

HOW CAN SOLASTALGIA RESTORE A LOST SENSE OF BELONGING TO THE IMAGE?

*An autotheoretical attempt to return to
a documentary practice
and recover a filmic voice*

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List of contents:

Acknowledgements 4

Abstract 5

Introduction. Everything Began with a Loss: 7

Screening 1.

Movements #1, #2, #3 of *Lovesong, a non-existent film in progress*: 19

Chapter 1.

Solastalgia. From Environment to Art: 21

Screening 2.

Movement #4 and #5 of *Lovesong, a non-existent film in progress*: 51

Chapter 2.

Borrowing Solastalgia. A New Word for Documentary Moving Images. 53

Screening 3.

Movement #6 of *Lovesong, a non-existent film in progress*: 77

Chapter 3.

From Lecture-Performance to a Solastalgic Film Form: 79

Screening 4.

Movement #7 of *Lovesong, a non-existent film in progress*: 141

Chapter 4.

Solastalgia Reactivates a Documentary Practice.

Experiencing *Lovesong. A non-existent Film in Progress*: 143

Conclusion.

Mountains inside. Mountains outside: 197

Appendix

Lovesong, a non-existent film in progress. The script: 211

Bibliography: 265

List of Illustrations: 292

List of Films: 295

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Abstract

Solastalgia is a neologism created by the Australian environmental philosopher Glenn Albrecht to designate the pain or sadness provoked by the loss of solace and the subsequent yearning for a lost sense of belonging to a place that could be called 'home'. In clinical psychology, Albrecht first used the term to associate this feeling of distress, specifically with environmental change (2005).

Since then, researchers, artists, musicians, writers, and poets have applied it, reviving the interest in the relationship between the environment and human experiences (Beinart, 2016), and while their experiences of place may differ, they all respond to specific environmental destruction (PCC, 2017). Effectively, solastalgia (only) exists when recognising that a place of significance is under assault (Lloyd, 2016).

In my research, I propose to borrow the term solastalgia from environmental philosophy and clinical psychology and use it to rethink the contemporary relationship with the documentary image. What if the documentary film image were considered as 'that' place of significance or 'home'? What if, as a result, creating an image could be understood as an act of belonging to that image? What if that relationship of belonging is under assault?

In times when the connection between images and things has become questionable (Steyerl, 2007), unreliable, overwhelming (Comolli, 2004), and powerless (Didi-Huberman, 2009, 2012), the possibility of creating can become obstructed, and the emergence of the poetic voice can become fragile.

Then, the question arises: facing this broken bond with image-making, is it possible to restore it, recover the voice and return to creation?

Emerging in response to this question, my practice is the film-performance (reconceptualised as a *spoken film*) called *Lovesong. A non-existent film in progress*, which explores the loss of my sense of belonging to a series of images I filmed in the past. By doing so, this practice-based PhD aims to argue how drawing solastalgia to documentary practice can - *despite all* (Didi-Huberman, 2003)- activate a filmic voice.

I analyse this creative practice through autotheory (Fournier, 2021) so that among notes and memories that follow and give an account of the iterations of the research process, a theoretical framework emerges. I invoke various textual forms, including an account of

my working process, the evocation of personal experience (emotional and reflective), the inclusion of fragments of the text and images from the film, quotations and materials from other filmmakers and artists (writers, poets, painters). This is contextualised with theoretical references to authors such as Barthes, Comolli, Bellour, Bazin, and Mulvey, among others and a practice review exploring the potentialities and limits of film-performance.

This research contributes to new knowledge by introducing the clinical term *solastalgia* as a valid concept to describe a wounded relationship with the documentary film image and consequently arguing how it paradoxically can reactivate documentary practice, poetically and politically.

INTRODUCTION.

Everything began with a loss.

I was in the first year of my PhD at London College of Communication. It was thrilling, and I was thrilled, yet at the same time, I soon began to feel absolutely overwhelmed and lost. I was trying to embrace twenty years of experience working with documentary filmmaking and transform it into a single PhD project. I was trying to put together all the ideas I had had during a long and fertile period of producing and teaching documentaries. I wanted to organise all these ideas, relate one to the other and find a way to make sense of them. Such an endeavour soon proved too vast, ambitious, shapeless, and without a clear direction.

The first academic year was about to end, and after several attempts to straighten out the search, my supervisory team highlighted a potential: something was missing, and that something was me. The exercise of recognising myself at the centre made everything reappear in a completely different light. Or, more precisely, it made everything momentarily recede and quieten down, only to reappear later from a different perspective. But before that happened, I began to remember.

Almost twenty years ago, I left behind an unfinished film called, in Catalan, *Cançó d'amor*, which in English means Lovesong. It was about a young Catalan poet, Lala Blay, reading her first poetry book called, in German, *Liebeslied*, in the house where she had written it. I wanted to film her relationship with the words she had written and her world, trying to figure out how to capture with images the challenge of creating a universe with words.

I did not finish that film and kept the seven tapes I recorded in a box placed somewhere on the bookshelf behind my desk chair. No other films would come. The reasons why I left it unfinished and stopped making films of my own were and maybe will always be not entirely clear to me. But something was sure: I remember the sense of loss from that moment onwards.

After that failed attempt -it would have been my third film- I focused on others' films, teaching filmmakers, exploring ways of doing, sharing them, accompanying creative processes, consulting, and producing. I have worked in cinema for twenty years, devoting my life to it. To borrow a declaration by Agnès Varda in her film *The Beaches*

of *Agnès*, cinema became the house I live in, to the extent that it was like “I have always lived there” (Varda, 2008).¹ Indeed, it is almost impossible to imagine a life without moving images, especially documentary moving images, even though I could no longer make my own.

Cinema was, and still is, the house where I live. But this may not be accurate. Since I stopped making my films, cinema has become a series of dwellings systematically built according to someone else's plans. Somehow, I became a passerby, a *flâneuse*, who spends more or less time in these houses, depending on and according to my invested thoughts and affection in the process of making them.

Memories and thoughts do not come alone. It was Sunday morning, and I walked my dog Greta while reading the newspaper on my phone. An article published a few days earlier appeared. The word at the top of the article, ‘Solastalgia’, caught my attention, and I started to read:

‘The fear and grief associated with a rapidly changing environment has a name: Solastalgia. It is best described as a sense of homesickness without ever leaving home’.²

Usually, when I read or watch, my body moves toward the text or image, first with curiosity and then with a need to understand and feel. I stay there—in the text or the image—more or less connected to it. And sometimes—these are the best cases, of course—a genuine encounter, even love, occurs.

It can happen differently. Instead of moving towards the object, willing to discover something, the text, the image or the sound may jump at me. These... these are memorable occasions. You have to imagine yourself somewhat unsuspecting, and then, as if in one leap, they -image, text, or sound- appear, catch your attention, and come determined to meet you. As if fate or perhaps chance conspired to make it so.

This was the case.

¹ Another filmmaker and thinker, Alexander Kluge, would say that cinema is a ‘homeland outside the real’ (Kluge, 2010, p.59).

² This is a quote from Ashlee Cunsolo, the dean of Arctic and Subarctic Studies at Memorial University in St John's (Canada), quoted by Osselin Michelin for The Guardian's article titled ‘Solastalgia: Arctic inhabitants overwhelmed by a new form of climate grief’ (Michelin, 2020).

Solastalgia and its explanation came to me with that strangely hurtful and empowering effect of discovery. This new word accurately defined the emotion that I had previously recognised simply as a sense of loss: I realised then that, despite working with films ever since, despite “living in cinema”, I had lost a sense of belonging to the image, a way of relating to it as if it were *my* home.

A box with seven tapes inside containing images of a lost or at least (momentarily) forgotten film. And a word that allowed me to explore my relationship with those images, a possible contemporary relationship with such images, the ones we might have left behind.

That exploration inevitably implied something I had seldom considered during the last twenty years: to open the box again. And there it was, a newly found word, solastalgia, giving rise to this possibility. The apparent result of such a daring act would have to be naming and a better understanding of the broken bond: I stopped making films because I had lost my sense of belonging to the images.

Yet, the theoretical and creative research prompted by the opening of that box would only take a short time to reveal itself as something else—or something more. Very soon, I found myself not describing a loss but approaching the possibility of recovering it, recovering that lost sense of belonging. The primary research and creative question had emerged: How can solastalgia restore the lost sense of belonging to the image?

If I wanted to explore how to regain the sense of belonging to the image, I first needed to address two fundamental questions, which were the primary conditions of my research: Can images be inhabited, a place that could be called home? And if they can, can the sense of belonging and attachment to them be felt under assault? In other words, can an image become a site of solastalgia?

I began to explore these two questions practically and theoretically. On the one hand, I opened the box that contained the seven tapes. I started to watch the images without knowing what I would find and began interrogating them: What film did I want to make twenty years earlier? In what sense I felt attached to it? Why did I stop? When and how did I start to feel that I did not belong to the images?

As a response to those questions, a film was coming into existence. I remember writing the title down immediately, almost without thinking, as if it was -again- the title that found me: *Lovesong, a non-existent film in progress*.

The First Movement of the lovesong was a reality. And it seemed that a working “method”, too. The Second and the Third Movements followed almost immediately.

I made the first three Movements within a year—it was 2021. In them, I try to explore, understand, and share the idea, or more than that, the emotion of an image as a lost home. Simultaneously, I focused the first part of my theoretical research on the new word, solastalgia, trying to build a bridge between it and film studies. The First and Second Chapters of my thesis share the results of this theoretical research.

The First Chapter introduces the concept of solastalgia and its origin in environmental philosophy. It then follows how it grows to define an era. Finally, it migrates to the field of creation, acknowledging its most common application (how to represent solastalgia) until it announces a twist: I will borrow the concept not as a subject matter but to apply it to the relationship with the moving image itself.

From here, the Second Chapter develops how I carry out the appropriation of solastalgia. The moving image is not considered a means to explore solastalgia but as a site of solastalgia. That involves considering the image as a place called home, which can be lost. This is why the following sections of this Chapter first argue how the image can be understood as home, in other words, a place with which we establish a bond of belonging, and secondly, in what ways this bond may eventually be at risk. The Chapter concludes with a section introducing a fundamental contradiction for this research: solastalgia is not only a concept used to define a loss. It can also be an activating force, in this case, a creative one. It is on this fertile paradox that the research question stands: How can solastalgia restore the lost sense of belonging to the image?

Indeed, there was a chance that the lost sense of belonging to images would be restored; in other words, creation or a documentary practice would be regained, enabling the recovery of the filmic voice.

The first writing of these two Chapters concluded in 2022. At that point, I resumed my creative exploration. It had been a while since I made the Third Movement, and by then, I already knew that the *Lovesong* would be composed of Seven Movements. There were

seven tapes, so it made sense to think of Seven Movements, even though that did not mean creating a dedicated Movement for each tape. It was more a kind of internal logic or coherence—also, maybe, a superstition.

The three first Movements were made in a row, yet it took a year between the Third and the Fourth. Perhaps this temporal distance is what makes the Fourth a pivotal Movement, crucial for that fertile paradox. Each Movement resumes from where the previous one left the exploration and reflection; they are segments of the same track of thought, Movements of the same (love)song. However, the distance between the first three and the fourth provided a new perspective. Time does not pass in vain. In the Fourth Movement, I am no longer trying to define the lost sense of belonging but to explore why that loss occurred. But there is more. In the same Movement, towards the end, in an unexpected turning point, the question of the reason for the loss gave rise to another seemingly fairer question: This was not about why I left but why I needed to return.

This distance, which influenced the Fourth Movement, also made me more aware of the “method” already in place. Indeed, I was following a pattern which involved a series of actions—watching the images in the order they were recorded, tape after tape. When something pricked me, I would stop and edit the images, associating them with others. After or during that, I would write a text composed of memories, reflections, and quotations. I would read that text out loud and live while playing those images for the viewer. These actions would end up being part of what I will call ‘The Protocol’, a document that is part of the written thesis and to which I will return later in this introduction.

While writing this, I realised that one of the central aspects of the protocol for the *Lovesong, a non-existent film in progress*, my practice, coincides with a central aspect of the thesis writing: the free or intuitive association between elements, however distant these elements may seem to be from each other. These associations, connections or correspondences à la Baudelaire (1857/1982) could also be understood as affinities, as Brian Dillon described (Dillon, 2023).

Not only the making of the *Lovesong, a non-existent film in progress* but also the style of my writing is marked by a track of thought built through affinities, the attraction to and between particular works, texts, images, and ideas that sidle up (Dillon, 2023), creating what Barthes would call an image repertoire (1977/1990). The *Lovesong, a non-existent film in progress* and the theoretical research share the imaginary space to which I have

built an attachment within time, a place of belonging. A place of belonging that functions as a patchwork or a collage made of all types of pieces: along with the images I made, there are film excerpts, paintings, poems, quotes, thoughts, mine and others, extracts from stories...

All these materials are intertwined with theoretical reflections, and the self, build on memories, emotions and personal reflections, acts as a guiding thread. Based on my experience in documentary film forms, I immediately connect this very intuitive, organic, almost not chosen way of thinking, filmmaking and writing with an essayistic approach, yet it is also identifiable with autotheory as a research method as it integrates the personal with theory and philosophy in a direct and self-aware, self-reflexive way (Fournier, 2021). Indeed, there is a nuance that autotheory brings to the table with special intensity and that is of particular interest to me: It is not only that theory emerges from the self, it is also true the other way around. The self emerges or re-emerges from the theory. And this 'spiral-like' activity (Bal cited in Fournier, 2021) is visible and crucial both in the *Lovesong* and in the thesis you are about to read.

In both dimensions, practical and theoretical, there is also a certain attachment and respect for the sense of chronology. I have been working all these years in layers, as if conquering stages, holding on to the 'truth' of each step, trying not to redo paths, or to redo them as little as possible. So, as you read, you will get to know my journey in a way that preserves some details and the order of dates, comings and goings, discoveries, changes of opinion, and an explicit self-awareness that even makes visible the interventions of my supervision team. This has been an intuitive choice. However, I think it has its origins in my work in film, which is very process-oriented, and also in my understanding of documentary as a filmic form that tends to include its own process in its final shape.

If the distance enabled Movement Four to evolve and redirect my gaze, from the description of a loss to the possibility of a return to an endangered place of belonging, this image-home, this familiar and sensitive universe, Movement Five and Movement Six elaborate on the reasons and chances of this possibility.

I can see now that the Fifth Movement is affected by a certain pessimism as if there was little point in attempting to return to something that felt like a failure. Lala, the poet, frequently appears uncomfortable in the images. Yet again, as in Movement Four, there will be a twist towards the end of this Movement: perhaps not all is lost, and the return is

somehow possible. This is why, in the following Movement, the Sixth, this possibility of return is nurtured, thanks to ideas such as the transformation of the wound (Varda, 2006, 2009), the magic films make (hooks, 2009), and the *inconsolable happiness* that poetry can leave behind (Montalbetti, 2017), but mainly thanks to the unexpected emergence of Lala's laughter in the images.

Yet, her laughter will not be the sole unexpected thing. Solastalgia, a word from environmental and psychological disciplines, unexpectedly serves to reopen that box containing the seven tapes I filmed a long time ago, recovering a practice that I had left behind. This appropriation of a word from another discipline offers me a distance that opens up possibilities to see and reflect differently on the image and my relationship with it. Solastalgia, unexpectedly, allows me to explore first the image as a home, then the image as a home that can be lost, and finally the possibility of restoring that sense of belonging that I thought I had lost.

Ultimately, how this recovery, restoration, and return to cinema have taken place under the light of solastalgia has also been unexpected. I have not come back to filmmaking by picking up where I left off, making a documentary film in the way I used to make films in the past, through what is commonly known as *auteur* cinema or creative documentary, that type of film destined for film festivals or art-house theatres. I *have returned* with a lecture-performance, or, as I will call it in my research, a spoken film.

If twenty years ago I was going to make a film called *Cançó d'Amor* (Lovesong in Catalan), today, on my return, I have made a spoken film called *Lovesong, a non-existent film in progress*. A spoken film, a film that only exists when it is said out loud.

I was unfamiliar with lecture or film-performances when I began this research. In the same unexpected way I remembered a forgotten box with seven tapes inside, the same unexpected way I happened to read a word that would change everything, I was unexpectedly introduced to this *new* (to me) filmic gesture, genre or discipline. The lecture-performance would quickly become the perfect candidate to be understood as a solastalgic filmic form: a film that has been lost and tries to return to its past life or the life it could have had. A film that -in fact- will not be able to return, a displaced film, which will admit the need to leave behind the preconceived idea it had of itself: the screen as the unequivocal place where image and sound can coexist.

After the First and Second Chapters on the definition and appropriation of solastalgia respectively, the Third Chapter of this thesis will focus on developing lecture-performance as a cinematic practice, exploring its potential as a solastalgic form. The Chapter consists of three sections. After briefly introducing lecture-performance as a practice and investigating those characteristics that are in dialogue with my practical and theoretical research, I share what I have called 'The Protocol' in the second section of the Chapter.

When I realised I had implemented a particular working procedure, I translated it into a protocol. It is a document written from a specific place. It contains rules, actions and disclaimers. It is addressed to future directors who would like, one day, to make a non-existent film in progress, that is, guidance for those filmmakers who intend to return to a film they had left behind. Between reflexive rigour and ironic tone that searches to guide a creation process and simultaneously plays with the idea of the impossibility of entirely doing so. The protocol aims to show how I appropriate a discipline I have only recently discovered to make a return to filmmaking possible, unexpectedly diverse, but possible.

Finally, following an intriguing tendency among lecture-performance practitioners to name and therefore redefine the genre through their practice, the third section of the Third Chapter seeks to rename what I am doing, trying to find a terminology that made me feel more comfortable: from lecture-performance to spoken film, returning film, displaced cinema.

Mine is a film that can only exist when it is told, a film that comes back to happen not on the screen or not only but next to it. Mine is a solastalgic film.

I had already worked on what could be considered the central piece of the thesis' Third Chapter, 'The Protocol'. The idea of a returning film had already appeared with the Fifth Movement, even if it was beset by doubts and obstacles. I even would cherish -in the Sixth Movement- the possibility of making this return possible thanks to an unexpected miracle in the form of laughter. And even though I still had to approach the returning and the displaced film as theoretical notions, the Seventh Movement would become the place for the final chance to essay on a return. It will soon prove unsuccessful... or perhaps not entirely...

This is how *Lovesong, a non-existent film in progress*, is finally made of Seven Movements with different durations, resulting in a two-hour and fifteen-minute performance.

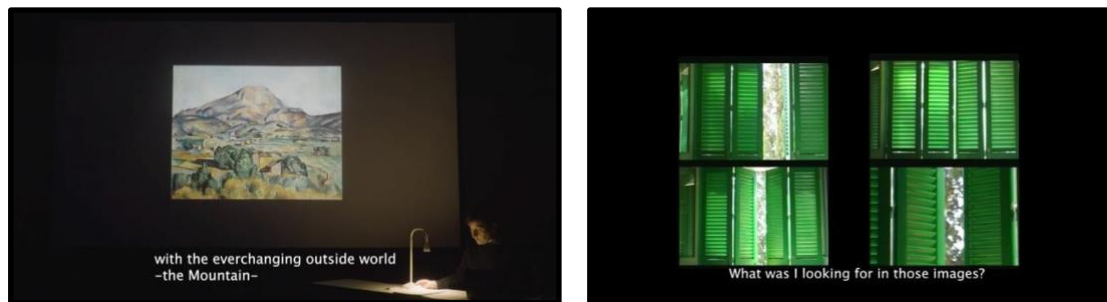
To date, I have performed it four times: three in Spanish, in Montevideo, Buenos Aires, and Bogotá, and one in English, in Reykjavik.

Despite the ambition for this regained practice always having been for a live performance, it is nonetheless essential to recall the circumstances that surrounded us while making it. Living in Barcelona and the conjunction of the pandemic and Brexit, made impossible from the very beginning of my research to share the work in progress in the way I had envisaged. That meant that during the four years I was creating the performance, I would share each of its Movements online.

The Movements were pieces that appeared one after the other, as a result of an exploration that moved forward using the needed time, with no pressure, no agenda, only curiosity and the need to know where the next step led. Today, I share the complete *Lovesong* as a live encounter, a challenging experience of almost two and a half hour (counting introduction and break). But I propose to you to experience the viewing of the performance in a way that is closer to what it was like to watch it while I was creating it. A creation that was viewed in process will correspond here to a viewing that will progress with the text: throughout the reading of the document you hold in your hands, I will invite you to see the different Movements, which will gradually appear.

You will see the first three Movements just before reading the First Chapter of the thesis. Then, I propose to watch the Fourth Movement (the turning point, where the crack appears) and the Fifth Movement (where the problems or the obstacles seem to grow), between the First and the Second Chapters. The Sixth Movement is placed between the Second and the Third Chapter and finally you will find the Seventh Movement, the longest one, before the Fourth and last Chapter of the thesis. You will find the links to see the Movements at the right time. From Movement One to Movement Six you will have access to the recording of a rehearsal of the Spanish version *Canción de amor, una película inexistente en proceso* with English subtitles, made in July 2023. The recording of the Seventh Movement corresponds, instead, to the live recorded English version that I presented in Reykjavik in September 2024. Both recordings were shot with two cameras, and the editing in both cases include images from the original video

screened in the performance and images of the performance as such with the intention to approach the live experience as much as possible.



Figures 1 and 2. Screenshots of the rehearsal recording (Spanish version).

This double documentation allows access to two experiences, the rehearsal and the live (with its accidents and omissions). On the other hand, the switch from one version to the other, for the Seventh Movement, gives a sense of a certain instability or resistance to fixation, underscoring the fact that despite the existence of records it is not in the nature of the *Lovesong* to be recorded.

It is essential not to forget that the experience is meant to be live and not pre-recorded. As I will develop in the Fourth Chapter, my voice should not be mistaken for a voice-over but a voice-body present on a stage next to the screen, sharing time and space with the viewer. Nevertheless, I believe these registrations can hopefully make visible and palpable the poetic and reflexive search, the narrative and the emotional journey.

Besides, the existence of these two versions also, and very significantly, gives an account of a reality that I have dealt with since the beginning: the coexistence of languages.

My language, the poet's language, and the language of the original film are Catalan. However, I adopted English from the very beginning to think about and create the spoken film.

I remember a question asked by the supervisory team when I began my PhD. "Why are you choosing to work and create in English?" I did not have a good answer at the time. Now, as I will develop in the Fourth Chapter, I understand. Unconsciously, English offered the distance that made the return possible, for one can only return to a place from which one has departed. Hence, that distance became crucial to be able to name

the image as (a lost) home, and as a consequence my mother tongue as (a lost) home. This is how my reflection on the image would end up involving language.

From the Third Movement of the *Lovesong, a non-existent film in progress*, I began to consider sharing the work in places where I regularly lecture in Latin America. So I started to translate, and from then on, the performance got two versions, the English and the Spanish. These are the languages that exist outside the images, the languages of the performance. Inside the screened images during the performance, the images I recorded 20 years ago, the language is always Catalan.

It is in this relationship between the language outside and inside the images that the switch in the recordings becomes crucial. In the Seventh Movement, as you will see, I dare to enter the image with my voice. Suddenly, instead of talking from the outside, in English or Spanish, my body leaves the stage and my voice becomes part of the image and therefore speaks Catalan. Language change, as I will argue in Chapter Four, is essential to the meaning of both performance and research. Therefore, the link for this Movement leads to the English version, because - in case you are not familiar with Spanish and its difference with Catalan - if I were to keep the Spanish version, you would not notice the change or the difference, and therefore, the deeper meaning would be lost.

Regarding the strangeness of the language, there is another relevant nuance to point out before you start reading the thesis. English is a foreign language to me. This choice, making a film and writing my reflections in and from a foreign language, has imprinted this research with a particular writing style, organising ideas and even getting to conclusions. The film would have been different, as would my reflections, if I had worked using my original language, Catalan.

What makes a film solastalgic? Or, in other words, how could solastalgia restore my sense of belonging to images, or how could it reactivate my practice, lighting the way to return to that home that seemed lost? How can solastalgia make it possible to regain the filmic voice?

In the Fourth and final Chapter, I attempt to explore that question. That is, having introduced and appropriated solastalgia in Chapters One and Two and explored lecture-performance as a possible form of filmic speaking, in Chapter Four, I dive into reflection and analysis of my practice. I identify three main aspects or even strategies that I found

to exist filmically in a solastalgic way. This means to exist in a way that manifests two things simultaneously: on the one hand, the loss of belonging to the images, thus showing detachment, distance and disruption. On the other hand, paradoxically, solastalgia activates the possibility of return, rapprochement, and recovery of practice and voice.

The three aspects or strategies are treated respectively in the three sections of the Chapter. In the first section, I delve into how the loss and distance are visible through the detachment between image and voice. In the second section, I explore the distance between languages. The languages that exist in the performance (Catalan and English in the original version, Catalan and Spanish in the Spanish version) and the one existing between the language of cinema and the language of performance as displaced cinema. In the last section, I recovered an idea announced in the First Chapter: solastalgia is also a matter of time. The detachment, the disruption, the broken bond, and the wound also have to do with time. A way to make it visible and try to return will be acknowledging and working on the coexistence of different layers of times: that of the images, that of the live performance, a shared presence between my body and the viewer.

While I can find in solastalgia a new word to describe a relationship to images marked by the loss of a sense of belonging, these three solastalgic filmic strategies served to reactivate my practice, illuminating the way back to that home that seemed lost. A word that designates a loss and simultaneously has the creative force to lead to a recovery. Fertile paradox. I wanted to understand why I left, and I ended up returning.

Yet, is this an actual return? Is the return possible? Just as Magritte once painted a picture of a pipe that was and was not a pipe... the return will not be a seamless, resounding, definitive return as the last Chapter of the thesis and the conclusion reveals.

As you will see, the end of this story seems to be very much like a door ajar... ready for returns... maybe... but then... also, inevitably, perhaps for new departures...

Screening 1

Watch

Movements #1, #2 and #3

Lovesong, a non-existent film in progress

[Link to the Spanish version with English subtitles](#)

CHAPTER 1. Solastalgia

From Environment to Art

1.1 Introducing Solastalgia.

*Midway on our life's journey
I seem to have had a dream.
In the dream
I was suddenly awoken by the sound of heavy explosions.
I open my eyes
Onto a boundless smoky haze.
The smouldering ground beneath
My feet make me feel
I am in some dark, desolate place.
Only by looking all around me do I discover
I have arrived at the pit's edge of the inferno.
This is the place that has been destroyed.*
(Zhao Liang, 2015)

These are the opening words of Zhao Liang's film *Behemoth* (2015). They introduce the viewer to Inner Mongolia's huge, overexploited open coal and iron mining pits. A man carries a mirror on his back and crosses the wounded landscape. Suddenly, he stops walking as he finds it hard to breathe. The image shows this monstrous landscape, despoiled and destroyed. Later, the inhabitants will be visible, their faces and gestures. The mournful voice announces that, like the man carrying the mirror, the inhabitants suffer from pneumatoxis, a black lung disease caused by their work in the mines, which has fatal consequences.

At the film's end, the camera wanders through deserted streets with no cars or people, just enormous yellow and orange buildings on the side of a road with no end. The voice, which has not left the viewers throughout the film, lets them know that this desolate place has been built, like thousands of others, with the materials that those miners and iron smelters struggle to produce fast enough for China's growing economy - paying with their and the landscape's health. Yet, there is no one on the streets. The houses are uninhabited. It is a ghost town. Only a man moves forward tirelessly with a mirror on his back, a figure suggested by the film as reflecting that strange world in our own. Theirs is

also our problem. At the film's beginning, the landscape the viewer saw was ravaged to build this cement, concrete, and steel 'desert'—one place in exchange for another.

I open the First Chapter of my written thesis with this breathtaking image. And - if you followed my instructions - you probably would have watched the first three Movements of my practice, my *Lovesong*. The question is, what is their connection? What can a ghost city in China have in common with a garden inhabited by a poet in Catalunya? This image, the whole of Liang's film, serves to introduce solastalgia, that word that became crucial to opening an almost forgotten box with seven tapes recorded in a garden inside. From these images from *Behemoth*, I propose in this Chapter to dive into the definition of the concept, from its emergence in environmental philosophy to its migration to the field of artistic creation in what could be called the solastalgic era. It is important to note that the research on solastalgia ran parallel to the creation of the first three Movements of the *Lovesong*. Strictly in parallel, that is to say, without apparently crossing paths. My practice does not address the concept literally or frontally. As you will confirm while viewing, the word solastalgia does not appear at any point in the performance. Instead, it provided first a trigger, therefore, an origin; secondly, it can also be understood as a context or backdrop that gives meaning to what is going on; finally, it will aspire to become a valid filmic concept to refer to contemporary image making.

So, the idea is to read this first Chapter with the first three Movements of the *Lovesong* in mind, understanding that solastalgia inspires and hovers over its creation and somehow offers a theoretical frame. But it will not be until the end of the Chapter and in the following Chapters that both lines, reflection and practice, the *Lovesong* and solastalgia, will begin to intersect.

Behemoth expresses a deep sadness, sorrow, despair, and distress provoked by the loss of solace the world once offered to this man, his community and, by extension, humanity. In other words, it expresses the sense of solastalgia provoked by a landscape -*their* landscape- in the process of forced transformation and disappearance.

Solastalgia is a neologism created by the Australian environmental philosopher Glenn Albrecht in 2003 to designate the 'pain and distress provoked by the ongoing loss of solace and the sense of desolation connected to the present state of one's home and territory' (Albrecht, 2019, p.39). The first use of the term was in clinical psychology. It came to fill a perceived gap, as Albrecht contended that no word existed to associate a

feeling of distress and psychological desolation, specifically with environmental change caused by natural or artificial factors (Albrecht, 2005; 2021).

Albrecht describes how unwanted transformation under physical desolation provokes a chain reaction. Firstly, it manifests as an attack on one's sense of place. Consequently, a sense of identity - understood here as belonging - is gradually eroded. And subsequently, a feeling of distress sets in. As a long-term effect, the meaning of home becomes blurred, and life is lived under the longing for a lost sense of belonging (Albrecht, 2005). In connection, solastalgia could be read as a specific form of melancholy, the same melancholy linked to nostalgia.

Indeed, in its etymology, solastalgia resonates with 'nostalgia', a Neo-Latin word created by Johannes Hofer in 1688.³ Nostalgia often appeared for people deliberately or forcedly removed from their homes. Being away from it, the endemic deep feeling of losing home caused the intense and painful desire to return (Anspach, 1934). In fact, as Kathryn Lloyd remarks, following the early definition given in the 1905 edition of *The New International Encyclopaedia*, nostalgia was perceived as a combination of psychic disturbances that made it a disease that could lead to melancholy and even death (Lloyd, 2016).

These two key elements - the sense of melancholy and the etymological origin indicating the connection to the geographical or spatial 'home'- lead Albrecht to coin a concept with a ghost reference to nostalgia as a word (2019). He sought to find a structural similarity to Hofer's neologism. Thus, solastalgia is based on combining two Latin roots, 'solace' and 'desolation', with a New Latin suffix *-algia* or pain. The word 'solace' derives from 'solari', and it means alleviation, relief or the provision of comfort or consolation in the face of distressing events, providing 'heart's ease' and bringing the discordant back to harmony. Alongside, 'desolation', which derives from 'desolare', connects to devastation, deprivation of comfort, and abandonment (Albrecht 2005; 2019). As a result, solastalgia would be the pain or the desolation caused by the loss of solace and the subsequent longing to regain it.

³ Hofer followed the Neo-Latin style, a European trend initiated by Petrarch and productive until 1700, by which one would recourse to classical compounds in the formation of the new word. Thus, he used the Greek roots *nostos-* and *-álgos* to translate the German word *Heimweh*. With it, he designated the pain of home, the English equivalent of 'homesickness', to describe the reduction in military efficiency by Swiss mercenary troops. *Nostos-* is a Homeric word meaning "homecoming" or return to the native homeland, which appeared for the first time when Ulysses tried to return home in the *Odyssey*. *-Álgos* means suffering, pain or grief. Nost-algia: Suffering, pain or grief provoked by the need to return home.

Despite the similarities between nostalgia and solastalgia, it is relevant to address what differentiates them to define better the use of solastalgia in this research. And for this, although my main reference is the work of Glenn Albrecht, there are a series of names referenced in my reflection, mainly from environmental philosophy, which I will not contextualise in depth as this is not the aim of the thesis, but which I have considered it appropriate to quote in order to surround and support Albrecht, as if it were a Greek chorus.⁴

In nostalgia, melancholy or homesickness refers to people distant from their homes (Bonnet cited in Askland and Bunn, 2018); hence, nostalgia is associated with movement in space (Askland and Bunn, 2018). In solastalgia, homesickness appears when one *is still in* one's home environment (Albrecht, 2005; 2019). The pain is experienced when recognising that a place of significance, the site of residence that one loves, is under assault (Lloyd, 2016; Askland and Bunn, 2018). As Albrecht notes, this situation provokes an implacable feeling of dislocation without actually having gone anywhere. Instead, the home, or more accurately, the sense or feeling of home, the one that has moved away (Albrecht, 2010). The places are affected, even destroyed, but they are still there; they are not entirely lost. In this respect, Albrecht does not talk about 'lost places' and displaced people but places in the process of being negatively transformed while people are physically *still* living there (Albrecht, 2005; 2019).

There is another differential aspect between the two concepts, although this is more complex to elucidate. As I noted above, nostalgia's first meaning was place-based, referring to an intense connection to the geographical home. Yet, nostalgia became colloquialised over time, gradually dissociated from its psychological disease status, and lost its spatial origin. Instead, it began to imply a temporal dislocation, a 'looking back' (Lloyd, 2016). In its current use, nostalgia is a 'pleasure and sadness caused by remembering something from the past and wishing that you could experience it again' (Sedikides and Wildschut, 2018, para.1). In other words, nostalgia today shows a preference for the past over the present, for a previous setting or environment in which the sufferer felt more *at home* than the present (Lloyd, 2016). Whether this past was real or not matters little to nostalgia. Svetlana Boym, in her study on nostalgia, concludes that '[o]ne is nostalgic not for the past the way it was but for the past the way it could have been' (2001, p.749). Be that as it may, it is clear that if nostalgia in its origins expressed

⁴ In reality, this note applies throughout this Chapter to deal with various aspects of solastalgia.

a longing for a place, nowadays, it is commonly understood as 'a yearning for a different time' (Boym, 2001, p.21). Definitely, nostalgia has become a matter of time.

Solastalgia is a concept that explores place-based distress (Askland and Bunn, 2018). It is the lived experience of loss, depending upon a current and direct event, which shows and unfolds in the present and a concrete space (Lloyd, 2016). The negative transformations of a loved place provoke and connect with negative emotional personal consequences in the present tense (Albrecht, 2005). Thus, solastalgia does not look back or aim to translate the experience into 'a personal history to endure, miss or romanticise' in the future (Lloyd, 2016, para.16). Nor does it fall under the seduction, like nostalgia, of an object that is unpredictable and 'notoriously elusive' (Boym, 2001, p.18) because it is situated in a past time and, therefore, somehow inaccessible. Solastalgia exists 'here' and 'now'.

However, there is also a temporal dimension in the understanding of solastalgia. Askland and Bunn affirm that the *solastalgic* experience entails not only 'scars on the physical and social landscapes (...) but also a temporal rupture' (2018, p.18). The loss of a present solace forcibly involves a dissonance with past experiences (traditions, memories, culture, heritage, transmission), impacting the possibility of future experiences of place (Askland and Bunn, 2018).

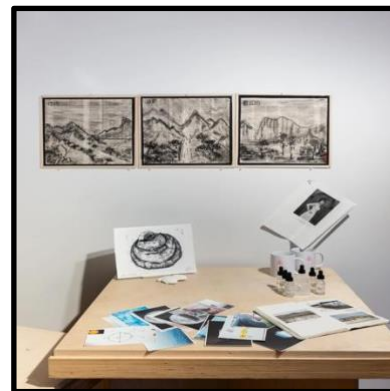
When nostalgia identifies that yearning for a 'different time' with 'the time of childhood' or 'the slower rhythms of our dreams', it is - in a broader sense - confronting or 'rebellious against the modern idea of time, the time of history and progress' (Boym, 2001, p.21). Within solastalgia, even though the attention is not fixed on the past but on the present, it shares with nostalgia 'the mourning sentiment of displacement and temporal irreversibility' (Boym, 2001, p.22).

The artist Nina Elder created *The Solastalgic Archive* (See Fig. 1-3), containing materials such as stones, drawings, photographs, sounds, sand, bottled water, perfumes, and pieces of paper with written messages of desires, wishes and fears. Coming from a wide range of contributors, some of whom were selected by open call, they evidence memory, oblivion, and destruction. Effectively, the archive shows a vanishing world. Although this vanishing occurs in the present tense, in front of our eyes, it still refers to a blurred past and simultaneously a particular sense of a future loss, keeping track of what could be understood as a way of life in permanent extinction.

The rupture with the surrounding landscape becomes a premonition of transition, an evolving and changing state (Elder, 2019). Mirroring this, Elder's evolving archive installation shows how -within solastalgia- understanding temporality entails a transformation process. Indeed, following Albrecht (2005, 2019) and Lloyd (2016), for solastalgia to manifest itself, there must be time for the transformation of a landscape, and, in turn, this transformation needs time to impact the people who inhabit it. Nina Elder started the archive in 2019, and today, as a repository that keeps growing, changing and evolving in a continuous update.⁵ Therefore, not only the content of the archive but a sense of ephemeral existence, mutation or existence-in-progress also characterises the archive itself.



Figures 3, 4 and 5. The Solastalgic Archive by Nina Elder, 2019.



⁵ Although information on 'The Solastalgic Archive' can be found on the Internet (<https://www.ninaelder.com/solastalgic-archive>), the archive as a whole exists and can be visited as a "nomadic" exhibition hosted by institutions that might request it.



Figures 6 - 11. *The Solastalgic Archive* by Nina Elder, 2019. Details.

Despite my interest in this temporal dimension and the idea of transformation, this research starts from and privileges the spatial nature of solastalgia, focusing on the loss of the sense of belonging to a place given in that 'here' and 'now', its nature and consequences. Yet, as I have shared in my introduction, in my case, this place is documentary moving image. And as such, it is inevitably linked to time. It is for this reason that I will return to the question of time later in my reflection. Specifically, in the Fourth Chapter of the thesis.

But before that, my next steps in the following sections of this Chapter need to explain how a concept related to clinical psychology and environmental philosophy can be extrapolated to art, especially in its documentary nature, to understand the documentary moving image as that place perceived as home at risk, that is, as a site of solastalgia.

1.2 More than an Environmental Concern.

Let me briefly review how Glenn Albrecht came to the term solastalgia.

In the eighties, Albrecht was pursuing a PhD in philosophy at the University of Western Australia, exploring the history of ideas related to the concept of organicism.⁶ Hegel became his primary reference, so when his supervisor, a prominent Hegelian scholar, passed away, he felt lost until he found another Hegelian philosopher with whom he could continue his research. For that, he had to move to the country's east coast to the University of Newcastle in the Hunter Region.

Albrecht's initial nostalgia for the landscape and life in western Australia soon led to immersion and enchantment for the delights of a place known as 'the Tuscany of the South' (Albrecht, 2019; 2021). One of the reasons was his knowledge of and passion for birds. From his childhood, he dreamt of becoming an ornithologist. Yet several events, including the early death of his father, made him finally switch to philosophy. However, his relationship with birds was once again ignited when he arrived in the Hunter Region: 'The native birds of the area were more numerous and, in many respects, more brilliant than those of the West' (Albrecht, 2019, p. 21) and while Albrecht made new ornithological discoveries, he became interested in the work of John and Elizabeth Gould.⁷ Following their footsteps, Albrecht travelled the Hunter Valley and built an imaginary picture of what they might have witnessed in the 19th century. He and his wife explored the wetlands and heaths along the coast, the rainforests inland, and the alpine landscape with the last remaining Antarctic Beech trees. The whole region, as Albrecht states, filled him with what the geographer Yi-Fu Tuan called 'topophilia', or love of place, or what Seddon would call 'sense of place' (Albrecht, 2019).

However, he was simultaneously confronted by scenes of desolation. The New England Highway crossed the centre of the Hunter River Valley, and the extensive coal mines

⁶ Organicism is the philosophical doctrine that everything in nature has an organic basis or is part of an organic whole. According to an organicist position, the universe would be orderly and alive, much like an organism.

⁷ John and Elizabeth Gould were a British couple who pioneered ornithology in Australia and produced high-quality illustrated books about birds. One of their most famous books is *Birds of Australia*, a seven-volume publication edited between 1840 and 1869.

thickened the air with dust and acrid smells whilst degrading and polluting creeks, streams and the Hunter River itself.

These confrontations with the destruction of a landscape transformed his personal experience into indescribable distress and profound unease. Albrecht realised that until that moment, he had lived a naïve sense of place, intellectually nourished by the work of pre-desolation pioneers (Albrecht, 2019; 2021) and his predisposition to the sense of attachment. Very soon after, he visited the Upper Hunter citizens' homes and listened to their concerns about the desolation. Albrecht and his team undertook a series of interviews to register these stories. One by one, the team brought the lived experiences of local people into storytelling (Albrecht, 2021). The citizens' tales narrated the chronic assault on their landscape. They shared their emotions, feelings, and thoughts of distress regarding their loss of sense of place, identity and belonging, provoked by forces out of their control (Albrecht, 2005; 2019).

In essence, their emotional reaction resonated with his previous personal existential and lived experience. Each showed the same negative and distressed response to the damaged landscape. They had witnessed that 'Earth and the human psyche were both in trouble in this place' (Albrecht, 2019, p.37).

This philosophical attempt to trace a direct line between the health of the natural world and the health of the mind had a notable impact on environmental philosophy (Albrecht's domain) and psychology (Smith, 2010). In particular, solastalgia increasingly became adopted as a psychological diagnostic tool to identify distress induced by the destructive transformation of loved environments (Askland and Bunn, 2018). What began as a personal lived experience and was confirmed, tested, and analysed in the Hunter Valley community eventually offered a term that became widely used to explain and understand what other communities were experiencing. For example, the experiences of Canadian Inuit communities coping with the effects of rising temperatures (Michelin, 2020), Ghanaian farmers facing changes in rainfall patterns or even those affected by Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans (Smith, 2010).

As a result, since Albrecht first defined solastalgia as psychological trauma, a range of neologisms, known as psychoterratic terms, began to address the threatened relationship between humans, the environment, and psychological states (Albrecht, 2010; 2019). The typology of psychoterratic terms (or states) includes positive and negative connotations. Solastalgia appears as a negative state or psychoterratic

disease, along with other concepts such as eco-anxiety, nature deficit, eco-paralysis, eco-nostalgia, and *global dread*. (Albrecht, 2010).⁸ Despite the relative novelty of these terms, the negative existential, emotional, and psychological experience that underlies them is not entirely new.

In 1906, Ernest Jentsch used in his text 'On the Psychology of the Uncanny' a German word, *unheimlich*, usually translated as *the uncanny*, to express the feeling of not being home. His reflection made him identify the usual and hereditary as familiar, dear and welcome, while the unknown, incomprehensible or unusual would provoke estrangement, unease, mistrust, uncertainty and even particular hostility (Jentsch, 1906). Some years later, Freud would follow this thread and expand on this type of anxiety or dread associated with the uncanny or the unhomely, deepening into different dimensions of life and death to explore madness, repression and childhood traumas (Freud, 1919/2003).

Even though place or home might not seem to be the main object of their reflection, the vulnerability of a sense of home and its potential loss is always present. So, it is not surprising that, as Anthony Vidler affirms, the topos of the uncanny in the 19th century was the haunted, abandoned house, whether real or imaginary (Vidler, 1994).

From the seminal texts by Jentsch and Freud, philosophers, writers, and artists will explore the concept of the uncanny or the unhomely. And if, in the gothic tales, the uncanny referred to the deep fears attributed to abandoned and haunted houses, its application soon proved to be the result of a mental construction.

Indeed, the passage from homely to unhomely operates in the mind, and the uncanny would essentially refer to a particular intellectual uncertainty, something that remains ungraspable and continues to elude one's understanding. What was contained and safe turns into a secret, obscure, inaccessible and even dangerous (Freud in Vidler, 1994): 'This uncanny not being at home is linked to a fundamental insecurity brought about by a 'lack of orientation', a sense of something new, foreign, and hostile invading an old, familiar, customary world' (Vidler, 1994, p.23).

⁸ Some of the positive psychoterratic terms would be 'soliphilia', 'topophilia', 'symbiocene', 'eutierria' (Albrecht, 2019).

Bachelard defines home as one's corner of the world, one's first universe (1957/1994), and I believe it is in the same line of thought that Jean-Marc Besse affirms that the way of inhabiting home indicates the way of settling in the world (2013). Indeed, one way of defining home would be precisely by understanding it in consonance with the world, a shared world, its history, roots, habits, imaginaries, representations, language, etc. (Besse, 2013).

It is precisely in this vein that Franco 'Bifo' Berardi will connect the uncanny today to the decline of the modern promise. What provokes the lack of orientation, the intellectual uncertainty, the sense of loss is the disintegration of the cultural and geopolitical orders as we have known them (Berardi, 2023).

The resonance between this definition of the uncanny and the notion of solastalgia provided by Albrecht is pretty evident. Solastalgia has become a much more widely felt emotion concerning what is now being called the Anthropocene (Albrecht, 2019).⁹ During this period of development pressure and massive change, Albrecht suggests that everything that was once familiar and trusted in our environment will likely be experienced as a loss, drifting towards what might be called 'the age of solastalgia' (Albrecht, 2012).

At present, as Joke Hermsen states, the culture of high performance, competitiveness and self-exploitation¹⁰ lead to states of stress, confusion and depression, provoking a melancholic sense of loss that has spread and taken firm root in society (Hermsen, 2019). As Berardi describes it, 'The general sentiment of our times is a physical and psychological breathlessness everywhere, in the megacities choked by pollution, in the precarious social condition of the majority of exploited workers, in the pervading fear of violence, war, and aggression' (2018, p.15).

⁹ The term Anthropocène was coined in the 1980s by the ecologist Eugene F. Stoermer to refer to growing evidence for the transformative effects of human activities on the earth. However, it was not until 2000 that it was popularised by Paul Crutzen as a new geological term to designate a new era, superseding the Holocene. Its popularity appears to be due to its role in illuminating and framing globalising discourses (Haraway, 2016).

¹⁰ I have added the idea of 'self-exploitation' in relation with competitiveness and high performance even if it does not really belong to Hermsen reflection. It comes from Remedios Zafra who explores it in her book *El Entusiasmo. Precariedad y trabajo creativo en la era digital (The Enthusiasm. Precarity and Creative Work in the Digital Era)* referenced in the bibliography.

Six years have passed since Berardi wrote this. Today, coexisting with the explosion of artificial intelligence and its more-than-human potency, there is also a chaos provoked by radicalism (Berardi, 2023) that seems to go in all directions. And in the face of that, Berardi quotes Ernesto DeMartino, who points out the inability of societies to interpret the signs surrounding them. And if they cannot read the world they are experiencing, then it would make sense to speak of the end of the(ir) world (DeMartino in Berardi, 2023).

Effectively, in the age of solastalgia, the loss of solace is not limited to native populations, that is to say, those communities whose identity and means of subsistence traditionally and culturally strongly depend on their connection with their landscape and territory. On the contrary, solastalgia has become an increasingly global condition, given the ongoing degradation of the environment, felt to a greater or lesser degree by different people in different locations (Smith, 2010), or given the 'end of the world' defined by De Martino (2023).¹¹ As Albrecht points out, the concept may be relevant in any context where there is an experience of home transformation, resulting in a loss of sense of place and a subsequent loss of sense of identity and belonging (Albrecht, 2005; 2019).

¹¹ It should be remembered that Albrecht came up with the term to talk about a phenomenon observed with native or aboriginal communities on the east coast of Australia and that the first extrapolation and application of the term outside Australian borders was to talk about other communities equally closely linked to the territory (Eskimos, Indigenous communities in Latin America, etc.). It was not until what could be called a third moment that the term became more generally used, reaching the cities, the Western mentality, and globalised realities.

1.3. Solastalgic Art in the Age of Solastalgia

Indeed, since its creation, the term solastalgia has appeared in various media, from political blogs to music album titles. Many researchers, artists, musicians, writers and poets have applied it, reviving the interest in the relationship between the environment and human experiences (Beinart, 2016). And while their experiences of place may differ, they each respond to environmental destruction, shedding light on the complex interactions with nature (PCC, 2017).

The artist and researcher Asley Sonceley wrote in her 'Manifesto of a Solastalgic Artist' that the purpose of art is to translate the earth's language. The artist must play 'a crucial and practical role as patient zero of our climate anxiety' (Sonceley, 2020, para. 6). Art becomes a form of evidence, and artists witness this pact between them and the environmental crisis (Kóvskaya, 2020).

Yet, as Maya Kóvskaya asks in her article about 'Solastalgia and Contemporary Indian Art': 'On what basis do art or poetry constitute evidence?' and 'What kind of a language can speak to and of these erasures and "disappearances"?' (2020, p.84).

In his TED Talk in 2010, Glenn Albrecht referenced an artwork by Kate MacDowell (See Fig. 12), also featured in a New York Times Magazine article on Ecopsychology (Smith, 2010). According to Albrecht, this piece titled *Solastalgia* is an example of how art can represent the stressing tensions between humans and nature unleashed by environmental change (Albrecht, 2010). For over a decade, MacDowell has created hand-sculpted porcelain pieces to confront the romantic ideal of the union with the natural world and the contemporary human impact on nature. Each piece records endangered natural forms, highlighting impermanence and fragility in a dying ecosystem. As she states: 'I see each piece as a captured and preserved endangered natural form and a commentary on our culpability' (MacDowell, n.d. para. 3).

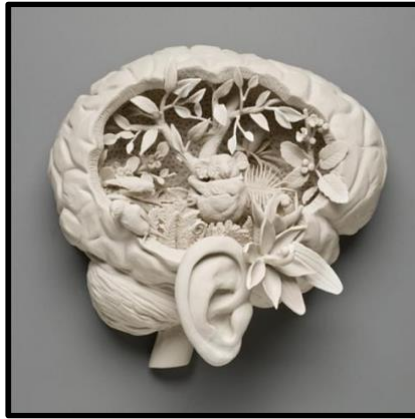


Figure 12. *Solastalgia* by Kate MacDowell, 2010.

Among other places, MacDowell showcased her work in 2017 as part of a collective exhibition at the Sylvania North View Gallery in Portland, USA, called "Solastalgia. Artists respond to environmental destruction". Other *solastalgic* artists in the exhibition included Satu Niku, who works with collages and videos to explore the relationship between identity and rootlessness (See Fig. 13 and 14). Roll Hardy, who since 2015, has painted landscapes of Portland, showing the apocalyptic abandonment and documenting places that may soon be gone (See Fig. 15-16). Or Michael Brophy and his painted chronicles of the environment's fate, where there is nothing left to recover and where strangely the ruins of what once existed generate another kind of beauty, even as the landscape of our longing fades away (See Fig. 17 and 18).



**Figure 13. *Solastalgia* by Satu Niku, 2011
Videoinstallation 3.30 minutes in loop.**



**Figure 14. *The Nostalgia of The Place*
by Satu Niku, 2013 Video, 7.05 minutes.**



Figure 15. Refuge
by Roll Hardy, 2015.



Figure 16. The Yard
by Roll Hardy, 2021.



Figure 17. Remnants
by Michael Brophy, 2019.



Figure 18. Encroachment
by Michael Brophy, 2019.

These examples illustrate two different creative approaches to working with solastalgia. One is the conceptual and poetic exploration of the term itself (for example, MacDowell and Satu Niku). The second is the critical depiction of vanishing landscapes (for example, Roll Hardy and Micheal Brophy). I have identified a third creative approach that completes this overview. Instead of representing the concept or the landscape, there are creations- and artists- focusing on exploring the *solastalgic* feeling that arises due to the rupture of a sense of belonging. They are poetic or narrative explorations of the endangered, wounded or even broken relationship between the artist and the transforming or vanishing landscape.

Already in 1906, Jentsch referred to how artists, poets and storytellers would feel drawn to explore the tension between the familiar and the uncanny, being a boundary that can be crossed with particular ease: 'It is a favoured and quite a banal trick to come up with the most hair-raising things and then to reveal all that happened to the reader in three lines at the end as the content of a wild dream vision' (Jentsch, 1906, p.14). Long after, Bachelard would also identify poetry as a way to orient us towards what is secret. For him, the lost house would be that of childhood, a home that will not be habitable again

despite being inscribed in us forever (to the extent that all other houses will be nothing more than narratives around it). It is thus a house of memory to which we can only return in dreams, a dream house that cannot be objectively described or reached. On the contrary, it must retain its shadows and its intimacy. A home, therefore, that belongs to poetry (Bachelard, 1957/1994, p.13).

Examples of this include Rebecca Beinart's performance, *The Forest of Lost Trees* (2016), in which she examines the link between environment and experiences and how personal narratives of loss are passed on. Through potential routes through the forest, a story is told aloud, at each stop, related to a tree. True stories, remembered stories, some heard from others, and some re-elaborated from archives... (See Fig. 19). Another is Bea Fremderman's germinating sculptures (2020), comprising everyday objects and clothes covered with vegetation after apparently being abandoned (See Fig. 20 and 21). Or the photographs by Yangkun Shi in his project called *Solastalgia* (See Fig. 22-24).

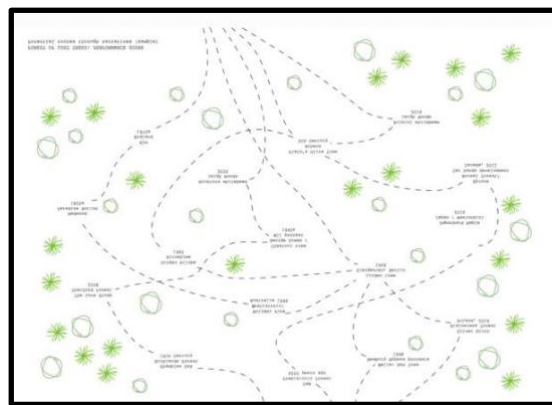


Figure 19. *The Forest of Lost Trees* by Rebecca Beinart, 2016.



Figure 20. *Living Chia Germinates from Clothing Abandoned on a Wash Line* by Bea Fremderman, 2020.



Figure 21. Detail from *Living Chia Germinates from Clothing Abandoned on a Wash Line* by Bea Fremderman, 2020.



Figures 22 to 24. *Solastalgia* by Yangkun Shi, 2016-

Yangkun Shi articulates his project *Solastalgia* as '[a] project about the young Chinese generation who have found themselves delving into memories and refiguring identities in a country that is changing beyond recognition' (Shi in Gear, 2017, para. 4). Departing from his own experience, Yangkun Shi introduces a new element to the approach to solastalgia.¹² He links solastalgia to a form of melancholy that people, when returning home, realise that what they see betrays what they had memorised (Shi, 2022). As I shared in the thesis introduction, 'returning' is essential for my practice: recovering a forgotten or abandoned material to question the possibility of 'returning home'. On the other hand, the idea of return is not implicit in the research question itself 'How can solastalgia reactivate a documentary practice?'. Accordingly, the concept of 'returning' will be central to the reflection that runs through the following Chapters. Therefore, Shi's re-interpretation of solastalgia introduces a crucial step for this reflection's evolution.

¹² Shi left his hometown of Shangshui, China, to study at Anqing Normal University and then at the London College of Communication, where he received his MFA in photojournalism and documentary photography in 2016. Each time he came back home, the sense of solastalgia struck him. The relationship between what he found in each trip and his memories of the environment and the people around him was fractured (Walsh, n.d.; Phmuseum, 2022).

Similarly, the sense of returning is central in Jessica Beshir's film *Faya Dayi* (See Fig. 25-28). Beshir, a Mexican-Ethiopian director, returned to her hometown of Harar in Ethiopia and was shaken by how economic factors and climate change had brought a dramatic shift (Beshir in Dollar, 2021). *Khat* -a plant containing a stimulant that speeds up the mind and body, similar to amphetamine, yet less powerful- was massively replacing coffee plantations, as it was a more lucrative business. As Beshir affirms, 'It was just all *khat*, suddenly (...). There was no more coffee; there was no more sorghum or *teff* — which is the grain's staple food. Starting from this visual landscape, I also wanted to understand the sociopolitical landscape. In doing so, I started to realise what the Oromo community was going through'. (Beshir in Dollar, 2021, para.7). The result is a whole generation trapped between forced migration and addiction. Similar to Shi, and beyond the link between solastalgia and 'returning' in both proposals, solastalgia in Beshir is also related to a generational phenomenon, that is, a phenomenon that manifests itself in a group of people who share the same age in the same period, in this case, Albrecht's age of solastalgia (2012).



Figures 25 to 28. Frames from the documentary film *Faya Dayi* by Jessica Beshir, 2021.

Again, Beshir captures in her film not the story but the *solastalgic* emotion provoked by it. Little information is given. Instead, the proposal relies on a poetic, immersive, and hypnotic black-and-white dreamlike filmic experience.

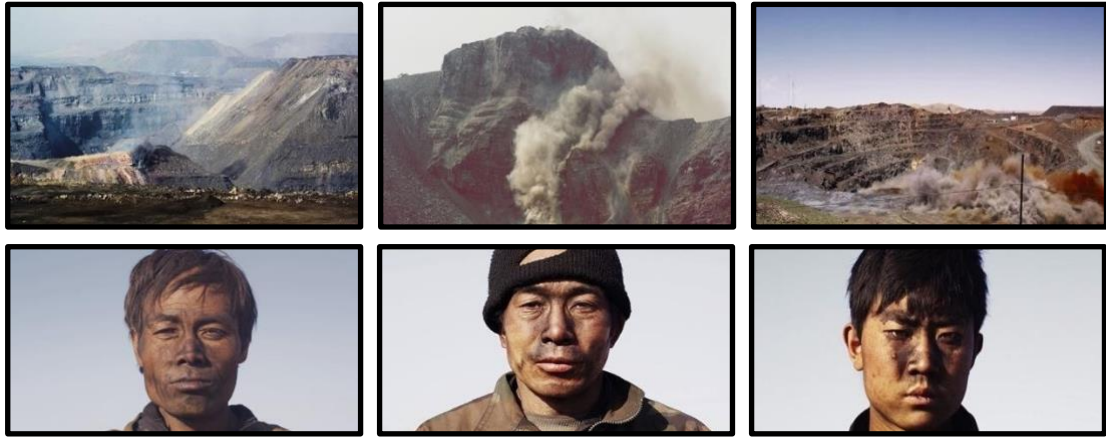
This is precisely what also happens within Liang's film *Behemoth*, which I referred to at the beginning of this Chapter. In these films, emotion is not portrayed but created.

Although solastalgia relates to these films' content, it also becomes a formal choice. It is not only about the subject. It is the way of making the film. It is about what is said and what the viewer experiences while watching the film. In *Behemoth*, images rather than the people do the talking (Ide, 2016). Even though Liang shot interviews, he decided not to use them in the final cut (Liang, 2016). Instead, he used only the visual aspect of the story: the images of the landscape and its inhabitants, which he approached with formal interventions closer to video art and experimental forms.

These interventions represent another essential element for understanding solastalgia in the context of my research: solastalgia will not only be treated as a subject. It will also be proposed here as a way of seeing that translates into filmmaking decisions. It is a filmic experience and a formal choice. Benjamin's sixth of the 'Thirteen Theses against Snobs' claims that 'In the artwork, content and form are one: meaning' (1934/1979, p.66). According to this, if the artist or filmmaker seeks to capture a *solastalgic* world, they should find a *solastalgic* form. It is not a matter of choosing between content (a *solastalgic* theme) and form (a *solastalgic* style). Content and form go together; distinguishing them would be nothing else than an illusion (Sontag, 1966).

But, recalling the question I quoted above, what kind of a language can speak to (and of) these erasures and 'disappearances'? (Kóvskaya, 2020).

In *Behemoth*, the filmmaker's formal intervention pushes the limits of the documentary genre towards a hybridisation of forms or genres. He confronts silent portraits and a landscape captured in a more conventional observational gaze. (See Fig. 29-34). However, he uses a mirror to disrupt the naturalistic approach to the place. He repeatedly introduces an unexpected naked body lying on the land. He fragments the image of the landscape as if it were made up of juxtaposed triangular mirrors. (See Fig. 35-38).



Figures 29 to 34. Poetic series of Portraits are confronted with observational Landscapes in *Behemoth*, by Zhao Liang, 2015.



Figures 35 and 36. The introduction of the mirror as a disruptive device in *Behemoth*, by Zhao Liang, 2015.



Figures 37 and 38. The naked body and the 'broken mirror image' as uncanny artistic interventions in *Behemoth*, by Zhao Liang, 2015.

In this way, Liang does not limit himself to delivering information on the devastation of the land due to massive mining and the subsequent health issues; he finds a form to express the *solastalgic* experience: so that an uncanny 'unhomeliness' emotion is shared with the viewer. In the vein of Brecht's 'distancement effect', this emotion aims to make the viewer think and act, and therefore it has political meaning (Didi-Huberman, 2008).¹³

¹³ The Brechtian 'distancing effect' or 'alienation effect', called in German 'verfremdungseffekt', is a theatrical method of creating critical detachment instead of emotional immersion. The aim was to avoid passive consumption and to invite the audience to actively reflect on the social and political implications (Brecht, 1964).

What makes cinema political is not (only) the content but the fact that it puts its creative system into political question, even in crisis (Comolli, 2012). Therefore, it is not unreasonable to think that if filmmakers want to film a suffering or wounded world, they have to find suffering or wounded images or, if not, find a way to wound them.

As stated above and following Benjamin's theses, 'content' and 'form' are not opposed but conjoined. Nothing is said; nothing exists without a specific form (Comolli, 2012). The formal disruptions proposed by Liang imply a critical stance towards the reality he is filming, turning his poetic gaze into a politically committed gesture, which means the director's standpoint is an appeal to that of the spectator. As Comolli writes, it is a matter of moving the spectator with cinema tools (2012).

Yrsa Roca Fannberg made her second film, *Last Autumn*, in 2019. She portrays a shepherd's daily life just before his retirement. He finds himself too old to continue inhabiting the countryside; in a way, it is like he feels that he doesn't belong there anymore (See Fig. 39-42).



Figures 39 to 42. Frames from *Last Autumn*, by Yrsa Roca Fannberg, 2019.

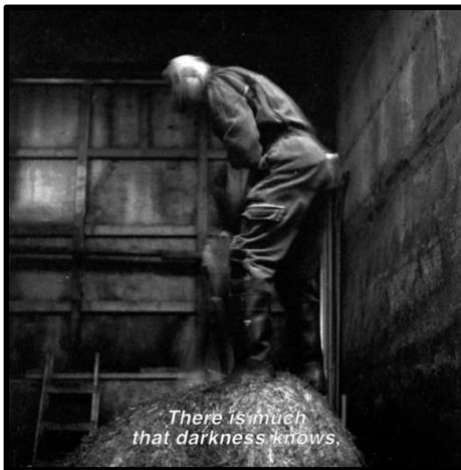
As he can't find anyone willing to buy his flock, he is forced to sacrifice it. The film is structured around this fact. The first part prepares the viewers for the crucial moment. And once it has passed, they can see how life goes on.

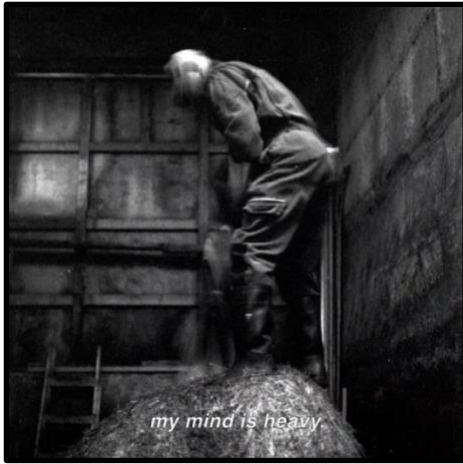
The sacrifice is deliberately left out of frame, evoked through what I would call a crack on the film's surface. It is a formal disruption of the filmic pact, dramaturgically acting as a punctum. Punctum. Roland Barthes (1980/1989) introduced this concept concerning photography, yet in filmmaking, I can see *punctums* every time the flow is disrupted, formally, narratively. The punctum designates what comes out of the scene like an arrow and comes to prick the viewer. It is a wound that hurts the established pact (what Barthes would call studium). Even if the relationship between studium and punctum is causal (the spectator knows that the herd will be slaughtered), is perceived in a casual, accidental, vibrant, moving way. The film is in colour with careful staging and an extremely respectful and silent distance. In contrast, a series of black-and-white photographs and a lullaby break in poignantly, replacing the moment where their slaughter should take place. (See Fig. 43-63).

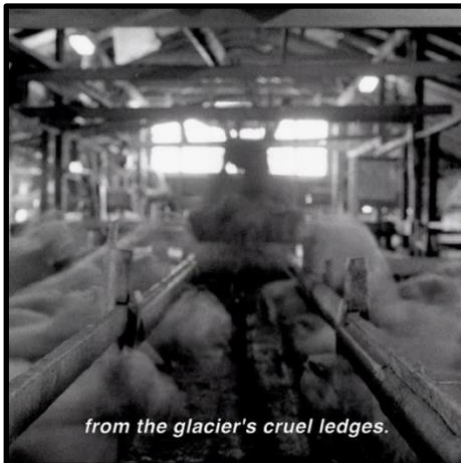


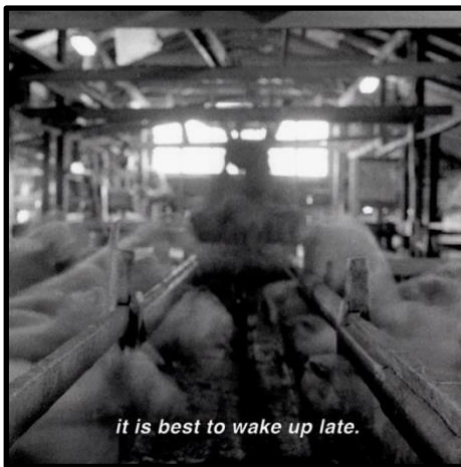
... Colour turns into Black and White. Music appears ...

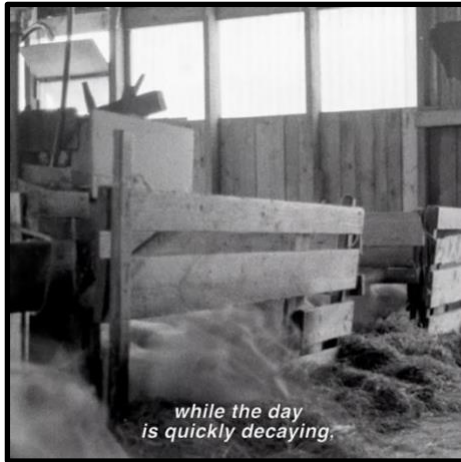












**.... Music ends. Colour comes back.
With it, the wind in the curtains. And reality ...**



**Figures 43 to 63. The punctum in *Last Autumn*,
by Yrsa Roca Fannberg, 2019.**

[Follow this link to see the film clip with the sequence of photographs and the lullaby <https://vimeo.com/546831794/e3873a75e0>]

The formal wound – maybe more than the content – brings the viewer the experience of solastalgia, the loss of the sense of belonging, and the emotions it carries. Thus, I intend to understand solastalgia as a filmic form, not just as a subject matter.

As solastalgia revealed itself to me as a matter of form - filmic form - I appropriated it so that it began to exist apart from issues of environmental devastation. The broken, wounded, lost sense of belonging would not be in the image's content but regarding the image itself, the image as 'a thing in the world, not just a text or commentary on the world' (Sontag, 1966, p.46). A thing in the world. Indeed, in film theory, the objecthood and plasticity of the image have appeared in the understanding of the image through different metaphors: the image as a square or a frame (Eisenstein, 1930/2010), a window (Bazin, 1967/2005), a mirror (Metz, 1977), or a doorway (Bruno, 2022) to name a few.¹⁴ In them, the image becomes the object of attention, the image not as a medium to show a thing, an object from reality, but *that* thing, *that* object. Surprisingly enough, all these objects could be found in a home: a frame, a window, a mirror, and a doorway...

¹⁴ Departing from manipulations during filming or editing that would mask a part of the shape of the film square, Sergei Eisenstein introduces the concept of 'dynamic square' to produce different projection formats at any stage during the film's screening. By doing so, it would explore and impress, in projection, every geometrically conceivable form contained within the initial, basic square, gaining freedom in spatial and figurative composition (Eisenstein, 1930/2010; Somaini, 2019). André Bazin's central and foundational claim, which will guide all his writings, is that the film's mission is to open a window to the world. By this, understanding the image as that window enables true political engagement, which defines great cinematic authorship (Bazin, 1967/2005; Hedges and Bernstein, 1984). For Christian Metz, the image acts as a mirror in the sense that, placed in front of the viewer, this recognises himself or herself as the necessary perceiver of the film's imagery (Metz, 1977). Finally, Giuliana Bruno has extensively worked on the materiality and textures of cinema as a screen, a surface, an atmosphere, a passage... and among them, there is the doorway, the image as a route or doorway between the mental and the real (Bruno, 2014, 2022).

Following this thread of thought, trying to focus on the image as *something* and not the image of something, could an image be understood as a place? A place called home? And if so, what if that image-home was in danger?

In my *Lovesong*, a *non-existent film in progress* there is the image of a house. Yet, what interests me is to understand the image as a house, a lost, abandoned house, a haunted house. When talking about words, John Berger states that they are never transparent. Instead, 'they create their own space, a space of experience', which would be 'furnished' and arranged very much as a home. The writer's objective would be 'to accommodate what belongs there easily and to welcome those who enter' (Berger, 1991, p.214-215). Berger is talking about words. Yet, I cannot help thinking of images.

What I had lost is not (only) the content of the image, the portrayed house, the garden, and the possibility of encountering the inhabitants of that garden the same way I did several years ago. What I have mainly lost is the image itself, a way of making images. It is not the place framed by the image. It is, instead, the image as a place, an image-home, which somehow stopped being hospitable to me.

In the following Chapter, I will expand these two possibilities. The first is the possibility of understanding the image as an image-home. The second, the one of being exposed to such a process of transformation that the sense of belonging to it might be found under threat.

Screening 2

Watch

Movement #4 and #5

Lovesong, a non-existent film in progress

[Link to the Spanish version with English subtitles](#)

CHAPTER 2. Borrowing Solastalgia

A New Word for Documentary Moving Images

One of my research aims is establishing solastalgia as a valid concept to describe my current relationship with the documentary film image. For this matter, I will argue for the creative potentiality of the documentary image as a site of solastalgia.

As I mentioned above, solastalgia exists when recognising that a place of significance (Lloyd, 2016), namely home (Askland and Bunn, 2018), is under assault (Lloyd, 2016). Based on this definition, two questions need to be addressed: How might a documentary moving image be considered a place called home? And in what ways is this image-place-called-home under assault?

2.1 Documentary Moving Images, a Place Called Home.

In the story of the concept of solastalgia, 'home' is a site of transformation. At origin, it was a very concrete place (linked to Albrecht's lived personal experience) connected to the Hunter Valley community. From there, other places appeared, including those of other indigenous communities. And finally, the place of significance was recognised in a global state or condition, inaugurating the age of solastalgia. Up to this point, all these places called 'home' were understood as physical places. Yet, the qualities that make them home, namely the feeling of comfort, solace, and a sense of belonging (Albrecht, 2005), do not rely only on their objective physical attributes but on the nature of the mental and emotional relationship that someone, or a community, builds with them.¹⁵

Freud understood 'home' not only as the place where one lives but also as the seat of consciousness, while Nietzsche articulates the huge emotional connection between home and the heart (Albrecht, 2019). Similarly, Bachelard sees in 'home' the place that provides interior space for the soul and psyche (Bachelard in Creswell, 2015b). Therefore, more than a place, 'home' is a particular sense of place that includes the reality and virtuality of experiences, thoughts, memories, dreams, and poetic images (Bachelard, 1957/1994). That psychic state is an interior space that bespeaks intimacy, where the intimate being and its vulnerability are exposed, experienced and protected (Bachelard, 1957/1994; Besse, 2013).

¹⁵ The English word 'home' is from the Old English word *hām*, which actually refers to a village or estate where many 'souls' are gathered. It implies there's a physical dwelling involved, but the main idea is that it's a gathering of people, therefore a community (Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online, 2022).

This specific sense of place is not a given but an artifice. As Emanuele Coccia argues, it is ultimately built through appropriation, habituation, domestication, and self-domestication (2024). This sense of place emerges from a process of attachment developed over time involving affection, cognition, and behaviour (Giuliani, 2003). The 'place attachment theory' is an environmental psychology concept coined by Bowlby and Ainsworth in the 1990s. It designates how people become emotionally and psychologically attached to places that have meaning to them (Luce, 2021), that is, places that evoke thoughts, feelings, memories and interpretations (Schroeder, 1991). These places, whatever they may be, more or less palpable, more or less unexpected, more or less usual, will embody a certain relationship with the world (Creswell, 2015a). So, could an image, a moving image, a documentary moving image be that place of attachment?

In the Black Forest, in a village called Todtnauberg, there is a hut. It was built and inhabited by a philosopher condemned by his own actions, Martin Heidegger. Probably, I should not mention him or his hut. Indeed, doing it is painful, almost unbearable, so I do it with inevitable regret. Yet despite my unquestionable antipathy to his pro-Nazi positioning and the harmful political and ethical implications of a part of his philosophical writings, I finally decided to include him here; there are three reasons for that.

The first reason comes from a story. In 1967, Paul Celan,¹⁶ a poet profoundly wounded by the Holocaust, received a disturbing invitation to meet the philosopher at his hut in the Black Forest. They admired their respective work. Yet, Celan obviously loathed the person of the philosopher. The encounter did not leave any trace, no photographs, no recordings, no writings of any kind, except a poem that Celan wrote while he was returning by train to his home in Paris two days later. The poem is called 'Todtnauberg'. It is not easy to interpret, like all Celan's poetry, yet it is, again like all his poems, inhabited by fatally wounded words that have received countless readings throughout the years. There is a slight possibility that Celan would expect to be asked for forgiveness by the philosopher. Yet, it is more likely that he would just wish to be looked at, spoken to, and addressed. It is more likely that he would search for a space for an encounter with the otherness, a painful understanding of the Other as part of a common wounded History.

¹⁶ Paul Celan was a renowned Romanian-born German-language poet of Jewish origin. Both his parents died in an internment camp during World War II. Celan himself was imprisoned in a work camp until his liberation in 1944. His poetry has been crossed by this historical and personal wound and burdened by the fact that the language of his poetry was the same as that of the executioner. He drowned himself in the river Seine in Paris at the age of 49.

It seems that what they shared in that encounter was mainly silence, a dialogue based on the unspoken, the unpronounced (Nancy, 2011).¹⁷

Following the spirit of this story, I do not seek - of course - to forgive, to remain uncritical or to try to accept the unacceptable. Nor am I overlooking, let alone endorsing, an aberrant fact or evidence. But I need to stay with the problem, to find a way to deal with it, to recognise that I cannot deny what I have learnt or felt once reading the philosopher ignorant of his intolerable political position and actions. This is a mark, a wound that I decide or need to embrace because I understand that life is made of these painful contradictions or, to use a better expression by Franco Berardi, 'disturbances' (2023), like in the disturbing invitation once Celan received. A shame that is part of our History, part of our constitution as human beings.

The second reason is that this philosopher was one of the figures introduced to me by Lala. As I will develop in the last Chapter, the loss of the image-as-a-place-of-attachment, the image-home, is also the loss of a world, of a way of understanding the world. This philosopher, his thoughts, or more precisely his thoughts as explained to me by Lala (it is essential not to forget that she was my school teacher), were part of the world I filmed, my image-home. Years after our filming, I realised that an unacceptable part of his story existed. Making space for him in this reflection, assuming the conflict of his presence - instead of rejecting it - means recognising him and his thinking as part of that cracked world. Or it could be more accurate to say that - as I will explain in the next section - making space for him in this reflection means recognising this type of wound as part of the *problem*. How his philosophy's meaning has evolved until today could be understood as part of those unwanted transformations (in this case, in the cultural landscape) described by Albrecht, which provoke a chain reaction ending up with a solastalgic feeling.

And the third reason is the hut itself. In the summer of 1922, the philosopher moved into a hut he built in the mountains of the Black Forest in Todtnauberg in southern Germany, where Celan visited him (see Fig. 64 and 65). He called it 'The Hut'. He used it not only as a place to inhabit and write; he also used it to illustrate his thinking (Sharr, 2017) in a

¹⁷ Jean Luc Nancy wrote a radio piece, 'La Rencontre', imagining or trying to understand what might have happened in that painful encounter. There is a published English version in an exquisite photo book by Stéphan Crasneanski called 'The Encounter'. A link to the radio piece, in French, can be found here: <https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceculture/podcasts/atelier-de-creation-radiophonique-10-11/la-rencontre-6515757>.

way that the hut and his thinking merged to the extent that he would finally state that thinking itself needed to be understood as a place, like a home.



**Figures 64 and 65. The hut in the Black Forest, Germany.
Photographs by Digne Meller - Marcovicz (1985).**

Thinking needed to be understood as a home. Is it possible to be in love with an idea and simultaneously reject its author? Although this is the case, I have to confess that this hut and the reflection surrounding it were crucial for me as they triggered my memory and made me remember the existence of another hut, the one that can directly answer the question I introduced above: Can an image be a place called home?

In contrast to the previous one, this hut was built by a filmmaker, Agnès Varda. She called it *A cinema hut* or *Une cabane de cinéma* in French. She called it so because it is an installation Varda insisted on defending as cinema, not without conflict.¹⁸

In 2006, Varda showed in the Cartier Foundation an installation in the form of a hut called *La Cabane de l'Échec* (in English, *The hut of failure*) made of the strips of her film *Les Créatures*. When it was released in 1966, this film represented a commercial and critical failure that nearly ended Varda's career as a filmmaker.

Three years later, she modified the installation for the Biennal d'Art in Lyon (2009), turning it into *A cinema hut: the greenhouse of happiness*, or *Une cabane de cinéma: la Serre du bonheur*, generally known as *A cinema hut – Une cabane de cinéma* (See Fig. 66-69). For this occasion, she used the images from another film, *Le Bonheur* (1965).

¹⁸ Note that she defended it as cinema, not expanded cinema.



**Figures 66 to 69. A cinema hut: the greenhouse of happiness by Agnès Varda, 2009
An installation 're-releasing' her film *Le Bonheur*, 1965.**

The first version displays an editing table with some film strips in it. In the second version, the table is replaced by sunflowers. What in the first version seems a reflection on a past wound, in the second becomes a celebration. From failure to happiness. Despite the differences, both installations serve the same purpose. They are the *re-release* of a film which had existed under a different form. With this project, she retook them in a way that renders them unreadable in their usual cinematic form (Vancheri, 2018). The hut walls are made of translucent film strips. Two open doors at each end allow the visitor to enter, *stay*, walk across it and leave.

In her proposal, two aesthetic strategies converge—archive material and architecture. Yet, while the first ties the proposal to a recognisable cinematic form (experimental cinema, essay film), the second removes it from a common and regulated form of cinematographic projection. Instead, Varda proposes an immersive environment experience where images are no longer bound to their representational content and no longer rely on the fable they write. In contrast, they find their value in the luminous space they form. By doing so, the behaviour of viewers changes, and the nature of their aesthetic experience becomes more visual than visible. Yet, this doesn't prohibit the cinematographic experience. Varda's hut gives it new phenomenological qualities: Entering *The cinema hut* allowed the viewer/visitor to inhabit cinema (Vancheri, 2018).

If the hut in the mountains allowed a philosopher to understand thinking as a dwelling place, Varda's film hut could metaphorically serve the idea of understanding the image as a place, a place called home.

At this point, and to add a twist, it is just as significant how the hut embodies a certain return to nature. As Coccia recalls, 'the hut has played this symbolic role: embodying the most elementary model of the artefact, a house that hides the fact it has been built, that conceals its own artificiality, to become a trompe l'oeil of non-human naturalness' (Coccia, 2024, p.150). The hut, that essential house that seems to have always been there. Indeed, as Bachelard says, the hut centralises the essential characteristics that make a home a home: absolute and primitive refuge against the forces that might besiege it, with the consequent solitude and concentration of intimacy (1957/1994).

Eight years before Varda released her film *Les Créatures* in 1966 - and fifty before her installation - Bazin wrote in *What is cinema?*: 'The cinematic image can be emptied of all reality save one – the reality of space' (Bazin, 1967/2005, p.108). From different perspectives, Varda and Bazin recognise the same: the image is a place to be inhabited. While Varda does so by undoing the solidarity - presumed by the historical apparatus of cinema - between cinematographic views and the projected image (Vancheri, 2011), Bazin offers a precise ontological approach to the reality of the moving image. He argues that the filmic universe appearing on the screen cannot be juxtaposed with our own. It necessarily replaces it since the very concept of the universe is spatially exclusive. The film is the universe, the world, the only *nature* for the film's duration. As a result, no cinema can be without constructing a space that substitutes the universe rather than being included in it. And within this *filmic* universe, cinema is committed to communicating only through what is real (Bazin, 1967/2005).

Yet, what does *real* mean in this context? Berger connects Bazin's idea to how cinema held spectators fascinated by the presence of what emanates from the image. What is real in an image is its own presence (Berger, 1991).

In other words, Berger states that cinema never ceases to pull us into a present (1991), what Barthes would call 'the that has been' (1980/1989) or Comolli would name 'true inscription'. 'True inscription' is the recording that testifies that what the spectator sees happened *here* and *now*, in a given place, at a given time (Comolli, 2004; Comolli and Sorrel, 2015). Comolli defines 'true inscription' as a unique and purely documentary

essence that all cinema radiates from its very origin. It would be a kind of ontological fatality installed by the images from the first film in the history of cinema, *Employees Leaving the Lumière Factory in Lyon* (Comolli, 2004; Comolli and Sorrel, 2015).

The cinematographic machine always films what happens in its presence, generating an exact coincidence between the body filmed and the machine that films it. At the same time, a machine (the camera, the cinematographic apparatus) and (at least) one body meet in the same space. From this encounter is born a unique, unrepeatable, inimitable recording of a shared experience. 'This relation claims to be a 'true inscription' because it is inscribed on the film or tape the truth of unique circumstances: its duration, intensities, and particular, singular, non-reproducible form' (Comolli, 2004, p. 344).

Berger has used these critical notions of 'encounter' and 'belonging' to approach the nature of cinematic images. He does not define cinema as a home but as movement or displacement. In cinema, he states, we are travellers as 'cinema is perpetually about leaving' (Berger, 1991, p.476). But at the same time, he argues that in *our* century of disappearances,¹⁹ cinema's longing is to offer a global refuge, which is a word that could define a home and that resonates strongly in what could be called *solastalgic* language.

Facing a film, spectators would 'discover what belongs to them apart from their single lives' (Berger, 1991, p.482). A filmic image is a place of encounter between the filmic universe and the spectators. And following Berger, the power of such encounters is to celebrate what we - as human beings - have in common, what we share (1991). Thus, spectators identify and recognise in filmic images something that can be shared, a place of belonging. Berger does not endorse the use of the word 'home' to talk about films. Still, I would argue that his understanding of it as a place of encounter and belonging echoes the sense of home I am using to sustain the idea of image as a potential site of solastalgia.

In our present, where 'the world of images is already a kind of second nature, something that creates reality, rather than a mere reflection of the world' (Pérez-Hita, 2020, p.38), I propose to understand the documentary image as *that* place of significance: an 'image-home' that provides interior space for intimate existence, and that is created through a

¹⁹ Berger wrote these words in the article called 'Ev'ry time we say goodbye' in 1990 (Berger, 1991). And even though he is very precisely referring to the twentieth century, I would add the twenty first century into that definition, at least in the light of solastalgia.

process of attachment involving affection and cognition.²⁰ This place is experienced and inhabited in a way that makes who we are and how we relate to the world present and visible.

However, there is something that falls short in this definition: it should emphasise the affection involved in the creation of this space of attachment and significance. If a place is a potential site of solastalgia, it is because it has been the subject of topophilia first, the subject of love.

[P]eople could come into the world in a place they could not at first even name and had never known before; and that out of a nameless and unknown place they could grow and move around in it until its name they knew and called with love, and call it home, and put roots there and love others there; so that whenever they left this place, they would sing homesick songs about it and write poems of yearning for it, like a lover.

(Goyen in Bachelard 1957/1994, p.40)

Love is a condition for calling home a home (Bachelard, 1957/1994; Besse, 2013). In other words, 'it is impossible to consider and construct homes without considering and constructing love' (Coccia, 2024, p.32).

For images, this love is called cinephilia.

Cinephilia. Love for cinema. More than that, cinephilia is the collection of proofs of that love, formalised through constructions of rituals of the gaze (Monroy, 2020). Thus, cinephilia denotes 'a way of watching films, speaking about them and then diffusing this discourse' (Antoine de Baecq in Elsaesser, 2005, p. 28). Loving cinema would imply creating an intimate relationship with the images, intertwining their life with one's life, and building an intimate biography as a spectator (Monroy, 2020).

²⁰ Based on Comolli's concept, which I have introduced above, I insist on using 'documentary' not as a genre but as inherent to the nature of the filmic image. Every image would have a documentary fate, that of the 'true inscription', the only supposition of truth in cinema: the *co-presence* of a camera and a body in space. The image as a documentary would not know, nor should it, nor can it get rid of 'true inscription' (Comolli, 2004).

Spectators would submerge themselves in lives that were not theirs; they would get lost in that new reality on the screen, being transported by it. While surrendering to it, as if they were (voluntarily) kidnapped, they would learn how to walk, smoke, kiss, fight, and grieve (Sontag, 1996). That experience would become as important as the films themselves. Cinephilia changed the way of looking at things (Monroy, 2020).

I was a teenager when I fell in love with Bergman's *The Seventh Seal* (1957), Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922) and Lubitsch's *To Be or Not To Be* (1942). Then would come Rossellini's *Roma città Aperta* (1945), Alain Resnais' *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1959), Mizoguchi's *Ugetsu Monogatari* (1953) or Ozu's *Tokyo Story* (also, 1953), among so many, many, many others including what would be my later enchantment with creative documentary cinema.²¹

When everything began, I started to nurture a sense of belonging not only to those moving images and those films but also to the place that showed them, which became a sacred space: going to watch those films was a unique and singular moment where the value and memory of the film count as much as the value and memory of the experience of watching them (Elsaesser, 2005).

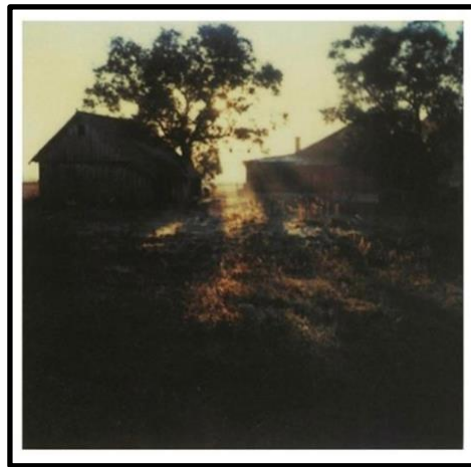
From there, my desire to make films began. Indeed, I had fallen in love not only with the actors, the stories, the films, and the experience but also with cinema itself (Sontag, 1996) and the possibility of making it. Cinephilia had changed my way of looking, and hence, it also changed my way of being in the world.

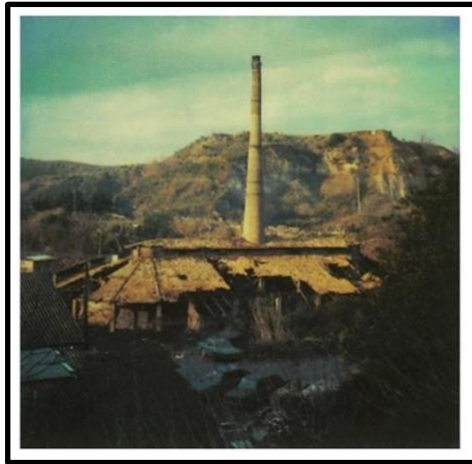
Cinephilia appeared as a discourse around love, 'a love that never lies (...) love of the original, the authenticity, the indexicality of time' (Elsaesser, 2005, p.41); a discourse around love and also faith (Monroy, 2020) or belief (Bellour in Elsaesser, 2005). And for me, this could not be separated from a sense of belonging. I inhabited the images. They would inhabit me (Besse, 2013). And as any (loved) home, it was an eulogised space that could be grasped, protected, and defended (Bachelard, 1957/1994). To build a home became the same thing as to build a form of happiness (Coccia, 2024). Cinema, the moving image, became a space of love, attachment and significance.

²¹ I remember being overwhelmed by the physical presence of the image seated in the dark and the state of remaining wonder. The first encounters with the moving image inaugurated a revered and lasting cinematic experience. Sontag remarked how the cinema began in wonder with the first film by the Lumière brothers, *The Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat Station* (1895) – 'the wonder that reality can be transcribed with such immediacy'. According to her, all of cinema is an attempt to perpetuate and reinvent that sense of wonder (1996).

There is a book, *Instant Light*, that shows a series of polaroids taken by Andrey Tarkovsky between 1979-1984 in his native Russia and Italy, where he was exiled for political reasons during the last years of his life (Fig. 70-75).

It is a beautiful book containing traces of daily life, images of a family house in the woods, a wife, a son, and a dog...; They show a place of belonging, a sense of belonging, which came from accepting, acknowledging, and loving these little and humble images of his own genealogy (Chiaramonte, 2004).





**Figures 70 to 75. Polaroids by Andrei Tarkovski in *Instant Light*,
edited by Giovanni Chiaramonte and Andrey A. Tarkovsky.**

Yet, this sense of belonging was not only about his life but also his image-making: 'I need to have a sense that I, myself, am in this world as a successor, that there is nothing accidental about being here'... 'I always felt it important to establish that I, myself, belong to a particular tradition, culture, circle of people or ideas' (Tarkovsky, 1987, p.192-193). To recognise oneself not only in what the image shows but also in the image itself, in the image-making. Cinema as a space of love, attachment, significance and recognition... the image-home. An image-home that can be lost.

The book counts on a preface by the poet and scriptwriter Tonino Guerra (who had collaborated with Tarkovsky in 1983 to make the films *Tempo di Viaggio* and *Nostalghia*). It ends like this:

These images leave us with a mysterious and poetic sensation, the melancholy of seeing things for the last time.²² It is as though Andrey wanted a swift way to pass on his own enjoyment to others. They are something to be shared, not only a method of making his own wish to stop time come true. And they feel like a fond farewell.

(Guerra in Chiaramonte, 2004, p.9)

²² Tarkovsky passed away from cancer two years later, in 1986.

2.2 The Image-Home under Assault.

If solastalgia exists when recognising that a place of significance is under assault, and if the image - or the filmic universe - is that place of significance, how is this universe being assaulted?

Susan Sontag began a text called 'The Decay of Cinema' by saying: 'Cinema's 100 years seem to have the shape of a life cycle: an inevitable birth, the steady accumulation of glories and the onset in the last decade of an ignominious, irreversible decline' (1996, para. 1). A few sentences later she realises that '[p]erhaps it is not cinema that has ended but only cinephilia' (Sontag, 1996, para. 2). Yet, I cannot see how can one separate from the other. Making is a way of seeing. Seeing is taking part of the making. Sontag herself, later in the text will recognise how films began to be edited in a different way as they were intended for other audiences, other conditions of watching. Leaving the theatre's dark room for the television in the living room changed the image-making. And she would finally claim something similar to: If cinephilia is dead, cinema is dead (Sontag, 1996). Therefore, I would defend that the assault on the image-home operates simultaneously on the nature of the image as well as in the relationship to it.

As I explained in the introduction to the thesis, I left a film unmade. And even though I don't know the exact reason, I recall feeling a growing feeling of loss of sense of belonging. I filmed Lala, the poet. She and her husband had been my teachers at school, and soon, they became my life's cultural, intellectual, and emotional referents. They became fundamental in my understanding of the world. Stopping filming her unexpectedly meant stopping inhabiting that world, that way of seeing.

As time went by, the images I recorded were forgotten in the distance- and again, this was a matter of both content and form. On the one hand, the universe I filmed stopped being my universe. I stopped seeing the poet, and somehow, I stopped having the emotional, creative and intellectual referents I used to have to the extent that some of those referents began to be strange to me or even harmful, as was the case of the philosopher of the hut I mentioned before. The fragments that appear in *Lovesong* belong to films, books, poets, painters that were part of the world that we shared. Little by little, it seemed that I would recognise myself less and less in them.

Giuliana Bruno talks about the filmic image as projection,²³ by which not only the image is projected but the viewer. Using the concept from a psychoanalytic perspective, she argues that the projection connotes a passage that is both an externalization of an internal process (excorporation) and an introjection of exteriority (incorporation). In other words, to project onto an image would entail a moving out of the inner self towards an outside in which one recognises oneself.²⁴ Following this idea, inhabiting an image could also be described as self-recognition in the world contained in the image-home and in the form this image-home has been made.

Home is also defined by a shared language (Besse, 2013), shared happiness, and a shared destiny (Coccia, 2024). In this sense, the recognition would not only be individual but mutual. A sense of home results from jointly elaboration on likes, dislikes, habits, interests and disinterests (Besse, 2013).

What would it happen if the image-home got wounded to an extent that self-recognition or recognition of a shared destiny would not be possible anymore? Would not this threat to the sense of belonging contribute to transforming this image-home into a site of solastalgia?

Looking back to those two decades of producing films and teaching filmmakers, I can see an overexposure to an overwhelming existence of thousands and thousands of images made by others. Now, what I do primarily would be described in the industry as consulting and advising; it would be what is commonly known as a script doctor. I do not really relate to these definitions: 'consulting' and 'advising' have always appeared to me too uncompromised. The 'script doctor' implied that films might be ill, and I do not believe creation can be. I prefer to call it 'acompañamiento creativo', in English, 'creative accompaniment'. Accompany means creating a space for dialogue with filmmakers to understand the deep reasons for their film's existence and, as a result, to identify the corresponding filmic choices and strategies. It is a shared creative process that entails writing and reading, filming and watching, and especially talking and listening, which are, according to Ursula K. Le Guin ultimately the same. Beyond illuminating the way to find the film, this continuous exchange creates a sense of community that is bound to grow

²³ A moving image is a technical image; technical images are projections (Bruno, 2014, 2022).

²⁴ As I have quoted before, Berger would refer to this double movement as a learning of what the viewer might have been and a discovery of what would belong to them. 'In (...) cinema people learn what they might have been and discover what belongs to them apart from their single lives' (1991, p.482).

(Le Guin, 2004). Yet, not only. It also grows the confrontation to a myriad of images that follow each other at an incredible speed. Thus, my lived experience leads me to corroborate what thinkers such as Hito Steyerl or Joan Fontcuberta describe as excess -or even 'iconic pollution'- defining the condition in which images sit and circulate in the twenty-first century (Steyerl, 2012; Fontcuberta, 2016).

This visual superabundance or unprecedented image inflation defines an era of image capitalism in which images are understood under the idea of excess (Fontcuberta, 2016). Donna J. Haraway proposes to change the term 'Anthropocène' to 'Capitalocène', an era where all of nature is transformed and controlled by the focus on the accumulation of capital (Haraway, 2016). In the same vein, Fontcuberta uses the word 'capitalism' to focus on this tendency towards accumulation. As Fontcuberta notes, the abundance of images outweighs the abundance of things (Fontcuberta, 2016), or to use Guardiola's striking words: at present, there are more images than memories (Guardiola, 2018). And this vertiginous production, circulation and transmission of images provoke what Byung-Chul Han calls *hypervisibility* (2017).²⁵ Images are not only abundant, but they are also overexposed, *hyper* present and over-exploited in a dense juxtaposition of ideas, symbols, images, sounds of different cultural forms (Han, 2017, 2018), which questions cultural identity and, therefore, the sense of belonging. Malte Hagener and Marijke de Valck would affirm that 'we all inhabit a world that is saturated by the media, its images and stories, its celebrities and formats' (...) '[T]here is no outside to the audiovisual universe' (2008, p. 29).

In such a scenario, the 'image-home' I have defined above would be jeopardised by what Hito Steyerl calls the 'poor image'. The poor image is an everyday image. Its quality tends to be poor, and the resolution is low as it is compressed for fast travel. It is popular, which means that it can be made and/or seen by many people. It can be transgressive or submissive. All images, past or contemporary, artistic or commercial, alternative or mainstream, whether they offer the rare or the obvious, from capitalist media or alternative audiovisual economies, all become, in some way, sooner or later a 'poor image' (Steyerl, 2012). They are everywhere: complete or fragmented, intentional or random, desired or imposed, clear or blurred, true or false. There are torrents, streams and open roads of images that never cease to flow from one to the next, launching the viewer into the utopia of infinity (Fontcuberta, 2016; 2020). The fact that almost

²⁵ Han defines *hypervisibility* and *hyperpresence* as symptoms of the current era of *Hyperculture*, which is a contemporary wave of simultaneous, superimposed realities.

everybody can become a producer helps only to contribute to this acceleration in the creation, leading to an iconic avalanche (Hispano, 2020). And if silence is essential for the act of listening, attention, care and trust needed to build a home (Besse, 2013), wouldn't the excess of sound and image (implicit in an iconic avalanche) make such a dwelling impossible?

Moreover, this superabundance of images echoes a change of paradigm: images would not be an act of memory (images' natural purpose is -was?- to remember) anymore but of communication (Fontcuberta, 2016). Indeed, communicating can certainly be an option. Yet, suppose the purpose of images is not to remember anymore. In that case, the temporal dimension implicit in any attachment process to a place (Smaldone, 2006), allowing for the creation of a sense of home, will inevitably be weakened.

It could be argued that this is a new Chapter in the long history of image devaluation (Guardiola, 2018).²⁶ At the beginning of the twentieth century, the culture of the image began to lose its original materiality and uniqueness. As Benjamin wrote, the emergence of different methods of technical reproduction of the work of art provoked the decay of the aura and the demolition of its ritual tradition (Benjamin, 1936/1968).

But cinema, in turn, generated its own concept of aura. Without going any further, wouldn't Comolli's 'true inscription' have something of that uniqueness, permanence and meaning that defines Benjamin's aura? It could also relate to 'the wonder provoked by the cinematic image from its origin due to the fact that reality can be transcribed with such immediacy' (Sontag, 1996, para.3).

'True inscription' -which could be understood as a basic motif of the documentary nature of the moving image- demands the presence actually filmed. It is the exact coincidence between the body filmed and the machine that films it (Comolli, 2004) that enables a filmic experience. This irreproducible *here* and *now* resonates with the *here* and *now* of Benjamin's aura.

Here, its existence needs another concept that Comolli theorises in-depth, the 'hors-champ' or 'out-of-frame'. The out-of-frame is a quality integral to moving images: every frame implies an out-of-frame. Every framed image is visible, and this visibility implies a non-visible, non-framed reality (Comolli, 2004; Comolli and Sorrel, 2015). In other words,

²⁶ Following the same apocalyptic vein as Benjamin, Debord and Baudrillard.

the 'true inscription' (what we see) requires and depends on what is not shown, what is left out of the frame. This relation between what we see and what we do not see resonates with the sense of longing and uncertainty expressed by David McGowan (2023) which is provoked by the first generation of cinephilia: 'The wish to retain the fleeting experience that emerged' (Hagener and de Valck, 2008).

Wouldn't the *hypervisibility* announced by Han (2017) undermine this invisible presence brought by the out-of-frame? And as a consequence, wouldn't the 'true inscription' that defines the documentary nature of the filmic image be compromised?

In such a case, the new qualities of profusion, immediacy and connectivity of the 'poor image' could be regarded as a kind of *second loss* of aura. Or, maybe aura is not something that can be lost but transforms or shifts the focus. As Steyerl argues, by 'losing its visual substance, [the poor image] recovers some of its political punch and creates a new aura around it. This aura is no longer based on the permanence of the "original" but the transience of the copy' (2012, p.42) in what Steyerl called 'circulationism' (2014).²⁷

In the '80s, cinephilia, as I have described it, began to decline, while a technological shift occurred with the arrival of videotapes, DVDs, and, finally, the Internet. As a result, the loved object stopped appearing in an immaterial experience, nostalgically stolen from the tyranny of irreversible time -the fleeting moment of the projection in a dark room- (Elsaesser, 2005). Instead, films would be physically touched, handled, owned, stored, and collected in personal libraries in videotapes and disks (McGowan, 2023). And as a result, a new role would appear the one of a collector and archivist (Elsaesser, 2005), a connoisseur of physical media in the era of the videotapes first (McGowan, 2023) and a master of the download, file swap, sampling, re-editing, re-mounting (Elsaesser, 2005) when the digital imposed, after. A new or second generation of cinephilia was born.²⁸ In line with Steyerl's circulationism, ubiquity and availability would replace and oppose the senses of uniqueness, unrepeatability, and purity (McGowan, 2023).

²⁷ In 'circulationism', circulation has a double meaning: 'continuous motion' and continuous 'public availability of something' (Steyerl, 2012).

²⁸ Elsaesser talked about a second generation that arrived in the first years of the internet, though he seems to base his reflections mainly on the DVD. After he passed away in 2019, McGowan would add to the first and second generation of cinephilia, a third one, which would be entirely focused on the internet era. Hagener and de Valck would instead concentrate the three generations into two categories, classical cinephilia (which corresponds to the first generation) and post-classical cinephilia (which seems to correspond to the second and the third generations).

Laura Mulvey shares in an interview the premise of her book *Death 24x a Second* (2006), which is how her habits of watching films had been changed by digital technology: 'I found that my longstanding cinephilia could be renewed by watching films (particularly ones that I already knew and loved) by transforming them, mutating them, through the digital, into different kinds of configurations or patterns' (Mulvey, 2014, p.87).

Like her, and as Thomas Elsaesser points out, the loving gaze that defined the first generation of cinephilia was transformed into a more self-reflexive and self-referential political gaze (2005). And as Hagener and de Valck will conclude from there, this transformation will lead to a more nuanced relationship to the image marked by a theoretically grounded hate-love back-and-forth (2008).

Something had definitely changed. The mutation of images and habits to relate to them brought more diversity, hybridity and inclusivity (Hagener and De Valck, 2008). And with it, the increasing content availability soon turned into what Elsaesser called the 'too much all at once' that ended by defining the contemporary relationship with the image (2005). Indeed, David McGowan, departing from Elsaesser's definitions of the two periods of cinephilia -the first, which appeared in the late 40's and the subsequent one, that began in the 80's with the emergence of video-, culminates in a third one, initiated with digital consumption, crossed by endless access, choice and continuous search. In this new scenario, according to McGowan, the possibility that an image - that object of desire - might disappear from our reach without knowing or controlling when, how, and where it might return will promote a new kind of relationship with it, one defined by a permanent state of unrest (McGowan, 2023).

Maybe as a result of that, diffusing an image - post-producing, launching, and accelerating its circulation- has become even more important than making it (Steyerl, 2014). This relentless peregrination forms and transforms images into 'ghosts', errant ideas, and itinerant images out of control (Steyerl, 2012). The 'poor image' by being endlessly distributed, compressed, remixed, reproduced, and copied becomes a 'ghost image' (Steyerl, 2012) that does not cease to flow, appearing and disappearing (Fontcuberta, 2016).

In such a volatile environment, amongst 'ghosts', the 'image-home' risks becoming what Fontcuberta calls a 'missing image' (2016). Missing images are those that have never existed or that have existed but are no longer available because collective memory has not preserved them or they have been denied (Fontcuberta, 2016). Their disappearance

can also result from more or less individually calculated abandonment, forgetfulness, or simply life passing by. As Fontcuberta writes, images also have their own life: they are born, grow, reproduce, and, ultimately, die (Fontcuberta and Antich, 2019). An image—I would add, the relationship with an image—can last a long time, but it certainly does not last forever. Indeed, as I will resume in the Third Chapter of this thesis, images... can also die. So can our relations with them, our sense of belonging...

Missing images, those that get lost along the way, end up haunting the world of visible images. Again, the ghost. The ghost image... A missing image (or relationship to an image) because it has become so transformed that it is no longer recognisable, because it has vanished or because it has died.²⁹

For all of them, ghost images, their only option is to surface and resist in the form of imagined places. An imagined place connects with a place that exists (or existed) geographically. Yet, it is experienced not through real place interaction but as a mental construction. If '[a] place is somewhere 'out there' in the world (...), an imagined place is an act of the imagination with a subject responsible for performing this act in relation to a place' (Van Alphen, 2005, p.54) which is not present anymore. The missing (ghost) images are places that are not present anymore; how do they become imagined places?

Once, my images, the ones I had left behind, were 'images-home'. Over time, they seemed to have turned into ghosts, haunting missing images that can finally only resurface as imagined places. In the following Chapters, Three and Four, I will respectively explore how the film-performance can be understood as an imagined place that appears as a replacement for the missing filmic image and how, particularly, my film-performance, *Lovesong*, rendered this imagined place a potential site of solastalgia.

²⁹ James Joyce wrote in *Ulysses* "What is a ghost? Stephen said with tingling energy. One who has faded into impalpability through death, through absence, through change of manners" (Joyce, 1922/1986, p.370).

2.3 Fertile Paradoxes.

As I stated, solastalgia is a 'pain and distress provoked by the ongoing loss of solace and the sense of desolation connected to the present state of one's home and territory' (Albrecht, 2019, p.38). That means that solastalgia is an emotional state in response to an endangered home. In the previous section, the image has been described as this possible endangered home and, therefore, a potential site of solastalgia; in other words, solastalgia would become a potential type of relationship with this image under assault.

However, to conclude this Chapter, it is essential to note a contradictory nature running through solastalgia, whereby despite being fixed on melancholy, it can also become a decisive trigger for action (Albrecht, 2012).

This active or reactive dimension within solastalgia entails political action on the ground but also artistic action. Art can play a significant role in restoring a sense of well-being, assertion, empowerment and hope (Daw, 2012). Therefore, the *solastalgic* artist's aim wouldn't be to use art to describe solastalgia but to see if it could be a vehicle for change (Daw, 2012), activating its potential for revolution (Albrecht, 2012). As Kóvskaya advocates, the artist can find a way to intervene in politics by teaching others to see differently and 'look again'. That means finding new narratives, optics and visions to illuminate new modes of being and belonging. (Kóvskaya, 2020).

Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner, a poet from the Marshall Islands, performed a poem at the UN Secretary-General's Climate Summit on September 23, 2014. The poem 'dear marafele peinam' addresses the poet's baby daughter.³⁰ ⁸ Despite showing an increasingly pervasive feeling of sadness and loss for a world that's being irreversibly altered (Holthaus, 2014), the poem's ending transforms into a cry to fight back, resist and transform solastalgia into action.

³⁰ This link shows the entire poem <https://www.kathyjetnilkijiner.com/united-nations-climate-summit-opening-ceremony-my-poem-to-my-daughter/>

(...)

*no greedy whale of a company sharking through political seas
no backwater bullying of businesses with broken morals
no blindfolded bureaucracies gonna push
this mother ocean over
the edge*

*no one's drowning, baby
no one's moving
no one's losing
their homeland
no one's gonna become
a climate change refugee*

*or should i say
no one else*

*to the carteret islanders of papua new guinea
and to the taro islanders of the solomon apologise take this moment
to apologise to you
we are drawing the line here*

*because baby we are going to fight
your mommy daddy
bubu jimma your country and president too
we will all fight*

Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner, 2014

Benjamin's *organising pessimism* concept could explain this artistic position. Didi-Huberman uses it in his book *Survivance des lucioles* or *Survival of the fireflies* to claim, following Benjamin, that images can open up the space for resistance.³¹ Organising pessimism implies discovering the space of the image within political action. The dissent would appear as a shock, 'cataclysm', or disjuncture, calling for the organisation of images and activating positive constructions of meaning. (Didi-Huberman, 2009).

But what are these "positive" constructions of meaning concerning the artistic action triggered by solastalgia? In the second section of the Chapter, I referred to a wound:

³¹ Didi-Huberman wrote this book to answer Pier Paolo Pasolini's thoughts about the relationship between the imposing lights of power and the surviving glimmers of counter-power. Pasolini ended up despairing of this resistance in a famous text from 1975 on the disappearance of fireflies. But, as Didi-Huberman claims, the fireflies have only disappeared in the sight of those who can no longer see them (Didi-Huberman, 2009).

Through wounding the image, the experience of solastalgia becomes not only visible but active. As Leonard Cohen sings in *Anthem*, it is through that crack that the light enters (Cohen, 1992).³² This light resonates with the lightning flash described by Benjamin, which appears within the dialectic image (1930/2012). In the dialectic image, the movement of thought ceases for an instant, creating a suspended moment of tension that underlies every critical reading. These moments are like illuminating sparks that provoke the only possible light to make the actual materiality of things visible (Didi-Huberman, 2008).³³ Somehow, they enable a distance to read the “reality” of things and images and gain a deeper understanding.

In this case, taking action is not really taking sides but taking positions. The activation of Benjamin's dialectic image³⁴ should not imply acting directly on reality to change it but offer a disruption that challenges the viewpoints. It is a response where the poetic, philosophical and political registers converge in the same gesture, which is a position (Didi-Huberman, 2008). As I have argued, the action or the position is not what the image shows or what the poem says. It is a fact of talking and showing, activating the voice, and reacting. Taking a position is assuming one's own voice and making it visible. And this position, as Didi-Huberman recalls from Benjamin's vision, means that the ones who take it must expose themselves in all the senses of the term. To expose themselves to the contradiction of other points of view, to expose themselves to make their positions visible, to expose themselves to the dangers inherent in having the position they have.

In cinephilia, the sense and the consciousness of loss are always present. Not only because, as Sontag would say, cinephilia is grounded in the ‘vast appetite for seeing and reseeing as much as possible of cinema's glorious past’ (1996, para. 10), but mainly because cinephilia as such is a product of the inevitable changes in the loved object itself provoked by the inevitable passing of time (Mulvey, 2009). Cinephilia in all its forms and by nature is marked by ever-present feelings of disenchantment (McGowan, 2023) as

³² Leonard Cohen's lyrics say precisely, ‘There is a crack, a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in’. The light, or any kind of revelation in the form of meaning or beauty.

³³ Didi-Huberman uses the word ‘historicity’ instead of ‘materiality’ in this context, but I am using the latter, considering them exchangeable based on Didi-Huberman's reflections on time and art. Following Benjamin's ‘historical materialism’, time would be the materiality of things, and the archaeology's veritable material would lie in the phenomenology of textures (Didi-Huberman, 2006).

³⁴ Or what I have called the wounded image.

every given generation mourns, romanticises and fetishes what has been lost in the transition of one stage of cinephilia to the next (Elsaesser, 2005).

It seems that the tendency is to relate this disenchantment and all its symptoms to nostalgia, to be more precise, to what Boym would define as restorative nostalgia, which tends to believe that the lost home was better, connecting it to terms such as truth and tradition, and intends to restore it (Boym, 2001). Yet, I would affirm that talking about solastalgia would be an interesting exercise.³⁵ There are two reasons for that:

The first is that it is not the departure of the cinephile that provokes the feeling of loss. It is cinema, understood as an image-home, that is transformed to the point of leading the spectator to the loss of sense of belonging: it is cinema (the image-home) itself and how it is made and watched (how this image-home is inhabited) that has changed.

Secondly, when the sense of loss is understood from solastalgia, it becomes productive (despite its negativity) and activates movement. Indeed, cinephilia is alive and malleable and has the potential to adapt to cinema's ever-changing circumstances and the whims and desires of new generations (Elsaesser, 2005; Hagener and de Valck, 2008). Hence, every disenchantment gives rise to a new possibility of enchantment. Mulvey, for example, discovered unexpected pleasure in what she called her new 'delayed' spectatorship, this new possible way of watching films based on stopping, returning, repeating and repeating scenes (Mulvey, 2014). At this point, it is relevant for my research to notice that this new way of watching films resonates with a new way of making them. This is not only because, as Sontag remarked in her text and I have already referred to, the new ways of watching forcibly implied new ways of making (1996), but also because since the second generation of cinephiles, initiated basically by the magazine *Cahiers du Cinéma*, making cinema will become inseparable from loving it. Light will enter through the crack not only as a way of seeing but as a way of doing.

The poet Ocean Vuong shared in a recent interview for The Guardian: '... when the world has kind of knocked me down, and I've decided, maybe after weeping in the dark, finally to get up off the ground and ask – "now what?" (...) When I get off of the floor -

³⁵ I want to underline that if I am suggesting solastalgia over nostalgia to address cinephilia, it is not because I am reading 'nostalgia' as a concept with negative connotations. In fact, Boym distinguishes two kinds of nostalgia. The restorative and the one she calls reflective, focusing not on the lost object but on the feeling itself, the longing. The reflective nostalgia, in opposition to the restorative, delays the homecoming and chooses to dwell on the ambivalences and contradictions of the sense of belonging, offering a much more fertile ethical and creative challenge (Boym, 2001).

metaphorically- the anger has come and gone, the sadness has come and gone – and I say: “What do I do with it?” Sometimes we just go and make dinner, we go and do dishes, and sometimes we start to write' (Vuong, 2022).

I can identify my own (regained) practice as such a response after the ‘world [had] kind of knocked me down' (Vuong, 2022). I literally put myself in this place of reaction or reactivation of the voice. I began watching the images on the tapes in order, one after the other. Each time something would come to prick me (punctum), I stopped and reacted with the use of two tools: my voice and through editing, associating these images with others from cinema, literature, painting, and photography, that is to say, working from a dialectical position (Didi-Huberman, 2008). The result is the *Lovesong, a non-existent film in progress*.

As I have mentioned in the introduction, the concept of solastalgia made me understand the nature of my loss concerning creation. What I lost was a sense of belonging to the ‘image-home'. From there is solastalgia's contradictory vein which made me open that box which contained seven tapes of an unfinished film and made me *do something* with it, take a position. Unexpectedly and paradoxically, the need to understand how I had lost the sense of belonging to those past images and why that signified stopping making films pushed me to create again, activating the possibility of regaining a poetic and political filmic voice that dares and assumes to expose itself. The form under which I returned to the creation was also unexpected and completely unknown: the lecture-performance. The next step would then necessarily be to dive into its nature, limits and possibilities. This is where the Third Chapter begins.

Screening 3

Watch

Movement #6

Lovesong, a non-existent film in progress

[Link to the Spanish version with English subtitles](#)

CHAPTER 3. The Emergence of a Solastalgic Film Form From Lecture-Performance to a *Returning Spoken Film*.

3.1 Lecture-Performance. Adopting a new way of speaking.

Two things were happening at the same time. I began to read about a word I had just discovered, solastalgia, and I was trying to place myself in the centre of the research. This met with the memory of a forgotten box with seven tapes inside, provoking the need or desire to open it and ask questions. However, one more element must be introduced to understand how, with the opening of this box, solastalgia would be able to reactivate film creation. This element is the Lecture-Performance.

I began to explore this creative form (unknown to me until then) when I quickly came across the writings of Érik Bulloet. His texts had been my first readings, and we started a short but fertile correspondence on the subject. Bulloet is a filmmaker I had met more than two decades ago and with whom coincidentally I lost contact around the same time I left the film unmade. I remember that we connected in the past because we shared a way to understand and love the documentary form; more than that, his short documentary films were an inspiration to me. Hence, it was a pleasant surprise to start researching the lecture-performance and to find that his name was one of the first, if not the first, to appear. With this appearance, it seemed that my exploration of lecture-performance as a possible attempt to return to filmmaking also implied recovering contact with a colleague from the past. Somehow, besides the joy of the re-encounter, I interpreted it as a good sign.

According to my notes, the first Bulloet text I read was 'How to make films with words'. The title resonated with what I will understand in my further readings was a foundational performativity text written by J. L. Austin in 1955, 'How to make things with words'. If there are words that can perform actions with their enunciation (Austin, 1955), one of these actions could perfectly well be a film. Indeed, just by talking, we can produce a film (Bulloet, 2017, 2018).

Such a statement would prove central to this practice-based research. As I concluded in the First Chapter, by confronting solastalgia with an unfinished documentary film, the possibility of recovering my poetic and political voice appeared. Yet, this emerging, regained voice would appear not as a documentary film as I had been practising it for

years but in an unexpected form: the lecture-performance.³⁶ In what way would this medium, unknown to me until now, serve to recover a documentary practice through talking?

I opened the box and started to create very intuitively—Movement One, Movement Two, Movement Three, Movement Four... Meanwhile, I would gather information on lecture-performances, including the pedagogical shift, associative basis, essay impulse, hybridism, fragmentation, particular interest in processes, interpellation with the spectator and reflexive potential (Bulot, 2012b, 2018; Oliveira, 2014). And while my reading made perfect sense, confirming the suitability of the lecture-performance as a filmic form for my research, nuances began to emerge.

Among the features that consistently appeared linked to what could be expected of a lecture-performance, two in particular caught my attention: openness and a critical view. I recognised my incipient work in them, but as my research progressed, they opened up in such a way that they also introduced some divergences or contradictions with what I was starting to do.

This is why, as tempting as it is to dive into lecture-performance, its nature, potentialities, scope and even limits, I have considered it more pertinent to focus on these two elements which are among the most characteristic. Avoiding a more in-depth analysis of lecture performance, which could undoubtedly be exciting, allows me to maintain the aim of this Third Chapter, which is to identify how lecture-performance can become a solastalgic filmic form.

Moreover, to find my voice by adopting lecture-performance as a new way of speaking, I needed to understand the seamless fit and, more importantly, the dissonances. And as I have stated, openness and critical view were the ones with which *Lovesong* presented those dissonances or discrepancies. Hence, it seemed pertinent to dedicate this section to the analysis of these two features.

³⁶ In my readings I have noticed that both theorists and practitioners refer indistinctly to lecture-performance and film-performance. In this text, they will also appear interchangeably. Not that they are exactly the same, but it is a question of nuance. I understand lecture-performance to designate works where the discursive intention prevails, while it could be deduced that in film-performance the link with cinematographic language or the presence of filmic resources is more predominant.

Most of the testimonies and reflections by different practitioners pointed to the openness of the lecture-performance as one of the more significant features, if not the most significant.

In one of his texts, Bulloz expresses how cinema has been understood as the art of a promise. He sees it as a paradox: 'we have to fulfil, to realise that promise, but once the promise is fulfilled it will disappear' (Bulloz, 2019, para.7).³⁷ Departing from that idea, he sees in film-performances the possibility of resuming those fading promises, unfinished ones, forgotten ones, hovering ones. The openness of the performance would be then understood as a confrontation and an assumption of the promise, keeping it always active, working with it, on it, making it the center. Keeping it open. As he would say, 'like a promised promise' (Bulloz, 2019, para.7).

Various artists or filmmakers put into practice and reflect on this same idea, nuancing it and bringing it into their own terrain, involving other ideas such as non-fixed form, constant transformation, the unfinished, the need for improvisation and the unknown. In the following pages, I will go through these other surrounding notions one by one, these five ways or more precisely, five dimensions (as they can coexist) in which the openness of film-performance manifests itself.

A first way of understanding or a first dimension of openness in film-performance is that it does not promote its fixation on a medium to be projected and reproduced later as many times as desired. On the contrary, a film-performance aims to be live and unique, that is, irreproducible.³⁸ As a result, the formal decisions in a film-performance tend not to be definitive. And therefore, the film itself shall be understood as an open form, unrepeatable, ungraspable, almost as a piece that exists only when it is in front of one's eyes, without pretending to fix a memory of its own history.

The artist Rabih Mroué, reflecting on his performative practice, would say:

³⁷ This disappearance has to do with the promise as such. A promise, when realised... disappears by definition. It becomes a fact, a thing, an action, an event...it becomes whatever it was promised and by doing so, it stops being a promise. On the other hand, as I already cited in the Second Chapter, Berger says, 'cinema is perpetually about leaving' (Berger, 1991, p.476). Disappearance would be in cinema's nature.

³⁸ In this sense, the film-performance loses the property that, according to Benjamin, makes a film a film, its technical reproducibility, that is, its capacity to be reproduced as many times as one wishes, in as many places as one wishes, even simultaneously (Benjamin, 2008).

I am not telling in order to remember. On the contrary, I am doing so to make sure that I've forgotten. Or at least, to make sure that I've forgotten some things, that they were erased from my memory. When I am certain that I've forgotten, I attempt to remember what it is that I've forgotten. And while attempting to remember, I start guessing and saying: perhaps, maybe, it's possible, it might be, probably, it can be, it looks like, it seems that, I am not sure but, etc... This way, I reinvent what I had forgotten on the basis that I have in fact remembered it. After an indefinite while, I retell it. Not to remember it, no, but to make sure that I've forgotten it, or at least parts of it, and so on and so forth. This operation might appear repetitive, but it is the opposite, because it is a refusal to go back to the beginnings, and what do you know of beginnings? This way I keep oscillating between remembering and forgetting, remembering and forgetting, remembering and forgetting, till death comes. I am betting on death to make me rediscover everything anew. Even if it happens that there will be nothing new; that will be in itself a discovery.

(Mroué, 2013, p.7)

The openness in the *telling* of the lecture-performance implies having to start all over again and again, even though one departs from an existing piece (imagined, written, edited). In the process, everything can happen, everything can change, everything can be reinvented, everything can be discovered or rediscovered.

One of Mroué's most famous works, *The Pixelated Revolution* (2012), deals with mobile phone footage recorded during the Syrian Revolution after the Arab Spring (2010 – 2012). The opening sentence of this 21-minute lecture-performance is '*The Syrian protesters are recording their own deaths*'. Departing from there, Mroué presents a series of videos taken by civilians and protesters, among which there is the exact moment an anonymous filmmaker is fatally shot while filming the person who points his rifle at him. Mroué calls it the 'double shooting', elaborating from there a theory of the symbiotic relationship between the camera and death. Can an image die?

I cannot avoid putting this question in dialogue with the reflection by Fontcuberta that I referred to in the Second Chapter of the thesis (pages 67-68). In his book called *Revelacions* (it would be *Revelations* in English) Fontcuberta, wonders whether (photographic) images, even if they are intended to fight passage of time, can also die

(Fontcuberta and Antich, 2019).³⁹ In a subsequent book, *Kintsugi*, he explores this idea further. Yes, images can die. The passage of time, their history as objects (where and how they have been stored, under what circumstances they have passed through), their own chemical metabolism and the degree of their deterioration... all these factors might make them suffer... and eventually die. However, while dying, they might transform in a new image, they stop being what they were to become something different, something else. They reinvent themselves. What is discovered while facing such process, is that 'behind an image, there is no mystery, just another image' (Fontcuberta, 2021, p.14). The light entering through the crack I mentioned in the Second Chapter. The lightning flash. The fertile paradox, again.



³⁹ In his reflection, death, deterioration, expiration and amnesia could be exchangeable words to refer to all kind of agonising processes concerning images that have been damaged, wounded, mistreated, attacked, abused... All of them are suffering images that have failed to fulfil their mandate, which is -while representing the world- stopping the passage of time, rescuing life from its mortal existence.



Figures 76 to 78. Images by Fontcuberta in *Kintsugi* (2021).

The same way, in a lecture-performance, the artist can somehow give images a second life: they become survivors, surviving images, escaping their destiny.⁴⁰ A dying image, also a suffering one, when reflected upon through performance, will never cease to come back to life, open, unfixed, transformed. An image behind the image. A promise. This potentiality might be why, for Mroué, the form of a lecture-performance, or 'non-academic lecture' as he called it, turned out to be the ideal form for his exploration on image, life and death. Mroué, by the force of his chain of thoughts, will end up concluding that if the image survived the shot, so did the person who made it. In face of such a suffering reality, he chose hope.

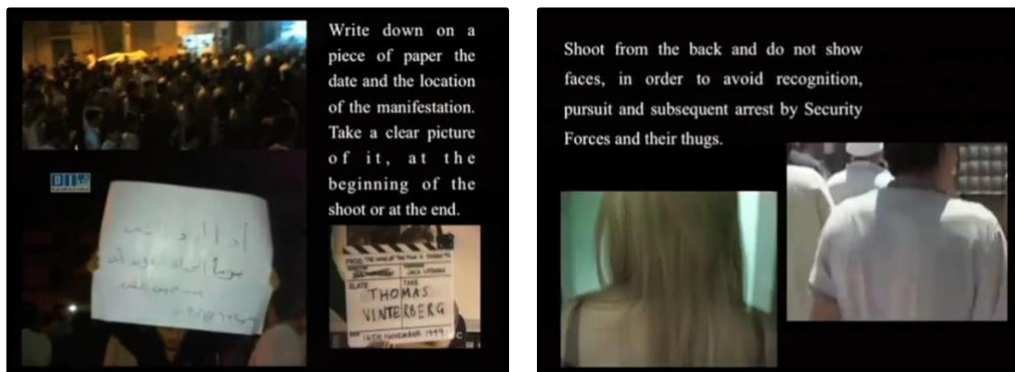
Didi-Huberman states that human beings make two mistakes in life. One is to believe that what appears, appears to stay. The second is to believe that what disappears disappears forever (Didi-Huberman, 2009). I would say that it is in the nature of the suffering and dying image never to disappear completely. They find a way to remain, as a trace, as a memory, as an emotional or reflective impact... Lecture-performance might be the creative way to make that visible.

And if the image *is alive after death*, everything can still happen. In this vein, Mroué's work illuminates how the potential transformation or modification is always present in a lecture-performance. Indeed, all of this would conform the second way, or dimension, of understanding openness: the constant transformation, reinvention, resignification, rebirth. The filmmaker must be aware and open to it (Mroué in Bulot, 2018) and therefore, to its resulting instability, vulnerability, unpredictability.

⁴⁰ I am referring here, among all the destinies that images can have, to what Monroy alludes in his book *Breve historia de la oscuridad*: the impossibility to alter the images, once they are *unleashed*, as 'cinema is the realm of the irreversible' (Monroy, 2025, p.23). According to this, moving image's fate would be moving forward, moving towards its own disappearance, maybe -eventually- its own death?.



Figure 79. Rabih Mroué performing *The Pixelated Revolution* (2012).



Figures 80 and 81. Images belonging to the performance *The Pixelated Revolution* (2012) by Rabih Mroué.

In keeping with this mobile and changeable feature, Mroué had always refused to record his lecture-performances. However, that was true until the pandemic lockdowns when he had to present his work online. It seems that those experiences might have changed his approach to accessibility as, in the following years, he began to restage and record his lecture-performances with this purpose (Bukuts, 2022). Perhaps this is why he ceased to resist fixation or, in other words, no longer seems to aspire to constant evolution or mutation, as other artists such as Uriel Orlow so insistently advocate.

Indeed, I would say that this position becomes imperative with Orlow. Drawing on the experience of his work *Unmade Film* (2013-2015), he would state the importance of constant evolution from one presentation to the next without considering leaving behind any register that contradicts its mutable and ungraspable nature (Orlow in Bullot, 2018). The constant evolution implicit in an open form comes with the assumption that there cannot be a fixed meaning. And as in Mroué, Orlow's aesthetic stance of resisting fixation makes perfect sense given the content and purpose of his work.

His *Unmade Film's* starting point is a complex, layered site: a mental hospital in Jerusalem called Kfar Sha'ul Mental Health Center, established in 1951 to treat Holocaust survivors, which was constructed using remains of the Palestinian village Deir Yassin, previously depopulated by a massacre committed by Zionist paramilitaries in April 1948. Orlow's primary connection with the story is that his great-aunt was among those survivors treated in the hospital. This personal story will be part of the performance and associated with other materials such as discursive registers, facts, pieces of information, and meta-analysis. Facing all these interconnections, Orlow realised how problematic it would have been making a single and linear film with a fixed form because it could lead to comparing and even equating two different traumas: the Jewish one in the Holocaust and the Palestinian one in the occupied territories. This is why his approach searched to avoid a definitive object, both in terms of finished (having an unequivocal end) and recorded (having an unchangeable form).

Another risk of a fixed form (finished and recorded) is that narrations with unquestionable ends tend to bring a resolution that given the content of this piece could have been read as a catharsis, which for him was not possible: none of these traumas -the Holocaust and the Palestinian occupied territories- have found a closure yet. Therefore, again, the film could only exist as an open form and remain unresolved (Orlow, 2024).

This is why *Unmade Film* is a collection of fragments made of the usual components of the research and production process of a film: a script, a storyboard, stills, the score, the voiceover, the scouting (he names it *reconnaissance*), the staging, the closing credits... Each of these elements is interconnected and serves the same purpose. Yet, they appear autonomously and in different forms of display: a series of drawings and text projections, archival prints, audio installations, soundscapes, projected still images, video installation, film projection, and what I think would be the centrepiece: a 45-minute lecture or film-performance, which is called *Unmade Film- The Proposal*.



Figures 82 and 83. Two moments from the film-performance *Unmade Film-The Proposal* by Uriel Orlow (2013-2015).

And besides the fact that the project left behind a printed publication explaining and reflecting on its making, there is no register of any of these various components. 'I make a conscious choice never to record them' (Orlow, 2024, p.74). This choice somehow restores or recovers the aura that films, being reproducible work, have inevitably lost.⁴¹ Yet, it is essential to note that Orlow claims that this recovery is not an act of fetishism but seeks to bind the experience to ephemerality and memory instead of being inscribed in a recorded medium (Orlow, 2024). This ephemerality relates to the fact that Orlow's performance is, as its subheading underlines, not a film but a film's proposal... which - by its telling- becomes the film itself. It is a film and it is not a film. A paradox -a fertile paradox again- that resonates with a text by Pasolini in which he states that a script is not a film but cannot be a regular text either. A script (a structure) alludes to a future, potential film (another structure). Pointing to a film, it will never fully become one (Orlow, 2025; Pasolini, 1988), yet it can only exist by being its promise. As a result of this paradox, the film's openness, as Orlow understands it, implies a certain impossibility. An impossibility to which the artistic couple Silvia Maglioni and Graeme Thomson will give another twist.

Maglioni and Thomson made a film-performance called *In Search of UIQ* (2013), departing from a science fiction film script they found by searching in an archive. Written by Félix Guattari in the eighties and called *A Love of UIQ*, it tells the story of an alien intelligence from a parallel dimension that falls in love with one of its human hosts. This event has catastrophic consequences for the entire planet. With this story, Guattari wanted to reflect on the twilight of specific political movements from the '60s and the descent to the darkness of the '80s shutdown of possibilities towards the neoliberal

⁴¹ Benjamin talks about the loss of aura of reproducible works in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1936).

model. To write the script he was inspired by the political movements from the '70s and the possibilities offered by the golden age of science fiction, aliens and parasitic contamination (Maglioni and Thomson, 2021).⁴²

For their part, when the artists discovered Guattari's script, more precisely three versions of the script, they realised that the aim was not to try and make the film Guattari desired or would have made. To begin with, they could not really know where his desire lay. There were three scripts for the same film and no clue as to which one they should follow. So, they decided to invoke the ghost of a film that did not exist. They created an *spectral* cartography of his scripts' possible futurities (Maglioni and Thomson, 2021). That means that they used the unfinished scripts as a trigger, understanding them as a labyrinth, a place they could derive, get a distance and get lost (Maglioni and Thomson in Bulot, 2018). This is how the projec starts, from something left unfinished, from an insecure, imprecise, incomplete, slippery, phantasmagorical starting point. The resulting film cannot exist without fissures and to find a fixed or definitive ending. The uncertain and fragile nature of the starting point makes it impossible to imagine a unique future for the film.

With Mroué and Orlow, the openness of the lecture-performance relates to the end: their works are open partly because they are unfinished, without a definitive end. That also implies that they tend to be conceived as a work-in-progress. In Maglioni and Thomson, on the other hand, the unfinished is the starting point.

This would be a third way to understand the openness: recognising the unfinished as a possible point of departure and not only of arrival. It is a starting point. It is the initial, foundational principle from where the performance would begin to exist.

Lovesong resonates more with this form of understanding the unfinished embodied by Maglioni and Thomson than with that explored by Mroué or Orlow.

Indeed, in my case it was not a question of leaving a work open, without a definitive form, ready for infinite variations. *Lovesong* did not really present itself -and it had never been its purpose- as a form which would seek to be continuously and endlessly modified or reinvent itself or remain unfinished. Rather, the resulting performance of my research

⁴² It is worth noting that Guattari's gesture was fully in line with the trend of the time to imbricate the social and political fears (such as space race, nuclear threat and ideological tensions) with the creative possibilities and the metaphorical reach offered by science fiction as a genre.

has reached a fixed form. It is a final form that can be adjusted after its presentations but doesn't aim to be updated each time, evolve, change, variate or transform. This would not be in its nature.

Lovesong, like *In Search of UIQ*, started from a work that was left unfinished, left behind. In Magilioni's and Thomson's case, a work that they appropriate, in mine, a work of my own... although the distance in time shows that the person who did it, even though *she* was myself, was already another person, another *me*, so that the fact of looking back, of looking again at what I once looked at, makes me feel that I am also appropriating, a little, something that was already alien to me... Be that as it may, the unfinished was not in the process, not in the end but in the beginning, in its beginning. And, inevitably, that foundation became a fate, a principle that, directing the performance from its origin, marked it as a finished-unfinished work, a non-existent film in progress.

This understanding of the openness linked to the unfinished as a departing point is what ignites the reflexive dimension of Magiolini's and Thomson's multidimensional project: transitioning between documentary, fiction and essay, intertwining video, sound archives, letters, reenactments, observational cinema and other strategies, the performance *In Search of UIQ* reveals the original *A love of UIQ* as both a lost film and a missed chance for cinema. Through a series of spectral fabrications, speculations and stagings, the film is an experiment with different forms of *unmadeness*: the initial coexistence of versions, the negation and rejection, difficulties, obstacles, the failed attempt, what was lost, what the film could have been and the hypothesis of its possible manifestations (Maglioni and Thomson, 2021; Bullot, 2018).



Figure 84. Maglioni and Thomson perform *In Search of UIQ* (2013).

The result is somewhat more complex than *that* 'making a film by its enunciation' stated by Bullot (2017, 2018), because in reality, what their film-performance affirms is practically the opposite: it is more about *not making* the film through its enunciation. This

statement is undoubtedly a provocation. But it is nonetheless true: what Maglioni and Thomson carry out is a dismantling, a dispersion and a redistribution of the different elements that would have made up a film. By laying them bare, they bring cinema back to the problem of its manufacture. The artists would call it 'exploited cinema'. Their performance embodies a form of instability, a form that seeks not to realise, but to unrealise itself, to constantly subtract itself, to escape its various manifestations, to approach its inefficiency (contradicting, as they would claim, the neoliberal meaning of the word 'performance'), its impossibility through the unmade (Maglioni and Thomson in Bullot, 2018). It's not making a film but de-realising it. 'The film must be performed at the very moment of its withdrawal' (Bullot, 2012a, p.9). Somehow, it is a claim of the impossibility to finish it, a claim of the unfinished.⁴³

Another filmmaker, Andrés Di Tella, would base his performative work on the same pretension, although he would do so in a less self-reflexive, vindictive and provocative vein. He will approach the unfinished from a more lyrical and nostalgic as well as playful point of view, becoming inseparable from inevitable elements such as transformation or the unknown.

In his performance *Diarios* (2022), Di Tella shows around nine short films, a selection from nineteen. He shot them over about four years with his cellphone and edited them with material 'stolen' from the internet and other personal archives. In the performance, they appear numbered but do not follow a numerical order. They are organised in three blocks, interrupted by two moments in which he reads fragments from his notebooks or diaries, where ideas, stories, reflections, and more or less recent anecdotes are gathered. Both the images and the texts (their content and order) are intended to appear improvised or chosen for each presentation. There is a moment when he sings, and on one occasion, when he presented it at the *E tudo verdade* festival in Brazil in 2023, he danced. He fell in love with the idea and repeated it in the following presentations.

Indeed, it would seem that for him, the most characteristic feature of the unfinished nature of performance as an open form would be the continuous evolution. He describes it as mutant, offering an experience that is never repeated similarly (Di Tella, 2022). Yet, to be more accurate, this liveness and constant movement may not be about not repeating but an opportunity to discover new ways, have new ideas, and introduce them

⁴³ Paradoxically, this film-performance, which negates the possibility of the film, is the only one, among my examples and so far, that counts with a recorded version. The film can be watched at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ascB097ckBU> . English original version with portuguese subtitles.

along the way. This aesthetic and reflexive position towards lecture-performance is fully consistent with Di Tella's work, which systematically focuses on his personal life, memories, family, identity, intimate circles, being therefore exposed to the vulnerability and uncertainty of the ongoing. This performance is not an exception. *Diarios*, which in English means *Diaries*, shows an apparently random collection of images and texts: glimpses of images and words, fragments stolen from daily life, and entries stolen from a written diary. All these moments of life, which are recognisable as part of a daily existence are, by definition fleeting, pushed into perpetual movement.

Yet, as he would confess in an interview I conducted with him for this research, transformation in his performance is more a desire than a reality.⁴⁴ The truth is that he doesn't change the films that conform *Diarios* that often. Moreover, he usually uses the same films, the same entries, and the same order. The performance is more scripted than it appears to be, and improvisation would be more of a possibility than what he will end up doing. Still, it does mark an attitude: each time he is about to perform, he needs to reconnect with the material (and his life) and somehow make the decision on what to keep or modify from previous presentations, how to update it concerning the context he is in, who he is going to talk to, how he is feeling at that very moment.

Finally, regardless of how much it is repeated or reinvented, what is scripted or what is improvised, what matters is that the form of the *Diarios* establishes a pact with the audience, by which the possibility to change things, to modify is always present. And it is this potentiality that would define the genre for Di Tella. He would state that the important thing is to make believe that one is improvising (even if it is not the case), that everything can change, and that everything can happen since it gives the impression of a live event and also perhaps a truer one (2023). This would be the fourth way of understanding openness: a certain need for improvisation, even if it turns out to be only an idea, a possibility, a potentiality. In other words, a pact with the audience (but also with the materials) whereby changes can occur, and even be desirable. To perform means to be open to a transformation that can take place live, before our eyes.

⁴⁴ I conducted the interview in May 2023 in Buenos Aires and I saw the performance *Diaries* in July of the same year in Montevideo.



**Figures 85 and 86. *Diarios* by Andrés Di Tella.
Public presentation at Donosti Film Festival, Spain, 2022.**

This sense of improvisation or even unpredictability in Di Tella becomes crucial. Maglioni and Thomson resonate with him on this point. As they do, he will also praise the sense of failure, the non-accomplished, the non-said, the mystery, the open quest, the unstable, and the ungraspable, all elements highly fertile to cinematic imaginary (Di Tella, 2023).

'With films, there are always things left to do. I don't like watching my films because I always see what I could change. With the performance, I wanted to have the opportunity to change, improve, and evolve' (Di Tella, 2023). The open and the unfinished are marked here by the possibility of being something else, even if it is not. And even if it is not... what matters is to invite the public to perceive it as if it were. What matters is the pact, regardless of whether it becomes a reality or not.

Di Tella achieves this, like the practitioners I have been commenting, by avoiding a final form. As I have already mentioned, it is about not recording the work and not aiming for a definitive end or a final meaning while performing. It is also, as Di Tella argues, about maintaining a certain formal rudeness (2023). Lecture-performances can afford to remain at the apparent stage of a work in progress, without having to be fully refined or polished. Indeed, Di Tella's performances take on a not quite edited look, even flawed, and without much attention to detail, colour or sound corrections of the projected images.

In the same way, as I have mentioned above, the acting evokes an improvisation, a randomness. And even if the texts are written in notebooks, the reading gives the impression of something fortuitous, forgetful and almost accidental.

This sense of fragility, even vulnerability, creates what could be a fifth (and last) characteristic of openness: the experience of the unknown.

Working with open forms demands a certain commitment to a process that has more to do with what is not known than with what is known. Not aspiring to a closed end implies not having a fixed structure and, therefore, working (and existing) as if there were no limits, exhausting 'the limits of the possible'.⁴⁵ It is a matter of speculating, of keeping the doors open, pushing further, using all the resources one has.

Sharing this confrontation with the unknown exposes the work, as it makes the process visible. It also exposes the practitioner. Performers share with the audience what they perceive, discover, learn as they construct and deconstruct images and words. Their thoughts, questions and doubts become visible and therefore vulnerable. On the rebound, this confrontation with the unknown exposes the audience as well. As Mroué would point out, the audience will enter to this liminal state of unknowing and, in a way, remain suspended in it. In this liminal state, unfinished performances will remind both performers and audiences that one can never be sure of what one sees or reads (Bukuts, 2022). Indeed, performers, in their open and transformative processes, do not search to share what they have found but what they are (still) looking for, what they do not have yet and maybe will never have; they share their quest, the process, a process of getting lost.⁴⁶

These five dimensions, forms or characteristics of openness that I have explored so far (the unfixed, a constant transformation, the unfinished, improvisation and the unknown) create a space for the encounter with the spectator by raising another crucial aspect of lecture-performance: presence.

In the first short film in *Diarios Di Tella*'s hands go from one passport photo to another. They are different photos of the same man, perhaps Di Tella's ancestor. He appears in those photographs with slightly differences but they are from the same period. Meanwhile Di Tella's voice can be heard saying 'Monday. Me. Tuesday. Me. Wednesday. Me. Thursday. Me'.

⁴⁵ This expression comes from the poem by Pindar, Pythian iii, used by Albert Camus to open his text *The Myth of Sisyphus* (2018). It says "O my soul, do not aspire to immortal life, but exhaust the limits of the possible".

⁴⁶ As Rebecca Solnit claims in *A Field Guide to Getting Lost...* getting lost is the guarantee of finding something unknown (2005).



Figure 87. Several frames from a sequence. *Diarios* by Andrés Di Tella (2022).

Being present, in a lecture-performance, is unavoidable. Between fragments, beats and pieces of daily life, images, texts, ideas, what remains, what is always there, is the presence of the self, the one who looks at the world and does the talking. A self who cannot not be present. 'The *Diarios* cannot exist without me', Di Tella would say. And he immediately asked in reference to *Lovesong*: 'So, what do you bring from your own story to your lecture-performance? You need to tell something about yourself' (2023).

Mroué (in *The Pixelated Revolution*) and Maglioni and Thomson (in *In Search of UIQ*) existed in their performances as filmmakers or artists who addressed creative (and political and social) questions. Orlow (in *Unmade Film-The Proposal*) introduced an aspect of the biographical self, as his lecture-performance departs from a family history. Di Tella (in *Diarios*) builds the universe of his performance on this personal dimension. Without his biography or daily life there are no images, no stories to tell, no content, no matter. From this perspective, I can situate *Lovesong* closer to Di Tella's diaries.⁴⁷ In his work, the personal is the point of departure and the substance. It is always present, more or less explicitly. Likewise, *Lovesong* could not be understandable without the presence of my own story. *Lovesong* is something that happened to me.

However, presence is not only that of someone who tells (from the screen or on the stage), it also implies someone to be addressed. In this way, the lecture-performance brings about an encounter between the practitioner (a body on a stage, a filmmaker and

⁴⁷ Or, as I will address in the first section of the Chapter Four, to Bulot's work, in which the personal is always hovering.

potentially a biographical self) and the audience. And being present allows the filmmaker or performer to feel what is happening with that audience.

Di Tella would argue that this is about maintaining the nerve that allows the performer to look for (any kind of) feedback and connect with it. In this way, presence is a matter of awareness. To perceive the audience's reactions and their different types of attention. To feel their presence and be responsive to it.⁴⁸ And simultaneously, the awareness of one's own life, that should be kept updated, 'alive'. Di Tella would insist in the importance of continuing to integrate 'things that just happened to you, dreams you just had' (Di Tella, 2023). These two types of awareness are in dialogue. Both lead to adapting the performance to each place, resulting in a third type of awareness, that of language (what to say and how to say it).

There is a reflexion by Vivian Gornick that strongly resonates here. She connects the presence of the writer to the fact that the one who writes (or in the case of lecture-performance, the one who does the talking and showing) addresses themselves to someone. It is by knowing who we are addressing that we will be able to identify the language we are going or need to use (Gornick, 2001). In the same vein, Orlow confirms Di Tella's position by stating that acknowledging the situation of the viewing guides the formal decisions that the performer will adapt or apply in a specific performance. However, this recognition will not only bring certainties but, as he recognises, will inevitably cause a certain sense of vulnerability to emerge (Orlow, 2015).⁴⁹ This vulnerability, which becomes crucial in lecture-performance, comes with a commitment towards the words the performer says, taking the risk of being misunderstood and exposed to the audience's judgement (Orlow, 2024): a commitment that also extends to and exposes this audience in return. Effectively, the speaker invites the audience to listen, understand and connect. In doing so, they both become witnesses of a unique occasion that unfolds in the present, in their presence (Di Tella, 2023), or even more, they become partners in the creation. In a lecture-performance, the audience needs to complete the non-existent film in their minds. The film they are witnessing is not a film but a future film collectively imagined (Orlow, 2024).

⁴⁸ On this regard, Di Tella mentions the importance of humour and how it allows one to connect with the audience and feel it. If he can make people laugh once or twice, he knows they are with him (2023).

⁴⁹ Gornick would also refer to the vulnerability and fragility of the writer or speaker concerning the need of feeling his or her presence in the written or spoken text (Gornick, 2001).

It is this shared commitment and this shared witnessing that leads me to the other feature I wanted to highlight in this first section of the Third Chapter, a feature impossible to understand without the notion of presence I have been discussing. I am referring to the critical vision that is attached to or expected from the lecture-performance.

In the words of Lola Arias, being modifiable and a non-fixed object facilitates constant revisions and updates and 'allows us to talk about today' (2017). Arias is an artist, theatre and film director, author of a project that could find a connection with *Lovesong*, even though it has not been a direct reference during the process. It is called *Mis documentos*, *My documents* in English, and is a cycle of lecture-performances in where artists from different disciplines present a personal investigation, a work-in-progress, a story that secretly obsesses them, an abandoned project. It started in 2012 in Buenos Aires and from then it has been intermittently programmed in there but also in other cities like Milan, Vigo or Lisbon. Each session is unique and unrepeatabe, but the rules of the game remain the same: a stage, an artist and his or her documents as material proof of a film that never existed or might exist one day.



Figures 88 to 91. *Mis Documentos* conceived and programmed by Lola Arias.

Each presentation creates its own universe, each follows the artists interests, obsessions, desires or ghosts. What they all share is the confrontation with something that was somehow lost, unfinished, unmade, unresolved, unfixed, open... they all give the opportunity of recovering something that was left behind and make it present. By

looking at the past, they end up talking about the present, a present that -not being fixed- will be constantly updated. In Arias words, 'if it is necessary to write for tomorrow, it will be rewritten for tomorrow' (Arias, 2017, para.6). And as Orlow argues, the changing nature of the performance, the script's evolution, and the associations... all become site-specific to the place of presentation (Orlow, 2015). It's about connecting, being present in the place and in the time.

This constant updating seems to be a fundamental characteristic of lecture-performance. As Bullot says, the performativity not only concerns Austin's description of words that can make things happen but also a certain theatricality by which every performance implies a presence, being present, being 'here' and 'now' (Bullot, 2018), being-in-the-present as Orlow would state (2015). And this 'here' and 'now' means action.

In the presentation of a seminar on Mroué's work, a quotation from Pasolini reads as follows: 'Only the actions of life alone will be communicated, and these will be poetry because, I say it again, there is no other poetry than true action'. (Sánchez, 2013, para. 4). This affirmation works in two directions: one that affects aesthetic or artistic action (creation as an action in itself, self-contained, that is to say that it needs nothing from the external to sustain itself) and another that goes beyond art and enters social and political realities. Both paths make the critical vision visible. Both ways make the critical view visible.

Indeed, the performative form enables artists to analyse and reflect on the setup of their creative work, the artistic context and its mechanisms (Blumenstein and Geuss, 2011). In Arias' project this self-reflection is central. Artists are invited to reflect and build a critical view on their own work. This self-reflection is not only about content or their subject matter, but it is lecture-performance itself, as a form, that creates the conditions for a self-reflexive approach: its open and unfinished nature, the improvisation, the quest, the unknown or unresolved and the resulting speculation favours putting one's own creative process in the spotlight. It is not about looking at the world, but at the image of the world and the way in which the creator turns the world into an image. Its possibilities and its limits. In this, the question of presence definitely plays a role. Indeed, as Orlow would say, the 'here' and 'now' make us reconsider the structure and the construction of a film and its narrative (2015). Everything can happen.

I mentioned that the poetic action advocated by Pasolini worked in two directions: activating creative questions and pointing to political reality. For Pasolini these two directions were inseparable, the aesthetic or artistic critical point of view or self-reflection would go hand in hand with a social and political critique (Pasolini, 2022). During his time as director of Spanish museum MUSAC, Manuel Olveira led an investigation group, curated an exhibition, edited a book and programmed a cycle of lecture-performances during 2013 and 2014.⁵⁰

The focus of this expansive project was to define the nature, limits and potential of lecture-performance. In this endeavour, Olveira writes about lecture-performance as a form of cultural production with an intentional character that 'explicitly thematises the relations between art and knowledge, between art and research, and between art and the forms of mediation and/or dissemination that are generally used to bring art itself to different audiences' (Olveira, 2014, p.10) . This self-awareness makes it an instrument of resistance to creative and cultural conventions, canons and status quo. Yet, its reflexion does not stop in the artistic or cultural universe. Lecture-performance becomes a tool for political intervention as it facilitates 'the critique of contemporary society and culture using the strategies of education, awareness-raising and activism' (Olveira, 2014, p.15). It is at this crossroads between artistic reflection and social and political awareness or critique that Arias finds herself when she expresses how she went from being interested in a more conceptual approach based on research or archives to being interested in projects that work with present, contemporary, unresolved situations and conditions. 'They [were projects that] brought a problem that was not only artistic but also political and social' (Arias, 2017).

Filipa César is a Portuguese artist based in Berlin whose work primarily focuses on postcolonialist processes of resistance to historicism. I must confess that I have not studied her work in depth, since, the themes, the language, the questions she poses lean the balance towards a historical-political critique that differs from my own poetic and therefore political interests and questions. However, I found a connection with one of her texts called 'Inhabiting the image', collected in the book edited by Bullot *Du film performatif* (in English the title would be *On Performative Cinema*). Already the title beautifully resonates with my research. When she talks about her work, she departs from the idea of the image as a place, as an archive that she can inhabit with her voice, 'using

⁵⁰ The MUSAC is *The Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Castilla y León*, a contemporary art museum in Spain created in the region Castilla y León in 2005.

words to state my research, reading my thoughts and quotations from other authors to make visible how images are produced at the very moment they are received, thus making them reflective' (César in Bullot, 2018, p. 242).

The voice can inhabit an image... Through those voices that preceded her, César exposes the image, her relationship with it and therefore, her presence. I see myself mirrored in this approach to self-reflective work. However, my way of understanding and experiencing my return to creation is not a critique or resistance against the filmic convention, the canon, or the status quo. Nor does it seek an overtly political discourse. The reflections that inhabit my film-performance are not politically or socially engaged if I understand this engagement as awareness or explicit participation, literal or straightforward critique of the 'present, contemporary, unresolved situations and conditions' Arias was talking about (2017, para. 22). I do not explore any unresolved concerns that dominate the contemporary agenda, namely environment, social justice, or gender issues.⁵¹

I see my presence and my critical view more in line with the phantasmagoria brought by Fontcuberta's reflections. It is a result of a displacement or a certain change of focus. If the documentary images tend to become invisible (it is not the image that we see but what it represents), when the image gets wounded, damaged, stained, broken, cracked, when the represented image disappears, vanishes, gets lost... dies, then something different happens: as Fontcuberta says, another image emerges. And this new image is not another representation, it is the image itself which becomes the center of the attention. When the scars, traces, ruins, vestiges cloud the representation, the image bursts in on itself. It is no longer a question of what the image shows but of the image itself, its materiality, in its temporality (Fontcuberta, 2021). The image shows itself. And it is no longer the fragility of the world that is at stake. It is the fragility of the image of the world what matters.

I am bringing solastalgia in this research, a concept from the environmental field, initially concerned with referring to a critical reality. Yet, my intention is not to explore or use it concerning environmental issues but to the image, stripping it of the theme. This is not about endangered landscapes but about images, understood as landscapes, as a place

⁵¹ In the 2024 publication of the AC/E's Programme for the Internationalization of Spanish Culture to promote the international presence of Spanish creators, professionals and artists, one of the main criteria that score points are that the work must be related to environmental and economic sustainability and/or social inclusion and gender equality (<https://www.accioncultural.es/en/pice-grants>).

of belonging, as a home in danger. This is not, either, about focusing on the threat or the negativity that the original concept represents but on the capacity it has, despite everything, to reactivate the voice, the practice, the potential of transformation and change: to provoke a response, in this case, a creative response.

Therefore, the main question resides in the *how*. How can solastalgia indeed reactivate creation? I am stating that film-performance appears to be the right genre or discipline to carry out this reactivation task. Yet, it is such a broad field of work that each artist, at least the ones I have mentioned, carries out such a singular work that, beyond specific resonances, what it does in a way is to redefine the limits of the discipline itself. It would now be a question of understanding how *Lovesong* is tracing its own path and what kind of film-performance it would be. To do so, I created a protocol.

3.2 The protocol.

Or how to establish a procedure for carrying out a non-existent film in progress through a solastalgic experience.

I had already completed Four of the Seven Movements of the *Lovesong* when I realised that I was repeating several steps in my work, following a procedure, a certain ritualisation or what could be understood as a protocol. I decided to write it down to understand better what I was doing.

And something presented itself very clearly from the start. It was undoubtedly a protocol that explained what I was doing, and that was stable and recognisable enough to indicate a path to keep following. But, very soon, it also seemed indisputable that it was a document that was not entirely transferable or reproducible. Although its essence, as a protocol, was to be sharable, it revealed itself as a somewhat erratic proposal that became fragile, vulnerable, limited and exposed to nuances, contradictions, and doubts. Some of them appeared while I was writing it and somehow, to a greater or lesser extent, found their way into the writing itself. Others have more to do with the moment I shared it and other creators put it into practice. Thus, rather than aiming to offer a mechanical operation or a working strategy that could be easily extrapolated, the protocol showed itself as a playful and somewhat ironic approach that, nevertheless, retained its reflective potential.

After all, cinematographic practice was born manifesting through texts declaring principles or rules to follow. There are foundational film manifestos such as 'The Futurist Cinema' (1919) signed by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti and Giacomo Balla among others, 'The variant Manifesto' (1922) by Dziga Vertov, 'The Method of Making Workers' Film' (1925) by Sergei Eisenstein or the 'Manifesto of the Surrealists concerning L'Age d'Or' (1930) signed by André Breton, René Char, Salvador Dalí, Paul Éluard, Tristan Tzara among others.⁵² From then on, the cinematic tradition will navigate between reflections accompanying creation and instruction manuals that search to dictate how to create. Indeed, film manifestos have both been 'creative and political engines (...) pushing forward film theory, criticism and history' and 'calls to action for political and aesthetic changes in the cinema and (...) the cinema's role in the world' (MacKenzie, 2014, p.1).

⁵² All these manifestos are included in *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures. A Critical Anthology* by Scott Mackenzie, referenced in the Bibliography.

Maybe aware of the potential of playing with that tension between reflections or reasonings and catalysts (even mandates), some filmmakers in documentary film - and not only – have created and made public their own decalogues, manifestos and protocols to share their way of understanding and experiencing cinema. There is, for example, Kosakovsky's Decalogue full of do's and don'ts, or the Dogme95 manifesto, where Lars Von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg wrote their list of vows, giving rise to a Danish film movement that generated a great stir. These filmmakers would soon distance, forget, dismiss or even deny or betray these rationalising, authorising, and legitimising gestures of the creative act, proving them to be more a provocation -and food for thought- than a path to be taken too seriously.⁵³

Even Mroué, while working for *The Pixelated Revolution*, realised that the Syrian protesters filming their demonstrations exchanged and circulated recommendations and directions on the Internet based on their own experiences. He collected as many as possible and put them together, realising that the collection soon resembled a film manifesto. Mroué reworked it with the collaboration of guerrilla filmmakers, resulting in a fictional list of thirteen recommendations, pragmatic directions, and six general pieces of advice on how to film manifestations (Mroué, 2013). The document was approached as a work in progress, subject to modifications, corrections and additions. Inspired by the Dogme95, Mroué searched to keep the same sense of provocation and playfulness. Nevertheless, the document also proved to be a useful tool (the fact that it was born out of the film protesters themselves evidences its seriousness) that not only served (future) filmmakers who intended to film protests but also provided the means for a deeper reflection on the process, the resulting materials and cinema.

This is the spirit from which I wrote and invite you to read this section: between playfulness and reflexiveness, between provocation and meaning. It would not make much sense to believe that I am trying to control a gesture -the creative one- that, by definition, is out of control, as the sculptor Richard Deacon recalls. In his book *I wanted to talk about the future, but I ended up thinking about the past*, he compares two objects.

⁵³ Lars Von Trier or Vinterberg would soon make films forgetting their own rules after they created them. Kosakovsky's last point of his decalogue would claim: 'Do not follow my rules. Find your own. There is always something that only you can film like no one else'. The same decalogue would imply its own negation. (Kosakovsky, 2012).

On the one hand, there is the *Venus of Berekhat Ram*, which is claimed to be the first artistic object found on a site from more than 300,000 years ago.

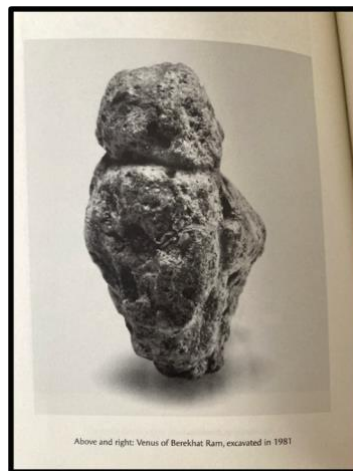


Figure 92. Image of Venus of Berekhat Ram in *I wanted to talk about the future, but I ended up thinking about the past* by Richard Deacon.

On the other hand, a hand axe from the same period.

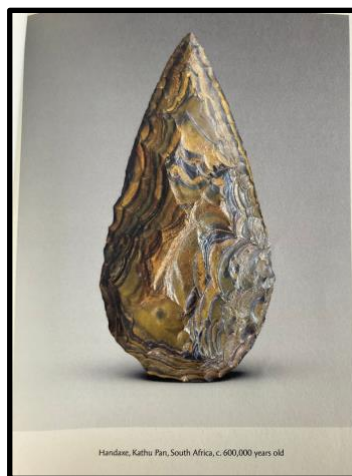


Figure 93. Photograph of a hand axe in *I wanted to talk about the future, but I ended up thinking about the past* by Richard Deacon.

As Deacon points, marvelled, while the artistic object appears irregular, rough, and even clumsy, the axe looks resplendent, beautiful, and irreproachable. How can the same human beings be so precise and precious with a tool to kill and imperfect while making a piece of art? He answers himself. While hand axes are objects with a purpose, the artistic object results from a process of not knowing, that is, the result of an act of freedom (Deacon, 2019).

This protocol without losing sight that art is about not knowing, getting lost, or acting as if one was free, follows the style of a manifest: exhorts the reader in a unequivocal and unilateral way, stating a position, avoiding ambiguity, even fostering certain antagonism (MacKenzie, 2014). However, I do not intend to direct and control a creative act, what I really seek is to add to a broader rumination on the lecture-performance as a solastalgic filmic form and what particular kind of film-performance the *Lovesong* would be.

It is this reflective will that also inspires the fact of preserving the protocol as a text *stopped in time*. In other words, despite all the nuances, contradictions, limitations and doubts that, as I mentioned earlier, I have encountered along the way, the idea has been to preserve the document as something I needed to create at a very specific moment in my research, a way of taking a distance and trying to understand what I was doing. And without wanting to perfect or update it, the idea is to share it now in its original integrity. It needs to be read as an isolated document, a record, an archive, a text within a text (which, nonetheless and inevitably, also resonates and dialogues with the rest of the thesis). It should therefore be understood as a tool that was crucial in helping me to identify my place in lecture-performance at a precise moment and allowed me to move forward in this practice, which was emerging for me.

If I recall the purpose of this search, to find a way to inhabit the image-home again, it may be valuable to revisit something that Besse says: 'We have to draw a circle so that the house appears, leaving out the chaos' (Besse, 2013, p.151). We live inside that circle we have drawn. We order it according to rules, habits, an organised set of rhythms, of gestures that give meaning and direction. This is how we delimit the territory, how we shape it, how we order it, how we appropriate it, how we maintain it in order to inhabit it and call it home. I could say, then, that the protocol is my attempt to draw this circle that could come to create that order and, therefore, offer the possibility of returning or at least providing a renewed sense of home to the image. An image-home. The fact that it is fragile, uncertain, nuanced even limited also makes it a tool, as I will resume in the conclusion, to test my research and reflect on the journey.

The Protocol

The protocol, addressed to an imaginary filmmaker, is constituted by:

- A set of **ACTIONS** that repeat, creating a (possible) method.
- A set of **RULES** that might evolve.
- Five final **DISCLAIMERS** (just in case).

Before that, I will briefly define the starting point.

STARTING POSITION

To start, you will need a container with a series of image and/or sound recordings intended to create a film once, which ultimately remained unfinished. You will also need the compelling need or desire to reopen the container, return to those images and/or sounds, and find a way to take them back or *inhabit* them again.

You will surely expect to find the film you left inside in that container. Yet, you will soon realise you have forgotten most of your past aims or creative intentions. In its place, you will discover a blurred memory. It's a vague notion. Something that is and it is not there. Do not worry. It will paradoxically become your best ally.

In my case, it was a box with seven Mini-DV tapes recorded in 2002. They portrayed a young Catalan poet, Lala Blay. In my memory, we mostly remained in the garden of her summer family house, where she mainly read her poems. Yet, I did not really know what the tapes strictly contained. Opening the box would be a journey to the unknown, a journey for discovery.

THE ACTIONS

ACTION #1

VIEW the tapes in order, as follows: press play, and when something in the images pricks you, you stop.

This prick is nothing other than the *punctum* described by Barthes. The *punctum* is what catches your attention, touches you, and shocks you to the point of wounding. It can be a detail, something random, an accident, or something unexpected. Whatever it is, it emerges from the images to meet you. You probably will not be able to name it. And that, deep down, is fine since it is precisely for this reason that it will stay with you.

Barthes
(1980/1989)

This wound is the one that can bring the viewer the experience of solastalgia, the loss of sense of belonging and the consequent emotions. Here, solastalgia becomes visible and active through this wound, which can come from the content or the form. If it is the content, it can be something that happens inside the image: a corner in the garden, the shadows, the movement of the trees, a gesture, a look, an unexpected sound or something that is said by anyone, either from in front of or behind the camera. If it is the form, it can be a change of focus, a camera movement, a curious framing, something you like or dislike, or a right or a wrong. Everything can move, touch, and hurt.

Once you notice (or more precisely, you feel) that wound, you can immediately stop or give some more minutes to the image to breathe. When you have definitely chosen the cut, you export the fragment to the editing timeline.

Remember: As Fontcuberta states, the punctum arises from the interaction between the image and the observer. It affects each individual based on their sensitivity, experience and memory. Thus, each time a wound makes you stop, it can only reveal your subjectivity. Wounds act as unexpected, stinging reminders of your lost world. No general, theoretical or universal purpose would sacrifice the singularity of the relationship between the viewer and the image.

Fontcuberta
(2022)

ACTION #2

REACT to the images that pricked you. Do it by recognising associations to other materials, images or texts.

The wound reveals a loss, but it must also be considered as the lightning flash described by Benjamin. This sparking light makes visible the historicity of the images, enabling or provoking a deeper understanding.

Benjamin
(1930/2012)

Benjamin in
Didi-Huberman
(2008)

If the wound is subjective, as I stated in Action #1, the 'deeper understanding' can only be subjective too.

This 'deeper understanding' is a discovery, a revelation for the viewer, who in this case is also the filmmaker. Revelation is the removal of a veil so that something can be seen: It is the apparition of something that was always there -in the images- and because it was momentarily forgotten, now reappears, manifesting under a new form and gaining a new meaning. The aim is not to explain the image, give extra information, or pretend to get to know all the answers. As Marc Augé affirms, these wounded images stage the world. The world itself becomes an image.

Wahlberg
(2020)

Marc Augé
(1994)

Therefore, by opening the box, you will confront not reality but a double of reality, which is not a fake but another reality with a new meaning.

Fontcuberta
(2022)

This new meaning, which leads to a new world, will appear through an associative experience. Jean-Hubert Martin curated a show in *Le Grand Palais* in 2016 called *Carambolages*. In it, he proposed a personal journey through works of art linked between them, not always through formal comparisons, but by a subtle association of how artists think or undertake the practice. These intuitive links transcended geography, historical time and disciplines.

Martin
(2016)

A word in a poem may lead to the name of a book, which in turn may invoke old photographs randomly found on the Internet, which may recall a particular painting, which may bring up an anecdote that had been forgotten, which in the same time resonates with a sequence from a film, which might trigger an emotion linked to the humming of a song....

This kind of work follows the principle of serial free association: it starts with a trigger followed by a flow of ideas, in which each idea will trigger the next resulting in a mental discourse, which Hobbes called 'train of thought'.

Hobbes
(1651)

As heterogeneity is key to building this kind of train of thought, your choice might include various types of images (still and moving images, painted images, film, and video) and also different types of text (quotes, poems, personal memories, fragments of novels, reflections on cinema, life...). As Laura Rascaroli signals, in an essayistic form, the image exists as sight and knowledge. Images, text, sound, voices... are material that invites us to feel and know.

Rascaroli
(2017)

The association between materials can be unlimited. In *Carambolages*, a domino effect pushes associations to an infinite transformation. The viewer never goes back, always pushed forward, from the first image to

the last one, which are radically, extremely different. Recognising one into the other is difficult, almost impossible. Indeed, that is a possibility, construct your work as a run forward, from one association to the next... without looking back. But, there is another option, which is to consider it as an interconnection, a back and forth between the associated materials, a back and forth between the trigger and the triggered. In this case, there will always be a kind of going back to the seminal material. Back and forth...

I have used 'similarity' and 'contiguity' as this main associative principles in this back-and-forth movement. In similarity, echoes and rhymes made the association.⁵⁴ By contiguity, the different materials were part of what Lala and I shared and exchanged during that period; they constituted my (maybe hers, too?) sentimental education. Other associative principles can be contrast and frequency. You might use them. I have not done it yet, and perhaps I will not, though they are not completely discarded.

A milestone for this kind of association would be Baudelaire's poem 'Correspondences' from *The Flowers of Evil* (See the poem below). It highlights resemblances and reciprocal relations between physical sensations. They are synaesthetic reverberations, which lead to links between images. These iconic resonances, in turn, imply a series of analogies of hidden symbols. By working on these three levels (physical sensations, images and symbols), Baudelaire connects affection with intellect and senses with sense. As a result, correspondences or similarities become a form of memory, since the

Baudelaire
(1857/1982)

Raymond
(1963)

Silverman
(1996)

Aristotl
(384-322 B.C.)

⁵⁴ As Martin recalls, Ricouer refers to the approach that works with echoes and rhymes as transhistorical as while the associated materials superficially change, there is some quality or essence that remains.

Martin
(2016)

sensation, image and symbol that constitute them are the reverberation that persists after that which produces them has disappeared. Correspondences are meant to invoke solastalgically something irrevocably lost, a kind of experience that seeks to remain.

Benjamin
(1927-1940/2002)

Correspondences

*The pillars of Nature's temple are alive
and sometimes yield perplexing messages
forests of symbols between us and the shrine
remark our passage with accustomed eyes.*

*Like long-held echoes, blending somewhere else
into one deep and shadowy unison
as limitless as darkness and as day,
the sounds, the scents, the colors correspond.*

*There are odors succulent as young flesh,
sweet as flutes, and green as any grass,
while others - rich, corrupt and masterful-*

*possess the power of such infinite things
as incense, amber, benjamin and musk,
to praise the senses' raptures and the mind's.*

'Correspondences'

in *The Flowers of Evil*, by Charles Baudelaire (1857/1982).

One way or the other, in this associative impulse, the links between materials and ideas tend to be intuitively, impulsively, and maybe also unconsciously motivated. Yet even in this case, they would not be without logic or purpose. Whatever the case, it provides insight into the emotional meaning, not the content. This proposition does not concentrate on knowledge and works with an emotional impact. Poetry emerges from the network of relationships between elements, complex, subtle and often secret references, while the accent on freedom, emotionality and intuition becomes a key.

Freud
(1919/2003)

Martin
(2016)

However, there is no poetry without meaning. In that sense, the free association used in this protocol would be inclined towards a 'stream of consciousness'

Kuenning-
Pollpeter
(2015)

because even though the association is intuitively made, the result seeks to find a defined structure in the form of a significant journey. For that, the use of a voice will be crucial.

ACTION #3

WRITE DOWN a text for a voice.

Provoked by the images, you might write a dialogic voice to confront them. This is not a voice-over but an embodied voice. That is, the voice will exist separately from the image and will be performed live during the screening of the edited images. In other words, being a form of expanded cinema, this is not a voice *inside* the film but *in front of* the film.

As a film-performance, it opens a *physical* space for images and the voice to meet. Inside this space, voice and image will not only exist separately but at another time: the voice will always unfold in the present, placing the images in its past. However, this voice, as in the essay film described by Rascaroli, does not come from an out-of-frame or a radical outside. It is born in and from the image's break; it emerges from the 'being-in-front' of the image, affected by it. Therefore, the voice reacts to the image, creating a dialogue that somehow tries to find meaning. Departing from Barthes, Fontcuberta deepens in understanding the text as a story given to the images so that the text becomes the punctum, the lightning flash, the wound or the disruption that enables a deeper reading. The text is what makes the image work. In pragmatic language, a thing you can do with a voice is to make it speak of the things it cannot deal with. The voice will bring in the affection, the reason or reasons you need to open the box again.

Rascaroli
(2017)

Fontcuberta
(2022)

Etchells
(1999)

To write the voice, you must identify which of your different dimensions or the various 'selves' is doing the talking. There is an 'I' among all the possibilities for conducting the narration. You need to choose which *persona*⁵⁵ will build the relationship with your film. That *persona* would be providing '[the] tone of voice, its angle of vision, the rhythm of sentences, what it selects to observe, and what to ignore [to] serve the subject' (pp. 6-7). Gornick describes in *The Situation and the Story. The Art of Personal Writing* the features that make this voice reliable. Some of these features would correspond to what could be a definition of solastalgic writing. Remember to detach yourself from yourself. That will enable you to organise the experience and be in charge of transforming it into a form. You need to get out of yourself, take some distance, and look at yourself as you look at the world.

Gornick
(2001)

Content-wise, the voice will have different functions. It will inform, connect, and reflect. The voice will give some information on what is happening in the images. It is a contextualisation of the filmic universe. In this sense, the voice would dialogue with the images (the ones you created and the ones you are appropriating), completing them and sometimes opening them to an out-of-frame. It may also introduce information about the character's past or future, the different images or yourself. It will connect the images (the ones you made with the ones you associate), building a sense of narration. And it will express your relationship with the images, reflecting or presenting thoughts on different questions about filmmaking or creation. These reflections can be general (about filmmaking and creation) or particular (referring to making the film). And they need to find

Gornick
(2001)

⁵⁵ In theatre, a *persona* is the personality and character an artist adopts in performance. The word *persona* is the Latin word for mask.

a balance with narration, description and commentary, that is, to give enough time to create an experience that enables the viewer to share the reflection, or in other words, to get a sense of the impact of what is going on and being told. An essential characteristic of the voice will be the ability to present and explore thought in conjunction with the image's allusiveness and the transitions between sounds and images. This feature approaches it to the first-person enunciation of the essay film, which tends to work in a stream of consciousness.

Rascaroli
(2017)

Another strategic characteristic that relates voice construction to the essay film is the relentless interpellation or search for dialogue with the audience. Yet, this feature concerns performance; it is also achieved through writing. According to Gornick, you should address someone as if writing in a conversation: the voice appears inseparable from the presence of the bodies, the artist's and the audience's bodies. By this, the voice will create a space for you. Voice is connected to the body to the extent that they become the same; you are this voice. Your story, emotions, thoughts, and *yourself* are visible in and through this voice. This speaking voice tends to directly identify with a real author. Érik Bullot would say that the body becomes the place of the word and from which the word will address the public.

Rascaroli
(2009)

Gornick
(2001)

Etchells
(1999)

Rascaroli
(2017)

Bullot
(2016)

ACTION #4

EDIT the different materials. Despite being action #4, it does not literally follow action #3, but rather exists in-between the first three actions as **it needs to iterate, going back and forth and readjusting.**

These are the moments where you connect the images you are recovering from the box with the associated images and your voice. Four essay film principles will be your guide: Connection between materials; establishment of new relations through thought in action (the stream of consciousness); auto-reflexive writing process; inner presence of the essayist (in this case, a visible embodied presence as I will continue to develop in Action #5), and the addressing yourself as well as the audience in a dialogic mode of communication.

Moure in
Liandrat-Guiges
(2004)

The materials you will use can be described as found footage. You are appropriating images; even the ones you once made in the past are re-appropriated by you. You are extracting them from their narrative continuity in a space and a time and placing them in a new context. In that movement, they retained some of their original meaning but also obtained a new one, which was provided by their new order.

Rascaroli
(2009)

In the case of found footage, you might be quoting more than 'appropriating'. As in the case of appropriation, a quote (be it a moving image, a still image, a sound, or a piece of text) is a filmic body that breathes differently. Every fragment cited arrives with its style, writing, climate, and diegetic elements. But what makes them different is that in the quotation, you are not aiming to disrupt the meaning but include it in your train of thought. Nothing should interrupt the course of the film. For example, if they last too long, the cited foreign body threatens the host body: the course of things installed by the receiving film can be broken or subverted by the newcomer.

Comolli
and Sorrel
(2015)

On the contrary, it is a matter of attesting to the film's truthfulness. The cited fragments act more as

Comolli &
Sorrel
(2015)

supporting pieces. However, they are not mere 'quotations' but active events in the film that receive them. You cannot forget that everything in a film is given to the ambivalence of the cinematographic fact. Everything nourishes the spectator's imagination.

As a matter of fact, the fragmentary is one of the aspects of the film that enlarges the field of the viewer's (and the maker's) imagery by using fragmentation as a trial and error, movements of comings and goings between the different layers of reality.

Bellour in
Alter (2017)

This dialectical attitude can create tension between the various types of images, sounds or any other formal element and between the perceptions and affections resulting from them. This tension grows in what Deleuze calls the interstice, a method of in-betweenness that produces something new or, more precisely, new images of thought. For Deleuze, the interstice carves an incommensurable gap that leads to a radical questioning of the image. It is a disjunction that works at various levels, including narrative, framing, editing, mise-en-scène, and soundtrack, and it is not associative in nature. However, there is an associative function of the interstice in the essay film: montage is used as a transition between images. This way, the disjunction is surmountable by flowing and moving through the fissures. There might be fragmentation and discontinuity, but the associative impulse concedes visual and conceptual fluidity and unity, a continuity of the thought.

Deleuze
(1985/1996)

Rascaroli
(2017)

Deleuze
(1985/1996)

Adorno
(1984)

Rascaroli
(2017)

This continuity of thought, created by the associative montage of different materials and the voice, does not search to describe, explain or affirm the world but to summon the unthought and to imagine a new possible

world.⁵⁶ Starting from the referentiality of the world argued by Bazin, and without betraying it, the image can play a crucial aesthetic and ethical role, which, as Fontcuberta argues, can turn it into the possessor, revealer and transmitter of possible worlds. These possible worlds can be dreamt, fantasised or longed for. Or conversely, they can be feared, demonised. They can be wounded, punished worlds. They can be worlds that heal. They can be known and familiar worlds, remembered. Or they can be completely new or unknown... also forgotten. They can be utopian worlds, dystopian... worlds that were lost... and maybe found, perhaps to be lost again... You do not really have to choose or even be certain, you can navigate from one to the other, you can coexist in more than one, you can build bridges, you can leave and go back. You can even exist in-between.

Bazin
(1967/2005)

Fontcuberta
(2022)

ACTION #5

**REHEARSE, adjust, count time and readjust again.
Rehearse once more. Repeat, repeat, repeat.**

This is a film that you will need to perform. In other words, you will produce and activate it by talking and supplementing it with its enunciation. The conjunction of all the fragments (images and sounds) will be invoked by your words, performing the film in its absence. Paradoxically, the absence of a non-existent film implies the need for several presences: the speaker, the audience, and the presence or primacy of the event or the experience.

Bullot
(2016)

The presence of the speaker: Viewers should have the impression that they know perfectly well who is speaking, which makes them feel closer to a sense of true speech. This presence also speaks of fragility,

Etchells
(1999)

⁵⁶ Possible worlds are descriptions of the world as it could be or as it could have been.

vulnerability and openness to what might happen. The word activates the body. In this sense, language is both a text and an event. As Austin proclaimed, the spoken word becomes action. And the document (the written word) becomes the pretext for that spoken word.

Austin
(1962)

'The document is the craftsman of awareness, the object whose function is to transform the words into acts', to put in movement the spectator (p.27).

Bardiot
(2019)

You might want to print the text. To own the text, introduce indications you will consider when reading it. These indications will become marks from your reading, signs, and hints for future readings. They might be updated (because you are not the same person each time you perform), but they act as landmarks that help to see and recognise your way. You might prefer to learn the text by heart. Yet, keeping the document in your hands adds an interesting nuance, as according to Bardiot, it creates (and I would add, nourishes and keeps) a distance instead of searching a theatrical illusion. It is like claiming that *this is a film, but at the same time, it is not.*

Bardiot
(2019)

The presence or primacy of the event: There is a theatrical nature that gives a unique nature to the event. If it is an in-person performance, you will need to choose the set, lighting, clothing, the possible activation of the script, and how to provoke the interaction with the audience or address and involve the spectator. If it is virtual, your decisions on the event may appear limited. However, regardless of the modality of the performance, it will be essential to keep the balance between the fixed parts and the ones to be acted on at the moment to retain some of the tension, expectation, uncertainty, and enthusiasm connatural to a life event.

Bullot
(2016)

The audience's presence: This speech act addresses a listener and demarcates a social operation conceived of *performatively*, which will only exist when the event occurs. The film does not live outside this event. Uriel Orlow, when talking about his performance called *Orlow (2015)* the *Unmade Film*, expresses that what is performed first and foremost is a commitment, namely to one's words: 'I offer a commitment to my words, and invite others to listen, to understand, to connect; this also means taking the risk of being misunderstood, making myself vulnerable to the judgements of others'. The addressing to the others I referred to in Action #3 comes into life; it is embodied and exposed, becomes something different each time, vulnerable, and dependent on the viewers' and listener's reactions, emotions, ideas, existence, and presence.

ACTION #6

GO BACK to the box once the Movement is finished.

View from the point you left it and continue until the next prick. Then, go through actions #2 to #5. Please note that you might need some time in between making Movements.

WHEN TO STOP

You might have an intuition of what you are looking for, but you won't really know what you will find or when. Robert Adams says that every work of art that works, it works because it is a discovery for its creator. Hence, you should not expect to know what you will find beforehand. Concentrate on the search. It will guide you.

Adams
(2005)

Prepare yourself never to find it, find a completely unexpected thing, or find *it* in an unexpected moment: to feel that emotion of having reached the end of your quest before seeing all the tapes. If this is the case,

a new question will appear for which it is impossible to have a previous answer. What should I do with the rest of the images?

ACTION #7

ENSEMBLE or FINAL EDIT.

This is a process, a work-in-progress at the service of the experience, of a discovery. Yet, one day, you will reach the end, and in that moment, you will need to assemble all the Movements together since the sum makes an entire film, be it longer or shorter. In the final edit, you must understand how to go from one Movement to the other and maybe make some adjustments. You will also need to harmonise the whole, unifying decisions or giving coherence to how texts, sounds, or images appear.

However, I would suggest that you try not to re-edit too much. As a result, you will manage to preserve the original impulse, that intuition that made each Movement a genuine, singular, unique filmic response.

Taking into consideration that this might end up being a film-performance, action #7 should include decisions on the conditions of the screening: the staging, the lights, the presence of the body, how to introduce the film to the audience, how to finalise, the qualities of the screen and the speakers.

THE RULES

I have identified eight rules that have appeared through *the making*. The process made me conscious of their existence and evolution, and I have proved them to be *revisable, reducible, extendable, or even denied* at any time.

RULE #1

Never cheat. I do not know what comes next, and I don't spy. If you want a real discovery, you must follow and protect the experience of viewing-reacting-reflecting in this order. Value the presence. Otherwise, if this works, you will not want to sneak in to see what's ahead. You will need time to give yourself and be prepared for the subsequent viewing.

RULE #2

Not re-editing or looking back. Or as little as possible. Each Movement is the reaction of a precise moment. I assume that once the whole act of creation is finished (in my case, the Seven Movements), finding coherence, giving consistency, and taking the distance to have an overview will be necessary. At that point, you will undoubtedly need to revise and you will probably have the desire to re-edit, a desire that can be difficult to contain. Be that as it may, it is necessary to differentiate between small adjustments, re-adaptations, updates to maintain a certain homogeneity and coherence of the whole and substantial changes, new meanings, re-creating something already created... If you want to keep alive the idea of *the non-existent film in progress*, it is important to preserve the genuineness of the result of each filmic response. That is the imprint of a 'you' at a given moment. If you re-edit it, that 'you' that was, will disappear. And the resulting film will cease to be the witness or the trace of a living process.

RULE #3

The use of black. Jacques Aumont talks about three uses of black: One, black as a punctuation or grammatical device, which as part of the narrative also allows the film to breathe. Two, black as an element loaded with symbolic meaning based on cultural, especially pictorial, representation: disappearance, end, death, solemnity, seriousness. Three, a postmodernist negation of the image, which would show the impossibility of representation or even its rejection.

Aumont
(2014)

You can still use the black screen as grammatical punctuations; as pauses to breathe; as a symbolic or iconic meaning; as a rejection. Yet, lecture-performance creates the appropriate circumstances for another use of black, one that I invite you to use.

It is a black that emerges and interrupts. It is a disjunction that while creating spaces *in-between* images (all kind of images and also other kind of materials like sounds, music, texts, voice) it makes the association between all of them visible. In other words, the black opens a gap, separates and simultaneously bridges these materials. And by doing so, it engenders a fragmentary construction of meaning that ultimately shows the gap not only between the materials but also, and more importantly, between the observer and who or what is observed, the filmmaker and the image, the viewer and the image... As Rascaroli would say, between subject and world, perception and knowledge.

Rascaroli
(2017)

Pierre Soulages was a French painter who created the *outrenoirs*, the *ultra blacks*. When he told how, in 1979, he painted his first black canvas, he recalled how there was nothing premeditated in this gesture. It is not that he painted something he already had in his head. On the contrary, he intuitively began adding black paste to the painting. But just as he added it, he took it out later.

Soulages
(2002)

And then he repeated it. Even more. There seemed to be no way out, but at the same time, he couldn't stop, and he kept painting the canvas black until he was exhausted. The following day, he realised that he had done something he had never done before: 'Black was no longer black. It became the site of a particular light. And that was what mattered to me. It created a space that was its own. A new adventure was beginning' (p.58). New and full of new emotions.



Figure 94. Woman in front of a painting by Pierre Soulages.

Photo credit Match with Art Instagram.

When light reflects, the space of the painting is no longer *in, on* or *within* the canvas, but it grows *in front of* it. Therefore, the viewer (and the maker first) is included in this space. The painted universe (the filmic one) emerges between the canvas (or the screen) and you. The creative universe exists due to your gaze at the moment and the place where you discover it.

'If you take a step sideways or if the lighting changes, because the sun turns or the evening falls, the light and its space are completely transformed' (p.113).

Soulages
(2002)

Your creation is not what is projected on the screen; it exists in the encounter between the screen, the voice, and the viewer. It happens beyond the screen. When Soulages claims that his instrument is not black but the light reflected in it, he is underlying the *ultra* in the

Soulages
(2002)

ultra-black, indicating this *other* place, the beyond. Similarly, the use of black in the non-existent films in progress aims to create a space where something else is reflected, 'a beyond'. This shared space enables the viewer to exist and fleetingly regain awareness of what they are doing: watching (or, I should say, witnessing?) a film.

While writing these actions and rules, I saw a Japanese film in the theatre. It is a horror or fantasy film from the sixties with ghosts directed by Masaki Kobayashi and called *Kaidan*, which adapts four traditional Japanese stories. Besides my interest in the film (the stories and the formal choices rooted in the Kabuki tradition), something about the film stuck with me. Or rather something concerning the screening of the film. What was projected was a celluloid copy, and besides a couple of out-of-focus frames and a frameshift, what actually punctuated the entire projection was a black space between reel to reel. The film, when spliced, retained a distance made of black, made of lack of image, between rolls. This systematic punctuation did nothing more than remind us that we were watching a film, that as spectators, we were inside the story and, at the same time, outside. The spaces in black made us responsible for our condition as spectators. In this case, the black was surely involuntary on the filmmaker's part, yet underlined something that had been indeed a creative decision: the stories that took place in the film were introduced by a narrator. This voice told what we were watching. A voice that brought a distance and addressed the viewer. 'Kaidan' literally means 'talk' or 'recited narrative' (dan) of a 'strange, mysterious, rare or bewitching apparition' (Kai). This film is a recited narration of mysterious apparitions.

RULE #4

Repetition of ideas, words, sounds, images.

There are different kinds of repetition that you will have an interest in having in mind:

Repetition as an act that incorporates difference. According to Gilles Deleuze in his book *Difference and Repetition*, it is in the dynamics of repetition where, thanks to variations, the difference, the creativity, and the opportunity to reimagine will appear. Therefore, repetition is not focusing on offering the same but on creating a possibility -through editing, that is, associating the different materials- for something (different) to emerge: a transformative experience, a process of discovery.

Deleuze
(1968/2002)

Repetition as a resumption of what has been left unfinished. For the philosopher Soren Kierkegaard, repetition constituted a possibility of recovering the past that has been left behind, a lost time that can also be seen in a present that constantly vanishes or a future that never comes. It is no coincidence that in his native language, the language he wrote, repetition, 'Gjentagelse', literally means to take up again, to recover. This understanding of repetition as a gesture of resuming can inspire the writing of the voice: this is a recovery of a film that has been left behind, unfinished and also, the time that separates the creation of each Movement makes the voice break the silence as an act of recovery of something that is systematically interrupted, and that has to be taken up again from the place where it was left.

Kierkegaard
(1843/2009)

There is a quote commonly attributed to Mark Twain, 'History does not repeat itself, but it (often) rhymes'. It suggests that events may not occur again in precisely the same way, but they can resonate and reverberate as in a *déjà vu*. From this quotation, it can be deduced

Doyle, Mieder
and Shapiro
(2012),
'History'

that repetition can be understood as a rhyme. Anticipations of certain elements that will reappear and be recognised, echoes between elements which become almost leitmotifs. These recurrent elements can become unexpectedly central to the meaning. Their accumulation also provides a sense of breathing, a repetition, like a beat, a rhyme, a rhythm between images, between words, and from image to words, intertwined, pushing forward, evolving, listening to each other, responding one to the other, accompanying one another.

A fourth way to understand repetition can be helpful, especially for Action #4, that is for editing: Repetition as an insistence or rehearsal. Gertrude Stein used the French word (*répétition*) to approach a possible definition. *Répéter* means to rehearse, insist, ruminate, to essay, to try. It is by repeating, trying, that you will be prepared for the final appearance. In some types of creations, let's take fiction films, these essays, ruminations, attempts will not be visible in the resulting work, which by definition would be that 'final appearance'. Here, you want to create a space for them... as *they are* the work. What you will show is the process, the repetition process, the way to the end, the journey... made of repetitions, all kinds of repetitions: as variations which include the difference, as resumptions, as rhymes, as essays. (See Disclaimer #3)

Stein
(1998)

RULE #5

Each Movement should include an external material: a fragment of a cited film, a painting, a song, a poem..

These materials appear through association with the recovered images. Something you say or see unavoidably invokes specific images of a pre-existing film, painting, photograph, writing... These invocations are not imposed by you, are not mentally or intellectually chosen; they need to appear unquestionably, unnegotiably. They are

materials that, in a way, already belong to the universe of the images you once made; somehow, they come from the inside. They need to be recognised by you as part of your sentimental education. By including the cited materials (films, still images, paintings, written works...) in your film, you create a heterogeneous fabric (each material has its own materiality, its own texture) that promotes a dialogue, a resonance, a movement of back and forth between your own images and those that have inspired you, that have built your way of looking and understanding the world. The coexistence of all these materials in your film creates a net of 'elective affinities' as Goethe would call them, a shared universe, a place of belonging.

Goethe
(1809/2009)

RULE #6

The unpredictability of sound. It is a difficult element to control, as it must bring into dialogue the sound that comes from the edited material (that is, the sound that comes directly from the capture - the diegetic sound - and the sound that may have been added in editing - the extra-diegetic sound - and the sound of the performance, that is essentially the voice that will declaim the text and the ambient sound of the room.

Actually, the ambient sound of the room is not - it should not be - a significant problem; it is that sound that will always escape us, the sound of the conditions of the projection of any film we may produce. However, the sound of the voice does pose a challenge. If the voice were a normal voice-over, it would be equalised in the film editing, keeping the hierarchy between the different layers of sound under control. Yet, here, it has to deal with a pre-edited sound, so it has to find a way to stand out organically, naturally and fluidly without negating the sonic features of its own that the screen material may have.

In the face of this, you could consider the possibility of controlling the volume live in the performance, adapting the different intensities as needed. In the event that this is not possible, you will have to turn the obstacle into creative potential by finding a balance between images with sound and silent images. These silent images can become the perfect host for your voice to read the text while embracing the sound of the room.

In this case, the breathing of the film would be constructed on this back-and-forth movement between sounds that come from different sources (from the screen, from the room, from the talking body) and the different silences implied by these sounds.

Whatever strategy you choose, you will need to find a way to work with the sound *inside* the image and the sound *outside* the image (mainly the voice, but not only! It could be live music or sounds of any nature) and consider them both equally the sound of the film.

RULE #7

Try not to make it (only) about you. Or, try not to put the biographical self at the centre.

(See Disclaimer #2).

RULE #8

Keep it an open process. By being open, you can understand different things. One would be to work from an improvisational attitude, leaving some aspects of the performance open to change and adaptation and be completed live each time you say the film in front of an audience. Another would be not to pretend to reach a final form and leave the performance unfinished, unfixed, and open or ready for evolution and modifications over time. You can also understand openness as a way of working. The openness of the maker towards the images and the work with them: watching, being touched, reacting and

fixing. A movement forward... kept until the end. A presence that is updated at every step. A here and now. A work-in-progress. The performance would make this work-in-progress visible.

DISCLAIMERS

Disclaimer #1

This protocol accounts for a work-in-progress, so it has been reviewed and updated with every new Movement.

Disclaimer #2

The non-existent film in progress is a film-performance. That gives it the nature of an open, unfinished or *unfixed* film and a self-reflexive attitude. Two features that also belong to essay films. Beyond names, genres or disciplines, there is something in the word 'essay' as such that is fundamental, not matter if you are making a film essay or a film-performance. 'Essay' refers to something in process, something that is in preparation to be, an attempt... a repetition *à la* Stein. The non-existent film in progress is not entirely in the editing program's timeline or as a ".mov" or ".mp4" file. Rather, it is between that file (or that timeline) and a written document to be performed by you. Or maybe, in your absence, by somebody else (following the indications you might have left behind in the written document).

Disclaimer #3

Each time I faced the Movements, I created a new document with discarded elements that did not find their place at that moment. Still, I would keep that document as the ideas, the references, and the reflections I wrote in it seemed interesting to be considered for the future, maybe the following Movement, as if I could foresee what was coming next. As time passed, before I resumed creation

and faced the next Movement, those ideas were dismissed, or I would simply forget that I had written them, not because they were invalid but because they belonged to another moment, to the past. They were outdated.

If each Movement is the response to the encounter with the material, you need to keep it alive, present, unprejudiced and free. This does not mean that previous reflections, ideas that hover, and the memory of what is being done should be denied. All the contrary. Let all these appear unexpectedly, the same way Malte Laurids Brigge understands that writing a poem is about having seen a lot of things, having had a lot of experiences, letting them grow and being forgotten and then letting them come back as memories, and..

Rilke
(1910/2008)

'only when they become blood within us, become our nameless looks and signs that are no longer distinguishable from ourselves-not until then does it happen that, in a very rare moment, the first word of a verse arises in [the] midst [of memories] and goes forth from among them' (p.6).

Your own experience can become sooner or later part of your work, will find its way in. Therefore, be ready to make space for it, more or less visible, more or less relevant. There is no point in denying that possibility. Let's be aware and try to understand in what way, if it happens, when it happens, your biographical self belongs to the filmic universe and becomes meaningful for the viewer. If so, let it be.

Disclaimer #4

The images you will recover belong to the past, probably to your past and certainly they talk about something, show a reality, portray someone that might be still there, alive, more or less around, within reach or maybe far.. You might still be in contact with that reality or that

person once captured by your images. You might recover that contact due to having opened that box. And that recovery will become part of your life. Again. However, it is crucial to remember that you are not working with that reality or person you once encountered and filmed (anymore). Now, you are working with the images resulting from that encounter. Your reality is those images and not what they contain, not the reality they represent.

Disclaimer #5

Even though I did not remember or know what was in the tapes, and I claimed that every association reacts and every voice reflects on the moment, I suddenly had the intuition of a direction. I took these notes some days after I finished and showed Movement #4 for the first time. I was in the kitchen, and I immediately left what I was doing and I wrote:

I said - in Movement #4 - that he left me. ⁵⁷I guess that this "leaving" helped me understand the lost world. It also acted as an analogy with that other "being left": being left by the images we made together. What role does love play in all this? Lovesong. This whole quest is organised around this title: Lovesong. Indeed, this is not in vain. Neither is the need to talk about cinephilia to express what has been lost. Cinephilia: love of cinema. Losing cinephilia is an inevitable way of ceasing to belong to the cinema. And then there is Agnès Varda, a key figure in understanding the possibility of inhabiting cinema. I can't imagine any other filmmaker who could be more linked to love, to a forceful (and uninhibited romantic) love for life, humanity, and cinema.

*Monroy
(2020)*

⁵⁷ I was referring to my long-life boyfriend, with whom I had made all my films until then.

Today, everything indicates that, yes, I will have to deal with love to talk about belonging or not belonging to the image. Or rather, to wonder if returning to that lost home is possible. In fact, at the end of Movement #4, I asked (myself? To the viewer?) to change the question. Instead of asking why I left, I wondered why and how to return. Is it possible to return? Agnès Varda, in a scene of her film 'Les plages d'Agnès', receives an unexpected call. The man who lives in the house she had lived in as a child calls her to give her a chance to see it, maybe for the last time, as he is about to sell it and doesn't know if they will keep it or tear it down. Once there, she asks the house owner if she can go out into the garden (yet, another garden!). She has beautiful memories of her games with her brothers there. She also has an old photograph.

Varda
(2008)

Agnès is now in her childhood garden, in front of the camera. Agnès between the garden and the camera, between the garden and us-the viewers. She looks at the viewer, looks around, and says: 'Le Jardin est bien là, Mais pas l'émotion' (the garden is there, but not the emotion). I would ask again: Is it possible to go back? I am different, and the images from the tapes in that box give me something different, but there is something recognisable. Georg Büchner writes in 'Lenz' (p.20):

Büchner
(1839/2004)

'The most beautiful images and vibrant tones are formed and fall apart. Only one thing remains: an infinite beauty that passes from form to form, eternally opening up, eternally transforming itself, so that it is obvious that it cannot always be

*fixed at will and placed in museums or put
in solfa and summon old and young to
digress and be enchanted in front of it'.*

Links break and recompose—all the time. But something remains—the capacity of love, the capacity of belonging. I return to a different place, loving in another way. But this is still 'love' and also 'my place'. My world faded away: the models of living, of relating, of loving, of making films, of loving cinema. Today, I return to it, 'loving' in a different way. I don't have a man by my side; I have a woman (a massive revolution in a large family, not Catholic but traditional. My father died without me ever coming out to him. Maybe he knew. Of course, he did). I've been married to her for eight years. And it's not always easy to say it. It still isn't. I've always wanted children. But in the end, I didn't. I have always understood life in a way that is radically different today. And as an inevitable consequence, I come back to those images differently.

Between the moment I made them and today, when I re-signify them, the time has passed, and things have happened. There is a reencounter, and definitely, as an exemplary solastalgic act in all its contradiction and fertility, there is a reactivation. Still, just as love has learned to be different, my way of looking and working with images is necessarily other. This is a film that can't be, and yet it is. Insultingly, it is. It's a spoken film; it's a film that needs to be performed. A film that, in order not to be half-hearted, will require the presence of a body that assumes its return.

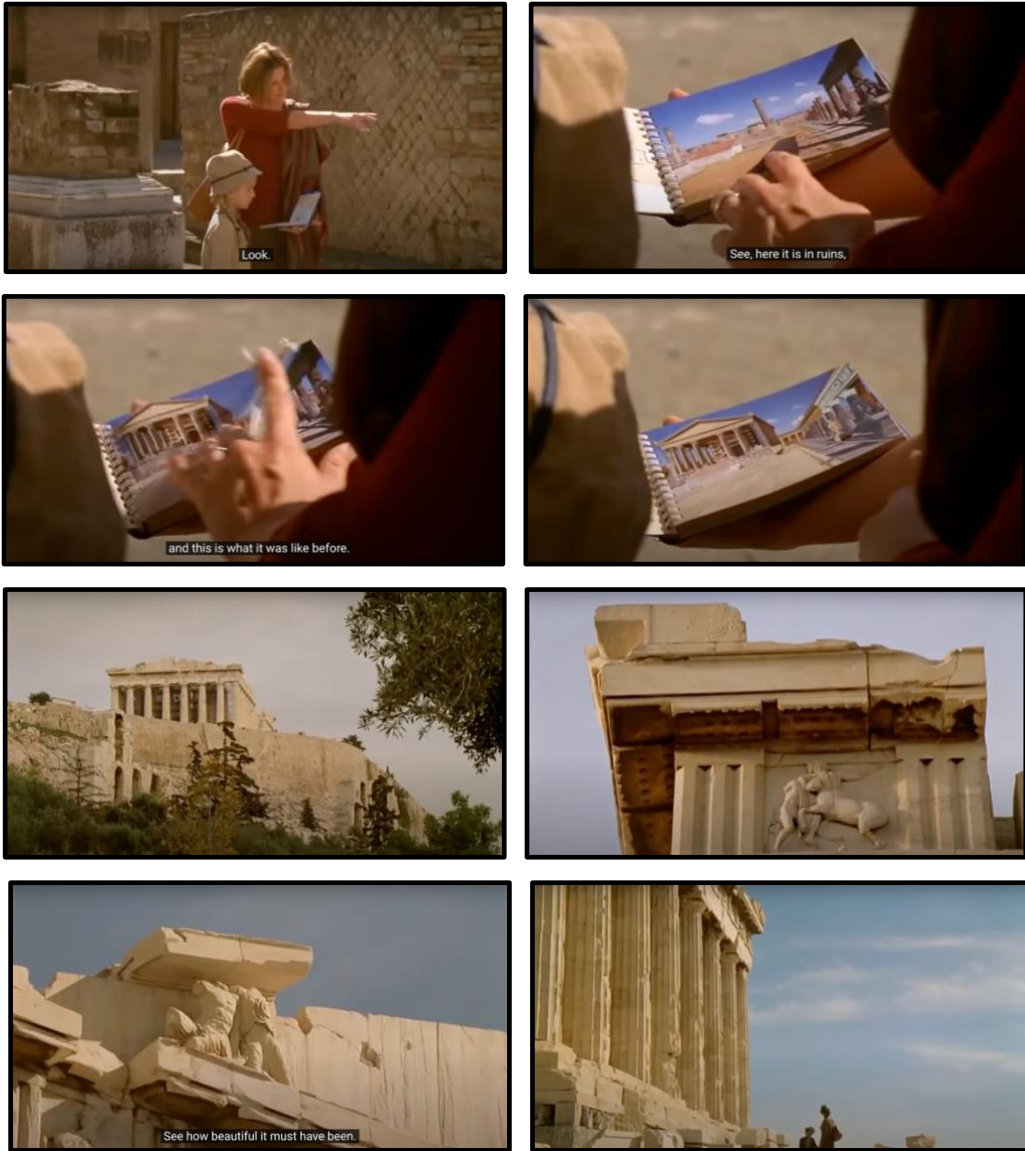
This piece of writing, which could be a part of my diary if I had one, was showing a way, a possible way. However, there was no use in intending to follow it (or others I wrote during the process) or to subordinate myself to it. One of the things that I wanted to protect the most was the "truth" of the protocol, which paradoxically -again- claimed freedom. A free protocol, a fertile paradox. Each Movement resulted from a moment of an encounter with the material; it needed to be a discovery. The way that those writings appeared during the process was just an intuition that led to a light flickering in the distance. Only in the end was it possible to see whether that light stayed on or had transformed into something else.

3.3 Spoken Films. Returning Films.

I needed to write the protocol due to my confrontation with the readings I made about the lecture-performance for my research. These readings uncovered several features or expectations associated with the medium which did not relate to my own experience and desire for it. I needed to resituate myself. Yet, it was a matter of redefining, reappropriating and renaming the practice. Considering that all this started with a word that had the power to open a box, *solastalgia*, it is not surprising to recognise how important words are to me.

I must admit that, well before writing the protocol down, I felt uncomfortable with the expression 'lecture-performance', mainly when translating it into Spanish: 'Conferencia performática'. I could not imagine a less appealing name. For this reason, and I am sure that the time spent on writing the protocol played a part in this, I began to imagine other names for what I was starting to do. And I came up with a concept that made me feel more at ease: Spoken film.

'Spoken film' takes its name from the film Manoel de Oliveira made in 2003, "Um filme falado". That film marked me when I saw it the year of its premiere in Spain (around the time I was shooting, twenty years ago, again!). A university history professor (played by Leonor Silveira) takes a cruise with her daughter from Lisbon to Bombay to meet her husband. On their journey, the ship stops in places steeped in history, such as Marseilles, Pompei, Athens, Istanbul, and Egypt, until the Persian Gulf, allowing the professor to transmit the world's past to her daughter in a straightforward, innocent, yet candid way. On the ship, they join three older women, played by three European divas (Catherine Deneuve, Irene Papas and Stefania Sandrelli), to have dinner with the ship's captain (John Malkovich). In a brilliant and utopian scene, each one speaks their own language. The ladies speak French (Catherine Deneuve), Italian (Stefania Sandrelli) and Greek (Irene Papas), the professor and her daughter respond in Portuguese, and the captain uses English. And yet they understand each other. Towards the end, an unexpected event occurs. The passengers and crew will see their lives endangered, leading to a dramatic end. The image of the captain, adrift... he is watching, shocked, the ship being blown up, apparently by a terrorist bomb. The teacher and her daughter were accidentally left on board. The image of his face freezes. He has realised. He is speechless.



Figures 95 to 102. Mother and daughter visiting the ruins in *Un filme falado* by Manoel d'Oliveira (2003).



Figure 103. The captain witnesses the ship exploding. The mother and the daughter are on board. *Un Filme Falado* by Manoel d'Oliveira (2003).

The three moments, the teacher speaking about history to her daughter, the conversation around a table in five languages as if they were one, and the captain's speechless face, are three images or cinematic moments that have stuck in my memory. The name I wanted to use emerged from somewhere between them.

The teacher talking about history to her daughter approaches speech as a matter of transmission (between a mother and her daughter in this case). This resonates with the origin of my entry into lecture-performance, a creative form that made sense with my interests, my approach to and experience of film, my own trajectory, in which creation is intimately linked to a certain sense of pedagogy.

The conversation around the dinner table shows how communication can become something which is not translatable. The scene in which each of the five characters speaks a different language creates an 'impossible' dialogue in which they understand each other, utopically, despite of all. This introduces one of the main aspects that I have been addressing in all this process and which I will develop in the second section of Chapter Four: how to deal with the passage between one language to another. English as the language of this writing and creation, Spanish as language of the Spanish version of the film-performance. And Catalan as the language of the images, my mother-tongue. The passage also between one filmic language to another. There is the filmic language as I have always known and practiced it (my lost language, my lost home) and there is lecture or film-performance (as a new language, new home).

And finally, the speechless captain. His impossibility to say in the face of a loss, a world that explodes, a world that disappears before his eyes, a world - by the way - that is the one that the teacher passed on to her daughter at the cruise stops, a world that seems - in this film - destined to collapse.

The loss of the image as a home mirrors with the world's fate explored in Oliveira's film. Images also die. And my quest of the possibility to return, the possibility of recovering the voice will find an answer that unavoidably resonates with the captain's face. A speechless face, that, in the impossibility of speaking (in the same way one used to speak) still says something.

This is how, borrowing the title *Un Filme Falado* - which I have translated to a *spoken film* instead of other possibilities such as *talking film* - seemed to make sense for a practice where films exist in their impossibility of existence, transmitting a world and a

language in its withdrawal, searching how to speak again, how to recover the voice, trying to find a way to survive by doing so. A film that can only exist when it is said.

So, spoken film. Yet, another way of naming what has been called before. Why do I need to rename a practice already recognisable and named by others?

In fact, one of the things that surprised me most while researching this medium was the proliferation of names for it. Witnessing how many practitioners needed to rename it to make it their own fuelled my boldness to do the same. It certainly opened the door for me, making me feel legitimised to do it. From Lecture-Performance to Film-Performance (Bullock, 2018), Unmade film or Oral Film (Orlow, 2015), Undone Cinema or Latent Cinema (Arsenal, 2023),⁵⁸ Exploited Cinema (Maglioni and Thomson, 2018), Overflowing Cinema (Di Tella, 2023), Live documentary (IDFA, 2024), among others.

Following my readings, all these different proposals designate a commonplace, very similar way of understanding 'cinema outside cinema', where words play a central role. Perhaps it is no accident that this sense of interchangeability is already to be found in what seem to be the two initial ways of naming the practice: lecture-performance and film-performance. Indeed, as I stated before, and according to my readings, they seem synonymous, but in reality, they are not. Orlow underlines that performance gives the lecture a dimension of artistic freedom to the assumed academic or linear format. In the case of cinema, performance would restore the lost aura. The film no longer exists in terms of its technical reproducibility but in its volatility of a here and now.

In the same vein, by naming their work in one way or another, practitioners highlight or emphasise some of their characteristics over others and sometimes even contradict or deny the latter: the hybrid potentiality in 'exploited cinema'; the unfinished nature in the 'unmade' and the 'undone'; what goes sideways or what escapes in 'overflowing cinema'; or the hidden promise in 'latent cinema'. And what is the 'spoken film' highlighting? I would say that it highlights the saying itself, the awareness of the emergence of a voice.

⁵⁸ The Arsenal, *Institut für film und videokunst* in Berlin organised an event in Berlin from 20-23 July 2023 called 'Film Undone. Elements of Latent Cinema' <https://www.latent-cinema.net/>. It would seem that latent cinema, undone cinema, is indeed in the air.

It is not a question of just saying the film⁵⁹ but of saying it in a particular way. spoken films appeared to me as a response to the suspicion that the relationship with images might have entered a solastalgic era. The relationship between an image and its maker is marked by a possible wound, rupture, estrangement or impossibility of continuing to inhabit the image. Spoken films would be those that face, explore and seek to name this loss. Each filmmaker of a spoken film would unavoidably take a position by naming and exploring the loss. For some, this loss might have the possibility to be healed; others might need to understand and find ways to live with it; others, knowing that it cannot be cured, will choose to live trying; others would realise how the loss or wound transforms them. In my case, I understand now that the *Lovesong* is and shows an attempt to transform the wound into something else, following what bell hooks affirms about cinema, its possibility to make magic, that is, to turn the real into something totally different in front of your eyes (hooks, 2009).

In one of the first texts I read by Erik Bullot, he would classify the different kinds of film-performance. He identified three different types: lost films, hidden films and missing films. The lost films have disappeared, and we know about their existence thanks to traces and hints or evidence. These films existed in the past, so their reappearance in the form of performance has something of a historical or archaeological act. The hidden films are voluntarily subtracted to make them seen or imagined, deliberately substituted by their discourse. These mental films tend to be conceptual proposals. Finally, the missing films are those films that were left unfinished in the past, and now they are somehow the object of restoration, of rescue (Bullot, 2021).

Following this classification, I would recognise my *Lovesong* as a missing film that I have intended to resume and somehow restore. It was left unmade, unfinished, unnoticed. It was left behind and kept in a box, retained in limbo in the manner of a promise. (Bullot, 2021). To tell the truth, all these years, between the moment I abandoned it and the moment I took it up again, it felt like a forgotten promise which carried the burden of an inevitable failure. Indeed, somehow, I 'say' or 'speak' the film that I could not make.

I began making *Lovesong* by questioning why I had not completed the film twenty years ago. As a result, the three first Movements dealt with the impossibility of making that film. However, something happened in the Fourth Movement, provoking a turning point.

⁵⁹ According to Bullot, a film-performance tends to be said (2018) or in other words, it is an oral film (2021). If the film is not said, it does not exist.

Paradoxically, by questioning why I left, I realised that what I was doing (or trying to do) was to find my way back. The missing film, as defined by Bullot, is less about making up for its absence than affirming its virtuality (2021), yet for me, the existence of a possible film has become real. Saying the film became a (different) way to make it, finally. From the Fourth Movement on, the performance moved forward, and I began to experience it as a peculiar, unexpected film, yet a film in itself and less as a reflection of a film that did not exist.

From that moment, even the form of the Movements changed. The Movements became longer, the images were less fragmented, and the relations between them were less associative; the black spaces tended to disappear, and the images became bigger, almost occupying the whole screen. I was coming back! Suddenly, there was a possibility to return, the same that Joao Moreira Salles explores in his film *Santiago*, a film whose story opens the Movement #5 of *Lovesong*. Joao Moreira Salles left a film unedited in 1994 because he realised he had got lost while doing it. He was shooting a portrait of his butler, Santiago, and failed to do so. His imposed gaze left no room for a real encounter with his character. Thirteen years later, he returned to the material and made a film sharing his reflections on his previous failed attempt, and by recognising a wrong, he created a film that included the first one rescuing it from oblivion. But not only this, *Santiago* contains the film he would have made and also the distance between it and the film he finally made: Moreira Salles' voice shares with the viewer the thinking, the doubts, the regrets, the findings that integrate his creative process, a process that allows him to go from one film to the other. Back and forth.

Echoing *Santiago*, more than a missing film, *Lovesong* became a returning film that, by resuming the job, would replace a film that was left unmade. "Perhaps", as my voice says at the end of Movement #4, "this film was destined not to be made until twenty years later".

Indeed, this search began with a voice that went away. But soon, searching for this voice proved it was not entirely or really lost. It had moved away. It had slipped far enough so that it would be possible, one day, to look back and see something.

And now... placed in front of the material again, what is left is to face the possibility of a return:

I love to think about the possibility that images can simultaneously be the end of something and the beginning of something else. Indeed, endings beget beginnings. They can become a promise... despite the mirror no longer reflecting what is in front of it, despite the distance, even the awkwardness, despite the crack, a kind of hope rises (...) "Nothing is Lost".

Fragment of the voice for the Movement #5

Wim Wenders wrote that films begin with words, and these words (referring to scripts, projects, and pitches) ultimately determine whether images will be allowed to be born (1992). Those words that convey, carry or invoke the images can also become a prison. According to Wenders, only a few films, freed from the words, can be shot, and from those, only a part will be visible and emerge on the surface. He would compare these visible films to the tip of an iceberg. We see a part of ice surfacing on the water, liberated from the words retaining them. Beneath, there is a block of invisible ice: the unmade films. Paradoxically, on this occasion, words did not hold the film back. On the contrary, they are the ones who came to liberate it! The words returned to the images, giving them a new chance to exist in the form of a film, an unexpected film, a performance film, a spoken film, or a returning film.

But how did this return actually take place? What does it look like? What did it involve? What, if any, are the consequences?

Is it really possible to return to the places we have left?

Screening 4

Watch

Movement #7 (and coda)

Lovesong, a non-existent film in progress

[Link to the English version](#)

CHAPTER 4. Solastalgia Reactivates a Documentary Practice. Experiencing “*Lovesong. A non-existent film in progress.*”

In this Chapter, I will expand on how solastalgia paradoxically reactivates a documentary practice through film-performance, creating the possibility of a filmic voice recovering.

Reflecting on the experience of making *Lovesong. A non-existent film in progress* could, without a doubt, have gone deeper in so many directions: questioning how to film poetry, deepening into the image as an archive, exploring the use of repetition, reflecting on the passage of time or the place of the filmmaker and the building of the self or adopting haptic cinema as a coordinate to address the relationship between the screen and the body.

Yet my focus is on understanding how solastalgia plays a very concrete and central role in the possibility of creating again. It is crucial to insist that I do not intend to offer a tool for filmmakers to make solastalgic films.⁶⁰ I remember how, at the beginning of this journey, I stopped to study this possible dimension; what could we be referring to if we were talking about solastalgic films? I spotted films dealing with landscapes or films exploring the tension between human beings and the place they inhabit or belong to (this place can be physical, emotional, historical, social...). This thesis began with a reference to the Chinese film *Behemoth*, which explored the mining devastation in Mongolia and its fatal consequences on the landscape and its inhabitants, who are doomed to fade away. I also mentioned the Ethiopian *Faya Dayi* and how khat cultivation wiped out coffee plantations and thus affected an entire generation to the point of irreversible uprooting. These films were the first objects of study in my first approach to solastalgia. What they have in common, and what makes them solastalgic, is that they focus on the relationship between a wounded or vanishing space and its inhabitants. Therefore, they explored the loss of sense of belonging as a subject matter. What makes them valuable is that, of course, beyond dealing with solastalgia as content, they also found remarkable and memorable filmic ways to convey the emotional consequences of that loss. However, my research does not focus on this approach to solastalgia. This is not about a subject matter to be told or explained. This is not about an emotion to be conveyed. At least, not only.

⁶⁰ In this respect, I would like to recall that the spirit of the protocol is more that of a tool for reflection than that of a creative guide or procedure tool.

As I stated in the First Chapter, to begin with, my attention is on the image as a filmic space, not on what is seen inside this image. And I aim to understand solastalgia as a filmic concept that could do two apparently contradictory things simultaneously: By identifying and naming the loss of sense of belonging to images, it would reflect on and offer the possibility of regaining that sense, that is, creating again.

To do so, this Chapter will recognise three ways solastalgia eventually makes this return possible. The first one, titled 'Leaving the Screen', explores how image and voice become detached from each other, inevitably leading to a displacement of filmic space. The second, 'The Lives of a Lovesong', will find this 'distancing' in language, introducing the ideas of translation and exile concerning the different languages of my film-performance, English, Spanish and Catalan, but also identify the displacement from a known filmic language to the newly discovered language of film-performance. The third one will focus on interrupting time and movement as a manner to make that distance, wound or detachment visible, adding concepts such as 'delayed cinema' and 'pensive spectator'. This last section is called 'Stilling/Stealing Time'.

4.1. Leaving the screen.

“Everything began, for me, with a feeling of asphyxia provoked by the difficulty of making films”. This is how Érik Bullot started an interview that I conducted in 2023.⁶¹ After we resumed contact triggered by this research, we exchanged emails several times. He would even participate in my first public presentation, which took place online at the Screen Research Forum organised by the London College of Communication. He would be the guest to respond to the first three Movements of *Lovesong*.⁶² After that, and during all this time, he would send me articles, books and films related to lecture performances. In return, I would update him with my performance and discoveries.

I knew him as a documentary and experimental filmmaker and was inquisitive about what triggered his exploration of film-performance. He is, indeed, a filmmaker, but not only. He devotes his time to teaching, writing, and reflecting on the multiple ramifications of the relationship between (moving) image and reality. Using the words that appear on his website, written by Pierre Alexandre Nicaise, he incarnates ‘an alliance of the explorer and the scholar, the magician and the researcher, the observer and the theorist’ (Bullot, 2025, para.3). Always curious about bridging between the past (the origins and precursors of cinema), the present and the future of cinema, he has looked into the different *lives* and *deaths* of the moving image, its limitations and moreover, its potentialities or promises, with a particular interest in the expanded forms (performances, installations and books), always cultivating a broad sense of knowledge (moving back and forth from theory to practice) on cinema in its broadest sense.

Be that as it may, one of his most outstanding characteristics, in addition to his sensitivity, clairvoyance and insatiable curiosity, is his work capacity. His output of texts, lectures, and film projects is vertiginous, although always visible in very specialised, even alternative, circuits. Perhaps it is for this reason that in our talk, he made clear -even if he did not use these exact words- that the asphyxia that hindered creation or his desire to create did not originate from any personal or psychological circumstance but from the environment or the cultural pact surrounding making a film, in other words, an endangered landscape, a solastalgic landscape, to which he would no longer feel he belonged anymore:

⁶¹ Like this one, the rest of Bullot's quotes in this section come from the same interview.

⁶² I will refer to it again in the following section, ‘The Lives of a Lovesong’.

'(...) I was making documentary and experimental films, which I loved, but what they allowed me to live as an experience turned out to be very poor. I thought that something had to change; there was something that did not work because it did not give me the feeling of being alive. That is what I am looking for: I want to be alive. That is my basic desire' (Bulot, 2023).

This essential human question about being or not being alive, of needing to be alive, pushed Bulot to stop making the films he used to create and invest more time in reflecting on them, teaching, and giving conferences on cinema. This shift would open the door to the performative dimension of cinema, pushing forward his relationship with filmmaking.

It was 2013, and he had to give a talk in Lausanne; the title was precisely 'Am I Alive?'. It was a talk about ventriloquism, a subject he had been investigating for a long time. As usual, he would offer a selection of his films, alternating between filmed diaries and essays on ventriloquism. However, that presentation became unique. His father had just passed away several days before, which gave another weight to the questions that crossed his proposal. 'What is the relationship between a voice and a body, a filmmaker -who has a life *outside* the film- and his double -the one doing the talking *in* the film-? What does it mean to be alive?' (Bulot, 2023)

Bulot remembered the challenge of addressing these questions in those circumstances and how, from that experience, his lectures transformed into film-performances. The theoretical proposals of his lectures began to merge with personal stories, anecdotes, and references to dreamed films that remained unmade like an eternal open promise. He became present, exposed to the audience, in open relation to the material, both theoretical and personal, intimate, and endlessly updating his emotional relationship to it all and feeding it back into the film-performance. Consequently, he gradually regained that lost feeling of being alive and felt empowered to restore a particular belief in (and a sense of belonging to) filmmaking.

He would ultimately identify this 'being alive' at the heart of the film-performance, offering a certain liberation, a way out. The paradox is that this way out would become a way in: leaving the cinema to return to it later, in a different way. Bulot confessed, 'At the beginning, I thought it was the end of filmmaking, that I was not going to make films anymore, that I would only make performances and talk about my dreamed films, about what I wanted to do' (2023). But that was not the case.

I remember the first film I saw made by him, a filmed diary called *Le calcul du Sujet. Journal Filmé 1* (1997-2000).⁶³ It is one of his first films and the first of a series of 8 mm filmed diaries with his son as the main subject.

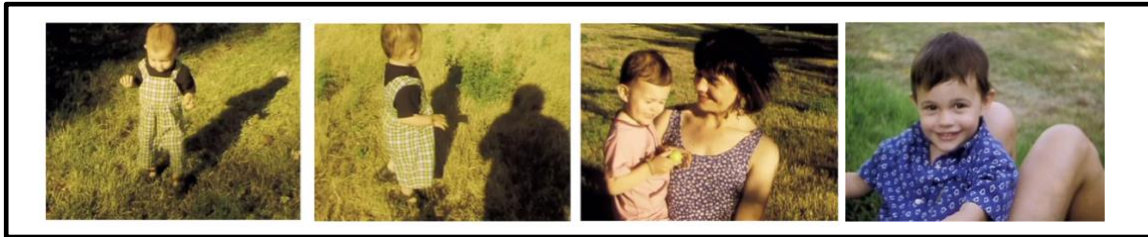


Figure 104. Frames from the film *Le Calcul du Sujet. Journal Filmé 1* by Erik Bullot (1997-2000).

'A hedgehog in the light, the shadows of a hand on a round belly, a bouquet of carnations, a tangerine compote, an infant's bath under a medlar tree, jumping in his mother's arms, the first steps in the grass, bus rides, trees in bloom, the child's runs in the countryside, shy glances at the camera, the return of the seasons, the shadows of the palms, still lifes, laughter and races' (Bullot, 2025, para.1).

This film is the filmed diary of a child's first three years of life and is still one of the films that has touched me the most in my spectator's experience.⁶⁴ What remains of it is the privilege of witnessing -during its silent ten minutes- how a child learns to look back at the person looking at and filming him -his father- hence acquiring the self-consciousness of being a subject. In this film, the viewer starts looking at the world (the hedgehog, the shadows, the belly, the trees, the tangerine compote, a baby unaware of our gaze) and ends up being looked at in return. Hasn't cinema always been a matter of exchange of gazes? (Comolli, 2004), or feedback -to use a word from Bullot?

Bullot explored this exchange (of gazes) over three more films over ten years.⁶⁵ However, this filmic pact (and others that crossed many other films of his) was somehow no longer sufficient, or it got exhausted and needed to be transformed into something else. In our conversation, he remarked precisely that it took him ten years to evolve

⁶³ In English *The Subject's Calculation. Filmed Diary 1*.

⁶⁴ If I think about it now, it could have perfectly been one of the films cited, if not invoked, by the *Lovesong*.

⁶⁵ *Oh, Oh Oh, Journal filmé 2* (2000-2002); *La Belle Étoile. Journal filmé 3* (2002-2003) and *Tohu-Bohu. Journal filmé 4* (2004-2007).

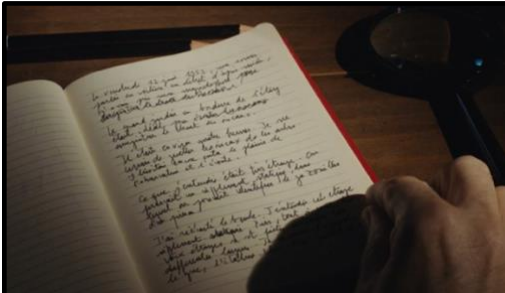
towards the performative dimension of cinema, another kind of exchange or feeding back loop, a 'more alive' one. The turning point was that conference in Lausanne after his dad had passed away.

Some days before our conversation in 2023, Bullot sent me a link to his latest film, *Langue des oiseux*, and I watched it.⁶⁶ In the form of a musical, both ironic and severe investigation, punctuated by scientific insights and ornithological observations, the film explores the powers of translation and a desire for communication that will prove impossible or hopelessly lost. In a dystopian proposal, a female narrator, *à la Chris Marker*, situates the viewer in the past, which is the future: 'I will tell you a story from before. It was before. Before the sixth extinction, before the disappearance of animals'.⁶⁷ From that moment, it unfolds as a fable where different kinds of translators of the language of birds try to understand -with very little chance of success- the catastrophe when it is too late. Finally, a question will be left hovering: 'Who will testify for the bird?'. It is a film about an inevitable loss. It is a sad film.

In the film, there is a sequence in which Bullot portrays himself as giving a lecture. He listens to a recording of people translating the birds into different languages, and (of course) they do not know what birds say. He has a notebook. And he reads out loud the notes he keeps in it. He looks at black and white photographs and talks about her mother's past. As Bullot explained in the interview, she had just passed away one day before the shooting. The viewer does not have this information, yet it is striking how the two film-performances I referred to relate both to a recent death. While telling his mother's past in the film, Bullot speculates: 'Maybe birds, when they sing, they bring messages from her and others that are not alive anymore'. This sentence, which, according to him, was written before her passing, acquired another meaning, another weight, the same that happened with the question about being alive asked a few days after his dad's passing.

⁶⁶ The title would be *The Language of Birds* in English.

⁶⁷ This is how the introductory text from the film *Langue des Oiseaux* (2021) begins. The entire text can be found (in French) at <https://www.lecinemadeerikbullot.com/films/langue-des-oiseaux>.



Figures 105-110. Frames belonging to the moment when Bullot, emulating a lecture performance talk about his mum's death. *Langue des oiseaux* by Érik Bullot (2021).

At this point, two crucial questions are therefore raised. One is the seemingly inescapable link between the sense of loss and the performance. The second addresses the possibility that -should the lecture (performance) potentially replace the film- the film itself may take the form of a lecture.⁶⁸ It is not only the fact that this particular scene is written and staged as if it were a lecture performance. The entire film proposal, constructed upon the feedback loop idea, continues the exploration Bullot carries out with his performative practice. As he explained, in a live performance, he can feed on the spectators' presence and reactions. He was inspired by this experience to structure *Langue des Oiseaux* through encounters with several characters who feed one another, as in an *exquisite corpse*.

⁶⁸ This question is the core of the lecture performance called *Traité d'Optique* (2017), which eventually became a *conventional* film.

Similarly, lecture performance will influence Di Tella's cinema, as his most recent film demonstrates. His film *Mixtape La Pampa* (2023) includes the work-in-progress or not-completely-finished quality I addressed in the Third Chapter. Bullot applies in *Langue des Oiseaux* a *mise-en-scène* that connects with or reminds of a performance. In contrast, Di Tella introduces more of the energy of the unfinished, the not-completely-achieved. The viewer listens to his voice-over, narrating a journey while seeing landscape images. Suddenly, someone who enters a room interrupts the voice in the middle of the speech.

The first dislocation for the viewer is the realisation that this voice has not been recorded in a studio while editing (as would be the usual procedure with a voice-over). That interruption, instead, reveals that that voice was (apparently) being recorded for the film in that room at that moment. The second dislocation occurs when he keeps the interruption (the accident) in the film instead of repeating and correcting the recording. By doing it, he introduces the energy of his presence recording the voice (its place and time), and the exposure of that presence, that body to the unpredictable, the unknown, the accident, the mistake. As a result, Di Tella brings the film closer to the openness and uniqueness of the work-in-progress of a lecture performance I have been discussing earlier. He introduces the unfinished. He introduces life.

I could state that these two filmmakers (among the practitioners I have explored for my research and discussed in the Third Chapter) have arguably become my two closest references. There might be different reasons for it. One is that they navigate between documentary films and film-performances, building bridges from one to the other, letting them rub off on each other. Another reason is probably the relevance of the personal aspect to their work. For Di Tella, the matter offered by his life is essential for his films, performances and understanding of creation at large. For Bullot, his personal life is not the main subject of his performances, yet it is definitely the trigger or a key element. Due to life circumstances, they have also become the ones with whom I have come to establish a dialogue, a bond. Between the two, in any case, there is a difference. While Di Tella maintains a playful dimension,⁶⁹ Bullot starts from the wound, even a certain trauma, from a strong feeling of loss, both personally and cinematographically.

⁶⁹ One of Di Tella's great references is the Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges, who would explore the impostures of the self, an irresolvable paradox (the writer will always be two, inevitably: the one who lives and the one who writes about what is lived) full of an ironic sense, also playful. See, for example, his text 'Borges y yo' edited in *El Hacedor* (1998).

The film-performance, for Bullot, was a way out of cinema. However, it has unexpectedly become a way to return to it with regained vitality, freedom and intimacy. It is not only a question of considering the lecture performance as a form of cinema but understanding and *using* it as a way of rethinking and making films. What seems clear to him is that filmmaking today is already inseparable from a performative logic, from the oscillation between theory and intimacy, physicality and virtuality, projected images and the presence of a body and its staged voice (Bullot, 2023).

The resonance with *Lovesong* is clear: by exploring the sense of loss, the possibility of cinema reappears. In Bullot, the loss of the father or the mother, the loss of feeling alive, the loss of freedom. In my case, the loss of sense of belonging to images, or maybe more precisely to a particular way of making images. I cannot help comparing this regained liveliness Bullot is talking about to my regained sense of belonging. Yet, this regaining is not innocent or straightforward. After leaving, the return inevitably brings something different, something new, something else, maybe something unexpected.

This return to the cinema could not be fully understood without Roland Barthes' text 'Leaving the Movie Theatre'. According to Barthes, the filmic image is a perfect trap which aims to captivate spectators by offering itself as a mirror: 'The image is there, in front of me, for me' (Barthes, 1975/1995, p.420). They would identify themselves in it narcissistically, stuck to the imaginary or ideological discourse in a hypnotic state, fascinated (Barthes, 1975/1995). In the face of this, Barthes would claim the need to detach oneself from the mirror. Filmmakers and thinkers, such as Bullot, have seen in this claim a stigmatisation of cinema: 'Barthes stigmatises the cinema, which he reduces to hypnosis, decoy, ideology' (Bullot, 2020, p.12); I would agree instead with Watts' understanding, for whom Barthes would not really reject the medium but identify and cherish the pleasure provoked by an altered state that lingers beyond the end of the projection. 'The power of cinema would reside not in its capacity to hypnotise us or render us passive but rather in its ability to transform the sensory experience of the world around them' (Watts, 2016, p.68).

Why would Barthes then claim the need to detach oneself from the mirror? Why would the viewer need to wake up from the hypnosis, the dream? When Barthes refers to exiting from the cinema, it is undoubtedly and first and foremost a question of leaving the movie theatre (Bullot, 2020). Once viewers leave the theatre, their sensations expand from the movie screen to everything surrounding them in what could be called an 'aestheticisation

of the world'. The world -life- will become a part of the aesthetic or sensory experience triggered by the screen (Watts, 2016).

Even more, Barthes points to the possibility of modifying the spectator's relationship with the image (Bulot, 2020), in his own words, 'ungluing from the mirror': 'Of course, it is still possible to conceive an art which will break the dual circle, the fascination of film, and loosen the glue, the hypnosis of the lifelike (of the analogical), by some recourse to the spectator's critical vision (or listening)' (Barthes, 1975/1995, p.421).

And what can awaken the viewer from hypnosis and activate their critical gaze and listening? One option would be using Brechtian critical distancing, in which vigilance and lucidity are sharpened (Bulot, 2020), and the viewer enters ideological alertness (Barthes, 1975/1995). Another option would be the theatrical approach used by filmmakers such as Oliveira, who, as Luis Miguel Cintra points out, would use theatre as 'an artifice that wants to be shown as such, that allows itself to be seen, not allowing cinema to become that machine of illusions and escape from our intellectual responsibility as spectators, in the oblivion of ourselves that cinema can so wonderfully become' (Cintra, 2015, p.26). Or the counter cinema practised by filmmakers like Godard and theorised by Peter Wollen, which advocated narrative intransitivity, estrangement, foregrounding of meaning production or self-referentiality, aperture or openness, among others (Wollen, 1972).

Barthes, on his side, 'is looking for a way to break the hypnotic spell of moving [images] other than demystification (...) [and] he finds the way when he allows his body (...) to look beyond the image, toward the more idiosyncratic territory of experience itself (Watts, 2016, p.76), or what could be called a *double fascination*:

[A]llowing oneself to be fascinated twice, by the image and by its surroundings -as if I had two bodies at the same time: a narcissistic body which gazes, lost into the engulfing mirror, and a perverse body, ready to fetishise not the image but precisely what exceeds it: the "grain" of the sound, the room, the darkness, the dark mass of the other bodies, the rays of light [of the projector and the screen], the entrance, the exit

(Barthes, 1975/1995, p.421)

Hence, the relationship with cinema would be twofold: On the one hand, what happens on-screen, the cinematic image and sound, the art kept within the margins. On the other hand, there is what happens off-screen, the surrounding world, and there is 'everything else that constitutes the experience' (Watts, 2016, p.69).

Comolli also described the relationship between the viewer and the screen as suspended or trapped between these *two realities*. The screening room and the screen. These two poles, consciousness (seeing the projection) and illusion (projecting oneself into this projection), contradict each other, yet they are in a relationship of reciprocal necessity. 'Every spectator is in a place where neither belief nor illusion can be absolute nor complete without an *outside*' (Comolli and Sorrel, 2015, p.175), and the viewer's gaze will oscillate between these two possibilities. This in-between, or in Barthes' words, this double fascination, would be what cinema is all about, its founding paradox: believing and not believing simultaneously.⁷⁰

Assuming this unavoidable paradox, while Comolli seems inclined to prioritise the belief, 'The spectator entering a cinema mobilises his desire to believe in lures and artifice' (Comolli and Sorrel, 2015, p.173), Barthes somehow needs to highlight the awareness of the situation, suggesting a *situated* approach to the viewing experience; he is 'focusing on that blind spot. He acknowledges the importance of the situation in which one watches the film' (Watts, 2016, p.74).

For Comolli, the illusion becomes dominant. Spectators entering a cinema theatre mobilise their desire to believe in this deception and enter the imaginary world. They will momentarily forget the frame in favour of the images, which are then seen as a totality, as the 'whole of the visible'. They will project something of themselves to the screen, seeking an unconscious resonance. The viewer is the one who never stops believing, even when they think that they no longer believe. Everything is fake, an artifice, yes. The viewer knows it, yet this knowledge of the artificiality of the movie theatre is attenuated during the screening as if bracketed. And the viewer will *choose* to believe in the filmic

⁷⁰ This line of thought articulated by Barthes and Comolli originates in what has been called the Apparatus Theory, introduced by Christian Metz and followed by thinkers like Baudry, stating the dual relationship between the physical life of the spectator and the financial and industrial mechanisms of filmmaking. The cinematic institution, that is, all the interdependent operations that set up the viewing situation, includes the technical basis (camera, lights, film, projector), the conditions under which the film is projected (darkened room, seated immobility, front-lit screen, the beam of light coming from the back of the room), the film itself as 'text' (involving various mechanisms for representing continuity, the illusion of real space and the creation of an impression of plausible reality), and the mental machinery of the spectator. The sole purpose of all this is filmic pleasure while inevitably remaining ideologically charged (Stam, 1992).

universe, just like they think in *real* life, which animates *real* bodies and produces *actual* words (Comolli, 2009, Comolli and Sorrel, 2015).

As I reread these lines, amid the process of bringing the writing of the thesis to a close, the latest book by Monroy, whom I mentioned when talking about cinephilia, falls into my hands. Referring to the cinematographic ritual involved in watching films in a dark cinema theatre, he says, in complete harmony with Comolli: 'In the darkness of the cinema, we are surrounded by people, but at the same time, we feel alone with the film, and it is this improbable conjunction that makes the viewing such a singular experience' (Monroy, 2025, p.24). While watching films, we, the viewers, tend to forget our own reality, absorbed and attracted by what is happening on the screen.

Giuliana Bruno's research gives special attention to the idea that a '[f]ilm is always housed. (...) It needs a space, a public house - a movie house' (Bruno, 2007, p.44). In this house, the screen becomes central, as it is the surface where cinema actually happens. Hence, the architecture of the cinema theatre must be dematerialised so that the spectator can concentrate on the screen, and the act of seeing can exist without distractions. In other words, the cinema theatre 'must make itself almost invisible to allow for visibility' (Bruno, 2007, pp.45). And this visibility is what would allow the viewers' minds to fully integrate with what they are watching (Monroy, 2025), losing themselves in an imaginary, endless space (Bruno, 2007). As the experimental filmmaker Peter Kubelka would claim, the perfect machine for watching cinema, or as he called it, the 'viewing machine', would aim, paradoxically, to disappear in the eyes of the spectator so that only the film exists (Bruno, 2007, Hanich, 2016).⁷¹ Beyond specific experiments, it is in cinema's nature, as Berger notes, to 'transport its audience individually, singly *out of* the theatre towards the unknown', shuttling us between a here, the theatre, the place of the audience, and a there, the place in the screen (Berger, 1991, p.475-476). The fact that the screen opens onto a 'there', a place, leads Berger not to consider it as a surface, unlike Bruno. Instead, for him, as soon as the lights go out, the screen becomes a space. What I would call an image-home. One that offers a refuge, a place to go. But also, one in where the viewer cannot stay for too long. If the destiny is to leave the image, sooner or later... Would that mean -following Berger - that the destiny of the image is to become a site of solastalgia?

⁷¹ Peter Kubelka called it Invisible Cinema. Although he theorised it in the 1950s, it was not until the 1970s that he put it into practice at the Anthology Archives in New York, opening a theatre that created the right conditions for the spectator to forget everything but the image and sound emanating from the film.

For Comolli, I was saying, the illusion becomes dominant. An illusion that would be that of inhabiting the space produced by the screen.

For Barthes, the spectator's place would be more on the side of being aware of the artificiality of the situation. Even though they can momentarily enter the story, their awareness of the experience and its physicality will systematically forward their attention *elsewhere*, on the fringes of the film (Bulot, 2020). Barthes turns his attention to it: the movie theatre, its noises, its smell, the seat, the other spectators, their movements, the projector, the projection's imperfections, the screen, the frame, and the soundtrack (Watts, 2016). What interests him is that a viewer is aware of the situation of watching a film and the ritual of cinema, a viewer whose attention (gaze and listening) would be slightly detached (Barthes, 1975/1995).

Slightly detached... While reading about solastalgia, I found a literature review published in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. It identifies critical factors that mediate the relationship between the lived experience of environmental change and solastalgia. In other words, a series of factors affect how and to what degree solastalgia presents itself and becomes visible. The review recognises four mediating factors of *solastalgic* experiences: uncertainty, mistrust, powerlessness, and "loss of sense of place attachment" (Galway et al., 2019).

I remember that when I came across this text, something struck me. These concepts resonated with others commonly used by theorists and practitioners to designate the contemporary relationship with the documentary image, conferring the exact contradictory nature of solastalgia. I had primarily worked with them. For example, the uncertainty explored by filmmakers and theorists such as Hito Steyerl (2007), the mistrust theorised by Didi-Huberman (2008, 2009) and cinematically confronted by Harun Farocki (2003, 2013) or the powerlessness denounced and reflected by Jean- Louis Comolli (2012, 2016).

To tell the truth, during my research, I had been concerned that the fourth mediating factor, the "loss of sense of place attachment", did not find an immediate resonance in my work, knowledge or experience of documentary filmmaking until then. As happens in so many aspects of life, I could not see for some time what now appears evident. Was not 'loss of sense of place attachment' another way to say detachment? Therefore, was not the detachment proposed by Barthes the fourth solastalgic symptom?

Fascinated and trapped by the situation, he -and the viewer- keeps a distance from the image instead of inhabiting it. 'I am hypnotised by the distance' (Barthes, 1975/1995, p. 421), he would write. In his case, it could be argued that the distance is voluntary and not imposed, while in solastalgia, the distance would be more of an unwanted imposition by circumstances. Yet, reading Comolli, it is clear that the existence of this cinematic distance is also not a choice. It is in the cinema's nature, imposed by the filmic experience. Illusion and artificiality can only coexist. Distance included. It is then a matter of attention, of degree of belief. While Barthes focuses on the illusion's rupture, Comolli concentrates on how this illusion operates and keeps returning to the same concern formulated in multiple ways in several of his texts: How far can illusion coexist with the deception without losing faith in the images and without having the desire or the need to escape from the lure? (Comolli, 2009; Comolli and Sorrel, 2015).

Watts would say Barthes' answer to this question can only be crossed by a certain melancholy (Watts, 2016). His claim for an awareness of the lure and his need to make it visible entails the omnipresence of the threat of losing faith. That made him a thinker of the distance, a solastalgic thinker par excellence! Yet, what in Barthes would remain somehow implicit in the spectator's gaze, in the *Lovesong* becomes 'real'; the film literally leaves the screen, overflows it, and spreads out, leading towards what I would call a displaced cinema.

There is an image on the screen—an image trapped inside the frame that I cannot inhabit anymore and to which I long to return, an image that is an island. Barbara Cassin wrote a book on the possibilities of returning titled *Nostalgia*, which she significantly rounded off with the subtitle *When Are We Ever at Home?* In that book, she said that images, also ideas, can be islands, like the physical one Ulysses once inhabited and left and then needed to return to. And, like with any island, any idea, one can see the edges. There is a shore, an outline that makes it finite, a boundary between inside and outside (Cassin, 2016).

Inside, there is an image. On the outside, a voice. A voice, that emerges -also- as an idea, a thought, a train of thought (another island?). It offers a world perspective (the world engendered by the screened image). It is a voice previously written and read aloud from a table at the side of the screen, a table with a chair and a table light. As Mary Ann Doane remarks, a voice engenders a body, or even better, a voice needs to be anchored by a given body. And the body must be anchored in a given space (Doane, 1980). It is my body, sitting in that chair, with the written text on the table, illuminated by the light.

The body reads, declaims, gesticulates. Acting as any other *voice-over*, it displays - Doane again - what is inaccessible to the image and what exceeds the visible (Doane, 1980). When it has time, sometimes, the voice, or more precisely, the body within the voice, looks at the images, sometimes at the audience.

There is no screen without a frame, and no frame without the edges of the frame: beyond these edges, the projected image shifts into the non-visible, the out-of-frame, materialised by black bands that connect with the room's darkness (Comolli and Sorrel, 2015). What was out of the frame or beyond its edges and was partially present, sometimes accidentally and sometimes voluntarily (the screening room), has become the film, the filmic space, the film's universe. The film is not on the screen anymore; the film (the spoken, the returning, the displaced film) happens between the image (or the screen) and the text (or the voice, the body).⁷²

When the body leaves the screen and occupies the space outside it, the 'here' and 'there'⁷³ that result from the invitation to inhabit a filmic space that I have been describing in this section becomes a 'here' and 'now', the 'here' and 'now' addressed by Di Tella or Orlow, among others.

The presence of the body (outside the screen) will make the separation between speech and image visible. It will make the distance, the rupture, and the wound evident. The image is there, and the voice is here, emanating from a source outside the frame. Separated, they force a dialogue that *spatialises* their relationship, which is not hierarchical anymore, provoking without a choice, an uncanny effect, and a displacement (Doane, 1980).

Historically, the subordination of the voice to the screen as the site of the spectacle's unfolding has made vision and hearing work together in manufacturing the 'hallucination' (Doane, 1980) -Comolli would say 'illusion' (2004; Comolli and Sorrel, 2015) and Barthes

⁷² It is a three-way relationship: the images (and sounds) on the screen, the presence of the body and its voice in the screening room (with the other stage elements at its service, light, props...) and the spectator. In this space, as I stated in the protocol, the filmmaker's work is revealed and laid bare; the game's rules are shared, avoiding the illusionism of cinema, and the spectator will always be aware of the pact. Shared responsibility.

⁷³ The coexistence of the 'here' and 'there' is also a coexistence of a 'now' and 'then', 'presence' and 'absence', 'body' and 'spirit', even 'body' an 'image'. And in reality it is not just that these opposites coexist, but that they do so with a tension, a tug-of-war, a back-and-forth that is essential for the filmic pact as described by authors such as Barthes and Comolli.

would refer to the 'wholly sensory world' (1975/1995). Now, the voice *out of place* designates a new understanding of the filmic space, one where the screen becomes a dramaturgic element and not the sole container, receptacle, physical and mental frame.

Besse argues that to inhabit is to draw a limit that will define a distance between me and the others, a distance that needs to be adjusted, kept and that ultimately will distinguish my space, the space that I inhabit, the space called home (2013). By leaving the image projected on the screen, the voice creates a new space and with it a 'new' distance (between image and voice). As a result, the filmic space, the home, shifts from being (only) within the limits of the projected image to being located outside, to the side. The screen and the body have become two boundaries that have opened up a space between them: a new filmic space.

From my experience performing *Lovesong*, the audience divides the gaze, sometimes looking at the screen and sometimes at the body on the stage, floating in between. This back-and-forth movement fuels the expectation and the tension that something may happen, even if it doesn't. The film is alive between two presences: image and voice, screen and body. The displaced or solastalgic gaze⁷⁴ travels from one (the image on the screen) to the other (the word spoken by the body outside the screen), and the film exists in between, in the gap, in the open crack or wound between them. The distance (between one and the other) engenders a threshold, a transition zone that opens up, which, following Besse, is potentially inhabitable because it actually acts as a departing space, a space where something can originate, take place, a platform where an encounter can occur (2013). An encounter between the voice, the image and the spectator.

It was my third year of research, and I had to go through one of the milestones of the process, the confirmation. It consists of a written and oral presentation of the work. The supervisory team and an external examiner attend this decisive ritualistic event. My external examiner was Maria Walsh, a Reader in Artists' Moving Image at Chelsea College of Arts, and she pointed out something that, as can be seen in previous Chapters, became crucial for my reflection: cinephilia was key to understanding the bond I had built with images over time. Another of her reflections raised the connection between my conception of detachment as a solastalgic filmic form and the filmmaker Chantal Akerman. I confess that, although I knew Akerman's work and, more than that,

⁷⁴ Although in the thesis I have not elaborated the term solastalgia in relation to the audience, I allow myself to use it here to qualify a type of gaze, the solastalgic gaze, which is the gaze that would correspond to a solastalgic image.

I admired her films and her understanding of cinema, I did not see the connection at that moment. The reason was that, as I have developed in the first Chapters, I tried to approach solastalgia not as a filmic subject matter but as a concept to be applied to the relationship with image making. Akerman's films address the loss of a sense of belonging thematically, exploring the broken bond with what could be called home (represented by places, sexual identity, love, memory, heritage, and also, or maybe above all, her mother). It is not until now, in the process of rewriting this text, that I realise that Akerman's detachment is not just about the content of her films. It is also about their form. Akerman's cinematic approach really explores, in some of her films, how to make visible this tension, this wound or crack, this broken link, finding ways to open up this space between image and voice, places and body. Detachment is not only a theme; it also speaks to the relationship between her and the images she makes.

There is one film, *Là-bas* (2006), in which she films from the window of an apartment in Tel Aviv. She has been invited to teach, and someone lent her a flat. Yet, despite all her plans in the city, she hardly goes out. Because of life anxiety (something that runs through almost all her films) and also because of the circumstances of her stay (a bomb explodes and a certain sense of vulnerability sets in), she stays locked indoors most of the time. She looks at the world from the same living room window. And films it.

The image shows the building in front of her window, her neighbours, some workers, the sky. They are glimpses, fragments from the outside world, they are barely what can be seen from a window frame.⁷⁵ Meanwhile, spectators listen to Akerman's voice. A voice that appears off-screen, in a diaristic fashion. She talks about the rejection of going out, of the (im)possibility of feeling at home despite the past, her family history, and her Jewish origins. She talks about the bomb that exploded, an attack. She talks about fear, vulnerability, fragility. She talks about everyday banalities; she had eaten a loaf of bread, or she would need to replace a broken glass. She talks about what she sees through the window. She answers two or three phone calls.

While sharing feelings and reflections, her voice shows a self-awareness of detachment, dissociation, distance, and displacement between her and the world, between the body and the image. This rupture is made clear by the fact that something appears between the voice and what is supposed to be seen through the window. I said the image shows

⁷⁵ There are two exceptions when the filmmaker (and or with her camera) leaves the apartment. In one occasion, she descends to the beach. In the other, she goes up to the terrace.

the building in front, the neighbours, some workers and the sky. But it is not that simple. Spectators see all these, and simultaneously they do not. What they see is a half-concealed world. What they see is basically the blind that covers the window, a sort of membrane that interposes itself between the world outside and the world inside, between Tel-Aviv and Akerman, between the image she apparently seeks to show (and ultimately she does not show completely) and the place where she and her camera are, the place of her voice, between the image and us, spectators.



Figures 111 to 112. Frames from *Là-bas* by Chantal Akerman (2006)

Yet, this membrane, by veiling, does not entirely obscure our view of the city. It reveals it differently, filtered, incomplete, and intuited. As Bruno argues, it 'is not a barrier (...) but a transitive site, a threshold' (2022, p. 230). A threshold that distances spectators from the filmed world (which seems unreachable) and paradoxically connects them to it. Is this coexistence of distance and connection, not the twofold relationship with cinema that Comolli and Barthes describe?

In Bruno's words, cinematic projection fundamentally relies on distance to achieve closeness. She talks about a 'distant intimacy' (Bruno, 2014, 2022).⁷⁶

By deliberately placing the screen between the world and the viewer, Akerman directs the viewer's gaze towards this screen (rather than towards the image), making the viewer aware that cinema, by its nature, simultaneously distances and brings closer.

Indeed, the image does not seek to describe or designate the outside world. What is portrayed in *Là-bas* is precisely nothing but the screen and our relationship with it, a relationship that designates the pact between image (or film) and viewer. A blind, a membrane, a threshold... *the screen*.

⁷⁶ She also uses 'distant proximity'.

As a threshold and following Besse's claim discussed above about the idea that one inhabit transition zones, the screen itself has become inhabitable (2013), a space of perception and reflection left to the spectator to have his own experience, feel, and search. The filmic space is not what is seen through the window but the window itself, a window-screen. Or, more accurately, it is as if Akerman had realised that filmic space could no longer be within the confines of the screen and had to be moved, figuratively speaking, to the space between the screen and the viewer.

When watching *Là-bas*, one can feel Akerman's voice as if she were sitting beside (and not in front nor inside the image), trusting her most personal, insecure, fragile thoughts, thoughts that, let's remember it, refer to a certain disconnection, thoughts that certify a detachment, loneliness, distance.

However, if I think of or remember the film, I have a strong corporeal feeling which makes this thought a bit more complicated. It is true that it is as if Akerman was sitting next to me, to us, viewers, telling us what she does, thinks and sees, reacting to her own images. Yet, maybe it would be more accurate to say that she -her voice- is not really in our place, she is not really sitting next to us, but we witness her presence in front of her own images, like in a chain. The image / the blind / the voice / the viewer. The voice would be trapped in between the veiled images and us. Or I should say, it would be a bridge, the needed link or light for us to know where to look at.

She is somewhere in-between, definitely in a close distance to the viewer, one that allows her to whisper while projecting herself not in the image, not in the outside world, but in the screen itself. Similarly, viewers cannot project themselves in the image but in the relationship Akerman has built with them and with the image. We have become her confidants in front of the same image. Here is the home we can be in, suspended in between, on this side of the screen. Not in an image (of the world) that has become impossible to reach. In our (broken) relationship to that image.

This loss of a sense of belonging not only to the world but also to its image certifies, in *Là-bas*, an inevitable failure: a de-territorialisation that refers to physical, historical, inherited, desired spaces and also filmic ones (Moreno Pellejero, 2024). There is no more possible connection between the 'here' and 'there'. The 'there' is half-concealed, impossible to inhabit with our gaze. What we have, as viewers, is a 'here' and a 'now' guided by a voice that keeps us on this side of the image.

The blind, the membrane, the threshold... makes the distance between image and voice visible. This visibility brings awareness of the disconnection between 'here' and 'there', placing the viewer 'here'. And as a consequence, the threshold becomes inhabitable (by the gaze) and the lure, the crack, the wound, evident. All this would make Akerman a filmmaker of the detachment, of the rupture, a *Barthesian* filmmaker, a solastalgic filmmaker.

However, in *Là-bas*, the film is kept inside despite the threshold, the rupture, the detachment between image and sound, and the loss of sense of belonging... the film exists inside a projected image which takes a form of a film. I mentioned before that in Barthes, this exit from the screen is something that occurs in the viewer's gaze.

This is how I perceive *Là-bas*. The film has not left the screen... at least for the time being. It should be noted that, like other Akerman films, it also has a video installation version. I understand these versions as a sign of a desire or need to find a way for the film to leave the screen, to overflow it, to extend it, to displace it. Today, I find this to be an explicit feature of *Lovesong*. Quite unintentionally - at least not on a conscious level - it has become a literally displaced film, cast out from the screen.

I read or re-read 'Leaving the movie theatre' while making the *Lovesong*, and I am sure it influenced my approach to the Seventh Movement, the last one. I had opened that box to explore why I left creation behind and why I left my own filmmaking. In the middle of the process, it was clear that this quest could only mean creating again. In other words, my exploration and discovery process transformed into an attempt to go back (a returning film). The image became bigger from one Movement to another as if it was growing, pushing its limits, expanding them until occupying the entire screen, creating the illusion of an inhabitable space. Until that moment, my voice belonged to my body and occupied the stage, the off-screen, the displaced filmic universe. Yet, inspired by Buster Keaton and Ingeborg Bachmann, this voice will dare to cross the border and, hypnotised by the newly enlarged image, will enter the screen. My body would disappear from the stage: I would switch off the lamp, stand up and sit among the viewers. The only trace of me will be my voice. A voice inside the image. Captured by it. A voice under the spell. A voice in and from the screen.

I now realise that the fact that leaving the stage means sitting among the spectators is significant. I had other options that might have been more practical, such as simply hiding backstage or getting lost in the darkness of the scene, away from the screen's light.

Instead, moving with difficulty in the darkness I descend into the auditorium stalls, sit next to other spectators I can barely see and watch the screen with them. If only for four minutes. Indeed, by doing so, I seem to literally give the image a chance to be inhabited again, not only by my voice (as a filmmaker) but also by my gaze (that of another spectator). It is like I am trying to move from Barthes' wounded awareness to Comolli's faith.

But my voice will not last long in the image (and therefore, I will not last long among the spectators). It will take only a brief moment to realise that it is impossible to go back to the images, to creation, at least not to the same place, not in the same way. And my voice will be ejected out of the projected image, back onto the stage to the side of the screen, displaced from the image. Again. Again. Back to its body.

I began the *Lovesong* during the Pandemic. That new temporary reality did not consciously influence or determine neither the content, the search, or the creative form, yet it definitely conditioned how I would share my work. Even though my references were live performances, I had to perform each of the Seven Movements online. First, due to the confinement. Then, Brexit imposed a new national policy that converted me into a remote student without possible physical access to the university. Each time I created a Movement, my team would watch the edited images on their computer and listen to my voice from the other end, while I was reading live. I also publicly presented the work in progress twice. By then, I had completed and performed the three first Movements online.⁷⁷ And soon, a question would begin to haunt me. If I was performing the *Lovesong* online, what was the difference between what I was doing and a conventional voice-over for a film? The way I was presenting my work did not differ much from showing a film online!

Even though I insisted on understanding *Lovesong* as a live performance, it seemed that this idea was, until then, just that, an idea, a mere illusion that had not taken place and did not seem to be happening any time soon. Should I give in to what seemed self-evident, edit the images and voice, and screen the resulting film instead? I resisted. *Lovesong* sought to explore the (im)possibility of returning to creation. So, even though I did not have the words to name it yet and I had not really had the opportunity to

⁷⁷ The LCC Screen Department, Screen Research Forum, organised the first online session in February 2021. I presented the first three movements and invited Érik Bullof to respond. The second was the same year, some months later. I also presented the three first movements translated into Spanish for an online talk organised by the Film Program of Di Tella's University.

experience it live, my strong intuition was that I could not make a film as I had been making them until then. Making *Lovesong* as a fully contained linear film on screen was as if that return could be an effortless possibility. It was like saying that it was, in fact, possible to make the film I did not make, that it had always been possible. It was as if these twenty years of silence had not happened.

But despite my intuition, I remained trapped for some time between these two possibilities: the performance as a final form and the performance as a prior step to a film, a prelude, an exercise to soften the blow of the return. I ended up doing a small experiment to try to elucidate that diatribe. I had to get over my doubts and feel or understand whether it was really essential for the voice to inhabit a different time and space from the images. Or if, on the contrary, I was being stubborn, and I needed to stop resisting the fact that my voice could become or be understood as a voice-over in an encapsulated film. There was still a long way to go, but enough progress had been made to present my research to my peers at the university. Part of my presentation was a fragment of *Lovesong*, and here came the test: to distinguish my voice presenting the research from my “creative” voice, the one inside my practice, *Lovesong*, I decided to record the latter. That is, I explained the research and showed a fragment of my practice at the end of my presentation. Yet, instead of performing it live, it was pre-recorded.

After a week, while reviewing the recording, I understood that something was lost: the feeling of a voice that is saying from the present, *in* the present, assuming its fragility, exposing itself to the error, being able, potentially, to improvise (even if -following the protocol- it would never do it), an existing voice in the here and now of the encounter with the audience.

From that moment on, I suspected that the *Lovesong* could not take a form other than a performative one, even though I had not yet had the chance to experience it. At that time, I had made the Fourth Movement. There still were three more Movements (the longer ones!) to come. And the confirmation of my suspicion came when I created the seventh and last Movement. When I experienced entering the image, driven by a need or desire, I immediately felt I needed to get out again. The image -the filmic universe I had been facing, rediscovering, sitting next to and suddenly entering- expelled me back to my present. And this moment became the essence of the film-performance, as, in a way, it embodies the answer to the question that triggered it: Is it possible to return?

My voice enters the image and immediately needs to leave it back again.⁷⁸

A voice that says:

The ghosts inhabiting this Lovesong are either dead or absent or have changed their habits. They are almost impalpable beings who never cease to be. They are the other. The ghost is always the other. But no, not always. Now, by entering these images, like the modern Sherlock or the narrator written by Bachmann, I'm afraid that the ghost, suddenly, is me, the last ghost in this story.

A ghost trapped in a world where I don't really belong anymore. And I'm not just talking about the past, this space, these bonds. I am mainly talking about the way of making images, inhabiting and loving them. If the image were a wall, into which I would have entered through this crack, these images would be a very old wall - like that of 'Malina' - a strong wall, from which no one can fall, that no one can break, but at the same time which will never be heard again.

Lala continues reciting her book. Relentlessly. But the sound of these images has been lost. It is impossible to know which poems she is reciting. Because as much as I've come in here, I cannot undo the distance between her and me, between these images, being what they are, and my present, which has remained outside.

The modern Sherlock Holmes, once he has recovered the necklace, unmasked the villain and rescued his beloved, leaves the film, returning to his reality, but not where he left it, but transformed. To enter the cinema to leave it, becoming a different person. Leaving the cinema, the image, the hypnosis, the dream, the miracle...transformed.

Indeed, I cannot remain in this wall that I have entered, miraculously, because the cinema can do everything. You can't go back to the past. I wouldn't want that either.

⁷⁸ This is the only moment in the performance where my voice is registered and included in the video within the image. I have turned off the light on the table. And I have left the stage to join the audience. I will return as soon as the image drives me back.

Actually, what I feel like and what seems right is to sit next to these images, listen to them, and talk to them. Look at them. Touch them. And breathe. Find a different way to inhabit the house. You can't stay here this way.

Wake up!

Fragment from the Movement #7

And there I am, present again, separated from the image, at a distance, detached. Again. If the proposal's central idea was exploring how solastalgia would enable me -as a filmmaker- to create again, in other words, if the proposal's central idea was about trying to come back to creation, to make films again, regaining a filmic voice, in that precise moment, the answer emerges: it is impossible for the voice to inhabit the image again, at least not in the same way. I needed to make that tension between the voice and the image visible, that apparently failed attempt palatable. The only way to do that was to perform the *Lovesong* in front of an audience live. It was the only way to stage the rupture.

My spoken, returning or detached film needed a stage with a screen and next to it a table, a light, the text (well printed and bound), a pencil, a stopwatch and a glass of water. A space in which the image/screen and my body/voice could be side by side, showing the inevitable and indispensable (solastalgic) distance between the two. Not too far away, not too close. A distance that for (only) four minutes would seem to be overcome but that, after that brief period, would end up being eventually reconfirmed.

A distance that, far from being critical, like the commonly politicised distance of lecture-performances, will be of a different kind: Barthes wrote, 'A distance hypnotises me', and he continued, 'which is no longer critical (intellectual), it is, one might say, an amorous distance' (1975/1995, p.421).

4.2. The Lives of a *Lovesong*.

What does an amorous or loving distance mean? In love, there is a displacement by which the true attention is not the loved one, the object of desire, or what Barthes called the lure, anymore but the relationship with that lure (Barthes, 1977/1990). In my *Lovesong*, the true attention is not on the film I could have made twenty years ago anymore but on the broken (loving) relationship with that film, expressed -as I argued in the previous section- by the distance between the image and the voice.

Indeed, a loving relationship elaborates on a distance, a reflexive one. Lovers need distance to understand the feelings that determine the bond. This distance will soon make them doubt and question, turning the (im)possibility of love into the subject of their thoughts (Barthes, 1977/1990).

I had just presented *Lovesong* at the University, and it was Bullo's turn to respond. These are the notes I took:

Erik pointed at the title of the lecture performance: Lovesong. He related it to the medieval Catalan and French troubadour tradition, where the songs had to do with loving from afar, from a distance, without accomplishment and deception. This consideration interests me in two ways: one is introducing distance, which is critical in the research. This distance exists between the (filmic) material and the gaze, the film and reality, between the eye and reality. The second idea that interests me is that the lack of accomplishment somehow entails escaping (future) deception. This is important for or resonates with the unfinished film. A third element, the word 'love' is crucial for the poems, the material, and my relationship with creation, but for now it is not central to the research.

Notes taken by me from Bullo's response
on the 15th of February 2021

In fact, at that moment, I was certain that love was not a central element or a concept to which I needed to pay special attention. It would take some time for me to understand its relevance for the research, becoming evident once the concept of cinephilia entered into the reflection. From then on, I was ready to fully embrace Bullo's connection to the

Catalan poetic tradition. *Lovesong* turned me into a troubadour, singing of love, a love that is inevitably lost and, therefore, a love that is inevitably sung from afar.⁷⁹

Indeed, as Barthes states in *A Lover's Discourse*, the lover can only understand the nature of their love from a distance (1977/1990). A distance that unavoidably will make lovers aware of the language. They can no longer assume it as absolute truth; it comes under question. What is said and what is not said. How and when. Using these or those words. Hence, language will not only be the weapon to express this love but also the terrain of analysing, knowing, struggling and resisting (Lemus Urbina, 2016). To do so, one of the tendencies in lovers' correspondence is to enunciate in a language other than their own: they read or use others' words, cite and quote them. They reflect, or better still, project themselves onto the experiences and narratives of others (Barthes, 1977/1990; Lemus Urbina, 2016). Yet, I suspect it is not only this. It is also the simple and fundamental fact of adopting a different language and gaining the needed distance with it. Borrowing or speaking from another (linguistic) place perhaps allows us to see and understand things better, at least with a different or renewed clarity.

In my *Lovesong*, there is one scene that appears twice. Or, more precisely, my voice recalls the same story twice.

The first time, it appears in Movement # 2. The afternoon light casts the shadow of the trees on the wall of the house. It is interrupted by archive images of the sanatorium in Davos. It lasts for a while. Back to the wall, Lala is seen through the window, busy in the kitchen. Outside, stray cats jump onto the garden table in a blurred image. Meanwhile, the voice says:

In 'The Magic Mountain', Hans Castorp -mirroring Mann himself- visits his cousin Joachim, interned at a Sanatorium in the high mountain, suffering from the same lung infection as Katia Mann.

Time goes by, and for one reason or another, Hans Castorp ends up staying there for seven years with a small wet spot in his lungs himself.

Indeed, time does not pass in that written Mountain as it does in the rest of the world. Its universe somehow reflects the world outside, but

⁷⁹ Troubadour is an Occitan poet. They sang about a beloved impossible to obtain and impossible to forget. The tradition emerged in the South of France in the XI Century and was practised in the South of France, Catalonia, and the North of Italy (Occitan territory) until the XV Century.

simultaneously, it exists in itself, self-sufficient, autonomous, following its own pace, like in an image.

In a scene of the book, one evening, away from the noise of a party, Hans Castorp, who is madly in love with one of the patients, Clawdia Chauchat - tells her: "Let us sit here, close to each other, and look on, as though in a dream. A particularly deep dream".

Hans Castorp uses French to express all these thoughts and feelings because -according to him- translating them into another language allows him to speak without speaking, with a slightly different kind of responsibility, like saying in a dream. Un rêve singulièrement profonde. A particularly deep dream.

Clawdia Chauchat would leave the Mountain the day after.

Fragment from Movement #2

The second time, it appears in movement #7. In the woods, Lala sits among green leaves. She has finished reading a poem, the last poem of the film. She looks at the camera. First smiling, almost flirtatious, then thoughtful. At the end, she looks away. My voice says:

In the second Movement, I refer to the scene between Hans Castorp and Clawdia Chauchat in 'The Magic Mountain'. Hans and Clawdia sit next to each other at the Berhof Sanatorium on the night of Carnaval, and Clawdia is about to depart. At that point, Hans needed to express his love for her in a foreign language - like the birds in this poem - as it allowed him to be closer to the fragility of 'saying without saying', like in a dream, a poem, or a miracle.⁸⁰ It is also a question of courage on his part to dare to say, in that strange language, before it is too late. But is it ever too late?

Fragment from Movement #7

Hans Castorp needed to do two things to speak from the right distance: one, to sit next to his beloved Clawdia Chauchat and the second, to use French, another language, to

⁸⁰ I'm referring to a poem that Lala reads just before: We stood for years / without knowing / at the gates of the forest / Until one afternoon / we set out on the journey through the grove / towards its preaching heart / Then, a lively song of birds / rose / in a strange language/ And deciphering it, we lost it / and in its existence, was given.

express his feelings towards her.⁸¹ As I see it now, I needed to do the same. I or my voice sits next to the image, echoing Hans Castorp sitting next to Claudia Chauchat. Displaced but not too far away, the voice has left the image on the screen and moved a few steps, making the distance between them visible, existing in that distance. And it does it by literally leaving the screen, using the possibilities of performance as a foreign, strange language. This is not all. I use English, just as Castorp uses French. I have written the original voice of *Lovesong* in that strange and foreign language for me, in order to be able to speak. Two strange languages that provide just the right distance. Two distant languages that allow me to see.

I remember the first meeting with the supervisory team. One of the first questions I was asked was 'why'. Why did I decide to undertake a doctorate in English, a language that was not my own and I did not master? Although it is a common language, an agreed place of encounter and communication with others, why choose it as the language of thought and creation to express myself? I answered that pursuing a PhD at an English university had been a long-time dream (a dream again!). That was true, an innocent reason that turned out to be crucial: the only way to gain the distance that would enable reflecting and ultimately returning to creation would be using (an)other language(s).

The images I took twenty years ago are in Catalan. Lala's poetry is in that language, our dialogues too. English momentarily offered a (creative) place for my voice from which to relate to those images made in Catalan, my mother tongue. English became the language that gave me the necessary distance to see. The same happened with performance and film. Performance allowed me to take a step back and get the right distance to reflect on cinema.

Hans Castorp says in *The Magic Mountain*: translating my thoughts and feelings into another language somehow allowed me to speak with a different kind of responsibility. These other languages provided the necessary distance to speak with that other kind of responsibility evoked by Castorp, which, in my understanding, means in this context, speaking with an awareness of the broken bond, the desire or need to restore it and its consequences.

⁸¹ During all these years of work, I have been obsessed with the right distance. But what is the right distance? What if, finally the right distance needs to be described as the loving one? In the second movement, I would add: "[M]aking an image can be like creating a dream in a foreign language, and then sitting next to it as you sit next to the person you love".

The issue is that in the spoken film I do not mention the question of language. The reflection revolves openly (only) around the image-home, with no reference to language as home at any point. However, I realised the importance of the language for my reflection when two things happened in relation with the live performance I did in Buenos Aires in August 2023.

But first, I need to go back in time a little bit. Once I ended the three first Movements (it was August 2021) I received an invitation from Di Tella to present them in his film program at the university in Argentina as a work-in-progress. I felt excited, so I accepted.

The point was that as I had been writing my voice in English, I should translate it into Spanish for the occasion. It was common sense: This is the language I use to work in Argentina, the rest of Latin America, and Spain. And translating the performance to Spanish made it more reachable for a Spanish-speaking audience. Two years after that experience, when I ended the entire *Lovesong* in English (the language of its creation), I presented it live at DocMontevideo first and Buenos Aires afterwards. It was 2023. Hence, I had to translate the remaining five Movements into Spanish. Again, it made all the sense. The result is that there are two versions of the performance: English and Spanish. The Spanish version of *Lovesong*, *a non-existent film in progress* is called *Canción de amor, una película inexistente en proceso*. Both versions contain two languages. *Lovesong* (which is the original version) is in English and Catalan. And *Canción de amor* is in Spanish and Catalan. So, whatever version keeps the idea of distance between a language-home and a foreign language. Therefore, the exploration of an attempted return remained intact. English or Spanish would be the strange and foreign or distant language, a language from where I try to return to a language-home (Catalan) by tracing its footsteps, nurtured by memories of the departure (Bartoloni, 2008).⁸²

In both versions, the moment when my voice enters the screen -emulating Buster Keaton and Ingeborg Bachmann- is a turning point where the return could seem possible. To express that possibility, I am not only disappearing from the stage but allowing the voice to enter the screen and inhabit the image again (travelling from the performance to the documentary film I wanted to make twenty years ago). To do so, I turn the text of my

⁸² Bartoloni calls pure language what I have renamed language-home. There is something with the notion of purity that I understand but prefer not to use for ethical reasons.

voice into Catalan (from the exiled language to the mother tongue or the language-home).

August 2023. I was spending a few months in Buenos Aires and I received a visit from my nephew Marc just when I was going to present the Spanish version of the performance live for the second time, so I invited him. I was afraid; he is a sensitive young man, yet I was unsure if he would connect with the spoken film. When it finished, he was in tears. He was affected by the presence of the garden, which made him think of my father, his grandfather (who passed away some time before and with whom he had a special connection). It was a strange thing, because my father does not appear in the performance, but at the same time there was something logical about it, as perhaps he could recognise something familiar in my approach to the world, to the place, to the garden. But the other reason for his emotion was completely unexpected: the presence of Catalan. My nephew has lived in the United States for many years (he studied there and then decided to stay). Yet suddenly, he realised how he missed his mother tongue; suddenly, he strongly felt the distance of that home-language, of his homeland and he suspected the difficulty, maybe impossibility, to return to it.

That was the first moment when I realised the importance of language concerning my research. My quest for the possibility of recovering creative voice by learning from the concept of solastalgia involved two homes: image and also language as a home. Indeed Foucault defines the language one has learnt since the infancy as 'the only real homeland, the only land where we can walk, the only house where we can take refuge and shelter' (Besse, 2013, p. 228). When Hanna Arendt reflected on what it meant to become a refugee and leave Germany behind as a consequence of the Holocaust, she was unequivocal on this point. The mother tongue, not the land of her fathers, constituted her homeland, which she had to leave behind. What she missed was German, not Germany (Cassin, 2016)...

The second moment when I realised that language was crucial in my research has to do with a video recording I made of the final rehearsal for that Spanish live performance in Argentina. I edited the recording. In it, I read the text in Spanish and it has English subtitles. This recording, in fact, corresponds to the links in the videos you have seen, from Movement #1 to #6.

When I shared this recording for the first time, I have realised something that I did not expect: an apparently insignificant detail - Spanish version with English subtitles- poses

a significant problem. Those viewers who are unfamiliar with Spanish might not be able to distinguish between what is said inside the screen (Lala's poems, our dialogues and finally, my voice when I briefly enter the screen, all in Catalan) and what I say on and from the stage, which is in Spanish. For a non-Spanish speaker viewer, the distance between languages (the language-home and the foreign language) vanishes completely, erased and unified by the English subtitles! This becomes a problem, especially regarding Movement #7, as it makes it difficult to understand what is really happening and its consequences, completely losing its formal and reflective proposal. When I enter the image I am attempting to return to my mother tongues: documentary cinema and Catalan. So, suddenly, language changes. I should say, languages change: the filmic language and the spoken one.

I disappear from the stage. I am no longer sitting next to the image, my voice is no longer outside the screen. It has entered the screen, together with the image. No, inside the image, acting as a voice-over. The images projected are larger than they are at the beginning of the performance, they occupy almost the entire surface and there are no cuts, they are not fragmented or associated with other images. It is as if not only my voice, but also spectators, with their gaze, could enter the image. I speak Catalan instead of Spanish or English, depending on the version.

However, once there, my voice realises that it cannot stay, it cannot breathe, and it needs to leave the image again. It will not last more than four minutes inside. I remember when I was writing that voice. I remember the feeling provoked by the fact that my voice could not stay in the image. It was not an intellectual decision, a choice. I really wanted to stay (I had dreamed about it for so long!) but I really needed to leave, maybe going through what Boym says: 'When exiles return home, they realise that there is nothing homely back there, and they feel more at home in the exilic retreat that they have learned to inhabit. The exile became home and it is the experience of returning to the country of birth that might become unsettling' (Boym, 2001, p.661). As Boym reflects, once a new language is discovered, one can no longer return to a monolingual existence.

Indeed, my voice leaves the screen, and I return to the stage and resume reading from the outside. I am back to the new foreign languages that provide me with the right distance to see: English or Spanish and performance.

The viewer must perceive this connection (or maybe coincidence) between image and language, between filmmaking and speech. Entering the image entails trying to go back

home, both filmically and linguistically. Not being able to remain also means losing them both. This is why the link to the Seventh Movement shows the recording of my presentation live in Reykjavik. It is the English version, and therefore it preserves the two languages, the language that once was home, Catalan, and the strange language, the one from which I intend to return and I will finally go back to, English and performance.

However, staying there, in this new language, will not be so easy either.

Besse recalls that pretending to learn a new language right away is impossible. 'First, we need to be able to settle there, to take advantage of the amenities on offer, to find a place where it is possible to camp for a moment, a shelter or a provisional house, a starting point, an area of familiarity from which we can try to open up new paths' (Besse, 2013, p.227). In this sense, the difficulty of fully articulating English and the specificities of performance hinders my attempt to inhabit them as a new language. But above all it highlights the struggle of leaving Catalan and cinema, especially documentary, behind.

Catalan and (documentary) cinema acted like concrete communities to which I could not help but continue to belong, even if I felt that they were no longer home. The fact that they were my mother tongues made them, as Foucault claimed, actual homelands (Besse, 2013). I grew up and learnt in these tongues (Catalan and Cinema) and according to Katarina Zdjeldar that shaped my abilities in a specific way that made them fit that particular community (Zdjeldar, 2009). When I left, I could not avoid exposing this origin. And this, unavoidably, talked about a wound.

When I speak English, my Catalan accent, grammar, syntax, and rhythm make themselves apparent, undermine any efforts to blend in, and somehow give me away. As Zdjelar affirms, the otherness of the strange language is evident by the imprint of our mother tongue, which never ceases to be with us (Zdjelar, 2009). It will always leave a trace, however subtle it may be. Indeed, as Besse would add, we bear the original language, and no matter how much we desire it, it is difficult, almost impossible, to completely escape from it. (Besse, 2013)

In the same way, *Lovesong*, while being an imploded, expanding film that overflows its assigned original frame - image, body and voice altogether, inside the screen – maintains the narrative structure similar to the kind of plot that one would expect of any film contained within the frame of a screen: a voice, that of the director (mine) who has lost something and goes out in search of it. In the end, what that voice will transmit to the

spectator is what it finds and what it has learned along the way. Indeed, I remember that when I was exploring other lecture performances or films for this research while creating *Lovesong*, I felt a difference caused by the linearity of my voice. *Lovesong* was not a collage, nor did it present a fragmented structure; it did not seek to experiment with form. Momentarily, I came to perceive it as a disconnection from the possibilities of the new language, even as a mistake. Now, I see it differently: when I tried to create the performance, a new language for me, my origins in cinema could not help but become evident. It would not just be a matter of recognising the affinities between the language of performance and specific (historical) approaches to film practice.⁸³ It is about not being able to forget, dismiss or hide the filmic language I come from.

This is how, *my* English and *my* performance bear witness to and reinforce the fact that once the bond is broken, what exists is the space between the place I belonged to and the (only) one from which I can speak now. I cannot return to the first one. I cannot (fully) inhabit the second as if the first was not there anymore. There is no return. There is no oblivion possible, either. Indeed, solastalgia deals precisely with that suspended space crossed by 'the pain derived from a desire to re-connect' (Lloyd, 2016, para. 5) with a place of belonging. A space condemned to exist between two places, the image-home and the body-voice, cinema and performance, Catalan and English.

This betweenness, the movement back and forth between one place and another, between languages, makes the rupture more evident and nourishes the self-consciousness of distance, and thus renders the solastalgic detachment visible.

In practice, this betweenness involves a continuous translation process from one language to the other. There was a first translation: from my thoughts and emotions, which indeed impulsively appear in Catalan to my writing in English.⁸⁴ A second translation was needed for public presentations in Latin America and Spain: from English to Spanish. As each of these languages' particularities, structures and rules manifested a different way to perceive the world (Müller, 2012) translating one to another was not straightforward. On the contrary, opacity, obstacles, impossibilities, and limitations appeared, but not only—also a great potential (Maharaj, 1994). Indeed, in every

⁸³ It would be the case with the essay, which shares many precepts with performative practice as I already pointed out in Chapter Three.

⁸⁴ The inner voice, the one I hear, speaks me in Catalan, my mother-tongue, that is the language of my intimacy (Cassin, 2016).

translation, a transformation occurred when I moved words, ideas, expressions, and emotions from one language into another (Müller, 2012). Some things changed, some got lost, and new things appeared. I wrote the text in English. Once I had the Spanish version, I went back to the English one to revise and translate again certain passages that changed as a result of the previous translation, and so on. These journeys from language to language, back and forth, constituted a process of continuous relations, exchanges and borrowing between languages (Bartoloni, 2008). Thus, from the needed passage between languages, that is, translation, discovery and invention emerged (Cassin, 2019). Translation had become a creative force.

Somehow, my words in my broken English, trying to express my memories, emotions and reflections that appeared (I guess) in Catalan inside me, as an inner voice, seemed to take a different weight, regaining a sense of freedom; they acted as if they were momentarily independent, existing finally in 'an embodied presence of a voice that can reveal itself' (Zdjelgar, 2009, p.75). Indeed, in its otherness, English became a place where I could name things differently, from a distance, with a refreshing sense of discovery, self-awareness and freedom towards new areas of meaning. Boym says that '[s]ome things can only be written in a foreign language' as it functions as an alternative reality, a potential world (Boym, 2001, p.660).

In her text, Zdjelgar writes about a concept that I found very appealing: 'para-poetics'.⁸⁵ It is an accidental use of language by which someone who does not master it,⁸⁶ would employ words or sentences in unexpected arrangements, unconsciously violating the rules of that particular language. Zdjelgar defends, ressonating with Boym, that these 'violations' in the frame of the 'para-poetics', far from being 'imperfections', become a potential (Zdjeldar, 2009). My imperfect English allowed me to find or discover ways to express myself that would not have been possible if I had attempted my *Lovesong* in Catalan. The same happened with performance.

Indeed, there is an analogy between the translation of the different spoken languages in *Lovesong* (Catalan, Spanish, English) and the translation from cinema to performance, from one medium to another, a translation between languages of practice. Not really

⁸⁵ Para-poetics is a term coined by Clark Lunberry, an American teaching English in Japan, to describe the poetic force conveyed by the broken English of his Japanese students.

⁸⁶ It could be a learner with little knowledge but also someone who has forgotten the language for any reason (Zdjeldar, 2009).

knowing how to deal with that new medium enabled a space of poetic existence. I remember an interview with Paul B. Preciado about his film *Orlando. My Political Biography* (2023). He said that it was precisely not knowing what he was doing, knowing little or nothing about filmmaking that gave him the freedom to do what he did.

According to Daniela Cascella, an Italian writer writing in English, there is the assumption that the 'original' language is the one that can speak the truth, the one that can be reliable (Cascella, 2023). I can relate to that! I admit that I tend to speak in Catalan when talking to babies and animals, even if there are only Spanish or English speakers around. Catalan is the language that appears when certain inner and uncontrollable emotions impose themselves, when I am tired, sad or angry. Yet, as Cascella will explore in *Chimeras*, that assumption should not be made without recognising it as a more complex and nuanced situation.

Indeed, writing in English implied and showed a loss of attachment to my original voice,⁸⁷ and as Cascella argues, that loss of attachment inevitably put me in a vulnerable place (Cascella, 2023). The same would happen with performance. And this vulnerability did not only come from the loss itself and the struggle to overcome it. It had to do with something else, something more.

To refer to the difficulty of existing in creation, the impossibility of writing, of saying, Cascella mirrors in a verse by the Argentinian poet Alejandra Pizarnik: 'I cannot speak with my voice, but I speak with my voices'.⁸⁸ The inability to speak with a single, coherent voice makes her transform her voice -the *I*- into a set of multiple, contradictory voices that represent her. Cascella sees in this inability one of Pizarnik's constants: the tendency to erase herself (Cascella, 2022). Indeed, the addition, the confluence of all these voices can lead to think of a concealment or silencing of one's own voice. It is not for nothing that Cascella calls her the 'poet of silence'. Yet, what seems a runaway through the plurality of poetry becomes, in reality, a reinvention: dispersing her voice in the voices of the writers she inhabited becomes a way, her way, of writing (Cascella, 2022, p.17).

⁸⁷ A loss of attachment that, as I have already discussed, provides the needed force and freedom to find a way to speak (again), unexpectedly opening up so many creative possibilities. As well as the self-awareness that would create the right distance to see.

⁸⁸ This verse belongs to the poem "Piedra Fundamental" by Alejandra Pizarnik edited in the poetry collection *Extracción de la piedra de locura*, first published in 1968 (I have read it in an edition from 2016).

Indeed, I feel that my voice in *Lovesong* shares this plurality in its content, as it invokes different voices, all those that have illuminated the way, that have inspired me, that have shaped my thinking. It invokes them and somehow merges them into my own, without hiding their origin. Multiple voices in one. But this plurality is also visible in the very construction of the voice. It does not and could not exist in just one of the languages I have signaled (linguistic and filmic) but in their plurality, their coexistence and, as I have already mentioned, their in-betweenness, the passages that connect and distance them simultaneously.

I remember one of the conversations with the supervisory team in the early stages. I was questioned as to why I stopped creating. Among others, a reason emerged: I admired the filmmakers I admire so much that somehow I got blocked; I would feel that there was no more space to talk. I erased myself. And maybe I could only reappear and reinvent when, once I left, I got the sufficient distance. A distance that was maybe provided by time but also and especially by the use of foreign languages that would make me move back and forth from then on. A distance that became right maybe due to the lack of knowledge in these new territories, this in-between cinema and something else, this between spoken languages. Not here. Not there. But, in-between, moving back and forth. The feeling that there was room for invention, invention and mistake, room for using my *voices*, felt like a green light, maybe a legitimation. It allowed me to talk like in a dream, with another kind of responsibility and sense of lightness, freedom and even boldness.

And, in any case, this 'not-really-knowing-how' turned essential to understand in what way translation is one of the instruments to reflect on the distance provoked by a solastalgic rupture with the image and, by doing so, to regain the lost poetic and political voice.

When I was writing in English, in a mental translation process, I had no choice but to translate what I wanted to say into that new language. Not translate, but transfer. 'Transfer' is a good word, and it adds a relevant nuance to the concept of translation. To transfer is less a substitution or replacement of words than as a transferral of a word and a language into another language. Transferring -from the Latin *transferre*- means taking something from one place to another (Bartoloni, 2008). It is an act of movement that can go both ways. From one language to the other. And the other way around. It implies that both languages (the 'original' and the foreign) coexist. The lives of the *Lovesong*. Catalan, on the one hand. English (or Spanish), on the other. The film I could have made, on the one hand. The performance that exists today, on the other. And in between, a

distance that can be traced. And each trace drags and brings, leaves a trail, something that remains and reveals itself, something that will be recognisable.

Maybe it was because of this distance to be walked back and forth that, unconsciously, I needed to create the protocol to enter into the performance language and exist there: the protocol as a guide to avoid getting (too) lost. And now, understanding my voice, not in translation, not believing that it can become something else, but in transference, that is, recognising itself in between, in movement, a concept is gaining strength: exile.

Exile happens when, once uprootedness has occurred, there is the realisation of the impossibility of returning (Cassin, 2016). Exile comes from the Latin *exsul* and commonly means to be 'a person banished from a place': ex- meaning out and sul, land. 'Out of a land'. Yet, apparently, this is not its *true* origin. Exile would really come from *exul*, which, with time, mutated to *exsul* (Hochman, 2018).

Following this theory, Jean-Luc Nancy would reinterpret the word: 'What is the exile exiled from? It is not from the ground (ex solum), but from one's own (exulare)' (Hochman, 2018, p.9). But what is the own? Nancy would say the land, the family, history, tradition and affections (Hochman, 2018). In line with the research, I would say that 'the own' could be understood as the sense of home and belonging. And under the light of solastalgia, I would add that one could feel exiled resulting from the transformation of a landscape, resulting from a wounded image-home. The exiled, therefore, would be the one who cannot return to him or herself. The one who cannot regain the sense of belonging to a wounded image-home...

I began *Lovesong* trying to understand why and how my bond with the image-home had been broken or wounded. This questioning opened the possibility of returning, which will unexpectedly find a main obstacle: the awareness of a distance that cannot be bridged. The distance between image and voice. The distance between languages. Indeed, the return might not be possible.

Yet, who said *returning* meant returning to what was or was meant to be? Who said that creating again was about making cinema the way I made it? Who said that returning to the wounded home-image meant pretending to inhabit it in the same way I did before that wound? Or to use my mother tongue, my home-language, the language I used to dream in the same way I used to use it?

In one of his early writings about solastalgia, Albrecht suggested that solutions would come from actions aimed at protecting, repairing and restoring 'home'. For him, that would mean strengthening the endemic and weakening the alien. In other words, after the diagnosis, the objective would be to negate solastalgia and recover what had been lost in the first place (Albrecht, 2005).

However, I dare say that here, solastalgia, as a creative force, has shown that it is not about going back and trying to restore what existed. It is not about mending the wound or learning to cope with it. It is not about negating solastalgia. On the contrary. It is about recognising it, embracing it and daring to transform it into something else.

This is what hooks refers to when talking about cinema and its potential to make magic, to change things, to take the real and turn it into something different before our eyes (hooks, 2009). And this is also what Lala writes about in her poem on the fountain:

Golden Fountain
remedy
that calms
the most anxious thirst,
in what hiding places
tell me
I have to find you
if nowhere I can find
fulfilment?

In vain
I carry the jug
through the stony field...

But not in vain:
on every stone
the mine of gold.

Not in vain: on every stone the mine of gold.

I am going through the last rewritings of the thesis, and I found a book in my village's bookstore. It is in a Catalan regional dialect, one spoken in my homeland, or more

precisely, my mum's land. The book is called *Lo mig del món (The middle of the world)* written by Roser Vernet. Between memories, stories and reflections, it tells the relationship between the author and her landscape, one she has returned to after living for a long time in exile. In the book, she asks, 'Who is rooted to whom: the exile to you or you to the exile?' (Vernet, 2023). After assuming the impossibility of returning to the world left behind, she admits that existing outside allows one to find something of oneself. And even though the returning attempts will take place, one departs again. Back and forth. In an endless transference. And that foreign place, that distance, that otherness eventually turns into a kind of refuge, a new kind of home.

Therefore, an exiled, the *renewed* filmmaker does not try to fix the wound or overcome the distance but finds a way to transform it, turning their goal from returning home to founding a new one. Yet, this new one is not completely away; it is not entirely new; it is also made of bits from the one they left behind; it is somehow close; this is what the gold mine would be. This is also what Varda achieved with her huts, transforming failure (a failed film that almost made her give up and leave cinema) into happiness (a new way of inhabiting cinema). By turning the cinema into a hut, she rebuilt her home.

Ulysses aimed to return to the home he left behind discovering that this return is not entirely possible. While Aeneas -another ancient hero- defeated by the loss of his home, Troy, and guided by a prophecy and his father's ghost (destiny and ghosts working together again. How could it be otherwise?) ends up founding a new home in Italy.

Similarly, displaced from the screen, speaking another language, what is recovered is not the home I left, but a new sense of home, since we are really at home '[w]hen we are welcomed, we ourselves along with those who are close to us, together with our language, our languages' (Cassin, 2016, p.63).

This is how *Lovesong* ends:

The last tape, "Liebeslied VII in Roman numbers", contains only 9 minutes and 38 seconds of images. In them, there is just the garden, more precisely, some parts of the garden.

It is the end of Autumn. We are alone. The house is closed. Lala is not there. Only the garden and the eye.

The first images of this 9 minutes 38 seconds are concentrated on the wisteria, which will start dancing with the yellow tree in a few moments. The first time I saw it, I thought of how this Lovesong began and the 26th of the Goldberg variations.

It was spring when I arrived in Buenos Aires to live a few months ago. Here, I resumed editing Movement number Five, which I started in Barcelona. And from here, from this window, from this unexpected home, I kept working on numbers six and seven.

To make this "Lovesong, a non-existent film in progress", I have followed a strict protocol from the very beginning. The protocol has actions, rules and something I called "disclaimers". The actions were. First, watch the material in order. Second, whenever something pricked me, I'd stop and react, which meant I'd edit the image, associating it with other materials; and third, to write the text. Actions two and three were intertwined until I finished the editing, getting what I have called 'Movements'. All these actions are repeated until the end of the tapes, or what is the same, until the end of Movement #7. One of the rules, there are six, is to respect the viewing order without cheating. I have to confess that I did cheat just a little. As I progressed with the tapes, as the end drew near, I needed to know what would come next...

It is not a serious matter to cheat or to cheat oneself. Indeed, in creation, it is sometimes necessary to do so to find certain truths. In any case, the wisterias we just saw dancing in Lala's Garden appeared for me -no cheating- at the same time as these trees. They are not wisterias, yet they are also dancing.

Black screen. The credits music comes in.

It's 'Hurt' covered by Johnny Cash.

4.3 Stilling / Stealing Time.

In the First Chapter, I wrote, quoting Askland and Bunn, 'Solastalgia is a concept that explores place-based diseases or distress' (2018, para.1). Place-based. Effectively, the place in solastalgia is central. And it is not only because it deals with its loss, the loss of a place, but also because this lived experience exists and manifests rooted in a 'here and now' centring all the attention on the relation between individuals or communities with a place, a landscape, a home.

However, solastalgia is also a matter of time. Therefore, while this research started from and privileged the spatial nature of solastalgia, I need to return to this temporal dimension: time is a fundamental part of the equation.

There is the past, as memories of the place are implied in that loss. And there is a future, as it is a loss that will inevitably affect any possible future projection. In the presence of solastalgia, there is a strong sense of a missing past and a missing future, but in their absence, they are incredibly present. And between the past and the future, the solastalgic present is crossed by transformation, or using an expression that appears in the First Chapter, an "unwanted change". Following Albrecht (2005, 2019) and Lloyd (2016), for solastalgia to manifest itself, there must be time for a transformation or, more precisely, two transformations: that of the landscape's unwanted change, which will provoke a rupture in the belonging relationship. And that of the people who inhabit it inevitably transformed due to that rupture.

This emotional journey of solastalgia, showing a transformation from the past to the future, might be the most apparent -maybe relevant- role played by time in the rupture of the sense of belonging: changes happen *over time*. Yet, time inherent to transformation is not the only way time crosses Albrecht's concept. In his book, *Earth Emotions* (2019), he also refers to time as a sign of conflict or clash (opposed forces were coexisting -and colliding- *at the same time*), as a mark of the past (*there was a time* when things were different), also as a mark of the present (*at a time, our time, or your time* when addressing to the younger generations) and even a promise or a menace (*there is still time* versus *there is no time*).

However, I do not aim to explore all these time dimensions here. Instead, there is a particular temporal aspect that seems crucial to the focus of my research. Solastalgia paradoxically transformed from a way of understanding a creative loss to a way of

returning to creation. This transformation could be possible through a certain detachment or distancing—first between image and voice, then between languages, and now concerning time.

There is one moment in Albrecht's book that can be read: 'If you take the time to look, you will notice that the natural ecosystems on the coastal plain are also in deep distress' (Albrecht, 2019, p. 169). 'If you take the time to look, you will notice'. This is the time provoked by solastalgia that interests me: the time of the rupture, the time of the awareness, the time that creates the conditions to open a (physical and mental) space to look. A suspended time, the time of the wound, I referred to in the First Chapter. Stilled time, stolen time.

Raymond Bellour says that cinema has always had trouble analysing itself (1990). By nature, cinema does not offer the possibility of creating the time for this solastalgic look: a displaced look that would allow pausing and stepping back to enable awareness, questioning and redefinition of how it actually looks at things. Yet, this does not mean that cinema -in his history- has not found a way to do it. By working on the unfolding, movement and flow that conventionally ensure the cinematic illusion, cinema found a way to turn back to itself, denaturalise and reinvent. From the fetishistic fascination of narrative progression to another kind of fascination crossed by intellectual curiosity (Mulvey, 2006).⁸⁹ A passage made possible thanks to the interruption of movement, the interruption of the illusion of time (Bellour, 1990). In *Lovesong*, this interruption is triggered by the presence and use of the voice.

Detached from the image, it creates what I have called a detached cinema and also an exiled cinema. It could also be understood as a delayed cinema -to use an expression by Mulvey. By telling the film, reacting to the images, and provoking a dialectic relationship with them, the voice inevitably and systematically interrupts them. As a result, the spoken film detaches from the filmic universe (the one recorded to be projected on the screen) to return to that universe, to those images differently. In other words, in the interruption, wound or crack, the film's time freezes, uprooting the viewer from the film's unfolding. Viewers will recoil from the image and resituate concerning it. From this newly regained distance, they will find the time to go back and add to it and reflect differently on film and cinema (Bellour, 1990). Bullot would say that one thing that displaced cinema allows is actually to think cinema through other media (Bullot, 2019).

⁸⁹ What Barthes called the double fascination.

This suspended, deferred, delayed, displaced time will create what Bellour and Mulvey call the pensive spectator, who will become double conscious: they would be aware of their presence at the cinema and, therefore, their own spectatorship. They would also reflect on what they see in the film (Bellour, 1990; Mulvey, 2006). Is this pensive spectator not very close to, if not the same as, that awake and critical spectator referred to by Barthes? Or the second generation of cinephiles?

The critical gaze, the *adding* gaze, would work, following Bellour, in two stages: by subtraction (from the illusion) and the subsequent (cinematic) reflection and awareness. Hence, interruption, subtraction and reflection. Yet, in what way does the voice in *Lovesong* activate these three moments that allow time to be suspended and delayed, turning it into a time for looking, a solastalgic time?

The First Movement begins with a black screen and someone (me) sitting beside it at a table illuminated by a lamp. I start reading a text: the title, and again, a black screen. Then, the first images appear, announced as the first images I had recorded: Lala, the poet, arranging a chair in a garden, a kitten in the chair, her hand caressing the kitten—the 26th of Bach’s Goldberg Variations. My voice is silent. Suddenly, the image of the kitten freezes, and the voice resumes the reading. Black. And a rather clumsy recording shows a series of images printed in a newspaper. They are frames of the film. The camera slides from left to right and back again. The image moves from one to the other, framing and reframing them. Black. A series of paintings by Cézanne. All of them show the same mountain. Le Monte Saint Victoire.

These are the first ten minutes of the spoken film. I began working very intuitively, reacting to the material and following—without knowing—what would become the protocol. Another thing I did not know is that I was already making decisions that could conform to what Mulvey calls an aesthetic of delay (2006).

Without realising it, I was foregrounding the inherent stillness of cinema. In the service of this, the black screen became a grammatical element in the entire performance. It would materialise the separation between the frames, conferring autonomy to each image (Bellour, 1990). By interrupting and breaking the continuity between images, by subtracting them from their expected story line, what black delivers is time. Instead of being a linear sequence of images, *Lovesong* began as a succession of images and black screens that follow each other in a suspended time.

The black screen, in its presence, opens a space between the images, echoing the space outside the screen, the space between the screen and my body, the space for the viewer, the space and time to look and reflect on what they see and also on themselves, a self-reflection. The black screen becomes a mirror. Hence, beyond its grammatical function, it will gain signification. The interruption of the images, of their unfolding, makes visible the contradiction, the solastalgic fertile paradox, the “non-existent film in progress”, resending the question to the viewer and their belonging relationship to their places, to their images, to their languages, to their past and the possibility (or not) to return.

However, it was not until I finished the Seventh Movement and started to prepare and rehearse for the first live presentations that I realised how the black screen’s presence had decreased as the Movements progressed until it disappeared. It was not intended. As a result, the fragments of images were more extended, and their temporality started to be uninterrupted. And then, the climax, the turning point, the moment when my voice entered the image, pretending to inhabit it. That voice that speaks in Catalan, that voice that tries to return. The image occupies all the screen and has its own time. The voice in it. An image-home. Finally. But then, very soon, the voice realises that it is trapped in the image, it cannot breathe; it has to get out. To get out, it says to itself, ‘wake up’. And it says it on a black screen. From there, the black returns. The images will be fragmented again, interrupt each other, connect and disconnect. A return is possible but not to the same kind of cinema. This is the possibility of reflecting differently on film and cinema, as Bellour claimed (1990).

Two other strategies appeared in those ten first minutes: the freeze frame and the photograph.

Freezing an image. The cat. But not only. Later, the fragment of Kosakovsky’s film, *Tishe*, and more cats playing in the garden. Later, also Lala’s laughter. Freezing a frame might be the most straightforward interruption of the apparent movement. Without breaking it up entirely (by freezing the image, something tells that the movement will be resumed at some point), the look stops in on one privileged instant among all the possible moments of the film (Bellour, 1990) and by doing it, it points at this moment of the narration and at the same time it ushers the viewer in a new level of spectatorship, the one of awareness of the physicality of the matter: an image is an image, an object of my gaze. It can be played, stopped, manipulated, or intervened. Mulvey’s delayed cinema. Again.

I remember one of the most memorable cinematic moments I have ever experienced. It is the end of Truffaut's *Les 400 Coups*. The young character, played by Jean-Pierre Léaud, has escaped from a reformatory and runs along the seashore. The camera gets closer. He turns his body and looks at it. The camera zooms in on his face, and the frame freezes—the end. There have been various interpretations of the meaning of this frozen image and the kind of closure it gave to the film. An open end, a paralysis, an entrapment, an uncertain future, a plead, a social critique, a questioning. Yet, in an interview, Truffaut confessed that this final freeze was an accident. He had told Léaud to look into the camera, but he very quickly turned his eyes away. Hence, once in the editing room, he had no choice but to freeze the image to hold on to the brief look for the ten seconds it finally lasted (Raskin, 1996).

Beyond all the narrative or discursive meanings viewers and commentators can give to it, what is sure is that this kind of intervention in the matter refers to itself. It is like if “at the end, you are no longer looking at the film, the film is looking at you” (Croce, 1960). Unavoidably, this will awaken the viewer's self-awareness. Reflection on cinema and reflection on the mechanisms of spectatorship itself, detachment. But not devoid of fascination. This is not the hypnosis in the illusion anymore, but a fascination provoked by the immobility itself and the reversal of time it creates by interrupting what is supposed to be moving. As Bellour would state, it is a way to open a door or a window and give access to what would generally be out of our reach: the skeleton of the film, made of fixed images. The shot reveals itself as a slice of a moving time. Stopping the movement momentarily ‘returns the film to its skeleton of fixed images. Like a corpse to the ashes. Ashes to ashes, frames to frames’ (Bellour, 1990, p.113).

This ‘returning effect’ that, in a way, becomes irrefutable evidence or overwhelming proof (to use two of Bellour's resounding expressions) of the photographic immersed in the film will not only appear in *Lovesong* with the literal freezing but also through the introduction of photograms or still frames: the green shutters, different corners of the garden, the wall, the shadows, a still frame of a mountain from *Chastie*⁹⁰ by Dvortsevov... are images that also still, stop, paralyse and steal time by interrupting the movement. These often unique, fugitive instants become decisive as they show how cinema *fights* against one of its very principles: the movement -and a conception of the flow of time that goes with it- (Bellour, 1990).

⁹⁰ Its translation in English is *Paradise*.

Cinema reproduces movement and creates the impression of time continuity with the succession of equidistant instants, or what Gilles Deleuze called in his work on cinema, 'any-instant-whatever' (1983/1994). Interrupting the movement by stopping the gaze in one of these instants would point at this 'any-instant-whatever' as a chosen one, transforming it into a privileged instant.

Removed from the flow of the stock material, these privileged instants would become pregnant moments (Lessing, 1767; Barthes, 1977/1990);⁹¹ that is, they would represent something significant and decisive, something that needs to be noticed and pointed out. A question, then, following Bellour, seems to impose itself: What kind of instants are picked up and privileged? And for what reason? (Bellour, 1990).

I have to confess. For me, stilling these images is not a question of privileging some moments over others. Even assuming that its temporality is being disrupted, taken out of the flow, and therefore differentiated and estranged, they are not really more significant images that stand out above the others in narrative logic or flow. But while I do not intend to privilege any one moment over another, I have to acknowledge that the estrangement provoked by the interruption of movement may lead us to stop considering them as 'any-instant-whatever'. Rather, what the suspension of time and suspended attention in these images undoubtedly does is to turn them into what Deleuze would call 'any-space-whatever' (1985/1996).⁹²

The image becomes a very particular space, an image-space, disconnected, emptied of its natural reality (Deleuze, 1985/1996), put into crisis, deterritorialised (Bell, 1997) and given a new value. Could this 'any-space-whatever' seen by Deleuze be a solastalgic space? Deleuze claims that to create this *new* space, it is necessary to leave the house, to abolish it, as the 'any-space-whatever' needs to be uninhabitable, giving rise to voids

⁹¹ The pregnant moment, introduced by Lessing in his work on the Laocoon, does not represent anything real. It is a fiction, a kind of synthetic image that represents both the average and the acme of a dramatic action (Lessing, 1767). A couple of centuries later, Barthes would refer to the same concept and, by applying it to photography, will become a moment that -by nature- would always be torn from reality and would imply a certain seriality. Instead of only one moment, it is a series of moments that will be selected from reality and unfold one after the other (Barthes, 1977/1990; Bellour, 1990; Watts, 2016).

⁹² Deleuze uses the expression 'any-instant-whatever' in his book *The Movement-image* (1983/1994), to define the specific nature of cinematic or moving images. It is in his second book, *The Time-image* (1985/1996), that he will use, instead, the 'any-space-whatever' as a sign of the passage from classic to modern cinema. I have to say that in my memory, there was also the expression 'any-image-whatever'. However, reviewing them and other texts that refer to Deleuze's work on cinema, I have to say that I have not found it referenced. He talks about instants-whatever, dialogues-whatever and spaces-whatever, but not images-whatever.

and disconnections. Among them, image and sound will tend not to correspond anymore. Nevertheless, there will be a relationship between the two, a kind of independent contact that distance provides (Deleuze, 1985/1996). This is the distance between image and sound (my voice), as I argued in this Chapter's first section.

According to Deleuze, empty or disconnected spaces open to a pure form of time. The image becomes a time-image as there is no longer a reality to be represented; the image is and offers its own reality (Deleuze, 1985/1996).⁹³ This resonates with the description of the filmic universe offered by Bazin. A filmic universe that, as I argued in the Second Chapter, relies on its own presence (2005). Places ready to be inhabited.

I have connected the frozen image and the still image to this 'any-space-whatever', this disconnected space, which, extracted from the flow of the representation of reality, becomes its own reality, time-image par excellence. But the truth is that while reflecting on the montage, Deleuze will never speak of the interruption of movement per se, as Bellour emphasises in his reflections on the interrupted image, the suspension of time, and the pensive spectator (Bellour, 1990). Be that as it may, I have a second confession to make.

These images that I remember as photograms or still frames are really moving images;⁹⁴ their movement and intrinsic time are almost imperceptible, but they are there and visible if the viewer looks at the image with enough attention. The wind in the leaves, shadows of the water slightly moving on the wall, Lala moving her fingers touching the grass, etc.

Other images, such as the ones I discover that someone else—not me—is filming,⁹⁵ or when Lala is laughing while the wind ruffles her hair, or when she looks out of the window as if trying to escape from the situation caused by the filming, or when the cat climbs on her back... All these images show more obvious movements, recognisable actions, and evident situations with an inner time, a time of their own.

⁹³ "Instead of extending into an action and a narrative progression, the time-image presents the cut, the disjunction" (...) It is a non-narrative and non-dramatized image, deprived of organic connections or identification processes. Instead, it is auto-referential, auto-temporalized, a-tonal and moodless (Wall, 2004, p.20).

⁹⁴ Not the freeze frames: they exist as remembered.

⁹⁵ In the first one, I am talking with Lala's husband; in the second, I am walking in the background of the frame, and I disappear behind a tree; and in the third one, Lala gives her back to the camera, sitting in the forest among the trees.

However, all these images (both in which movement or time is more visible and those in which it is less visible) have been so affected or impregnated by the temporality of my voice reading that they appear somehow *objectified* on the screen. They are a frame within the frame, an image-object-of-the-gaze, paused without being paused, disconnected, emptied of everything less its own nature as an image. An image that enters into a distant relation with a voice, my voice.

To do so, they need to be silenced. My voice silences the sound of images. My talking means their silence. I talk and talk, and talk, and this talking becomes their time. Could silence be a way of stilling images? Silence flattens them, pointing at their spatial dimension. An image without time that becomes mainly space, a space that could be called home.

I mentioned earlier that, beyond using black, two main strategies appeared in those first ten minutes. One was a frozen image that opened the reflection to a still image that turned out to be in motion, even though that motion and its time were muted or substituted by the movement and the time of my reading voice.

The second was the use of photographs.

There are filmed photographs (stills which, when published in a newspaper and with time, became in some way photographs; photographs partially and randomly seen among the notes and the scripts, photographs of the poet José Ángel Valente filmed while reviewed on a computer screen, etc.), and there are photographs that appear in the timeline as if they were another image (the photographs of the Davos Sanatorium; the ones of two poets, Ingeborg Bachmann and Wislawa Szymborska; Lala's recent photograph placed next to her image of the past showing a frozen laugh, etc.).

Both strategies serve to suspend and break time, working against the movement (and time) of the film, uncoupling the spectator from the image, and pulling them, as Bellour would say, out of the 'ordinary image of cinema' (1990).

Thus, freezing, stilling and introducing photographs are all ways of inscribing the film to its own materiality, reverting it to itself, and reminding the viewer that a film cannot be reduced to the perception of a natural time. The suspension of time dissolves that illusion, searching to unsettle the spectator's perception, approaching their act of seeing to reflexivity (Bellour, 1990).

When time stops (it) thinks (itself).

Photographic images, however, introduce something else.

In cinema, as Mulvey states, the experience of the passage of time preserves the illusion of a 'now-ness' that points to the future (2006). Images take over, one after the other, always moving forward (even if they speak of a past time, even when they move backwards in time in such recognisable figures as the flashback), losing themselves in a vanishing point that always lies beyond the end of the film. Meanwhile, photographs are images that look at the viewers from the depths of the past (Barthes, 1980/1989; Bellour, 1990). Peter Wollen would formulate this difference by conjugating the image. If the moving image would say 'it is happening', the time of photography would claim 'it has been' (Wollen, 1984). If cinema cannot not exist in the present continuous tense (it is continuously moving), photography belongs to the realm of the past, or, according to Wollen, I should say it in the plural, the realm of the *pasts*.⁹⁶

One could say then that when photography penetrates the film, it rivets the gaze, freeing it from the flow of images and making it aware of what has happened. 'What has happened', the past, or the pasts, should not be understood as part of the narration but of the matter. What has happened is not the past in the images but the image as past, that is, the consciousness of the image itself and the time of its registration.

Indeed, as Mulvey claims, the 'there-ness' and 'then-ness' of the film's original moment -or its moment of registration- tends to stay hidden. When photography, or the consciousness of the nature of any image as essentially photographic, appears and interrupts the flow, that past(s) comes to the fore (Mulvey, 2006) and engenders the viewer's present (Wollen, 1984). In other words, delayed, the presence of the past finds consciousness in the present, the narrative flow is cancelled, and the fascination of time fossilised overwhelms the fascination of narrative progression (Mulvey, 2006). Something more happens that I believe adds to this fascination. When a still image is included in the film's flow, while that flow is cancelled, the original time for the photograph's perception is transformed. According to Wollen, the amount of time in the

⁹⁶ In fact, the movement involved in cinema -movies- is actually various movements. Berger talks about the movement of the images, also the movement from the 'here' of the spectator and the 'there' on the screen (Berger, 1991). There is also the movement that cinematic image is able to capture and I would add cinema is movement, insofar as it moves us. On the other hand, when Wollen affirms 'the time of photographs is one of stasis. They endure' (1984, p.120) he does not refer to a single but various pasts. That is, while photography captures a specific moment, stilling time, that freezed moment can represent different temporal aspects of the past, such as events, states and processes. Hence, the way photographs represent time depends on the type of photography and the context in which they are used (Wollen, 1984).

present that can be spent gazing at a photograph (which by the way, is decided by the viewer) is limitless (Wollen, 1984). When this photograph is included in a sequence of moving images, the length of the viewing is set, planned, and controlled by someone else, the filmmaker. The contradictory juxtaposition of times, the one that one would have spent gazing at the photograph and the one the filmmaker gives, is fertile.

At the core of this fascination, the presence of photography—and I would add that, in general, all ways of interrupting moving image flow should work similarly—opens a breach in cinema (Wollen, 1984). And it does it in such a way that, as Bellour and Mulvey point out, the possibility of another film emerges from this breach.

This 'other (virtual) film' appears between the recorded film and the edited and projected film (Mulvey, 2006; Bellour, 1990). It is in between these two films -the one that happened in the past and is not usually seen and the one that is seen in the presence of spectators- where the cinematic meaning lies. This cinematic meaning is what Barthes would call the third sense (1975/1995), which is not an apparent or transparent sense but obtuse, fragmentary, punctual, unpredictable, deliberately subjective and self-reflective (Bellour, 1990). Here, in *Lovesong*, interruption of movement and time is crucial⁹⁷ for this 'other film' to appear, crossed and defined by this third sense. If Barthes' fascination longs 'for a way of bringing the flow to a stop', Wollen's fascination, as he claims it, would go a bit further and be with how 'the spectator is thrown in and out of the narrative' (Wollen, 1984, p.120). In any case, the stilling or stealing of time must have a purpose. My fascination would be the one that directs the spectator's gaze towards a space opened next to the screen, invite them not to sit in front of the images but next to them.

Mulvey and Bellour have been essential for me in approaching this section with a reflection on time and its role in the detachment process. They have guided the unfolding of ideas around the different ways in which *Lovesong* interrupts the illusory and transparent temporality of a film that could have been, provoking the distance and estrangement necessary for a reflective proposal on the (im)possibility of inhabiting the image anew. Yet, it is essential to remark that most of their reflections (especially

⁹⁷ Along with the other *strategies* I have already discussed in this Fourth Chapter: the detachment or distancing between image and voice and translations between languages.

Mulvey's) deal with fiction films, not documentaries. And even though it is not a problem,⁹⁸ I think I must remark on this nuance at this point of the reflection.

For Mulvey, delaying the movement, interrupting it, fragmenting it, or stopping it makes fiction dissolve and disappear, bringing in all the uncertainties that belong to the reality of the index, that is, the physical connection, the inscription, and the trace every image brings with it (Mulvey, 2006). I have the impression that in *Lovesong*, this return to indexicality or reality is not always what the delay, the interruption, and the temporal detachment introduce. It could have been the case with the freeze frames and the still images, but I believe that the inclusion of photography in this reflection points elsewhere. Indeed, the photographic instant is always -by nature- a 'decisive instant' torn from reality (Barthes, 1980/1989), but what makes them pregnant moments is the fact that, by suspending time, they momentarily bend cinema in the direction of photography's static time and its power to inscribe death, in particular its own death (Wollen, 1984; Bellour, 1990).

The emergence of 'past' and 'death' propels not only the spatial nature (Wollen, 1984) of the image but also its archival nature. All the images I made 20 years ago are, per definition -freeze, stilled or not- archive material. So are the photographs that I include through a work of association, as well as other elements such as the paintings of Cézanne or Kiefer or the different fragments of films that, invoked by my voice, go through the story and the reflection. All these materials are part of the past. And I realise now that they have something in common. They share a way of understanding creation, which would focus on trying to understand life and humanity more than trying to address the world.

Lovesong hosts images from films by Viktor Kosakovsky, Alexander Sokurov, Sergei Dvortsevov, Dominique González-Foerster, and Joao Moreira Salles. My desire and melancholy were and are directed towards such images, discharged from the burden of the world in a straight and explicit way, but not for that reason, lacking commitment and responsibility.⁹⁹ I have forgotten most of what I thought and felt when recording those

⁹⁸ In the First Chapter, I already claimed the desire and need to treat the documentary as a creative impulse more than a genre.

⁹⁹ I remember receiving a phone call in 2017 from Luciano Barisone, at that time the director of Visions du Réel, a film festival in Switzerland. He was sad. He realised that from then on, he could not make a place in the program for films dealing with beauty because -pressured by global events- he felt that he had to ask films to deal with the discomforts and concerns of the world.

images or imagining a film that never existed. Still, I know that I filmed Lala, her relationship with her poems and the garden in the light of those films, out of love and desire for that kind of relationship with the images (and the world).

And the images that today conform to *Lovesong*, recorded by me in the past or invoked in the editing from the present, all belong to a time that is not there anymore. Those images appear to me like that "Torso of Apollo", sculpted in Paros marble between 480 and 470 BC and brought back to life by Rilke in the following verses:

*We cannot know his legendary head
with eyes like ripening fruit. And yet his torso
is still suffused with brilliance from inside,
like a lamp, in which his gaze, now turned to low,*

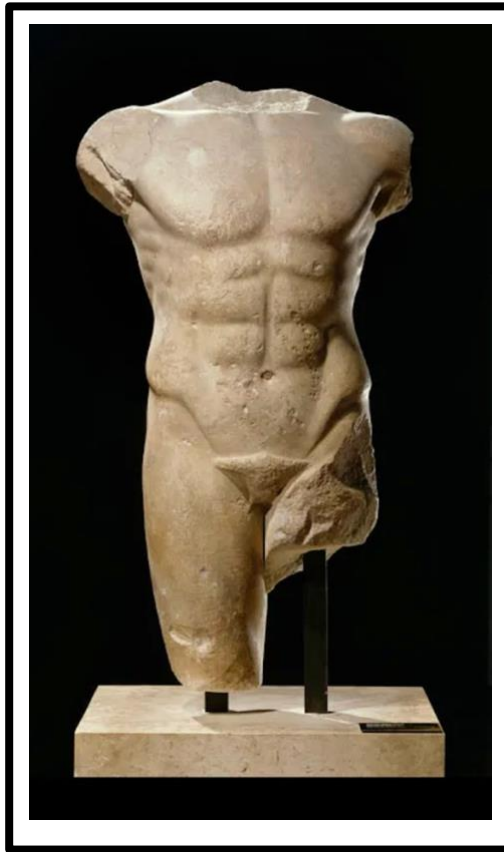
*gleams in all its power. Otherwise
the curved breast could not dazzle you so, nor could
a smile run through the placid hips and thighs
to that dark centre where procreation flared.*

*Otherwise, this stone would seem defaced.
beneath the translucent cascade of the shoulders
and would not glisten like a wild beast's fur:*

*Would not, from all the borders of itself,
burst like a star: for here there is no place
that does not see you. You must change your life.*

Rainer Maria Rilke's 'Archaic Torso of Apollo'
(1908/1989), translation by Stephen Mitchell.

While facing this thesis's last Chapter, I read Louise Glück's reflection on Rilke's poem. She talks about the power of what remains unfinished. She says that Rilke's poem begins with the unknowable, a void located in the past. And it ends with the unknown: a new, different life, a void projected into the future (Glück, 1994), from one void to the other. This is a beautiful thought. And I could not avoid relating it to these images, to their solastalgic destiny, to Lala's poems, and to *Lovesong*.



***Figure 113. Archaic Torso of Apollo
Sculpted in Paros marble between 480 and 470 BC.
Exhibited in the Louvre Museum.***

I looked for Catalan translations of the poem. I found two made by two renowned Catalan poets, but I do not speak German, so I was not entirely sure about them. I emailed Lala. I also told her I saw *Lovesong's* images reflected in that stone and Rilke's interpretation of the statue. She answered right away. She sent me a third and a fourth translation, one made by herself. Each one has some bit that I prefer over the others. Maybe I should create a version made with those bits and pieces. To end her email, she wrote: "I see [in the poem] a turning around the ruin. Works of the past have been cut off from their world and mutilated, but they are a gaze that continues to appeal to us, making us review what we do and who we are".

Detachment deals with space but also with time. The new *Lovesong* happens between the past and the present. A crack opens.

I have talked about a crack between images and voice. There is also one between two languages, or should I say twice, with two different kinds of language? A crack between two idiomatic languages (Catalan and English; Catalan and Spanish) and two filmic

languages (conventional, traditional or transparent film and film-performance). And there is another between two times, two speeds, two kinds of images—one that moves and the other that reposes and returns the gaze. Forcibly, the shift of consciousness between temporalities ushers the cinematic image into a new physicality, reinventing itself (Bellour, 1990).

Every passage between the one and the other means a transformation.

The images, the stone, ruins and archive, fragmented, detached, delayed, precarious, unfinished, broken, paralysed, intervened, disrupted, bothered, suffering... they look at me, at us, from the past. Similarly, the young Antoine Doinel, played by Jean-Pierre Léaud, looked at the spectator converted into an image. The viewer is no longer looking at it. It is the image that looks at the viewer (the spectator, the filmmaker), opening a space for the one standing in front of —or sitting next to —it.

Like whispering,

You must change your life...

CONCLUSION

Mountains Inside. Mountains Outside

When I wake up every morning, I see the same image hanging next to our bed: *Mountains inside, mountains outside*. Johan Van Der Keuken, a Dutch photographer and documentary filmmaker, took that photograph in 1975. Van Der Keuken could have been one of the ghosts of the *Lovesong*, as his work has been one of the primary references in my devotion to documentary filmmaking. And he, for sure, the first filmmaker that has clearly obsessed me (except from Murnau when I was a teenager, maybe).

I can barely imagine a filmmaker with his capacity to love the world he filmed, the most humanist filmmaker. This attitude has always been a huge inspiration, and it may be the main reason for my fascination with him and his work before and after he passed away in 2000. I peregrinated in Amsterdam -his home- the same year, looking for his footprints in a snow-covered city. The same way I peregrinated in Paris to say my farewell to Comolli, the third ghost to appear in the *Lovesong* (after the poets Ingeborg Bachmann and Wislawa Zsymborska) and my most memorable mentor, twenty years later when he passed away in the spring of 2021.

Coincidentally, the same amount of time separates the two peregrinations and the shooting of *Lovesong* from the resulting spoken-returning film, *Lovesong, a non-existent film in progress*.



**Figure 114. *Mountains inside, mountains outside*
by Johan Van Der Keuken (1975).**

An open window, photographed from inside a bed, so the form created by the legs under the sheets echoes the mountains seen in the distance through the window. There is a correspondence between the two spaces of the photograph. The one from which the photographer looks at the mountain (and takes the photograph). And the one the mountain occupies. I realise now that the place we -my partner and I- decided to hang the image creates a third echo: from the sheets-mountains of our bed to the sheets-mountains of their bed, to the mountains through the window. One, two, three... echoing one another. In the distance.

Mountains.

More mountains. Like the ones that appear in *Lovesong, a non-existent film in progress*. The mountain of Cézanne, of Kiefer, of Thomas Mann, the mountain that can be seen in the distance from Lala's garden, the iceberg, the mountain in Dvortsevov's film. The presence of these mountains in my film is not calculated, and it does not follow a program or argument. They just kept appearing, unexpected, resonating with each other, an unsearched leitmotif, all offering a variation of the same figure, a triangle. The poet, the world and the poem. The poet, the painter, the photographer or the filmmaker, the(ir) world and the resulting word or image. The triangle, again.

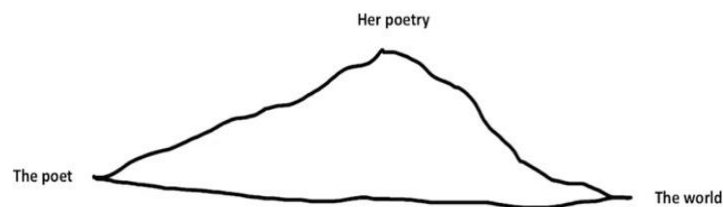


Figure 115. Image from *Lovesong, a non-existent film in progress*.

Twenty years ago, I wanted to explore a very particular triangle, Lala -the poet-, her words and the world that had inspired her. Today, instead, the triangle that has been addressed is the one formed by me as a filmmaker that got lost, the images I once made - understood as a world- and the possibility of returning to them, or in other words, the possibility of writing, talking or creating again. Twenty years ago, I stopped making my films. It could have been because I got tired or bored, lost interest, or just stopped wanting to continue for whatever reason. The truth is that I never tried to know, and it

was not until solastalgia appeared by chance that it came back to me, and I began to understand... The truth is that I never left...

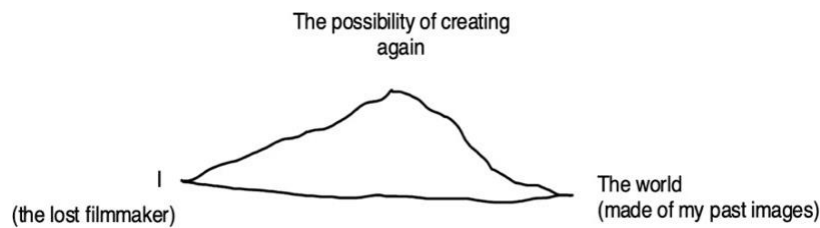


Figure 116. Resignification of Figure 115.

My relationship with the images I used to make was transformed, more than that, broken and lost. And the first question -the one that triggered everything- began to haunt me. Following solastalgia - the distress and sorrow provoked by the loss of home - what if what happened between my images and I was that they stopped being my home, or the other way round... what if I stopped belonging to them?

To begin my exploration of this possibility, I needed to confirm first that an image could be understood as a world (and not only considered as the image of the world), or more precisely, a home, that is a place with which the defining relationship would be that of being inhabited—an image-home.

To make an image, even to watch it, would be inhabiting it... or, in other words, building with it a sense of belonging. Two different notions appeared in trying to understand the complexity of this sense of belonging to an image. To belong to an image somehow implies having an attachment that could be called love (if with places is topophilia, with images would be cinephilia). In fact, paradoxically, this love is the condition for solastalgia to exist, and at the same time, it becomes vulnerable because of solastalgia's existence. And there is another dimension, one that has to do with constructing an identity of who we are. To belong to an image can also imply recognising oneself in it, that is, to project oneself -or even one's possible life- into it (Berger, 1991; Bruno, 2022).

Indeed, coming from another field of study, solastalgia invited me to think about an unexpected relationship with images, understanding them as a place called home and using uncommon notions to name the relationship with them: a sense of belonging or attachment. Even though these two are related to other concepts that have been usual suspects in cinema studies, such as cinephilia or projection.

In this sense, solastalgia became an intriguing and promising word, triggering a further question: what happens when that sense of belonging to an image might be at risk, under assault or wounded? I tried to identify in my research -both practical and theoretical- different possible reasons for that.

As with the iceberg that appears in movement #4 of the *Lovesong*, there are three different reasons why it can break off:

One is due to a transformation in what surrounds it... in this case, the warm water in the Ocean. The second would be an external accident that unexpectedly overcomes, for example, an earthquake. And the third comes from the inside. In other words, the very properties of the ice (geometry, thickness, density, temperature, fabric, and impurity loading) can predispose the ice to crevasses formation, leading to a break-off.

Fragment from Movement #4 *Lovesong*, a non-existent film in progress

First Reason. The sense of belonging to my images could have been lost because of the surrounding increasing and overwhelming superabundance of images, fostering notions such as poor images (Steyerl, 2012) or missing images (Fontcuberta, 2016) as a replacement for the type of images I used to love or belong to, the images I would make or project myself. I realise today that this replacement provoked in me a certain feeling of devaluation and lack of interest or attraction, and therefore -even unconsciously- it made me stop. However, I have to confess that while I sense “poor images” -endlessly circulating and reproduced images- as alien to me and my bond to creation, the notion of “missing images” -images that have been forgotten and, in their absence occupy space- appear highly appealing, intriguing, promising and fertile. Not for nothing, cinema has always been the place of ghosts...

Second Reason. Accidents or unexpected events might have happened along the way. My partner in life and filmmaking left me short after the shooting; Lala’s reactions while being filmed show my clumsiness in approaching her with a camera, the pressure or low self-esteem triggered by anecdotic encounters or discoveries, such as that film by the couple Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet seen in Sitges Festival... I can see now that I lacked the confidence or the mechanisms that could have offered me the needed critical distance to navigate all these interruptions, dodge them or even make them part of the process, which would undoubtedly have enriched it. But yes... I see this now

because it is now that I have gained that distance, in this case the distance that time can also offer.

Third Reason. The very properties of the ice predisposed to crevasses... in other words, the “natural inhabitants” of that world (the disgraced philosopher of the hut would be the clearest example of this, but also, some of the filmmakers and poets cited in the performance, who were little by little substituted by others) began to show wounds and cracks that made the attachment or love and recognition more difficult, almost impossible in the following years. I even started to feel that Lala and her husband inhabited a reality that did not represent me anymore, as if they belonged to a world that was getting distant from mine. After the filming, I started to see them less and less until I stopped seeing them altogether for more than ten years, until now.

During my research, I tried to understand the personal and general reasons through practice and theory. Yet, I realised that what became really important was not to know the exact reasons for the emergence of this solastalgic feeling (rarely there is only one reason for anything!) but to identify its symptoms: a loss of love, of recognition, and a growing detachment which ended up in a vanishing sense of belonging to the image. Regardless of the reasons, what seemed palatable was the possible understanding of image as a potential site of solastalgia.

In this manner, solastalgia served to describe a concrete rupture between my voice and the image, framing it in a larger context, that of contemporary documentary moving image making. What happened within the communities in Australia ended up expressing a whole era. We are all exposed to solastalgia. We can all understand our relation with the transforming landscape (all kinds of landscape, physical, social, economic, political, emotional, creative) and name the resulting emotion more accurately, thanks to the existence of solastalgia as a word. Indeed, as evidence of the openness of the term, which Albrecht himself migrates from environmental studies to define an era, which he called the ‘age of solastalgia’ (Albrecht, 2012), my claim is that the appropriation I make of it in this thesis can perfectly and legitimately come to offer a new concept to film studies, describing a new way of understanding a possible contemporary wounded relationship to image-making. To this end, this thesis defends the idea of the image as a place called home and goes on to make an argument for it as an endangered one. By doing so, it aims to contribute to film studies by introducing solastalgia as a valid concept. A valid filmic concept that should not only have a theoretical dimension but also a creative

or artistic one. With my research, I seek to raise and encourage the possibility of creating again, recovering the filmic voice.

If solastalgia is a new word for an ancient emotion (the uncanny), solastalgia concerning creation also refers to something that has always been there. Maurice Blanchot found a precious way to define any act of creation. In the artistic gesture, he saw an Orpheus descending into the darkest point of the realm of the dead to rescue Eurydice, his deceased beloved. According to the myth, he loses her forever when he tries to look back at her as a gesture of reassurance (Blanchot, 1953/1982). For Blanchot, this is the exact moment when art emerges and fails. Again and again. Eurydice (or the pursued image) disappears every moment the writer or artist turns to the paper or canvas to write or paint what he has (not) seen (Hermsen, 2019). Lala's poems talk about this unavoidable, timeless loss innate to every act of creation. They express the tension between what can be said and the unspeakable, the graspable and the ungraspable, the possible and the impossible, the present and the absent.

We can name a sea view, but in doing so, something will be inevitably lost: 'We will never be able to grasp the unique and specific character of the sea expanding before us' (Hermsen, 2019, p.61). Indeed, solastalgia could have been a term invented long ago to designate the impossibility of completely inhabiting the created image and inhabiting it without fissures or wounds. That impossibility, that loss, that tension has always been there, making creation what it is. In the same way, it is certainly not the first time in the history of humanity that the landscape expels those who inhabit it. But for some reason, it seems that today, this timeless concern has become actual, concrete, and palpable, driven by a relatively recent phenomenon.¹⁰⁰ And then, that timeless question, perhaps, became contemporary in the sense that today, it gets particularly significant and relevant, a priority.

Whether in its timelessness or timeliness, solastalgia describes a relation with the (contemporary) image. Still, as I have argued in the thesis, it does not only do this. Its paradoxical creative force allows it to describe something that is lost and, by doing so, recover it simultaneously. Indeed, solastalgia served to identify, give a name and try to understand my possible relationship with images as if they were home under assault. It

¹⁰⁰ Or at least, a phenomenon that today seems to present itself in a more strident, more piercing, more threatening, less manageable form.

also served to open a box and create again. Solastalgia became a trigger for an action, a reactivating motor, a creative force.

I opened the box and began to create, as in a ritual, for four years. For that, I forged a protocol. It was never my intention; it just happened—a protocol with actions, rules and disclaimers. Yet, even though it is a protocol that others could follow, its spirit clearly differs from (or transcends) that of a tool: it is more of an intellectual device serving my reflection on solastalgia as a concept. A concept offered to filmmakers to question what it means to make images today when the sense of belonging to images is so fragile.

Indeed, if the bond is wounded, broken or even lost... my research seeks to explore the possibility of inhabiting the images again—the possibility of recovering a filmic voice.

This is not only a theoretical question. As I cited in the thesis' First Chapter, Vuong refers to creation as a reaction, a response to the world. I see my voice as a response -literally- to those images. And together, image and voice, in the form of *a non-existent film in progress*, are a response to a wounded world.

Reflection in cinema has been the domain of the essay film. Observation of the observational cinema, storytelling of the so-called narrative films... Similarly, solastalgia could relate to a specific filmic form, such as the spoken film. Yet, it is unclear that this would be the only way for cinema to be solastalgic. My creative reaction or response took a particular form where the voice and the image needed to be in dialogue, at a distance, one next to the other, and in a very organic way, lecture-performance emerged as a discipline or genre that seemed appropriate. And while I found my place in that new (for me) creative landscape through a very intuitive and vulnerable creative work-in-progress, I also needed to appropriate it theoretically. The protocol became one way to do it. The other was to rename the practice as a manner of pointing out how lecture-performance and solastalgia could meet: Lecture-performance became a spoken film, as one of the most critical solastalgic specificities is that my *Lovesong* is a film that only can exist when I tell it. The paradox again: as it shows in the title, *Lovesong: a non-existent film in progress*, a film that does not exist yet at the same time, it does. Another form of naming it referred to the film's central question: to know if it is possible to inhabit the image again, to return to it... A returning film... And the last one would identify a solastalgic film as a type of displaced cinema. I understand that if solastalgic films are aware of and explore the detachment provoked by the loss of sense of belonging to the image, their form needs to elaborate and show certain displacement. Suppose the

wound, the detachment, and the displacement are between a subject and a place. In that case, it makes sense that, filmically speaking, that would translate into a displacement or distance (maybe rupture) between the voice -the voice of who is looking and talking- and the image-home. Indeed, I found in the lecture-performance (my spoken returning film as a type of displaced cinema) a form defined by the detachment or distance between voice and image. Unavoidably, staging creates a dual distance between voice (body) and image (screen) when performing a film. It is a distance in space: the voice is not inside the image but next to it. And it is a distance in time: the images become an object, and therefore an archive, so somehow in the past, while the voice is always enunciated in the presence of an audience, thus, in the present.

I identified this distance as the central filmic feature, gesture or strategy of what could be understood as a solastalgic film. In other words, I found that exploring and elaborating this distance is the way for solastalgia to describe the loss of sense of belonging or attachment to the image while reactivating creation and regaining a filmic voice. Yet, it does not come alone. Two other strategies or procedures appeared to be also crucial. The first, to be aware of the distance implies an in-betweenness that ignites a continuous moving back and forth between forms, genres and disciplines, in other words, a constant translation between languages and filmic pacts that results in a hybridism or cross-disciplinarity, which results to be natural to lecture-performance. Or, more than that, an eclecticism that always makes one speak from a particular outside. The second strategy, this 'outside' from where one speaks, is the place and time of the voice that refers to an image and by doing so, it stops it, activates it, questions it, and relates it to others... This disrupts the natural flow of moving images shared by lecture-performance. In a solastalgic film, in a solastalgic existence, different times will coexist, what is there and what is not there anymore. In-between a space... a space for a pensive spectator.

Perform the distance, the continuous translation, the time disruptions, all these elements make a solastalgic film and all of them are closely linked to lecture-performance. Is, then, the lecture-performance the solastalgic genre par excellence? Maybe. No, I am not sure. There is something in that possibility that does not fit, not entirely. It is like those habitual forms of thought by which, effectively, we immediately think of essay film when we hear 'reflexive cinema'... Yet, should not all films be reflective? Or observe or narrate, among so many other things? Does not solastalgia refer to an emotion (provoked by the loss of sense of belonging to the image) and a reaction (the exploration of that loss and the question on the possibility of returning and regaining the lost voice) that mirrors a possible relation to image-making? I found my way with lecture-performance, renamed

as spoken film (also displaced or returning film could be possible). Yet, I want to believe that other filmic proposals could also be possible, that there can / will be different ways to reflect on the image as a site of solastalgia. Two years ago, in April 2023, I taught a seminar at Di Tella University in Buenos Aires. I have been teaching there for years, always filmmaking, always documentary.

On that occasion, I decided to share my 'last findings', I wanted to talk about lecture-performance and solastalgia. So, I shared the protocol and reflected on what would make a solastalgic film. To reinforce my point, I showed film excerpts (the ones I discuss in the thesis) and I also performed -as an example of my research- the Fourth Movement of *Lovesong*. I was trying to navigate between waters, trying to open up my approach to as many options as possible. As a result, in groups of five to six students, they had to create a short lecture-performance and show it to the rest of the group.

My expectations were that my teaching would invite them to explore their relationship with the image. I wanted them to wonder about its nature. How fragile or vulnerable was this relationship? How exposed or affected by the times in which we live? I wanted them to explore and discover, to take a journey full of uncertainties rather than certainties. Yet, the dangerous outcome was that despite my own uncertainties, the proposals seemed replicas one to the other, and somehow all replicas of the *Lovesong*. It does not really make sense to make films that look like and say the same. Something was wrong...

Perhaps it was the protocol's fault. It may have been too imposing. Or the opposite. It was perhaps too clumsy. Or outdated and in need of a rewrite. I am not sure. And as I already mentioned in the introduction to it, in Chapter Three, there was no point for me to go back to it, it was not my purpose to revisit it... Because it seems precisely that it would be in the nature of manifestos and protocols to be limited, imperfect, contradictory, insufficient, questionable and questioned, betrayed, deniable.

Perhaps, then, the responsibility lay in the idea of a solastalgic film. And I was forcing wounded relationships with the image among the students, and a similar way to approach them... By doing so, their creative act, as much as beautiful, well-crafted and apparently meaningful... became a bit of an exercise in style. And, therefore, somehow empty. Moreover, if the relationship is wounded, as in *Lovesong*, it might not be clear what else could be said after recognising and sharing that the voice has been lost.

Suddenly, I felt the same way I used to feel two decades ago when fake documentaries, or mockumentaries, became a trend. Their purpose was to fool the viewer and, by doing so, somehow demonstrate that images cannot be trusted. But, once one made the point, why insist on it? Very soon, it felt like a closed circuit, a narcissistic proposal with only itself as a goal. If solastalgic films become methodical, they would be trapped in the same self-referential situation. The purpose of a solastalgic film is to show and explore the wound and, at the same time, to activate recovery. Once the voice has been recovered, it may not make sense to make solastalgic films, one after the other. What would make sense is that once the voice is recovered, the filmmaker would use it to say something else in subsequent films. What would make sense is that once a filmmaker makes a solastalgic film, the one that allows him or her to make films again, the next film would deal with the world he or she has rediscovered.

But is it really possible to recover the voice? This is the central question of my research. If I explore how solastalgia can reactivate a documentary practice or enable a filmmaker to regain a filmic voice, I am somehow stating that regaining a voice and returning to an image-home is possible. Is it? Did Solastalgia really enable creation again?

When I publicly present the *Lovesong*, I cannot avoid having an intriguing and, at times, disturbing feeling. Suppose creation in photography and cinema intends to survive us, to be a trace that remains (Barthes, 1975/1995; Bazin, 1967/2005; Fontcuberta, 2021; Fontcuberta and Antich, 2019). In that case, how can I feel that my return to film creation is such if, in reality, what I have created is a temporary work which only exists when I say it?

Bulot talks about missing films. Their nature is not to be found. That is, being missing films, they must exist, showing their missing and maybe failed nature (Bulot, 2012a). This is not only the domain of lecture-performance. Remember Joao Moreira Salles and his film *Santiago*. He appears in movement #5 of the *Lovesong* and at the end of Chapter Three of the thesis. His return aimed to amend a wrong: he had filmed Santiago, his butler, without leaving him enough space to exist, as he was treating him not as a film character but as a butler to be ordered. Yet, in his returning film, he cannot really undo what he already did. The images cannot be changed, and with their impertinence, they do not cease to attest to what happened, giving the filmmaker away! Returning can mean the end of hope and the loss of innocence because arriving and searching for signs and testimonies of what one left behind soon proves useless and even painful (Vernet, 2023). Hence, Moreira Salles' return can never be entirely complete or restorative... Maybe

returning is nothing else than recognising this truth: The return can somehow occur, but paradoxically, when it does, it inevitably certifies its own impossibility. In the same way, when performing a film in its absence, the performer says a film that could not be made, that was left unfinished. In telling it, they attest to its inexistence.

Yet, by telling it, paradoxically, the film exists. Differently, but it exists (Bulot, 2018). Full circle. Back and forth. One way or the other, the film can only exist (or be performed) at the moment of its withdrawal (Bulot, 2018).

The film can only exist at the moment of its withdrawal... Ontologically speaking, this idea resonates with Orpheus' fate. Yet, here, it is literal, palpable. The film exists and does not exist simultaneously. It is a non-existent film in progress.

Hence, the point may not be to elucidate whether it is possible to regain the sense of belonging to the home. But rather than that, to understand that as long as a complete return proves impossible, it becomes the milestone—the goal that conditions everything or almost everything. The resulting voice, trapped in between, trapped in the process, would then be a trace or a reminder of a failed attempt, and it would also become proof of the impossibility of not continuing to try.

Coda:

It is August 2024. I am writing this last part of the thesis while spending a few days in the countryside in my mother's hometown. On this occasion, being here is more of a need than a choice. Our home caught fire, and we needed a refuge until it was fixed. And here we are, in this tiny village in the south of Catalunya, in a region called Terra Alta, Highland in English, despite being more of a valley. Due to the landscape, one could believe being in Tuscany (as in Albrecht's "Tuscany of the South" where everything -solastalgia-began!). There are olive trees, pines, almond trees, and vineyards. Every evening, we have a ritual: walking along the river. Yet the river, today, is almost dry. No surprise. My wife, who is taking filmic notes for her next film, films the river, or the stones and rocks that used to be underwater, our dog Greta and me. I keep silent and look around. And I cannot help thinking that I could not film this. Could I film something else?

Today, I would not know what to film. I close my eyes (or I imagine that I close them) and remember the images I made for my first film, my graduation film, thirty years ago. It was called *Memory*, and it was a portrait of an old lady, Angelita (little angel), whose husband had passed away. She lived in this village. She also passed away a long time ago. For

that short documentary, I filmed images of the river in super-8. This river. Her images (in video) were in black and white. The river, in colour, should create a dialogue with her: the portrait and the landscape. In dialogue with those images, the super-8 showing the river and the black and white video portraying Angelita, there was her voice, remembering, sharing glimpses to her past life, when she was young and met her husband. Tender and joyful memories of the village, which they never left. Also, the child who never arrived and the civil war. Despite the pain, both good and bad memories were home to her.

If I close my eyes again (or imagine that I do it), I see the vivid and lively colours, the ones of the images and also the ones of the river as I remember it. The water running. Its freshness could even be seen in the image. The white little round stones. The different nuances of green. Small escaping fast fishes. Empty snails on the shore. The river and its image merge into the same thing in my imagination and memory.

An image-home. Yes, it is my image-home.

A place that I recognise as my childhood and adolescence. That is home.

Rilke would say -and I do not know from where this quote comes- homeland is meant to be found in childhood. Even if it was only the landscape of my holidays. And not all holidays. That is what, for me, a mother's home ultimately means. Her childhood blended with mine, with that of my siblings (I am the youngest of six). Her homeland became ours. Even if it is not entirely true. In any case, our sense of belonging (I say 'our' because I know for sure that this feeling is shared with my brothers and sisters) is connected to that landscape. A place. And a time. A time when everything seemed still possible. An image and a home without fissures. Not yet.

But now, an image-home impossible to return to. Does it mean that I am homeless now? A burnt home (at least momentarily), also a homeland wounded by time and loss. Personal losses, past and future ones. Also, as I have argued in the thesis, a lost sense of belonging to image making, to cinema.

Yet, *hopefully*, there is a way back. During these last five years, I have tried to find it. And it seems I found the answer in refounding, reimagining, and reinventing. Transform the image-home into something else... even if you know this might only be a paradox or an illusion.

A film destined to fade away.

(...)

June 2025. Almost a year has passed since our temporary exile to the Highland—a tough year. The memory of that August is vivid. It was during those days that we got the contact of the veterinarian who would diagnose Greta's cancer. It was the beginning of the end, of that end.

I cannot help thinking this research existed between two massive losses. Two deaths. Just before I began to enter what had been my dream -giving me time to explore cinema-my dad passed away. Greta died one month ago—five years in between, five years trying to rebuild a home. And here I am, continuing to question the relationship between images and home. Home.

Now, I understand that I could not have made *Lovesong* without my dad's death. Five years ago, a few months after he passed away, I wrote a haiku (it is the first one I have written in my life. Also the last):

*I am forty-five years old now
The exact age you had when you had me
It's time to refound myself*

The same gesture - a para-poetic one - the exact nature...
Refound the home. The image-home.

And I also understand I could not make this film today, without Greta. If home, as Bachelard taught us, can be everything, anything, I have lost home, again. That is a fact.

Yet, as Cassin would ask... *Are we ever at home?*... I was doubting, in the conclusion of the thesis, about the meaning of making solastalgic films, in the plural. I was wondering if it was possible. A solastalgic film is a film that recognises the loss of the sense of belonging to the image-home. While doing it, paradoxically, it regains or recovers that (lost) sense of belonging, transformed into a different one, a refounded one. Hence, can one still be a solastalgic filmmaker once the voice is recovered?

As I can painfully prove, now... losing and recovering is not a one-way road; it does not find an end. It is rather a back-and-forth endless story. Like the sea described by

Holderlin in his poem “Andenken” (“Memory” in English). *The sea, which gives and takes away...*

Therefore, a solastalgic filmmaker, like all filmmakers, like all artists, is somehow destined to make the same film.

My home, the home that appears in *Lovesong*, is suspended between two losses, two deaths. It is as if that space would be trapped between the two mountains photographed by Van der Keuken, destined to be endlessly lost and regained. Mountains inside, mountains outside.

There is an echo between this image and two other images appearing in the thesis. On the one hand, the image that opens the lyrical drift in *Last Autumn*, by Yrsa Roca Fannberg. It shows a mountain through a window (fig.38). On the other, the window in *Lâ-bas*, by Chantal Akerman. A veiled window that reveals and conceals simultaneously the outside. The viewer sees and does not see a building, not a mountain, but it is still a mass, out there, distant, unreachable but present (fig. 92). The triangle again. The poet. The world. The poem.

The film might fade away. Home, as I know it, might have recently vanished. Again. And this is how it has been and everything points out that this is how it will continue to be. This is their destiny. Nothing stays forever. And precisely because of that, like Orpheus, but also like Echo, the nymph punished by Hera to repeat the last words of any sentence she would hear, the solastalgic film, the solastalgic filmmaker is condemned to face that loss each time, to feel it, to name it and by doing so, to try and transform it in something else. And be ready to start all over again.

Nothing disappears completely— da Capo al Coda.

Appendix

Here you will find the script of *Lovesong*, a non-existent film in progress. A script which is not a script for a film which is not a film. And yet they are. I claim that this is not a script because it does not show what a film script would normally contain: a reference of what happens inside the filmic universe, the words that are said, the gestures, the actions, the images. This text that I share is the voice of *Lovesong*. The voice in a strict sense, the written words that I read while the spectator watches the image (and also me reading). I have decided to include a scan of the last version I read, the one that I presented in Reykjavik almost one year ago. This way, my notes and indications for the reading are visible: marks written in Catalan that signal when to take a pause, breath, slow down, give time... Also, when I need to remember to be dynamic or go faster because I might arrive late to a certain image, when to wait for a specific image to appear or something to happen inside the image as a sign of when to start. There are also the numbers of shots when they act as a series or repetition, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6... While performing, when I see these numbers I know that I need to pay special attention to the screen, as the idea is to count them to be able to keep certain rhythm. Each time the image changes, while reading, I need to find myself at the next marked point of the text. It also includes the time of the black screen. When it starts I have to start the timer. And stop it when they finish. That gives me an idea of the time I have to read a certain passage when there are no images as reference. These marks are normally the same version to version but they have several variations. When I rehearse I update, even if it is with minimal changes, nuances. A word that is added. Another that is erased. A pause here instead of there, an accent here and not there... Each performance is different.

Before the script of *Lovesong* there is a document that says INTRO. This is the last thing I wrote when I prepared my first performance for DocMontevideo. I realised I needed an introduction. I am standing up in front of the audience, with a zenithal light. I address to them. This is the only moment that the word solastalgia will appear in the performance. I do not read the text. I learn it by heart. I tell it.

Then, I go to the table. I switch on the light. I press the play button and I begin... I will not stop until the end. 2 hours and 15 minutes later. A lifetime.

LOVESONG.

A NON-EXISTENT

FILM IN PROGRESS

Text- Fourth Version – September 24

INTRO

All this began when, about four years ago, I came across a word by chance while reading the newspaper: SOLASTALGIA.

The Australian environmental philosopher Glenn Albrecht coined it in 2003 to designate the melancholy, sadness, or unease provoked by the loss of a home. With clear resonances with "nostalgia", what differentiates SOLASTLAGIA is that in it, it is not the people who leave but the place, the place of belonging, called home. Albrecht came up with this word to talk about something he was observing in the Aboriginal people of south-eastern Australia as they were being dispossessed of their homes due to climate change and the direct intervention of mining or road building.

In time, others used the word to talk about other communities. And years passed, and Albrecht himself spoke of the solastalgic era. The houses at risk were not just natural landscapes but also social, political, affective, emotional, imagined, and dream landscapes. All of them were being or could be taken away. All of us were exposed to this loss.

Intrigued by this idea, a question came to my mind: What if an image could be considered a place of belonging? What if the image was that place called home? A place that welcomes you, offering you identity, comfort and refuge. And furthermore, what would happen if that place, that image-home could be lost, had been lost, or was about to be lost?

This is how this exploration begins, with a word that served to open a box. A box with seven tapes containing recorded images inside and from which seven movements would emerge, as in a song that would begin like this.

MOVEMENT #1

Pantalla en negra

Twenty years ago, I tried to make a film about a poet. I wanted to capture the relationship between her, the words she created, and the world she inhabited.

I was determined to deeply explore and understand how the creative or poetic act could engender a new place, which would be a mirror to a known reality and, at the same time, offer a refuge from it.

The recording resulted in seven tapes that were kept in a box.

Here is the first attempt to recover that film in the form of a "Lovesong" or "A non-existent film in progress".

The first movement of which would be called
"What lasts is founded by the poets." Hölderlin

Retorn a la pantalla en negra

The poet I filmed, Lala, was my art teacher when I was a teenager. Some years later, we met again. And our conversations about art, cinema and poetry began. She had just written her first poetry book, LIEBESLIED. Love song. She gave me a beautiful hand-made copy. And I learnt every poem by heart. (25")

46" ↓
Almost immediately, I decided to film her in a very simple gesture that would become a pact between us over a year. I would go and visit, and she would read her creation in the landscape that inspired her, which also was the place where she used to write and the world that appeared -more or less explicitly- in her poems.

Primer fragment. Imatge del gat que es congela

23" ↓
This is how the first tape begins. "Liebeslied One in Roman numbers" is the name in the K-7. These are the first recorded images. The first encounter. Lala, placing the chair for the first reading in front of the camera, the baby cat (who will grow

up during the year and through the images) and the 25th of Bach's "Goldberg Variations".

Nege = Resbalat un moment -
Imatges del diari

During all that year, we would meet, and I would film her sitting in different places: in the garden, among the pines, inside the old house with green shutters on the windows, into the woods, next to the fountain, in front of a hermitage, in the middle of a dirt road between fields, or with her Mountain and the sky in the background.

She kept saying her poems. She repeated them over and over again because I asked her to do so.

In the book, she identifies two worlds, one of the facts ("an orderly house of reasons and proofs", as another poet, Mary Oliver, would say) and one of creation, love and beauty. In her poems, which open the door to this second world, she conveys the impossibility of grasping life through poetry and how, paradoxically, at the same time, it is poetry which has the power to bring a true sense of reality.

I, for my part, wanted to capture this bond to creation by showing her reading and reading her poems in the landscape. I wanted to explore the place she had inside her creative world and the place she adopted in front of the "real" one. I needed to understand how these three elements: the poet, her words and the world would relate to each other. I wanted to walk the distance between the world she created and the one that existed next to her creation. I wanted to know which would survive which. I tried to understand the process of going from one to the other. (back and forth)

I left the film unfinished.

10 Quadres del Cézanne

1 Cézanne was obsessed with a mountain. Le Monte Saint Victoire. He painted it up to 87 times.

² He continuously struggled with the ever-changing outside world—the Mountain—to extract its essential characteristics.³ But in his letters to his doctor Gasquet, he stated that it is impossible to pretend and fix a complexity⁴ beyond our reach. It is not feasible for art to faithfully capture an eternally changing world⁵ as if it were immutable.

In response, his work speaks of reality's continuous⁶ change. Art should not be interested in stopping this change⁷ (freezing it) but reflecting it, following it, encouraging it, being part of it,⁸ and reacting to it.

In this search to find this balance between the reality of nature⁹ and the reality of the painting, when he succeeded in doing so when he succeeded to capture the world's essential and eternal change into a picture,¹⁰ he would compare it to "putting the two hands together."

I see here the triangle again:
The world.
The poet.
Her poetry.

Lala declaims her poems over and over again. Bach variates an aria more than twenty times. Cézanne chases almost one hundred times a moving mountain.

SD " A world that escapes. This is its fate. A poet tries to capture it by leaving an image behind, an image (or a word) containing the relationship with this escaping world, a surviving image, a surviving word. A mark of a time and place. A mark of her existence in that time and place. The poet tries to find a way to leave the mark—the poet looking for her voice.

This is the poem number VI in Liebeslied

(dir el poema mentre va apareixent en anglès a la pantalla)

*Hi ha qui pren el camí
de la paraula al callat,
hi ha qui demora al silenci.*

MOVEMENT

*Hora foscant poblada de pelegrins,
fronterera...*

*-hora primera
fora del temps-*

*Hi ha qui transita l'afrau,
hi ha, però, qui funda.*

Fotograma congelat Tishe!

SEGOUS
→
Around the year two thousand and two, Kossakovski got ill and had to take a long break. While obliged to stay home, he took a camera and filmed through his window. Some workers were opening a massive hole in the middle of the street, and for a few days, he would film the works and everything that would happen around it. The machines at the construction site, the workers, people walking around, little love stories that were briefly unfolding, falling drunkards, the rain, the trees, the pigeons in the window frame.

This is the final scene of the film *Tishe!*

Fragment Tishe!

In this sequence, the old lady calls her dog "Tishe, tishe", yet at the beginning, we had a very different impression: she seemed to ask the world to be quiet: "Hush, hush".

45"
In front of the world, one has two possibilities: to talk or to stay silent.

One of Kossakovski's statements goes, " If a painter who paints with his right-hand gets his hand cut off, he will learn to paint with his left hand. If they cut it off too, he will paint with his feet, first with one, then with the other. And when he can no longer, he will learn (how) to paint with his teeth".

MOVEMENT #2

The first day of the shooting took place on a spring afternoon in the garden of the village family house. Inherited by Lala's mother, this holiday house was built at the beginning of the 20th century with the money won by a great uncle in the lottery.

For Lala, it became a temporary home to escape from everyday life, read, write—a shelter.

Second movement. "**Comme un rêve singulièrement profonde**" / "**Like a particularly deep dream**", Hans Castorp

Lala placed the chair in front of the camera for the first time. Afterwards, she read all the poems in a row, in order. Meanwhile, I was trying to find the image. An image that should show at the same time:

Her place

The place of her poems

And my place.

My place, or in other words, "from where I would look at her?" would rapidly transform into the place from which I -along with the future spectator- would listen to her. From that moment on, the image became a place of listening.

In the following image, she will get to the book's last poem, the number thirty-five. This particular poem will be repeated during the shooting in each reading session. Trapped between a ritual and an obsession, it -that particular poem- became a place that I needed to revisit.

MOV.
CÀMERA

El pla tremola

This was its first reading.

La Lala llegeix el poema en directe

.....*Al Daguestan, amor, fundar la casa*.....

Imatge de la paret amb ombres

Dagestan. From the Turkish word "Dage", which means Mountain. And the Persian suffix: "-stan", which means land. Dagestan. The land -the place- of the Mountain.

- No per pausa -

The Mountain of Cezanne, again. And also "The Magic Mountain".

Thomas Mann started to write it in the year nineteen twelve, following his experiences and impressions during a visit to his wife, Katia. Due to lung disease, she had to spend several months at the Wald Sanatorium in Davos, Switzerland.

PAUSA

Imatges del Sanatori

It would take Mann twelve years to finish the book.

In "The Magic Mountain", Hans Castorp -mirroring Mann himself- visits his cousin Joachim, interned at a Sanatorium in the high Mountain, suffering from the same lung infection as Katia Mann.

Time goes by, and for one reason or another, Hans Castorp ends up staying there for seven years with a small wet spot in his lungs himself.

Retorn a les imatges de la paret

Indeed, time does not pass in that written Mountain as it does in the rest of the world. Its universe somehow reflects the world outside, but at the same time, it exists in itself, self-sufficient, autonomous, following its own pace, like in an image.

Imatge de la finestra

In a scene of the book, one evening, away from the noise of a party, Hans Castorp, who is madly in love with one of the patients, Clawdia Chauchat - tells her: "Let us sit here, close to each other, and look on, as though in a dream. A particularly deep dream".

Hans Castorp uses French to express all these thoughts and feelings because - according to him- translating them into another language ^{allows} allows him to speak without speaking, with a slightly different kind of responsibility, like saying in a dream. Un rêve singulièrement profonde.

Clawdia Chauchat would leave the Mountain the day after.

Els gats es van veient més clarament

I never knew much about the garden, the house, the family history, or the village. Only what could be seen at first glance.

Ritme

A Mediterranean garden, with plants resistant to lack of water, shady areas full of temporarily adopted stray cats, a bougainvillea, a couple of really tall cypresses, pines, shrubs, aromatic plants, a wisteria, corners more or less abandoned, hidden, left to their own free will. For the first days, Lala's reading kept us there. No other place, no other world seemed possible.

Imatges de Parc Central

These images belong to a short film ^{shot by} by artist Dominique Gonzalez Foerster in Hong Kong.

On the screen, she wrote:

"Places in a foreign language."

"Cinema as a foreign language."

And yes, making an image can be like having a dream in a foreign language and then sitting next to it as you sit next to the person you love.

But what happens if the bond is somehow broken? What happens when it gets blurred? What happens when the correspondence between you and the image seems to vanish?

Through these images of a non-existent film, I want to explore how this disappearance can take place. How did it take place?

In the first days of confinement in two thousand twenty, the Pandemic made one thing clear: there are many kinds of silences. The street without children after school, the supermarkets without the hustle and bustle, the masked people who recognise each other just with their eyes.

El pla es congela

There are different kinds of silences... and they all have different meanings...

Imatges de gats. Diàleg en directe.

Torna el silenci.

There are different kinds of silences. There is, for example, the silence in "A Humble Life." An elderly Japanese woman who has devoted all her life to sewing kimonos... Today, widowed and with her adult children far away, ~~she~~ lives alone in a mountain house. She receives the visit of Sokurov, a filmmaker with a foreigner's friendly, respectful, and contemplative voice, who transforms the silence of loneliness into a complicit silence ^{negre} that the viewer is invited to share.

Fragment d'A Humble Life

Indeed, a voice can decide to remain silent and listen before resuming the journey. ^{YET} And certain silences—like a foreign language—can become a way of speaking, a particular form of dreaming.

MOVEMENT #3

Negre

Ritme | If some silences are a form of speech, others are the condition for the voice to appear. They are prior silences, indispensable to activate gaze and speech. They are silences placed before us, opening spaces, provoking, pushing us to exist.

Third Movement: "The Cinematic Image Can Be Emptied of all Realities Except One, that of Space", André Bazin.

Imatges de les persianes

On my visits to Lala, I usually spent the night in the house—sometimes one, sometimes more, but never too many. The filming consisted more of comings and goings, of goodbyes and reencounters.

Now, I seem to remember that I was the last to ^{go to} sleep on the first night. Someone locked the house's front door, and everything was silent except for my noises.

Summer was about to start or had already begun. I don't really remember. I do remember a warm night and these windows... and my obsession with filming them at all hours and in every possible way.

More than filming through them, I filmed them, trying to make them the centre of the frame, giving a sense of an "outside", both in the dark and in the light of day. Indeed, the next morning, I was the first to get up. And I kept on trying.

I insisted. In fact, I re-framed them with tiny variations, one after the other: a more or less open shot, shot correction, open shutter, closed shutter, focus, out of focus.

What are we looking for in an image? What was I looking for in those images? Looking at them today, I can understand that I was trying to make images that captured the essence of Lala's poetry, which, for some reason, I saw reflected in that place.

I aimed to use the camera to make images, those images, rather than to look at and capture the experience we were sharing and let the image be the result, the trace of that experience.

Imatges del jardí

When everyone got up, we certainly prepared coffee and something for breakfast.

We didn't read poems that morning.

the garden

In the images, there is only silence and space—the garden—and the cats, of course.

I remember that one day, Lala was a little uneasy about the meaning of our pact. It had to do with the privacy of those moments. But it wasn't about protecting something intimate. It wasn't that at all. Instead, she (rightly) wondered whether what mattered to us would really matter to others. If, after all, what we were doing didn't turn out to be somewhat bourgeois. There we were, reading poetry and sharing space (a garden), making an object together, which could feel cut off from the world as if the world that had been left out of this cut-out didn't matter to us.

images

I like documentary images, particularly for one reason. They are not just "objects" to be looked at; they become places—a shared place that those who make images and those who look at them end up inhabiting together. The images create a space for an encounter, for numerous encounters.

Cadira

Their time becomes our time; their universe becomes our universe; their destiny becomes our destiny.

But, in an image, there is always what we see and don't see. There we were, yes, in the garden, with Lala's poems, ^{not} silences, ^{the} and cats, but not only. There is always more. There can always be more.

The year was 2002. Surrounding these images was the world: a coup d'état in Venezuela; FARC guerrillas kidnapped Ingrid Betancourt in Colombia; a Tupolev 154 flying from Moscow to Barcelona and a Boeing 757 cargo plane collided in mid-flight over Lake Costanza, on the border between Germany and Switzerland; Seventy-one people died; the US State Department issued a report (as a result of the Twin Towers attacks) that would drastically change international policies, designating North Korea, Cuba, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Sudan and Syria as 'state sponsors of terrorism'. Brazil won the football World Cup, playing with Germany. Two Earth Observation satellites were launched. One from Europe. The other, from the United States, Dolly, the sheep, suffered severe arthritis, raising serious questions about the risks of cloning; "Star Wars 2", "Lord of the Rings 2", "The Hours", and "Spider" were released in the cinema; Johnny Cash recorded what is undoubtedly the best version of the song "Hurt" in existence.

SENIA
neo
and
ritual

None of this can be seen in these images. But if I were to say exactly what I have just said, these images would be immediately re-signified, and somehow, the world, another world would appear before our eyes.

Thanks to Baudelaire in 'The Painter of Modern Life' written in eighteen hundred and sixty-three, I understood that what we create or say needs to be anchored in a time and a place. But what is the time and place of these images? Where and when do they belong now? Is it really that world they need to confront or worry about? Is it that past that needs to be invoked? Or, what kind of out-of-frame are they or should they be in dialogue with?

"Out of frame". Jean-Louis Comolli has written extensively about this term. It essentially refers to what happens outside the image, what the image hides. It is not simply a matter of not showing. It is about making it evident that

something is not being shown. The "out of frame" designates that which ~~is~~
~~without being, that which, without being seen~~ ^{being unseen}, is present - a present absence.

It can be a hidden promise, a threat lurking from the edges of the image, a lost illusion, a surprise to come, a warning of something unsuspected, a notice of something that is still there - whether we like it or not - a subtle announcement of the next step... It is the imagined, the remembered, and even the apparently forgotten. It is a ghost that haunts.

I see in this garden - today - two ghosts.

Ghost number 1. A poet in a garden.

IMAGE

^{NEGRE}
This is Ingeborg Bachmann. Lala introduced me to her life and work. From that moment on, she would be a fundamental presence.

In January 1963, a journalist asked her: "Why did you stop writing poetry?"

"I stopped when I began to suspect that I could "write" poems even if I lacked that compulsion to write them. And there will be no more poems unless I convince myself they need to be poems again, so new that they correspond to everything I have experienced until then." Bachmann stopped writing poetry the moment she began to write without being moved, without shuddering, the moment she began to write without risk.

"Writing without risk"...she says... "Writing without risk"... I would like to believe that creating is a reaction to the world. And what the work shows and shares is a need to react/respond. The need and the desire to speak. The need and desire

to say, to have something to say. To take a position and to expose oneself in doing so. To dare. To take the risk.

The second ghost. Another poet in another garden.

IMAGE

Wisława Szymborska. Several years after the shooting, I discovered her work somewhat by chance and became passionate about her.

Ritmi
↓

In one of her poems from 1988, "Children of the Time", she writes:

"Whatever you say reverberates,
Whatever you don't say speaks for itself.
So either way, you're talking politics.

Even when you take to the woods,
you're taking political steps
On political grounds.

Apolitical poems are also political,
and above us shines a moon
No longer purely lunar."

Ghosts in a garden.
Poets and places.

MANECE ingoing

After the shooting, I selected some images to publish in a cultural section of a Catalan Newspaper. Next to the frames, I placed a fragment from one of Lala's poems.

A fragment that shows a question that became essential for my documentary work. It belongs to the poem number thirty-four. The second last poem of the book:

It says as follows:

"Com podria sortir, restar, entrar-te
des de quin territori vorejar-te
per tornar a tu?"

That "you" could be any "other": a lover, a father or a mother, a sister, a brother, a stranger, a friend, or an enemy. It can be only one person or an entire community. It could even be that "other self" we all carry inside.

It may be alive, dead, ^{wellknown or} unknown... It can not yet exist; we may even have imagined or dreamt it.

It can also be the reader, the viewer, the listener..., and all receivers to come, who will never cease to find unexpected ways of existing in the face of what has been created.

The "you" could also refer to the poetic word or the image itself... How to find the right words and images? How to get to them, hold them, open them, and let them go?

It would be/as if the poet, the artist, the filmmaker - mimicking Cézanne - could not help but wonder: how to find the access to "capture" what, by definition or nature, is ever-changing and slippery?

Finally, that unreachable "you" could be the world—the world outside. The one we are part of—whether we like it or not. The one we somehow need to question and to which we ~~must~~ return systematically.

The whole world. Which is not here. In the image. But which, at the very same time, is.

MOVEMENT #4

"To Believe and Not to Believe in the Filmed World." Jean-Louis Comolli

I started the fourth movement less than a month after Comolli's death. He was beginning to be old but might have become older without the illness.

With him, I began to fall in love with documentary films. It was 1996. The University (where I studied cinema) had invited him to teach creative documentaries in a short seminar.

He gave his lectures in French; back then, I barely understood the language. Yet, I felt that I understood everything. Through his words, creation and its purpose, implications, and even its burdens, frailties, and mysteries became so clear to me.

Imatges de la casa

Since then, I have devoted myself to this kind of cinema—making it, interrogating it, questioning life and creation, departing from what could be called a documentary gaze.

Comolli's writings would always be there, enlightening the way.

Imatges del jardí

In the previous movement, images brought the garden back to existence, transforming it into a filmic place inhabited by ghosts. There they were -without

being there- the world (with its events, wounds, hypocrisies and even celebrations) and two more poets.

"The invisible never ceases to haunt the visible", Comolli would say to speak of the out-of-frame. What I do not see is also there, hovering and opening doors to other realities, memories, and places. After his funeral, I walked with Marie Pierre (another mentor) through Père Lachaise cemetery (another kind of garden), and she said: "There is a difference between dying and disappearing. Comolli has only died".

This is how, unexpectedly, he has become one of the ghostly dwellers of these images—present from now on. "Not disappeared". Inevitably bonded to them (as certainly to so many other images made by so many others). He is and will be there (or here) despite his absence. Inseparable from what we are seeing right now, despite the fact he never knew of its existence, neither of the images nor the garden.

But he will not be the last ghost to join. Until now, I was sure I was the person making the images. Still, at least three fleeting and almost imperceptible moments suggest something different: I am not always the person behind the camera, watching through the lens.

I appear twice in the image, very briefly. In one, I talk with Lala's husband, maybe about life or cinema. Who holds the camera was following a cat, and unexpectedly, we got in his way.

In the second one, I can hardly be seen; I appear -tiny- from the left, walking from the edge of the image towards a tree. I seem to be looking at the camera very briefly, and I quickly disappear, doubly hidden: first by the tree, then immediately by the decision to stop filming.

And there is the third image—an image showing hands moving, addressing Lala, explaining something, interrupting the situation, and indicating from the camera. They are not my hands but those of my life partner, who, by all appearances, made some of these images. We had been together since we were teenagers, and we used to make films together. He left sometime after this shooting.

And here is where ^{the other} ~~another~~ ghost appears. But it is not him. This ghost is not a person; it is the past that reappears, of which he would be one of the signs. A past crossed by the signs or marks of my failed attempts to make a film.

While making this movement, I found three folders with notes, reflections, and images gathered over several years following the shooting. Although they are not dated, I can identify three kinds of attempts in three different periods according to the nature of these materials. There are, in order: First notes for narrative structure and editing, with possible beginnings; Second, a more or less in-depth analysis of the poems with notes indicating a possible filmic translation; And third, a theoretical approach to what I considered should be the filmic work with poetry, sound and silence in a film of this kind.

Among the notes, I wrote some reflections that are not very understandable, like the following.

"Not to talk about Lala. Not to talk about me. Talk about creation; about the representation, and the expression and expressiveness of the self without the self."

There is also a list of possible titles. At that time, I marked with a cross two of them :

"Jo no he vingut per res, que ni tan sols he vingut": I didn't come here for anything; I didn't even come.

And "La veu callava": the voice kept silent

Both were taken from her poems, and I realise that both are somehow a form of denial or refusal of a presence. A refusal of a voice. Hers? Or rather mine?

Among the documents, there is also a piece of paper that corresponds to the early days after my break-up.

It reads: "Spitsbergen, " meaning "jagged peaks". Spitsbergen is an island named after the Dutch explorer Willem Barents, who mistakenly discovered it while searching for the North Sea route in 1596. It follows the word "Settlements". And here comes a list of six names of Norwegian, Russian and Polish sites on the island: remote settlements and mines, some abandoned for decades. Also, a stone circle, the location of the queen's palace in "The Snow Queen" by Hans Christian Andersen.

Neape

It was 2006, and I had the idea to travel to Spitsbergen and film icebergs melting.

1/ Afterwards, I would make those images dialogue with the ones I had filmed with Lala. I remember that the connection was clear for me: a block of ice breaking off the mainland or ice melting was the closest I could imagine—at that time—
2/ to expressing the emotion or thoughts provoked by that lost bond, *that* broken universe once protected by a garden.

I never went to Spitsbergen, and I never thought about it again until now.

I googled "Spitsbergen", and among all the information and images uploaded by bloggers and YouTubers, those that caught my attention belong to one of the two abandoned Russian mining communities, Pyramiden (left in 1998). I remember that, among all of them, it was already the one that intrigued me the most; I don't know why. Today, Pyramiden is a ghost town with four main buildings: one for families, one for men, ³ one for women and one for the children's school and recreation. To these is added another building which houses a swimming pool, a cinema theatre, a library, a bar with a still working gramophone with 33 revolutions per minute records from the sixties. And a communal canteen, dominated by a mosaic, showing what one would imagine and expect to see outdoors: a polar bear, the sun, and an iceberg.

An iceberg in Spitsbergen. Le monte Saint Victoire. The triangle again.

The poet, her words and the world. The painter, his paintings and the world.

The poet. The painter

1/ And what about the filmmaker?

What was I looking for? Where or what was I really looking at?

Imatge del camí

This was the first time we went out of the garden. We took that path to the woods. It was a walk that Lala and her husband used to take in the summer evenings. On this occasion, we searched for a place to keep reading and reciting poems. The idea was to find a spot to see the mountains in the background.

-Whenever you say, ok?

Lala Diu el poema en directe.

.....Not to say the word that extends from me to you.....

-I have to repeat it because I have said twice, "From me to you."

Is it Ok?

She repeated the poem, and this time; she said it well: "Not to say the word that extends from me to you" the first time, and "Not to say the word that extends from you to me" the second.

She then recited another poem, and suddenly, she stopped. She was feeling awkward. I suggested she pause between poems to take the tension out of the situation. I hesitated in my intervention, reflected out loud, got lost while talking, and ended by saying, "Well, I don't know... maybe I'm wrong."

We all began to discuss, trying to understand what we were doing there, reading poems aloud in the middle of the mountain. "Did it make any sense?" "Would

the viewer understand?", "Would anyone care?", "Were these questions even important at that moment?"

Lala listened and ended up saying as if trying to reassure me, or us, her included: "Even if it's strange, it's OK because we'll see how it turns out in the end, won't we?" But I wouldn't. The film remained unfinished despite continuing to film for the whole summer until the end of autumn and my attempts to approach its editing in the following years.

Reading about icebergs, I found the following information:

There are three different reasons why an iceberg breaks off. One is due to warm water in the Ocean. The second would be an external accident that unexpectedly overcomes, for example, an earthquake. And the third comes from the inside. In other words, the very properties of the ice (geometry, thickness, density, temperature, fabric, and impurity loading) can predispose the ice to crevasses formation, leading to a break-off.

When he left me, he said, "You know? You had left me before". Maybe. I don't remember. No. I don't know. I don't even know if such an idea makes any sense.

I DON'T KNOW IF I LEFT THE IMAGES BEHIND OR IF THE IMAGES LEFT ME FIRST.

I don't know if the garden vanished because we didn't find ^{the RIGHT} ~~and maintain a place~~ ^{CIRCUMSTANCES TO} where we could exist and look at one another. Or maybe it was because of an unexpected accident, like an earthquake.

↓ something unexpected,

Or maybe the reason comes from within, as in the iceberg. And was this film's destiny not to be made? Or at least not to be made until twenty years later?

MOVEMENT 11

So rather than asking why the bond with these images, with this familiar universe, with Lala, her poems, the garden, creation... was lost or broken, perhaps one should ask why to return now, trying to recover the voice; why should it be recovered? And if so, in what way is it possible?

MOVEMENT #5

"Nothing Is Lost" Paul Celan

The images we have just seen belong to "Santiago", a film made by Joao Moreira Salles in 2007. However, this may not be entirely accurate.

The images, in reality, belong to two films. The one that Moreira Salles shot and intended to make in 1994 and the one he finally made 13 years later, in 2007.

In his first attempt, he approached a character called Santiago, the director's family's butler.

For the film he wanted to make in the first place, he had written a solid script in which everything fitted together and was under control.

The script provided precise directions, indicating how Santiago had to appear in front of the camera to fit in with the director's already-formed impression or idea of him.

When he began to edit, Moreira Salles realised that he had left no room for the character, that he had not allowed him to exist freely, and that none of his decisions had anything to do with a real encounter.

He left the film unfinished.

Yet for some reason, thirteen years later, he returned to the material, discovering that among those images, something had been recorded that made visible precisely that truth: that of a director giving orders on what to do, what to say and how to act to a character who, being basically his butler, had no choice but to obey.

Seeing how Santiago strives to serve and please Joao Moreira Salles is shattering. And the director's attempt to come to terms with this reality and correct it more than a decade later is precious.

Just before showing these hands, the voice-over representing the director says something like this:

"Santiago asked us to film the dance of his hands."

It seems that this was his daily routine, exercise, and skill. And indeed, he would have been so excited that Salles filmed it. And the truth is that the images are so beautiful. The movements are. The moment is.

Filmed in two long takes, which were included in the final film, apparently respecting their original length, they may indeed be the only existing images, resulting from what Santiago himself asked for or suggested in the shooting.

And as the director acknowledges in the film, they would not have been in the first version. Nevertheless, they were crucial for the film that finally came into existence after a long silence, **the returning film**.

We have seen the whole sequence with the original score, that is to say, as it is edited in the film that returns. I didn't intervene in any way. I simply took it out of its usual place and hosted it here.

The film *Santiago* is one of the most beautiful works I have ever seen. However, whether this return could or can be truly restorative is unclear. *Santiago* remains and will remain the butler, and Joao Moreira Salles will forever be the son of the family he served.

Indeed, it may be an illusion to go back and pretend to reconstruct a gaze outside this fact.

And we... here we are in the garden again, perhaps pursuing another illusion: trying not to restore a wrong but continuing to search for something I couldn't find almost 20 years ago. Return to resume an unfinished search.

These images come just after we walked into the woods when Lala, sitting among trees with her back to the camera ~~because I asked her to do so~~ would say that we should not worry too much if we felt lost because we would end up by finding our way and seeing how the film would turn out.

It is early morning, and the shooting day with Lala is about to begin.

Lala parla de Valente

-Are we filming?

... And one can say, "This was the person".

Negre (just abans del negre)

Lala recited "Elegy (A fragment)". It is a moving poem which starts like this:

(recitar el poema mentre apareix la traducció a la pantalla)

"Si después de morir nos levantamos,
si después de morir
vengo hacia ti como venía antes
y hay algo en mí que tú no reconoces
porque no soy el mismo"

The poem continues to express the uneasiness provoked by a return or a reencounter in which no recognition is possible. Lala explained how this "dying" could be many things: leaving, growing up, leaving behind as a way of dying, of letting something die. And then returning and feeling the loss, as Valente expresses it, ^{the loss} that of returning and looking at ~~oneself~~ again and feeling—inevitably—"that the mirror does not reflect the face".

Returning to these images brings some of that uneasiness, a confrontation with a mirror that no longer reflects - not entirely - what is in front of it.

^{the film}
In "The Beaches of Agnès", there is a scene where Agnès Varda returns to the garden -yet another garden – the garden of her childhood, which she visits before the current owner sells what once was her family house. She looks at the garden and remembers. Then she looks at the camera and says: "The garden is still there. But not the emotion".

Yes. The garden, Lala, and myself... are all there... but not the same emotion. Time has passed for everyone: for Lala, for me, for the garden, and for these images that contain us.

And we barely recognise each other.

Why go back, then? Looking for what and how?

Fotografies de Valente

José Ángel Valente is one of Lala's favourite poets. In this house, she introduced me to his universe one night, sometime before the shooting.

I have always been interested in the origin of creation and how those who create have come to do it. Just after Lala read the poem, I told her how, since the beginning, Valente's life caught my attention so much because he seemed to live as a *non-poet*, as someone who didn't pretend to live as one.

Lala recalled that she knew of his existence because he had translated one of her most cherished poets, Paul Celan. We talked about Valente being a translator and how he considered translation a way of articulating the poetic voice from the text of others. I didn't say or think about it at that time. ^{But} ~~Still~~, now I believe ~~that I believe~~ that making a film is a bit the same: translating the world into images, from one language to another, trying to find a poetic voice from and between the bits and pieces that reality -or life- is leaving behind. My reality now is not those encounters anymore. But the images I was left with.

ritw
Foto
BBN

Tornem a la imatge de Lala.

- **What do you want me to read?**

..... *El Fracàs seria sobreviure*.....

This was one of my favourite poems. Even "Failure would be to survive" became a recurring idea to explain the fragility from which I feel every filmmaker would have to speak. In this shooting, Lala reminds me that she and I would have disagreed about the poem's meaning some days before. There is no way to remember which discussion she is referring to. And I have no clue what the disagreement might have been. It will remain unknown. Images rarely reveal everything.

...

It seems that Lala was not so at ease that day. She would wait in silence for me to prepare the right image. Patient. Looking away or closing her eyes. Sometimes, she would move restlessly and ask me which poem to read. From my side, as the images reveal, I didn't really find a convincing shot. I was obsessed with her image reflected on the window -which I wasn't really able to capture how I wanted- and with stealing silent moments from her, that while for me they attracted ~~something which I identified with~~ a certain truth, for her, they ^{were} ~~made her feel~~ awkward. The last time she would ask for a poem to read, I suggested one that, as she claimed, she had just read two minutes before! It is like, focused as I was in the making, I forgot about being there with her.

Perhaps what was happening to Lala had nothing to do with the filming or me. And she was just tired or... not in the mood. I am unsure if I saw it then, yet today, I see her ^{anoyed} ~~saturated~~, more intrigued by what was going on in the next room or outside the window, in the garden... willing to finish.

⊕ or at least disconnected

Avió *are you laughing*

- *The plane doesn't fly anymore, does it?*
- *What do we do now? Do we continue?*

Negra boca / Negro

Be that as it may, what now becomes clear is that what I was looking for at the time was not clear at all. Despite this, or instead because of it, the images exist as they do: cracked, uncertain, clumsy and imperfect. And that is why they speak and say more than they appear to, giving us away.

ended up saying
What Lala made clear to me that day was that she felt strange looking at a place other than the camera. At that time, I was really obsessed with Brecht, *so I aimed for* ~~with the~~ uncanny, *an* with the presence of her body as she recites, with the empty gaze as if she was looking inward. *an*

Proposals, or rather impositions - such as these - are today so obviously just ideas, and the fact is that it is precisely around ideas - ~~and~~ not in them - that most of the time life is lived.

she
Finally, she asked me if she could stop averting her gaze, turned her head slightly towards the camera and said the last poem of the day, ~~the last poem of the book~~, the same one we heard in the second movement. It is the only one she recited, looking directly into the lens.

Ritmo
Lala amb so en directe

-So? What do we do? The last one?

..... Al Daguestan, amor, fundar la casa.....

-What are you laughing at?

-That I like it a lot. That I like it a lot. I like it a lot.

Negre breu i imatge congelada

Seeing Lala laughing in the image. Provoked by my laugh.

Freezing that image, suspending it in time, not letting it go.

Making another image a couple of years ago.

And placing one image next to the other.

It was July 2022. Lala was presenting her last book, an essay on the poet Paul Celan, in a Bookshop in Barcelona. We barely saw each other in these 20 years—maybe two or three times, always punctually—in presentations of her poetry or essay books.

The images I made 20 years ago turned out to be my last. “Liebeslied,” her book, was the first one. And she became a writer. I love to think about the possibility that images can simultaneously be the end of something and the beginning of something else. Indeed, endings beget beginnings. They can become a promise. Despite the mirror no longer reflecting what is in front of it, the distance, and even the awkwardness or the crack, a kind of hope rises.

By a quirk of fate, this is the book Lala presented ^{that} ~~last~~ year on that hot summer’s day. The title comes from a poem by Celan himself: “Nothing is Lost.”

----- INTERMISSION -----

MOVEMENT #6

9 plans d'ombres a la paret

1 I have accompanied others' films, which is the same as saying that I have dreamt others' dreams for 20 years, and one of the first and foremost questions I have tried to address and understand each time is what was their quest, what they were looking for.

And you don't look for something unless ² you have previously lost it.

Effectively, every film begins with a loss. And creating would be nothing else but to react to this "having lost something", this absence, wound, crack, crevasse, rupture, or even failure or defeat.

3 But if going back and pretending to restore -or heal- any of these is not the option. Then, how do we face and respond to this loss?

Agnes Varda made a film in 1966 called "The Creatures". It seems that it was a complete commercial and critical failure that nearly ended her filmmaking career.

Ten years later, in 2006, she took the leftovers of that film's stock and built a ⁴ shack with them. The walls were made of strips with those wounded and surviving images, whose primary purpose was now to let the light in. She called it "The failure hut". ⁵

Three years later, in 2009, Vardà decided to make a new version of that ^{hut} shack. She kept the same idea, ⁶ but if when entering the "The failure hut", viewers

would have found inside, in the middle, an editing table, as a kind of ruin, crack, scar - that is to say, a proof, relic or reminder of that wound⁷ - this time, they would discover sunflowers instead. A handful of sunflowers scattered around the space, each in its pot. She called that "A cinema hut: The greenhouse of happiness".

8 If going back and pretending that we can restore what has been lost is not an option, then, according to Varda, we are left with two possibilities: The first, to try to accept the loss and learn to live with it and with what is left behind. The return film would have to make room for this absence and find a way to embrace it—the failure hut. *Anna*

9 The second option: to transform that loss or wound into something else. From failure to happiness. Is it true, then, that nothing is lost? *Calina*

Movement #6: "Whatever Returns from Oblivion Returns to Find a Voice",
Louise Glück

Summer passed, and we kept filming. It was a mixture of spending time together and having a shared goal: making a film. We mainly stayed in the garden, and when the heat calmed in the evenings and before the sun fully set, we went for what became our "regular walk."

Among all the hikes, we particularly liked the one on the path that led to a dry fountain.

That day, I asked Lala to sit next to the fountain and declaim the poems that came to her mind, the ones that inspired her at that moment. She recited poems

of her own and others she liked by other poets in other languages; most of them had to do with fountains.

Lala was in a good mood. More than that. She was joyful. We both were.

But if, in these years, I have come to remember the filming - which in reality has not happened very often - the truth is that I did not remember these laughs, nor those to come.

This is something that (suddenly) happens when we revisit images of something we have experienced. They can open up spaces in the heart of memory, bringing back or removing some of what was left out. When that happens, the image relentlessly certifies: "You forgot it, but that happened... You might have forgotten it...yet it also happened". And so, seeing these images that have the power to open up spaces in the heart of memory has more to do with discovery than remembrance. Looking at them becomes like being in front of something new, and everything -suddenly- can happen.

something

everything

Lala a la font

-What do you have in mind then?

..... **Daurada Font**

Esperar que la Lala giri el cap cap a l'esquerra i el torni a girar cap a la càmera

Images can bring back what we have forgotten. But as this "Lovesong" has been demonstrating, they can also bring back something of what they hide, that which, even without being seen, does not cease to exist. And that is how ghosts

give themselves away. Alongside the laughter, one more ghost appears here, this time self-imposed, a ghost that, at the time, paralysed the filming.

the other, again

During the shooting, a few weeks after recording these images, I saw a film called "Workers, Peasants", made by the couple Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet in 2001.

The film shows a series of characters, all survivors of World War II, brought together to form a sort of "commune". They want to forget and find a way to reconstruct -from the ruins- a home, a refuge against the ugliness and brutality in the world, imagining other possible ways to relate to each other and with nature. They talk as if they were keeping an oral diary or recording their testimony for an investigation or a trial. I remember them declaiming, sitting like Lala in the forest.

I left the cinema feeling that what I wanted to do with "Lovesong" had already been done perfectly. The two films had absolutely nothing to do with each other, but the way of conceiving the filmed spoken word did. This discouraged me, and I couldn't see how to continue.

Indeed, it was a naive reaction, superficial, and I was missing the whole point. Art is not about doing things nobody has done before, even if they have nailed it! It is about doing them believing in its uniqueness.

It seems the following was a very windy day; I don't remember what we could have done during the morning or for lunch. According to the tapes, we didn't

FOTOGRAFIES

record until that evening, looking for a specific light in the garden. We would change the places where we put the chair. She would read the poems, one after the other, again.

The repetition is always there ^{↑ PROSA} in the poems that reappear in each reading, in the reading itself, as an act; in the staging for the camera: find a place, sit down and declaim, another place, sit down and declaim again. "Repetition" here is a form of quest, essay, trial and error. It is also a way of resuming from where we left it a few minutes or hours earlier, the day before, the week before... or twenty years ago. The variations of Cézanne's mountain, under the appearance of a filmic attempt, of an endless approximation, Repetition as a stubborn form of return, over and over again.

And between repetitions or returns, between ghosts, what appears again is ~~the~~ ^{that} happiness I had forgotten, ~~that certain happiness~~ ^X. Perhaps what happens is that sometimes, there are states of happiness that we forget and need some distance to be recognised and praised again.

Here, and now, in these images *à la Straub-Huillet*, with her sitting here and there in search of the last sun's light, with no other intention than trying to make a film against the wind, I see that happiness. Not only in Lala but also in the images. And in her poems. Curiously, a particular way of being happy always appears in the poems chosen to read that evening: it returns repeatedly under the appearance of a miracle.

Here, Lala repeated twice the poem about the golden fountain she had recited in the forest the day before. The golden fountain can calm the most anxious thirst but is challenging to find. The poem's voice then wonders if this search will be in vain... for in vain does one carry the jug across the stony field. And the voice answers to itself: "But not in vain, in every stone the mine of gold". A miracle. And it will not be the only one. In other poems read that same evening: The aurora will shine under our feet, or we will be able to get up and walk on the waters, or we will share the glass to quench our thirst and end up feeling dregs of wine on our lips...

Some years after the shooting, I learned of a film that Straub-Huillet made about Cézanne. In the centre of this film is the Saint-Victoire, the mountain that Cézanne had painted almost ninety times. The film was made in 1998, and the main idea that runs through it is the realisation that it was no longer possible to film the same mountain that Cézanne painted eighty years before. Straub-Huillet placed the camera in the same spot where Cézanne would spend long hours trying to capture it. When they filmed, the noise of the motorway and the burnt fields rose and stood between them and the mountain. Time had passed, transforming everything. However, something miraculously remained. The mountain's presence, its weight, its meaning.

There is the mountain Cézanne painted, and there were also his portraits. "Portraits must be posed", Cézanne would say. And the long duration of the poses required by Cézanne was well-known. In the presence of Lala, in the presence of these images, is the very presence of that mountain. Lasting presences that, as much as they may have been forgotten, end up returning,

unveiling and revealing themselves, surviving. Posing mountains, posing portraits, posing images, posing memories.

The following morning, I suggested staging a situation. Lala would come into the dining room and open a book with illustrations by Anselm Kiefer, another painter of mountains that refuse to disappear. Kiefer will be one of Lala's anchor points. Among other things, they share two recurring sources of inspiration: the poetry of Paul Celan and that of Ingeborg Bachmann—two poets fatally in love with each other.

Lala repeated the same action at least six times. She would enter the dining room, take the book, open it to the same page, and close it again. The camera would film three times from this same position. Three more, in a close shot, centred on the painting. "Repetition" becomes something else here. It seeks the perfect shot (perhaps in vain?). It also implies an alliance: we are making a film together. Lala read ^{here} the only poem about a mountain: "Sentim l'irresistible pes de la muntanya". We feel the irresistible weight of the mountain.

MASSA
aipe!

..... SENTIM L'IRRESISTIBLE PES DE LA MUNTANYA

— Yet more mountains. The ones that Kiefer has in his head and that he will never stop painting. And the one in Lala's poem. And another miracle. "The small morsel of bread that shines between the teeth".

I have always mixed up the mountains painted by Kiefer. They are a recurring motif, memory-mountains that are so similar... obsessively identical; they do not

forget. They are almost perfect triangles, enormous, with all possible variations of the colour of the earth, made with a great deal of paint, which sometimes crumbles and falls off. Sometimes, the body of a man rests at the base, with his naked torso, looking at the sky. Some repeat a written phrase, a verse by Ingeborg Bachmann: "Your age, my age and the age of the world cannot be measured in years".

When Anselm Kiefer was 18, he travelled to Provence, the south of France, in the footsteps of Van Gogh. He kept a diary where he recorded his encounters and thoughts. On the 3rd of September, he wrote: "You have to draw a lot, and then sometimes something happens".

Pausa.

La Lala sembra que vagi a parlar.

Juice
I have an obsession with believing that every film begins with a loss. But to tell the truth, this obsession doesn't come alone: if every film begins with a loss, it ends with a revelation. bell hooks says that "films make magic. They change things. They take the real and turn it into something different before our eyes".

Negre

Films and poetry.

also
In them, the miracle, the magic, the unexpected, and the accident appear and reveal discoveries like the ones caused by the cat who, in love with a poet, will never stop looking for ways to be with her.

Discoveries that appear while searching, while surrendering to the search. Discoveries made of repetitions, rehearsals, tries, attempts, approaches, pretending to find the right image, maybe the definitive one. Repetitions where one gets lost because getting lost is the only guarantee of finding something. Returning repetitions that maybe, in the end, will enable - by drawing a lot - something to happen.

"Create the right circumstances for something to emerge", Cézanne would say.

La Lala creua els braços

But what appears, what is revealed is never something new; it has always been there and comes to the surface. Something that returns from oblivion in the form of a voice, a smile, or a miracle. Something that remains and survives. A presence. A weight. A meaning.

Films. Poetry. And a cat in love with a poet with a mountain in the background.

Negre i muntanya sola

To create and share images is to invite us to look at the world again, as many times as necessary, to learn to look at it until we are ready to see that revelation, that miracle, that piece of life that went unnoticed or until we can endure what a poet once called "an inconsolable happiness".

MOVEMENT #7

quan lala entro

You can try and learn to live with the wound, loss, and silence, or you can try to transform them into something else, as in a miracle. And if Lala's miracle is in her poems and her laugh, where is mine? The one that could allow the possibility to return?

Movement #7. The returning film.

A few months have passed since the last recording. Autumn has arrived. And it seems that I kept asking Lala to act. I slightly remember that she loved gardening, but I'm sure she arranged those plants for the filming. Not to be seen but listened to. Again, an out-of-frame. But this is different from the previous ones. My words do not invoke it in this case; it is already there, in the image, without being seen, guiding the breathing. Lala willingly, in alliance, stands outside and acts.

In fact, totally committed, she will do everything: gardening, opening and closing windows, walking up and down, reading tirelessly. She would also propose ideas, situations, actions, and places. Almost every shot will have two or three takes, variations that, honestly, are practically identical.

In a few minutes, we will leave the house. Lala will pass in front of the camera several times along the path that leads to the woods. I will ask her to sit on the path's edge and recite. We will even arrange the red plants behind her to make the image more attractive. The truth is that the deep red leaves in that path

sa lala

*lala entro
pla*

captivated me, probably because they reminded me of these covering the house. They are like an echo. In the meantime, I would talk about Straub-Huillet and their film "Workers, Peasants" and how something in their film bothered me: they did not work with real peasants but with actors. The truth is that today, this concern is so ridiculous. Lala is a real poet, but it is evident that she is also acting. She has been doing it for a while now. The camera, the pact, our relationship, the shared time, the agreements ^{but also here} and disagreements... all turned her into an ally; that is to say, it inevitably made her, among other things, an actress of herself, from the poet to her double.

On the other hand, the fixation with the Straub-Huillet couple and the disproportionate role they played in blocking me from continuing to film Lala revealed something else, something that would happen from then on: The admiration and love for those directors I admired and loved so much would end up making it impossible for me to dare to speak.

I saw "Workers, Peasants" in October at a festival near the sea in Barcelona. It was part of a section called "Seven Chances". It is difficult not to see the coincidence now: **seven tapes** called "Lovesong", **seven movements** of a "non-existent film in progress", and **seven chances**. But seven chances for what?

"Seven Chances" is also the title of a Buster Keaton's film. There is a sequence where Keaton is running down the hill, chased by thousands of rocks of different sizes. A mountain again, a threatening one this time, that allows Keaton to show his acrobatic skills. Keaton's films, full of persecutions, pirouettes and dreams. Like this one.

→ Lala

MOVIE
CAMERA

Pd: Keaton

In "The Modern Sherlock Holmes", Keaton plays a projectionist who dreams of becoming a detective. He is in love with a girl with another pretender, who turns out to be a bad guy. While showing a film in the cinema, Keaton falls asleep and merges what is happening on the screen with his real life. The characters in the projected film take on the appearance of the real ones: the girl, the girl's father, who, on the screen, puts a pearl necklace in safekeeping. And the boy, who makes it seem he wants to marry the girl yet actually intends to rob the necklace. In his dream, Keaton discovers the lie, and the only way to unmask it (and get his sweetheart back) is by splitting up, entering the screen and inhabiting the image—an image-dream. And although Keaton will need some (initial) adjustments before he can inhabit it without trouble, he will eventually succeed.

continuació

Pel·lícula de Keaton. En sortim. Finestra amb so.

Imatge de la finestra en silenci

My dream would also be to inhabit the image—inhabit the image again, in my case. Enter these images and be part of them. This seventh movement could be my final chance—the chance for the miracle to occur. Enter and inhabit the image.

Imag:

Can a dream become a miracle? What if, while in front of images we have made, we are suddenly absorbed or swallowed by them? As if the image were a window that opens and invites you to enter. A window or a crack.

to there a bar:

There is a very enigmatic book called "Malina" by Ingeborg Bachmann, one of the ghosts that appeared on more than one occasion in this garden. I read it long

ago and never forgot the emotion provoked by the end. The narrator is a woman who lives with her companion, Malina and loves someone else who lives down the street, Ivan. As the story progresses, different elements (objects and characters) disappear, not from the reality portrayed in the book but from the narration itself, as if they had never existed. In the end, the narrator is with Malina in the house. He is drinking coffee; outside, one can hear the sound of an ordinary day while she -the narrator- walks into the wall, holding her breath. The wall opens. Only the fissure that -in fact- has always been there can be seen. A standing still.

She ends up disappearing, she just disappears, absorbed by the crack.

I have cherished this idea since I started working with Lovesong: the idea of "literally" entering what I filmed, letting my voice be swallowed by it.

What if that were possible? ^{Lola esquera} What if I split up and was able to get in? How would life be back inside this wall, back inside these images?

MARCO

La meva veu -en català- entra a les imatges

Imatge d'arbres, torno al seient.

This is the last day we filmed together. But I think we didn't know it back then. And it's not really important. Yet, I would say that the fact that these images are the last ones unknowingly awakens a dormant feeling that I can't help but relate to them: a particular future disappointment towards an expected film that never existed. Maybe this feeling also has something to do with my future silence... Disappointments can also become a ghost.

We began our usual walk, taking the same path as always, leaving the house by the front door that enters the garden, turning left, and leaving the pavement and the last few parked cars behind; we would enter the same dirt road surrounded by the same fields. But this time, from there, we turned off to take a drift that would lead us to a different place, a leafy spot in the heart of the forest.

While preparing the camera, we discussed theatre, the directors we liked, books, art, and music. In between, inevitably, what was sneaking in was life, a way of living it. There is no doubt these moments, that bond, are the closest ^{would a} thing to what I ^{I have been} could call "sentimental education".

We also discussed the light, wondering how many more hours we would have to film before night fell. From the conversation, it is understood that we would sleep in the house that night and continue filming the following day. From that morning, there are some images of Lala opening and closing windows. Nothing more. We also discussed the walking in this scene. Every recorded situation in this tape starts with Lala walking to one side or the other, sometimes towards the camera, sometimes away from it. Then she sits down and looks at the place. Whatever the action, we constantly repeat it at least twice. Sometimes, with some changes in the camera's point of view. It always ends with her sitting down and reciting.

On this occasion, she would recite for the last time. And she would only read one poem. And only once. It was a new poem. And it was the first time I listened to it. The poem belonged to what was to be her second book, which she had

started writing in those days, and which will be called "Plec de claror", "Fold of Light".

..... **Woodland**

Apareix -en silenci- el poema escrit en pantalla

Esperar a que la Lala desvii la mirada

In the second movement, I refer to the scene between Hans Castorp and Clawdia Chauchat in "The Magic Mountain". Hans and Clawdia sit next to each other at the Berhof Sanatorium on the night of Carnaval, and Clawdia is about to depart. At that point, Hans needed to express his love for her in a foreign language -like the birds in this poem- as it allowed him to be closer to the fragility of "saying without saying", like in a dream, a poem, or a miracle. It is also a question of ^{boldness} courage on his part to dare to say, in that strange language, before it is too late. But is it ever too late?

I knew I was in love with documentary cinema when I saw -for the first time- a fragment of "Chastie" ("Paradise"). Not the entire film, just a fragment, yet the fragment would be enough. "Chastie" is the first film (a graduation film) by Sergei Dvortsevov, a filmmaker I have admired ever since. It is the portrait of a nomad shepherd and his family camped in the Southern mountains of Kazakhstan. The fragment shows their youngest son fighting sleep to eat what is on his plate.

Clawdia

and manage to eat

Fragment de Chastie-PARADISE

These images continue to move me in such a way... I think it's because they show so delicately and justly what cinema can do: capture a minimal scene that could have gone perfectly unnoticed and make it essential—the moment when a child is finally overcome by sleep despite his resistance.

1'04"
A long time ago, I read one of the sentences that captivated me the most. The Czech filmmaker Jan Svankmajer said that the distance between reality and dream is a single movement: opening and closing the eyes. The child closes his eyes and momentarily falls asleep; he opens them again, wakes up, and falls asleep again.

To enter the cinema with ~~his~~ eyes closed, to wake up and leave the cinema, leaving the dream behind, and then return in a single movement.

What I had forgotten about the film and did not expect now is the image that follows that scene, and that metaphorically could also represent the child's dream.

imatge muntanya

1'36
The mountain. The last one. The triangle, again. The poet, her poems, the world. A world that escapes because it is its nature to do so. A poet, a painter, a filmmaker, those who stubbornly try to catch it. And the resulting work -words or images-... an attempt to capture this attempt... which will always be both sufficient and insufficient... at the same time.

Dvortsevov made three more documentaries, and then he decided to stop.

2,04

Negre

He could not bear the weight of the world; in other words, he could not bear the fact that he could not really do anything for the people he filmed other than film them and make them exist for others. For him, it was not enough. And he stopped. Instead, he would begin to make fiction films, leaving the cinema to get back in differently.

Imatge finestra

I stopped making films when I had just started. And instead, I began accompanying others' dreams. And now, here I am, briefly trying to peek out and return to my dream, my images, my image-home.

There is a question that I keep asking the participants in my workshops because, for some reason, I feel it helps to find the place from which to make films. What is home? To date, I have responded in three different ways according to the changes that life has brought me. First answer: "A home is a place to which you return". The second: home is "a place from which to look and to name the world". And not so long ago, I started to need to give a third answer: "A home is a place that hosts you no matter how unexpected this hosting might be".

This is an unexpected return. The lovesong came back in a form that I could never have imagined. There it is, Varda's "Cinema hut, the greenhouse of happiness."

maybe,

Coda.

DESMEÉS QUE TÍTOL APAREIX

IMATGE

The last tape, "Liebeslied VII in Roman numbers", contains only 9 minutes and 38 seconds of images. In them, there is just the garden, more precisely, different views of the same corner of the garden.

It's late autumn, on a weekday. I have a vague memory of getting in the car with the camera and driving and getting there: of sneaking in. I open the garden gate - or jump over it - and start filming. The house is locked. Lala is not here. We are alone. The garden and the eye.

The first images of this 9 minutes 38 seconds are concentrated on the ^{violet} wisteria, which will start dancing with the yellow tree. The first time I saw it, I thought of how this Lovesong began and the 25th of the Goldberg variations.

Wisteria dancing with tree. Music. P. DEBANAAL CRONOMETRE

Ventanas Buenos Aires

When I arrived in Buenos Aires to temporarily live, it was spring. Here, I resumed editing movement five, which I started in Barcelona. And from here, from this window, from this unexpected home, I kept working on numbers six and seven.

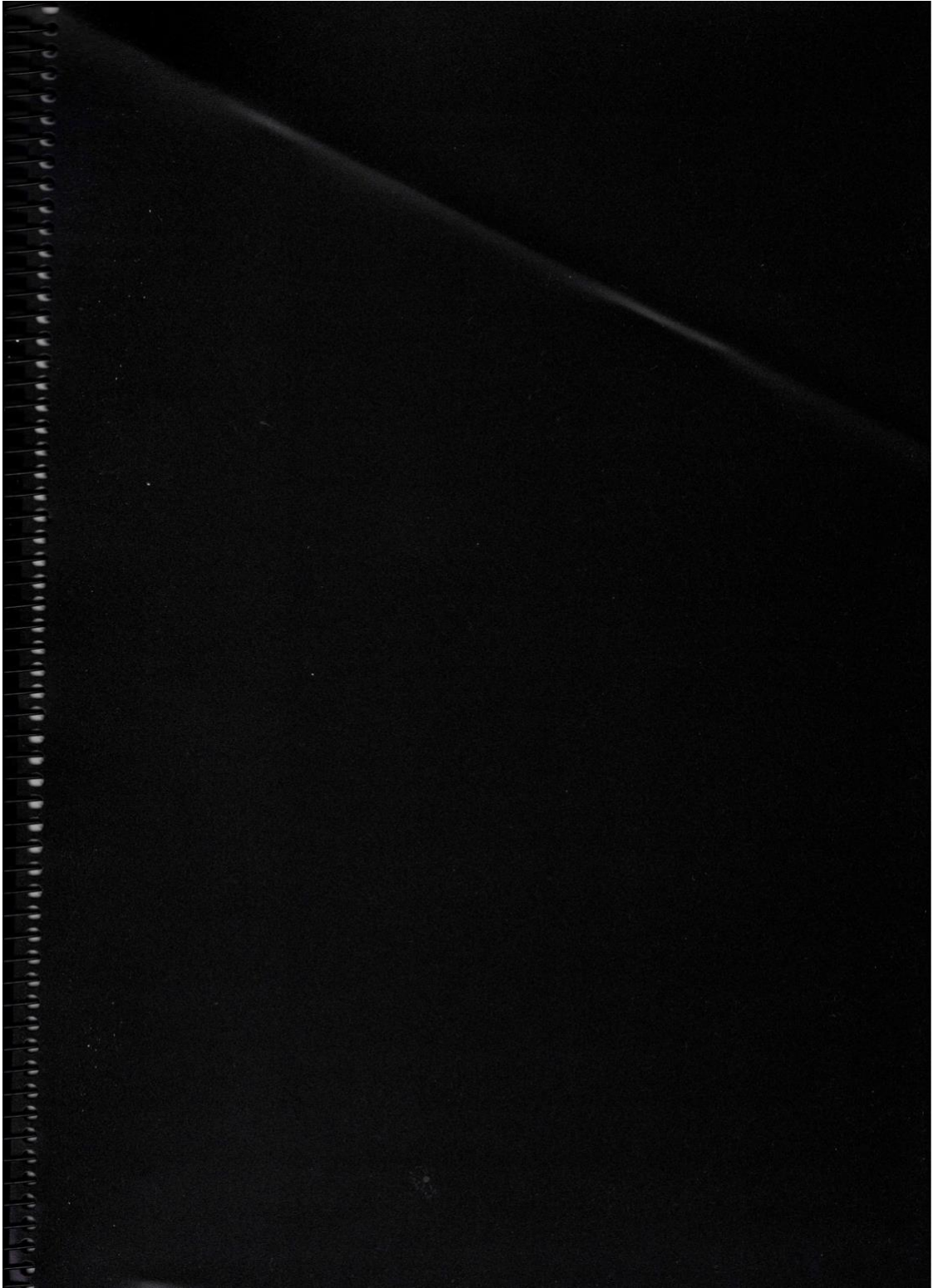
To make this "Lovesong, a non-existent film in progress", I have followed a ~~strict~~ protocol from the very beginning. The protocol has actions, rules and something I named "disclaimers". The actions were. First, watch the material in order. Second, whenever something pricked me, I would stop and react, which meant

Ritme

1'57"

157" I would edit the image, associating it with other materials, and third, to write the text. Actions two and three were intertwined until I finished the editing, getting what I have called "movements". All these actions are repeated until the end of the tapes, or what is the same, until the end of movement #7. One of the rules, there are six, is to respect the viewing order without cheating. I have to confess that I did cheat ~~just a little~~. As I progressed with the tapes, as the end drew near, I needed to know what would come next...

It is not wrong to cheat or even to cheat oneself. Indeed, in creation, at least, it is sometimes necessary to do so to find certain truths. In any case, the images of the violet wisteria we just saw dancing with the yellow tree in Lala's Garden reappeared for me -no cheating- at the same time as these trees. They are not wisterias nor violet or yellow, yet they are also dancing.



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List of Illustrations

Figures 1 and 2. Screenshots of the rehearsal recording (Spanish version).

Figures 3, 4 and 5. *The Solastalgic Archive* by Nina Elder, 2019.

Figures 6 to 11. *The Solastalgic Archive* by Nina Elder, 2019. Details.

Figure 12. *Solastalgia* by Kate MacDowell, 2010.

Figure 13. *Solastalgia* by Satu Niku, 2011 Videoinstallation 3.30 minutes in loop.

Figure 14. *The Nostalgia of The Place* by Satu Niku, 2013 Video, 7.05 minutes.

Figure 15. *Refuge* by Roll Hardy, 2015.

Figure 16. *The Yard* by Roll Hardy, 2021.

Figure 17. *Remnants* by Roll Hardy, 2019.

Figure 18. *Encroachment* by Michael Brophy, 2019.

Figure 19. *The forest of lost trees* by Rebecca Beinart, 2016.

Figure 20. *Living Chia Germinates from Clothing Abandoned on a Wash Line* by Bea Fremderman, 2020.

Figure 21. Detail from *Living Chia Germinates from Clothing Abandoned on a Wash Line* by Bea Fremderman, 2020.

Figures 22 to 24. *Solastalgia* by Yangkun Shi, 2016-2020.

Figures 25 to 28. Frames from the documentary film *Faya Dayi* by Jessica Beshir, 2021.

Figures 29 to 34. Poetic series of Portraits are confronted with observational Landscapes in *Behemoth*, by Zhao Liang, 2015.

Figures 35 and 36. The introduction of the mirror as a disruptive device in *Behemoth*, by Zhao Liang, 2015.

Figures 37 and 38. The naked body and the 'broken mirror image' as uncanny artistic interventions in *Behemoth*, by Zhao Liang, 2015.

Figures 39 to 42. Frames from *Last Autumn*, by Yrsa Roca Fannberg, 2019.

Figures 43 to 63. The punctum in *Last Autumn*, by Yrsa Roca Fannberg, 2019.

Figures 64 and 65. Heidegger's Hut in the Black Forest, Germany. Photographs by Digne Meller-Marcovicz (1985).

Figures 66 to 69. *A cinema hut: the greenhouse of happiness* by Agnès Varda, 2009. An installation 're-releasing' her film *Les Créatures*, 1966.

Figures 70 to 75. Polaroids by Andrei Tarkovski in *Instant Light*, edited by Giovanni Chiaramonte and Andrey A. Tarkovsky.

Figures 76 to 78. Images by Fontcuberta from *Kintsugi* (2021).

Figure 79. Rabih Mroué performing *The Pixelated Revolution* (2012).

Figures 80 and 81. Images belonging to the performance *The Pixelated Revolution* (2012) by Rabih Mroué.

Figures 82 and 83. Two moments from the film-performance *Unmade Film-The Proposal* by Uriel Orlow (2013-2015).

Figure 84. Maglioni and Thomson perform *In Search of UIQ* (2013).

Figures 85 and 86. *Diarios* by Andrés Di Tella. Public presentation at Donosti Film Festival, Spain, 2022.

Figure 87. Several frames from a sequence. *Diarios* by Andrés Di Tella (2022).

Figures 88 to 91. *Mis Documentos* conceived and programmed by Lola Arias.

Figure 92. Image of Venus of Berekhat Ram in *I wanted to talk about the future, but I ended up thinking about the past* by Richard Deacon.

Figure 93. Photograph of a hand axe in *I wanted to talk about the future, but I ended up thinking about the past* by Richard Deacon.

Figure 94. Woman in front of a painting by Pierre Soulages. Photo credit Match with Art Instagram.

Figures 95 to 102. Mother and daughter visiting the ruins in *Un filme falado* by Manoel d'Oliveira (2003).

Figure 103. The captain witnesses the ship exploding. The mother and the daughter are on board. *Un Filme Falado* by Manoel d'Oliveira (2003).

Figure 104. Frames from the film *Le Calcul du Sujet. Journal Filmé 1* by Erik Bullot (1997-2000).

Figures 105 to 110. Frames belonging to the moment when Bullot, emulating a lecture-performance talk about his mum's death. *Langue des oiseaux* by Érik Bullot (2021).

Figures 111 to 112. Frames from *Là-bas* by Chantal Akerman (2006).

Figure 113. *Archaic Torso of Apollo*. Sculpted in Paros marble between 480 and 470 BC. Exhibited in the Louvre Museum.

Figure 114. *Mountains inside, mountains outside* by Johan Van Der Keuken (1975).

Figure 115. Image from *Lovesong, a non-existent film in progress*.

Figure 116. Resignification of *Figure 115*.

List of Films*

Akerman, C. (2006) *Là-bas*. Belgium/France: Paradise Films.

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