négatives*. Hints of narrative can be discerned: the text in the sound track contains fragments of stories—about a shipwreck, about a family that is haunted by menacing men who enter their home and burn down their front door,

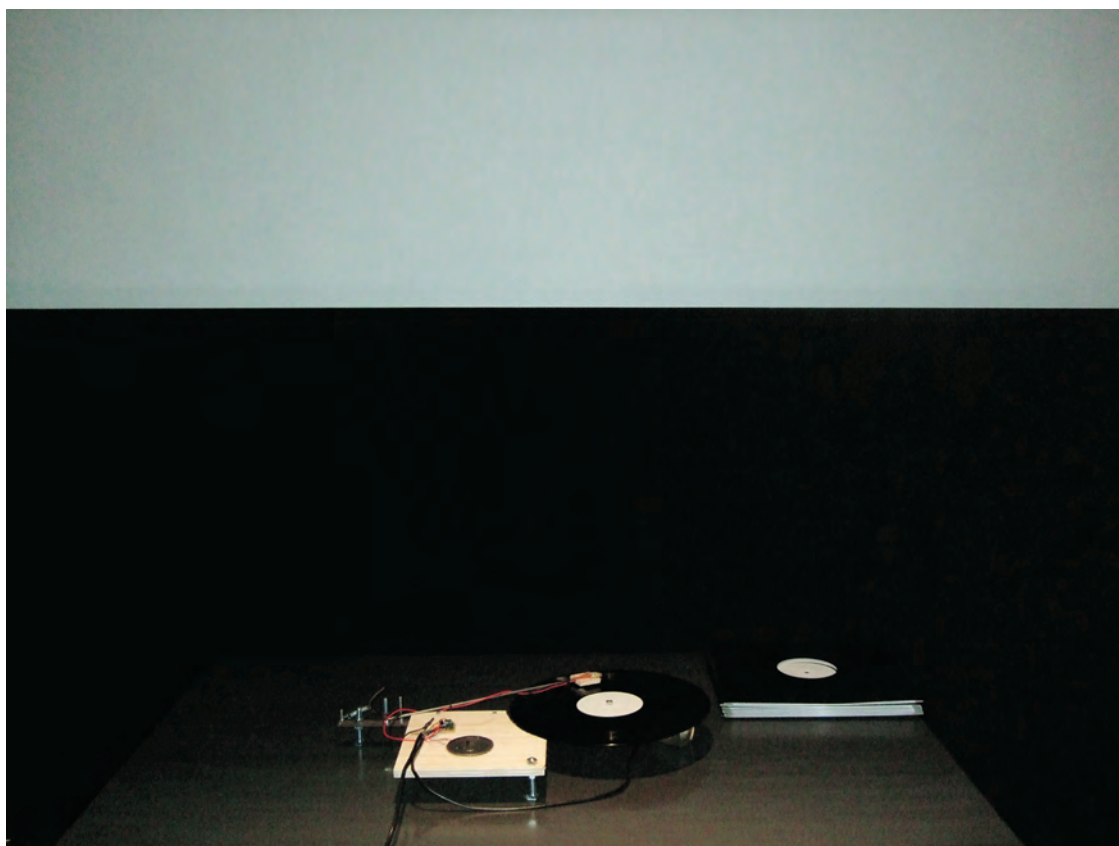
about a man who confesses his homosexuality but is set up, blackmailed, reported to the police, about flight across a border, exhaustion, resignation. In the image track one can, in accordance with the film's subtitle, "A Couple of Days in Portbou", distinguish a loosely constructed travelogue: in the first images we arrive in an airplane over the Pyrenees, as we reach the town we visit the Benjamin Memorial Museum, stroll along the railway tracks, the yards, enter the abandoned station house, as the night falls we see the trains passing through the dark, a ship in the harbour, searchlights, the morning after we get on the train and see the landscape pass by outside of the window.

There are, in short, hints, fragments of narrative. But the aim of the film's montage is not to tell an identifiable story, to link together images and sounds into narrative and plot. Instead, the montage of documents in *The Hours That Hold the Form* follows a movement of flight. Time, the minutes, the hours hold its form. Its theme, its content, its motif, its very figure is the fugitive: the nameless and the invisible by definition, he whose identity is suspended in a passage, he who lacks representation and whose name cannot be articulated or pronounced. The fugitive is present in the film in a number of ways. It is Benjamin, who decided not to get stuck on his passage through this town, and whose remains—documents, images, writing tools, an empty satchel—are put on display in the destitute museum. The fugitive is also the shapeless beings who float about in the sound track's scenes of persecution and flight, scenes that flow into and out of one another, that are interrupted and restart. And the fugitive is a figure operative in the materiality of the film itself, with its discrepancies and its asynchronies, its lack of definite identity, its suspended form. *The Hours That Hold the Form* is a movement, the transgression of a border, the passage through a non-space.

Selander's documentary montage, in other words, does not mean to produce a narrative, to explain what has happened, to show the past as a course of events with a rationality. She seeks something else: a montage of the monument, an epitaph in cinematography, a constellation of images and sounds that finds a permanent form for the movement of flight and that, in the distance between the conventions of storytelling and the muteness of historiography, creates a memory of something that, eluding representation, remains nameless.

Involuntary Autobiography, 2007. Mixed media: sculpture, sound.

Installation view, *Arts Birthday*, Moderna Museet, Stockholm 2008.



Making a book on Lina Selander's works is not a far-fetched idea. As writing and traces of writing are interspersed in most of her works, and as the tension between word and image is of crucial importance to them, they seem to stir the desire to write about them. Sometimes during the editing process I had the feeling that books (or at least texts) about Selander are virtual in her works, that books and texts move as potential replies on the indexical level (as thoroughly analysed by Trond Lundemo) where the unseen and unspoken come together in an expression by unfolding a new temporality, forced as they are to give evidence to the events of the works and simultaneously struggle with their own discursive abilities and disabilities. There is an affinity between Selander's works and writing and the textual medium, and as all affinities this implies similarities, but more than anything it implies negotiations about shared differences, negotiations that are here mainly pronounced through the composition of the essays, the editing and the graphic design of the book as interpretative but also figurative tasks—tasks that carry their own problems and obstacles. Interpretations, as well as translations between media, mean transfigurations of the translated and interpreted form, and in accordance with the logic of representation there is always the well known risk of the book and the discourse hollowing out an unfavourable distance between on the one hand the artworks and the artistic practice and on the other the book itself, the documental material that sample the works and the essays that delve into and materialise in writing a relation to them. Furthermore, in the last instance a book is also an object, taking up positions in spaces and contexts, and in the undertaking to say, to show and be something about something else, it can't completely escape representation.

When editing a book about an artistic practice I think it is of utmost importance to bear this fact in mind and to comprehend what the book can and cannot escape. But at the same time, when we think about how the book and discourse arrest movement and re-present, we must also consider that a book can remodel, even radically change the notions of object and representation and gain force through the projective movements of its becoming. It can bear witness to the experience of convening with the concept and composition of the artworks it presents, more than trying to fixate and repeat what cannot be fixated and repeated. If such a task were to succeed, this book would be close to what it is about; it would have become a new and different object

and constellation of ideas, involved in a critical dialogue between objects and ideas that do justice to both itself and the contributing essays and to the artistic practice in question.

Having said that, it is either an exaggeration to state that Lina Selander's practice exercises a certain force on discourse, evoking the desire for dialogue, storytelling and reflection or it is to assert that her own writing plays a crucial part in establishing this exchange. Presented in intersections between different layers of the installations, written material works in ways that escape writing's usual fate of becoming simply a straightforward commentary on images and installations as objects in space. The meaning of Selander's writing cannot be confined to the semantics of the statements as it is displaced and transformed through the assemblage or montage of different layers of expression and media. Put in the simplest of words, the space installed becomes a space of poetry, a space where meaning is produced by the sliding between the elements that articulate it and by the maybe fragile and heterogeneous but nevertheless singular composite of the installations. In these processes of transformation and translation, the writing, the image and the word as homogeneous entities are renounced and transferred to a more unstable logic as not-just-writing, not-just-image and not-just-words. The privative dynamics of transformation and displacement is induced upon the categories of space, sound, text, word, film and installation and unfolds that logic of poetry which the essayist has to keep up with when writing about Selander. This is the difficult task of the essayist that can explain how Selander's works uncover such a desire to be written about: her works prove that there can be a qualitatively different text than the one we contract when we usually write, the not-just-text that manages to challenge our notions on text and textuality.

I'm not going to plunge into any effort to close or try to conclude the arguments of the contributing essays; such a synthesising attempt would go against both the intentions of the book to fuel a critical but open dialogue and the spirit of Selander's works to make such dialogue possible in the space they invite the spectator to share. How the invitation is received can be scrutinised in the essays.

Cecilia Grönberg's montage essay is a performative reading of the photographic aspects of Selander's works;

Mara Lee uses the materiality of the text to signify the experience of literally being in touch with Selander's works and within this dimension of palpation she problematises the works in terms of gaze and otherness, distraction and desire; Frans Josef Peterson uncovers *The Hours That Hold the Form* as a work that insists on itself as singular experience, questioning itself as form and investigating its technological conditions; the essay of Sinziana Ravini, evoked by the desire for storytelling, braids a piece of her own story into the weave of stories in Selander's works and engages Selander's writing in a discourse on the economy of narratological desire along political and historiographical lines; Trond Lundemo's text is a meticulous reading of *When the Sun Sets It's All Red, Then It Disappears* in the intersection between images and words, stillness and movement; finally, Kim West's multifaceted and profound essay that has given this book its title which spells out the space evoked by Selander's works and installations (what I a moment ago called the space of poetry) as the space of memory, the works being all "experiments with mnemotechnologies and historiographies, with documents and montages, with the modes and models according to which images, forms, sounds and words can be combined so that they are transformed into memories or produce other historical experiences." At the point where the work of memory and historiography combine in the montages, histories are to be told anew, and Selander's works do this by engaging and exposing the film technology and the history of cinema, holding together a number of different historical legacies at the same time as they "distort, disjoint and disperse the components of the cinematic apparatus" and consequently contest their own history. This is where we find the film art as a space of memory, West tells us, which "produce a spatial mnemography that can generate other experiences of memories and histories, beyond fixed anecdotes, established narratives, or accepted historiography." Accordingly, this is where we also have the profound joy to meet Selander's work as perhaps one of the most thought-provoking there is today: amidst the many unresolved tensions between word and image, between storytelling and historiography, and between the use of the film technology and its history, these tensions are brought into play in a figuration that insists on itself as a productive and singular form of experiences, memories and histories. Hopefully this book will manage to team up with(in) this space of memory, awaiting those future books about Selander's work that seem to be virtual in her work.

I wish to express my gratitude to everyone who has been involved in the work on *Lina Selander: The Space of Memory*: the contributing writers and translators, the proofreader Julie Cirelli, the graphic designer Andjeas Ejiksson and the publisher Staffan Lundgren. Lina Selander, who I have consulted through the editing process and who has been deeply involved in the selection of the presented image material, deserves special thanks for her patience and willingness to collaborate. My colleague Oscar Mangione ought to have my expression of gratitude for the support he has given me to get pass temporary obstacles in the editing process. Finally, I am grateful to Axel Nordin, Nordin Gallery, Stockholm, as well as to Längmanska Kulturfonden and the Swedish Arts Grants Committee, all of whose generous support has made this publication possible.

Fredrik Ehlin, April 2010

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