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Master thesis
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22.11.2021

MUTE ASH

Memory, Image, Place and Loss



¹ Figure 1

Tyst Aske



Til Stian

Contents

ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION I,II

101 CATULLUS

TABLE KITCHEN WITH MEMORIES

LOOKING FOR EVIDENCE

SORGARBETE/GRIEFWORK

FACTS

SEA AND WAVES

BURNING IMAGES AND BLACK IMAGES

HOW TO MAKE A PERSONAL STORY INTO ART

LIST OF FIGURES

REFERENCES

Abstract

«Not a single idea or work of art could be generated without it,” she notes, “and although it is **often uncomfortable**, it is also exciting.” It is doubt, after all, that has the power to free us of delusions.³

I want this thesis to be fragmented in format and the feeling of doubt should be seen throughout the whole text. That all the different perspectives of my doubt should help me to understand what I look for, or help me to accept that all questions doesn't really need to be answered. While working on the text I have also been working practical with the inquiries for my artistic work and I see that behind the word DOUBT I can find valuable attempts and questions that I consider as equal important as the finished work. The title of the whole work could have been DOUBT, or it could have been CARE, or it could have been DECONSTRUCTION, or it could have been MEMORY. This list could go on forever, and that is also maybe my wish, that the list just continues in me while working on my questions, but I also want to make statements during the process to be able to navigate in what I do. There is so many directions for everything, and the hard part is to narrow my thoughts down so it can be readable for the reader.

My background has been in photography, and the background for this thesis is also in many ways photography and questions around photography. It's about listening and looking at photographs and how to deal with the experience of that.

In the preface I also want to mention the artist and smell researcher Sissel Tolaas before going further, Tolaas work with smell as an artistic expression and has founded the SMELL RE_searchLab Berlin (supported by IFF Inc). She has built up various archives of smell recordings, an archive of 10,000 smell molecules, and Nasalo, a unique smell lexicon, so far containing 4,200 terms and expressions. Smell is so much linked to memory, that's why I mention her in this preface, because I also experience smell many times when looking at photographs. And by exploring the smell when looking at photographs so many new perspectives and thoughts comes to my mind, and it's interesting to think about how smell is connected to memory and in what way this impact my work.

With doubt as a starting point I want to discuss photography, care, loss, memory and place.

³ Siri Hustvedt, *A Woman looking at men looking at women*, Hodder 2017.

Introduction I

Twelve years ago my close friend and his older brother died in a climbing accident, on an island in the north of Norway. In 2018 his parents gave me his analog photographic negatives after I asked them to have a look at it, a collection of around 1000 negatives from his past two years. An intimate and private gift, which I received with humbleness. I decided to work on this material in the photographic darkroom; print it, look at it, reflect on it and meditate over it. It became a method for myself to remember a beloved friend. This process revealed complex questions in me; and touched me in a way I find difficult to explain. This experience is more about listening and asking questions, and a way for me to respond to this, was to weave it into my own practice as an artist. I wanted to use his collection of images as a starting point to explore my own experience of mourning. My intention wasn't that the material should be looked upon as anything magnificent or special from other personal archives. I don't want to say that these pictures need to be shown to the public, maybe these pictures are just meant for me and people being close to him. This work is more an attempt from me to make sense of the human impulse to mourn; *why do we need to memorialize someone? Why the need to assemble trivial remnants of a lost presence?*

Introduction II

This essay is an effort to write my thoughts and reflections on my art practice, focusing on the work to-be- realized for the graduation show in may 2021 at Tromsø kunstforening. I have found it difficult to use a collection of images from a close friend who is now dead as a starting point for an art project, and I struggle to find the right words for the questions and enquires I have for this work. I use a material and a story which is deeply personal connected and also have a specific background history for myself, it's private. In one way I don't see any ways to not tell this story, but at the same time I want the work to reveal other questions in me, which is not connected to the specific accident or which is not connected to the word *death*. This ambivalence is also something I found interesting. In the process of writing I have looked at literature and works which in some way are connected to grief or archive. I must be honest to say that I have struggled to grasp the essence of what I try to assemble with this work, but one question that comes back to me is *what am I looking for?* By dividing the paper into different sections I have tried to look at Roland Barthes, Marguerite Duras, Susan Howe, Deluze Gilles, Pia Arke, Anne Carson, Sissel Tolaas, Jonas Dahlberg and my own work to try to come further in the questions *what am I looking for and how to make a personal story into an art project?*

I want to leave the idea of showing the collection of images from my friend, and find a new way to represent and talk about my questions around the work, and maybe the questions is the work itself. Hopefully it is. Before coming to that point I need to go through the processes which my meeting with the collection of images redeemed in me.

I want my text to show this process, I even wanted to show a timeline in my own grief, switching back and forth between diary rabbling and other texts. Last fall I attended my second year at the master program at Academy of Valand. In one of my first text tutorial I had a meeting with the professor at the academy Jason Bowman. I presented my work at zoom, felt insecure and too abstract while talking, it was difficult to suddenly come in to a new class in the second year, and with the distance teaching because of the pandemic it was even harder to present my ideas for a new teacher. Jason was sitting in front of a window with curtains covering the windows, he stands up after I had my introduction and said he wanted to show me something, he took his computer closer to the curtains. It turned out that his curtains was a piece of art with a *grief timeline*, showing grief as something very unpredictable, attacks of sorrow with lines going up and down, a timeline. It was a work he had made himself. Periods of harmony, but then again attacks coming back as a shock, different colors on the lines and the letters, different words popping up on the timeline. With the light coming from behind in his Glasgow apartment and his presence while talking about the timeline it

was one of the strongest work I had seen on grief.

Taking this experience into my writing I felt inspired. Jason also presented the idea of meta ethics within my text. As I understand it- meta-ethics asks what morality actual is. I have tried to think about this while writing my thesis, to let the text itself open up questions around ethical aspects, instead of letting the words tell you what is wrong or what is not. Let the text live its own life. Grief and loss is something we all experience in one point, it's a personal experience. In society it's different norms connected to grief, and I think it's interesting to have the words *norms* and *grief*.

101 CATTULUS

*Many the people many the
oceans I crossed—*

*I arrive at these poor, brother, burials
so I could give you the last gift owed to
death and talk (why?) with mute ash.⁴*

When I found the translation of the poem Catullus 101 by Anne Carson it was with huge enthusiasm, I felt I have found something to lean against and words to be safe in. While reading it, different words stayed with me, these words I marked with a red marker. I think these words will be important in the finalization of the work.

OCEAN

BROTHER

BURIALS

LAST GIFT

TALK(WHY?)

MUTE ASH

⁴ Anne Carson translation of the poem «Catullus 101 by **Gaius Valerius Catullus** (født ca. 84.f.kr., død [ca.54.f.kr.](#)), *Cattulus 101*

Kitchen table with memories
(Images)



Stian`s archive_foot and hand I⁵

⁵ Figure 3

On the kitchen table in your parent's house and your childhood home, your father had placed three different boxes with your photographic archive; one big black archival sleeve box, one small blue unorganized soft perm and one white envelope with hundreds of negatives floating around in it. I looked at the negatives lying on the table, I looked at your father, I looked at your mother, I looked at your images hanging on the wooden walls and I looked at the door to your old room.

Eleven years earlier, some week after your burial I got your camera, your whitewool shirt and your car.

When I stood in your parents' kitchen, I thought about me taking care of this collection of images, a personal photo archive from you. I think about what an archive is and why I should have it, and why I am interested in it. Should I just keep the negatives in the boxes, hidden away, like a secret altar. Taking care of it.

The French writer Roland Barthes began writing his classic *La Chambre claire* (Camera Lucida)² right after the death of his mother. He studies old pictures of his mother, looking for her, in one of the pictures he finds her. He refuses to show this picture of his mother as a girl and writes; “*I cannot reproduce the Winter Garden Photograph. It exists only for me, for you, it would be nothing but an indifferent picture, one of the thousand manifestations of the ordinary... ”*

Barthes understand that the *punctum*³ In this photograph is his alone. The emanation of the referent which for him is the essence of the photograph is in this picture a personal connection. For me the winter garden photograph opens up rooms within the collection of images from my dead friend. Cynically the images have value for me because he is dead, in every negative printed from his collection, I see death and symbols.

I think about the word **brother** when looking at your images. The fact that both you and your older brother died in the accident, and the fact that your little brother is still alive. When I look at the negatives only, not the printed images, I get glimpses of what the motif is, but what strikes me the most is what is my responsibility in the process of going through these images. Why do I want to look at them and which story do I tell after looking at them, what is it to see?

² Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*

³ The *punctum* points to those features of a photograph that seem to produce or convey a meaning without invoking any recognizable symbolic system. This kind of meaning is unique to the response of the individual viewer of the image. The *punctum* punctuates *the studium* and as a result pierces its viewer. To allow the *punctum* effect, the viewer must repudiate all knowledge. Barthes insists that the *punctum* is not simply the sum of desires projected into the photograph. Instead, it arises from details that are unintended or uncontrolled by the photographer. Photography can be distinguished from painting or drawing in that its apparatus visualizes the world automatically rather than being wholly informed by the interventions of the photographer. The theory of the *punctum* speaks the indexical nature of the photographic medium. It also accounts for the importance of emotion and subjectivity in interacting with photographs.

Diary I.15.10.2018 (First meeting with the place)

Yesterday I came back from the trip to the accident place. It took me nine years to visit the mountain where the accident happened. Have not really figured out why I should go there, or maybe its more about I did not really now how to visit a place with ghosts. Because that is what the place is for me, but at the same time its just stones and shifting weather. I realized this is something I want to do alone, and just be there in silence and in some way register what I see. I brought a camera, old positive color film and linen cloth with photo sensitive chemicals covering the cloth. Then I at least had something with me. Like a last gift, or a personal ritual of the death. I have no idea what this trip will give me or what I registered there. But it felt good to be there, it was not comfortable. I slept in the climbing cabin, it was cold, snowing outside and darkness was surrounding the cabin. I did not sleep good, but still it was good. I was for sure looking for ghosts. But today I visited the place, the first time and maybe the last. Now I have seen with my eyes where it happened. And why this need of needing to see something? What does it give ?

Diary II.20.10.2010 :(Geology / History and death)

I read the report from the accident tonight. The only thing I think about while reading is the small written text in the report, 16th of July there is full daylight, day and night in Tromsø. Grey stone and midnight sun. GREY SUNSET.

From wikipedia//

On the islands north of Tromsø there is tonalite and tonalitic gneiss which consists of plagioclase quartz and belongs to the TTG-group. The oldest rocks are 2880 million years old, and this area is special because the rocks are very little affected by the metamorphosis and they have a voided the caledonian mountain range building.

On the northern side of Ersfjorden the 1800 millions years old Ersfjord granite exists. This is a plutonic rock, which most likely is a western extension of the correspondingly more metamorphic rocks in Finnmark.

“Plutonic rocks are igneous rocks that solidified from a melt at great depth. Magma rises, bringing minerals and precious metals such as gold, silver, molybdenum, and lead with it, forcing its way into older rocks. It cools slowly (tens of thousands of years or longer), underneath Earth's crust, which allows the individual crystals to grow large by coalescing, like with like; thus, plutonic rock is coarse-grained rock. The rock is later exposed by erosion. A large body of this type of rock is called a pluton. Hundreds of miles of plutonic rock are batholiths. “

In ancient greek religion Pluton, better known as Hades is the god of death, god of the underworld.

***The sun** does not set below the horizon within a 24 hour period.*

PLUTONIC TONALITIC GNEISS AND CLIMBING IS

A VERY GOOD COMBINATION

**MIDNIGHT SUN AND HADES IS NOT
WRITING POETRY ABOUT MAGMA AND CLIMBING IN
GRIEF IS A CLICHE, WHY NOT?**

The day after the death of his mother 26th October 1977, Roland Barthes starts the work of *Journal de deuil* (Mourning Diary),⁶ 24th of July 1978 he writes;

Grief

or.

Photo of the winter garden: I search hard to find the obvious meaning.

(Photo: Powerless to say what is obvious. The birth of literature)

«Innocence». The one who is never harmed.

⁶ Roland Barthes(*Journal de deuil*), published by Le Seuil, 2009

Looking for evidence

(Is it possible for me to enter this material and find a room for my grief)



Stian`s archive_Waves⁷

WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR ?

What happen if i bring my grief into the pictures?

MAYBE YOU DON'T FIND WHAT YOU LOOK FOR ?

⁷ Figure 4

I took your images with me in the darkroom, and enlarged them on the wall. The projected image on the wall is a projection of the negative, it is just light, no material, if I turn off the light it will disappear. It touched me to look at the images in this way, the combination of light coming out of the pictures and the big size made me get the feeling of being in the picture, a way to meditate over what I see. When all the settings in the machine was ready after tests with aperture and time I glued sheets of photo paper on the wall, illuminated the paper with light from the photo enlarger and then developed the paper in chemicals. Then I had your picture printed. These pictures are full of memories, I have a personal connection to them, maybe too much of a personal connection. When I reflect upon the process in the darkroom I think this is something I want to show or communicate; the investigation of something, the research phase, like a scientist looking for details and register the results. How to translate this experience from the darkroom for others? Another aspect of the darkroom process is that I can look at your images on the wall without creating any physical material out of it, I can look at light. And the idea of just looking at light is in itself fascinating.

*Nox*⁸ which translated from latin means night is the title of a book by the Canadian writer Anne Carson. It's an elegy for her brother who disappeared and was found dead many years later in Copenhagen. The book is full of photographs, poems, annotations, translations, definitions, scribbles, drawings and letter fragments. The bone for the construction of the book is the poem 101 by Catullus, Carson deconstruct the poem and on the left hand page through out the whole book we find definitions of each of the words in the poem. This factual information faces the more personal context in the book, and create space for new things to appear.

I look at the printed pictures from your archive. What am I looking for? What do I find? I don't know, maybe it's just about doing something, to focus on something, doesn't matter what it is, just to have a goal, to put my grief onto something concrete. What is norms in grief? I sense something, but maybe it's more about my life here and now, not about the past and my grief. Can you accept that grief is finished, am I allowed to say that.

I look at the past as something light, something to grow from, something to remember as something good. There is especially two pictures that draws my attention; the one is the image with the ocean and waves coming in «*Waves*», and the other is the one on the foot and the hand, «*foot and hand*»

«*Waves*»

This pictures is about place, its about my connection to this place. And it's also about how the ocean makes a straight line to the sky, horizon. And its very simple and banal for me, the horizon tells my about a line between earth and heaven.

«*Foot and hand I*»

What interests me in this picture is the closeness to the skin and the act of the hand holding tight to the foot. Just this. And of course the softness of the skin, the softness creates a contrast to the hard stones in the mountain. And for me, in this work stones representing the death.

⁸ Nox by Anne Carson, published by New Directions publishing Corporation, 2009

Excerpt from **PIERCE - ARROW** by **Susan Howe**⁹

En naktergal sjunger på
Hemligt språk fågeln
Blir bedragen när hennes kärleks
Sång görs offentlig på
Hemligt språk en poets
Offentliga röst jag bär
Namnet Mary Ellen i mångtydighet
Är jag ett spöke du känner

Den som var och inte var
Det vi kommer att få veta
Den Som var och inte var
Vi sjunger sida vid sida

⁹ Excerpt of *PIERCE ARROW* by Susan howe, Swedish translation by Marie Silkenberg. I have read the book «Spinnaker» by Susan Howe translated into Swedish during the process of writing this text and the Swedish translation turned out to be important for me because of specific words in the translation I find interesting.

I learned from Nox that by writing and collecting in the process of grief you can create your own rituals.

From Diary II. 20.10.2018

Birth of emotions and death of emotions.

Sorgarbete/Grief work

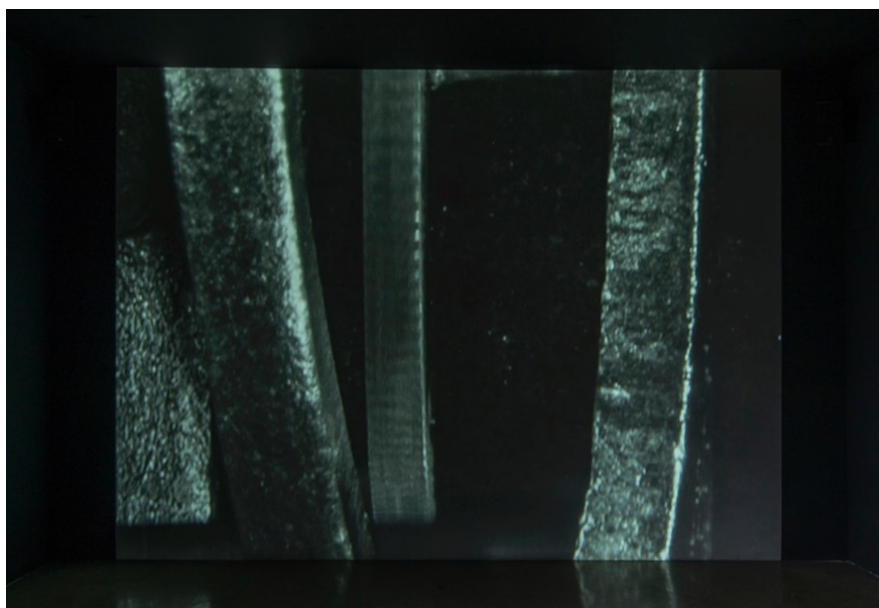


Stian's archive_0300¹⁰

¹⁰ Figure 5

Jonas Dahlberg's work *music box*¹¹ can be described as a grief work. The work is a close up study of a music box which was found in the house after his dead father, which has been in the family for several generations. The view follows a camera which attends to search for something inside the box, and sometimes we get so close to the object that it reveals as a universe.

For me the music box and the work Dahlberg has done with it itself creates a distance to the private, an object which can alone represent something. My fascination for this project lies in my own longing for creating a distance to the photographs I use in this work, I both want the photographs to be shown, at the same time I don't want them to be shown. I know that this work require a distance, but I don't know how to make it. Maybe the easiest way is to think about the collection of images as something else, not the work itself, put it aside and think about something else. I think this was the reason that I burned all the small prints I made in the darkroom, to let something new grow from the images.



Music box, Jonas Dahlberg, 2015¹²

MALE GRIEF-EXPAND ON THIS

GRIEF IN NORMS- EXPAND ON THIS

TIMELINE IN GRIEF

¹¹ Jonas Dahlberg, *Music Box*, 2015, Single channel installation, HD video, black and white, sound, 26:55 min(continuous loop), Projection dimension ~ 4 x 3 meters

¹² Figure 6

I see that the specific image cannot give memory nor presence nor future.

PLACE

Simultaneously as Dahlberg worked with the music box project he also was chosen for his proposal for the Utøya memorial¹³, which also has its origin in grief. He worked with the proposal simultaneously as he worked on the *music box* installation. Later in the process the Utøya proposal was canceled because of criticism from people living in the area where the memorial was going to be placed.

The idea of the proposal interested me a lot, and in the concept of the memorial it was especially ideas about hiding the view of the Island itself and the idea of cutting something away that interested me. The sketches for the proposal shows how Dahlberg wants to make a cut in nature, by cutting away parts of the peninsula to show that something has been taking away from us, people has lost their lives, and by not seeing the actual place where the terror attacks had happened, the art work creates space for the viewer to deal with their own experiences of loss.

Another aspect that interests me in the proposal is how we facing a trauma, how we talk about trauma and loss.

When I think about my own work I also think about the issue of showing a trauma. The collection of images can easily be seen as a monument over the dead person, and this is something I want to avoid. But one thing is to say that I avoid it, an another thing is to actually do it. This is one of the responsibilities I have when I have chosen to work with this. I ask myself where I draw the lines within my responsibility, is it about being open and show all the thoughts in the process. By being open can I then just do everything with the images and tell the story I believe is important, or is it just I need within myself ?

The collection of images becomes a monument inside of me, a room from the past which I never can leave, always coming back in waves.

¹³ Jonas Dahlberg's proposal for the memorial for the terror attacks at Utøya won the competition that was announced for everyone to participate in. His proposal was later canceled because of critic from the people living in the area where the memorial was going to be placed.

From Diary III.17.09.2017:

DREAM (Stockholm- Tromsø)

I am writing about this as a dream, but it's not a dream. It happened. But it feels more like a dream. I write it straight off.

It's morning. September. I walk out of our apartment in Stockholm, Katarina Bangatan. Our son was born 5 weeks ago. Earlier that year me and my partner was accepted to the art academy in Tromsø, but first one more year in Stockholm, then summer 2018 we moved to Tromsø. Eight years ago my friend died in the climbing accident just outside of Tromsø. The sun is strong, I am on my way to the post office to post a letter, walking fast towards the post office which is some minutes away from our apartment. Quite early I see a woman walking unsteady and wobbly in the streets, she falls, some people help her up. She stands up again, walking further. She is not old, around 50 maybe. The people helping her walk away, I look at her, thinking that she needs more help, because she is still unsteady in the walking. She tries to cross the road with cars, then she falls to the street again. I run towards her, afraid that she will be hit by a car, I take her arm and help her up, she can't stand for herself, so I need to support her. She wears glasses, short hair, dull eyes, she wears a sign which describes her work in a hospital nearby, doctor in something. First I think that she got a heart attack, or a stroke, but then my feeling is more that she is on something. I ask if I should call for an ambulance, or some friends or family, she just mumbles «no, I don't need any help, it's okay». Suddenly she just grabbed my arms, looking straight into my eyes, no more dull eyes, clear and bright, then she said “ ARE YOU LONGING FOR TROMSØ? “, “ the words just punch me in the face, don't know what to say, said something like, “ how do you know? “ just thinking about god, felt like talking to someone far away. Then she stops talking, just silence and then walks away, I still clearly see her hands, her eyes, the blue sky in Stockholm that day, my newborn child, and my thoughts which directly goes to the mountains in Tromsø. (time is just fucking with me) Later that day I still remember her name from the sign, google her name and see that she works on that specific hospital.

Facts

What's in a fact?

Evidence from the truth? What is truth?

The book *Sorting facts or nineteen ways of looking at Marker*¹⁴ by Susan Howe is a self declared experiment in *poetic documentary* or as she calls it *factual telepathy*. It is a study of film, documentary, poetry, and it's an elegy of Susan Howe's husband. It starts with the poem pythagorean silence (Pearl Harbor)

PYTHAGOREAN SILENCE

Pearl Harbor

age of earth and us all chattering

a sentence or character

suddenly

steps out to seek for truth fails

falls

into a stream of ink Sequence

trails off

must go on

waving fables and faces War

doings of the war

maneuvering between points

between

any two points which is

what we want (issues at stake)

bearings and so

holes in a cloud are minutes passing

which is

which

view odds of images swept rag-tag

silver and grey

epitomes

seconds forgeries engender

(are blue) or blacker

flocks of words flying together tense

as an order

cast off to crows

¹⁴ *Sorting facts or nineteen ways of looking at Marker*, Susan Howe, published by New directions publishing corporation, 2013

The beginning of the book which was the reason I got interested in it, starts with a biographical data over her husband, the sculptor David Von Schlegell. This interested me because of the way Howe describe his life and how she describe his last days. David was an artist, but between 1943-1945 he was healthy enough and young enough to serve as a bomber pilot and weapon officer in the Eight Air Force. She writes « he had, till the day he died and was cremated, a long scar on his left arm after the injury he got after he was shot during a flight with a B-17 flight through the burning skies above Emden in Germany. The bullet crossed his wrist, but he managed to carry the plane back to the base in England»

On his death bed her husband says « without words what is facts?»

Susan Howe writes that she in her writing often has explored what constitutes an events official version in contrast to an earlier version which because of this construction is in imminent danger of being completely wiped out.

For my work the word *fact* has been fascinating to reflect upon. Especially because it was made a report after the accident, which carefully go trough the different steps that led to the fatal accident. By reading about it so concrete it kind of get mixed with my own pictures of what happened. It's like reality and fiction meets, and I think about what I can learn from the report which for me represent reality. I don't know if it's relevant or not, but when I read *Sorting facts or nineteen ways looking at Marker* I got obsessed by the way she explains the scar of her husband, for me this reflection tells me about details and how details can be important for our memory and what we focus on when telling our personal story.

I want to draw the facts from the report.

Diary III.16.08.2017:

(Birth)

IF I COULD WRITE A SONG.

It is linked together in a weave. Presence is in this room. Three days at a room in Danderyd hospital just looking at a new life with the window open and swedish hospital food.

Mikkel writes me in an email that lightness and darkness is primarily inside yourself.

Diary V.20.10.2018:

(MUTE ASH)

I READ NOX BY ANNE CARSON AND THE POEM CATULLUS 101 IS INCLUDED. I READ IT AGAIN, AGAIN, AGAIN, AND AGAIN.

*Many the peoples many the oceans I
crossed—*

*I arrive at these poor; brother; burials
so I could give you the last gift owed
to death
and talk (why?) with mute ash.*

I WRITE;

- 1. mute ash. stille aske. mute ash. stille aske. mute ash. Stille aske*
- 2. FILMING ARTIC OCEAN. THE UNSTAD BEACH. WAVES AND LIGHT IN
WINTER. GIFTS. TAKING CARE OF A GIFT OR GIVE IT AWAY.*
- 4. TALK (WHY)*

Sea and Waves

(*L'homme atlantique*)

In the documentary about Marguerite Duras, *Duras filme*¹⁵, the filmmaker explains that “saying things is an effect of lack; lack of life, lack of sight,” and later adds: “I think it is an absolute rule, and it is the fullness of the lack of being, either being in desire, in love or in summer, that allows us to say: love, desire, summer.”

The film *L'homme Atlantique*¹⁶ by Duras consists almost only of black images. The rest is images of the sea, waves, the beach, images of Duras lover Yann Andrea Steiner and rooms.

Duras made this film in the house in Trouville in 1981, and it was one of her last films. After that she went back to writing. The soundtrack consist of two elements: sound of ocean that comes and goes and Marguerite Duras voice which reads a text. She reads about loss, a love story which ends, somethings that dies. There are many layers in the film, but what interests me the most is the black images and the sea. Of course the text which Duras reads give me the context of loss, but it is the sea and the waves I remember. Deluze Gilles writes in his book *Cinema 2: L'image-temps*;¹⁷ «We are not restored to the earth but to the sea. Things are erased by the tide rather than being buried in dry earth.»

The black images; endless new worlds, death, chock, space for grief.

The **Ocean** and the sound of waves creates a room; for me to recognize, for me to scream in, sleep in, lay down and cry in. The waves and the sea was the first I saw in your pictures, and why is the sea something for someone, it's so big, so full of symbols, so full of everything. But if I try, if I try to be banal, romantic and personal this is what I see in the picture of the north Arctic Atlantic sea; with the waves coming in in their own rhythm. I see myself as nineteen, I see you as nineteen, young bodies, naivety, I see bonfires beneath the sea, actions without responsibility, youth, yes a see youth and when I look at it now I see youth and now, it creates this strange feeling of time. In this time you have been dead, I have not been dead, it's dizzying, time and death. And of course I see water and horizon. I remember when living by the sea, close to the sea, that I was thinking about the horizon and what it represents. I google the word horizon and find the greek meaning; from greek *orizein*, to limit the line that separates the earth from the sky.

HEAVEN

EARTH

ALLOWS US TO SAY: LOVEDESIRESUMMER!

¹⁵ *Duras filme*, a documentary about Margueritte Duras made by Jérôme Beaujour and Jean Mascolo

¹⁶ *L'homme Atlantique*, Marguerite Duras, 1981

¹⁷ *Cinema 2:L'image-temps*, the second volume on Cinema by Deluze Gilles,1985

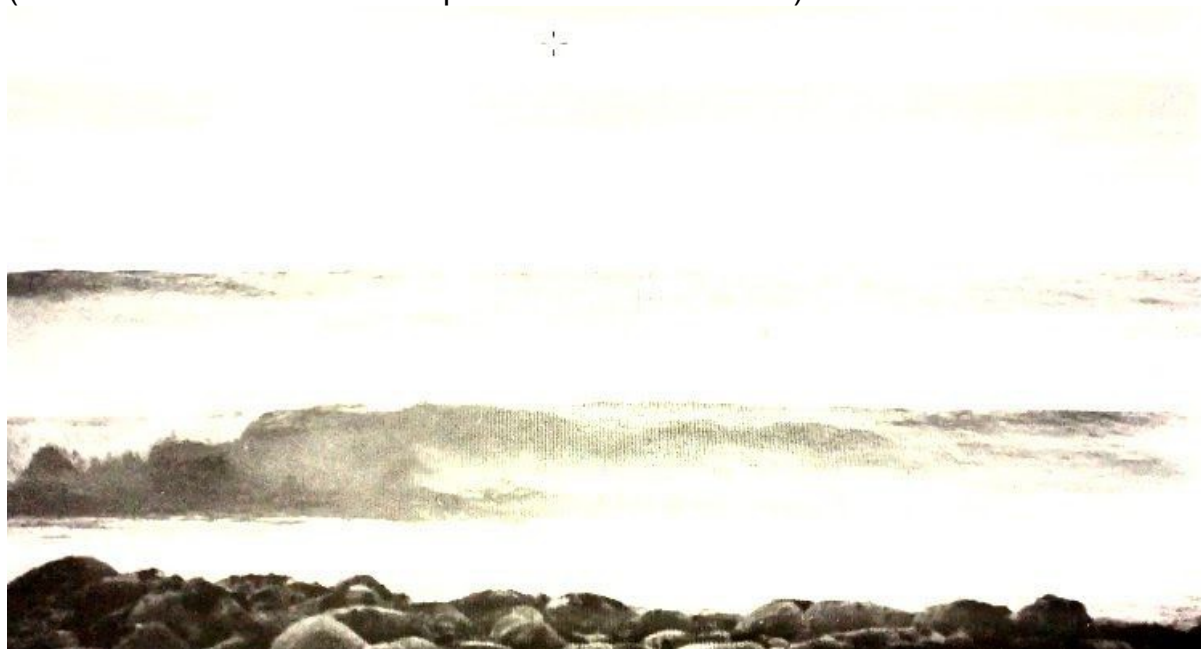
Mail conversation

(Excerpts from a mail conversation between me and Karl Henrik Edlund 16.10.2021-22.10.2021)

From the day I started to look at Stian`s images, I have had ambivalent questions around what interests me in these images and in what way this has a value for others to look at. I write something one day, then the next day it feels completely wrong, I think one day it is obvious why I work with this, then the next day I don`t understand anything. In one way I try to get the images to symbolize something in myself, a self-portrait, but doesn`t really trust my own distance to the material. When you asked me about symbols in relationship to these images and what the symbols mean for me, it opened up new rooms and got me further in the process. Because if I look at the images I have made a selection of I only see symbols; ocean, mountain and skin. But yes, what does that mean? Its maybe there I should begin, just write directly of what I see in detail what these different elements has of importance, no matter how banal it feels.

Burning Images and black Images

(Conclusion made in the arctic part of the Atlantic ocean)



Stian Archive_Waves II ¹⁸

A friend sent me another translation of the Catullus poem.

101

From Overseas, 'by highways and by byways',
I've come, my brother, to this hollow spot
to go through this rigmarole and mouth these words
and talk to you, who cannot now answer back
since 'you', in fact, have been ripped out of the world:
my brother, gone—God—stolen completely away,
while I go through the motions for form's sake
of mouthing these words and paying my respects.
So take them, my 'respects'—I can't stop crying—
with, finally, brother, this greeting, my goodbye.¹⁹

¹⁸ Figure 7

¹⁹ Leontia Flynn, *Slim new book*, a collection of translated poems by Catullus written over the course of several years, 2018

The autumn I started at the art academy in Tromsø in 2018 I wanted to do something physical on the place where the accident happened. I had never been at the mountain where it happened before. At first I was thinking about bringing metal plates with photo sensitive chemicals on top of the mountain, to register something from the place. This was too much of a project to bring to life at this point. I also had the idea of going to the place alone the first time, so it was not possible for me to bring so heavy material for the trip. I decided to bring linen cloth in my bag, this was not heavy, and it was possible to cover it with photosensitive chemicals before leaving. So this was what I did. It was overwhelming to walk up the mountain, very steep, and after some hours it also started to snow. Big mountains around me, snow and also quit dark at this time of year, late October. OVERWHELMING was the right word. I had not planned the trip well, and the small path up to the little climbing cabin was very difficult to follow in the snow, and big rocks was covering the whole mountain side, so it was quit difficult to understand the way. In the end I arrived at the cabin, before going in for making food and fire I took the linen cloth from my backpack and covered a spot on the mountain side. This was the place Stian and his brother slept while they spent time climbing in this area, and from the cabin you can see the mountain where the accident happened. The experience from this trip was very important for me, both in the aspect of my own grief, but also a way for me to come closer to the work I am doing. I understood that it was important for me to do something physical with the material, and the action of walking and just doing something.

In 2019 it was an exhibition at Trondheim Kunsthall by the danish-greenlandic artist Pia Arke²⁰, the title of the exhibition was *Wonderland* and consisted of photography and films from the period 1990 -2005. An aspect of the exhibition that interested me was Arke's work with a pinhole camera²¹, which she built in Copenhagen herself in the 1990's. In the exhibition brochure its written: *The measurements of the pinhole camera were taken from her own body, making it large enough for her to stand, full length, inside it. The exposure time was approximately 15 minutes. Whilst sitting inside the camera she could see the picture come into being. She could create shadows with her body, through leaving some areas less light exposure than others. The camera obscura is present in many of the works shown in this exhibition, as method, but also as prop and backdrop. The series Nuugaarsuk / Pinhole Camera Photograph / The Point (1990) shows Nuugaarsuk Point, close to Narsaq in Southern Greenland, where the artist's childhood home had long since been demolished. Arke put the camera at the exact spot where her childhood home had once stood. The pictures show the same view that the artist had once seen from the windows as a child, thus becoming a poetic mixture of memories, the physical site and the body of the artist.*

²⁰ Pia Arke was born not far from the town of Scoresbysund (Greenlandic: Ittoqqortoormiit) in North-Eastern Greenland. She was a result of the relationship between Greenland and Denmark, with a Greenlandic mother and a Danish father. For Pia Arke the history of the two countries was a personal matter, directly connected to her own family history. Her artistic praxis was a means to process the colonial history, but also a recovery of history for the artist herself and her ancestors. Arke's artistic oeuvre is a work against the collective loss of memory which silence has led to.

²¹ A **pinhole camera** is a simple camera without a lens but with a tiny aperture (the so-called pinhole)—effectively a light-proof box with a small hole in one side. Light from a scene passes through the aperture and projects an inverted image on the opposite side of the box, which is known as the camera obscura effect

I think about the word **Burial** from the translation of Catullus, and how our rituals connected to burial is. I also think about interacting with memory with your own body, as I translate some of the work Arke does with her pinhole camera. For my own process it has been important to use my own body to come closer to an experience of my grief and also come closer to my own artistic practice.

It is both about destroying images and about minimize the material. I have during the whole process, I think from day one that I got the material had the idea of destroying the images, burning them or let them tear apart in nature. I have tried to do it, I went for an artist residence in Gotland spring 2021, spent time burning the prints I had made. It was by the baltic sea. Another sea, but waves coming in, and the sound of waves while burning the images was quit beautiful, very brutal, but still beautiful. I have learnt from the process and by presenting the different steps in the research work that some of the actions I have done can be looked upon as a masculine way to deal with grief. I am interested in how these patterns is shown in life and in an artistic practice, and I am interested in what we can learn from this. The first thought is childhood, and how we learn to experience and be in the world from our parents or people close to us in this phase of life. Why this need of destroying? And, what happens if I try to think opposite, *taking care*, would then something new appears.

I once again will mention Jonas Dahlberg and his work with his proposal for the *Utöya memorial*. I watched a talk where he speaks about loss as architecture.²² One of his first ideas was to place an object in the water, so the island of Utøya got hidden from the memorial site. This idea brought my thoughts directly to my own work with the collection of images from my friend, to hide it. But what to show then? What happens If I only show the backside of the darkroom prints I have made from the collection. Concrete the backside consists of chemicals, white spots, purple spots, marks. The paper is quit bubbly and damaged because I have travelled with them in the car, made collages out of them and had them outside in all kinds of weather. So it's definitely marks of work on the backside. I have played with the idea of framing the backside of the prints carefully and beautiful with white wooden frame and glass, writing single words on each of the eight prints I have done, like a **burial** or once again as a **last gift**.

In the same lecture Dahlberg talks about his work with the film and installation *music box*. While working on a commission from the town of Kiruna his father was sick and dying, he needed to take a break from the work in Kiruna. (This was also the same period as he worked on the proposal for Utøya) During his break he found this music box machine in his childhood home. He brought it to his studio and just looked at it. This music box turned out to be a film work. Dahlberg films the landscape inside the music box, while we listening to the machinery of the box, not the music, only the machinery. A complex work, both private and readable for the audience.

Why I mention black images in the title of this chapter is maybe my longing for making this project very simple, by simple I mean few objects. Taking it apart and in the end just showing something completely different than the images themself. Letting go of the control and hopefully something like a *music box* appears.

²² Loss and Architecture, AA School of Architecture , lecture date 2015-10-23. Available online at Youtube; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RSVNntsES34>

Personal story into an art project

I would like to end this essay with my reflection on how to make this private story into something to look at for others.

The aspect of time is the first thing I think about. The accident happened in 2009, now its 2021, twelve years. In 2018 I asked for the pictures from my friend, three years ago. It feels like I just got them, but 2009 feels like another life and another time. What have happened during this time, maybe distance is the right word. And what I think happened for me with distance is that I can look at the accident and the following death to something to grow from. What I mean is that the death reveals questions in me which I can see a value of and learn from. And in time new perspectives reveals, almost a new life. Time has also given me the opportunity to make different attempts on achieving what I search in my questions.

Hiding is the second word I think about, hiding what will be too obvious, hiding the images, and instead show patterns of work I have made. By printing the images over and over again, like an obsession I see that the images not necessarily need to be shown, maybe just the notes I have made is enough. In the film *Notes on a Memorial*²³ Dahlberg explains; *the memorial tries consciously to disrupt the view of the island in order to create a more private space where our gaze turns inward in ourselves.*

The last words marked red are **Mute Ash** and **Talk(why?)**

Believing in the images.

Mute Ash Mute Ash, Stille Aske, Tyst Aske, Mute, Tyst, Stille, Ash, Aske, Mute Ash, Mute Ash, Stille, Aske, Tyst, Aske, Aske, Mute, Mute, Ocean, Last gift, Brother, Talk why, burials, OCEAN, MUTE ASH, BROTHER, LAST GIFT, TALK WHY, BURIALS, ocean, last gift, talk why, last gift, burials, burials, burials, last gift, last gift, ocean, ocean, ocean, OCEAN, OCEAN, Mute ash, ASH, WHY, TALK, TALK, TALK, TALK, TALK, talk, talk, Tyst aske

²³ Notes on a Memorial, a film document about the proposal for the Utøya Memorial made by Jonas Dahlberg, 2018

List of figures

Figure 1, *Stian`s archive_foot and hand*,2019

Figure 2, *My own archive_Ilja foot I*,2021

Figure 3, *Stians archive_foot and hand*,2019

Figure 4, *Stian`s archive_Waves*, 2018

Figure 5, *Stian`s archive_0300*,2019

Figure 6, *Still from Music box*, film installation by Jonas Dahlberg

Figure 7, *Stian`s archive_Waves II*, 2021

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