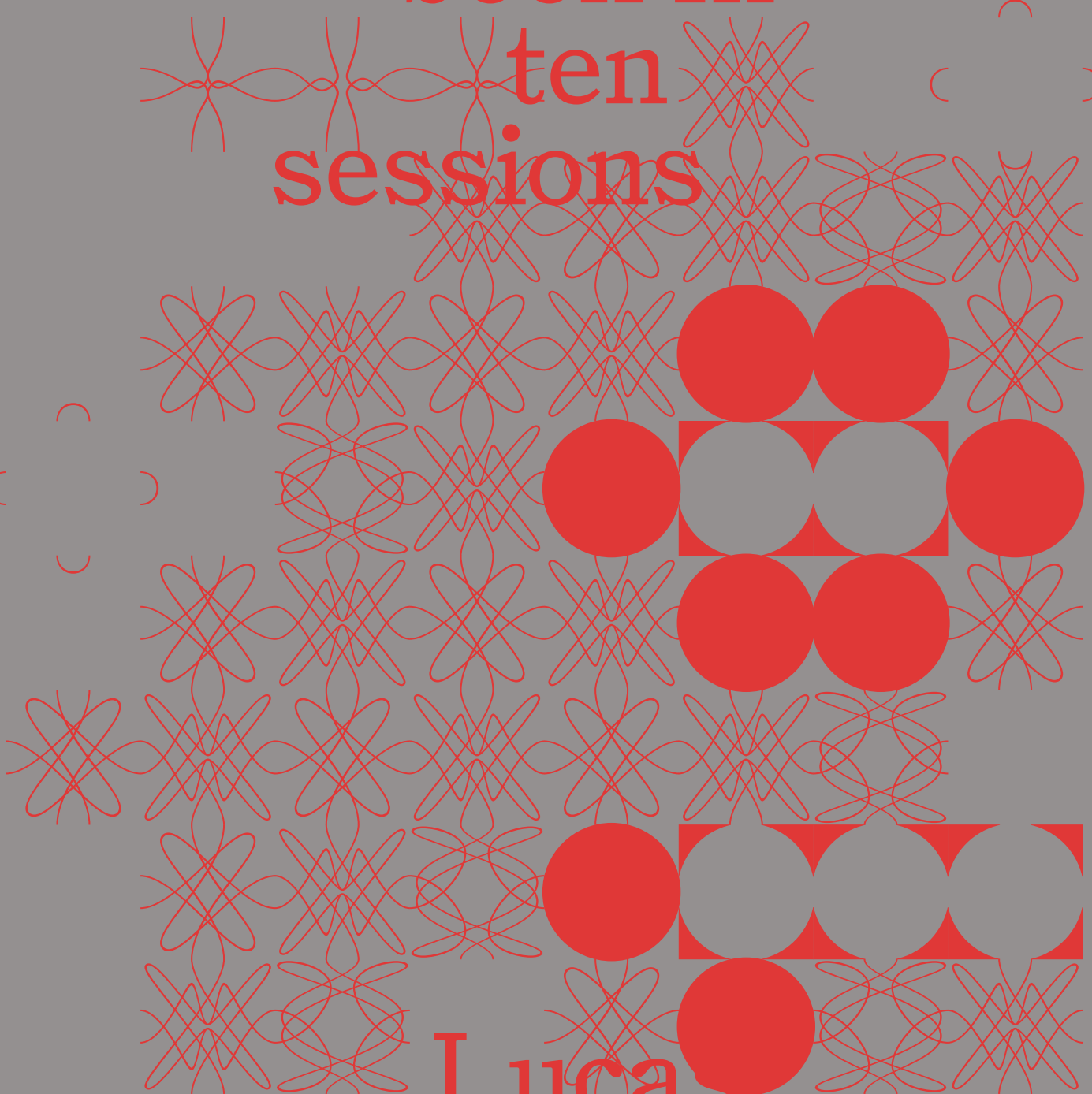


Missing  
Links:  
A  
book in  
ten  
sessions



Lucas  
Ferraço Nassif

# Missing Links: A book in ten sessions

01



mutantarchive



arca1000000 {a Mutant;Faith[if there was ever a time to rip the slit ;  
to scan the horizon of the unconscious, to soften the focus of ego so as to allow light in; to sHIFt in the face of a threshold, to transmute— to push against any rigid state of self; to hope into a focused point, a beam, a vector, to penetrate the boundary between the lucid and all dreamstates; to apply one's own will and carve out space within the psyche; to be attempt to perceive an experience of feeling alive; in any moment; (in virtue of fear and the transposing of flesh); a semi-permeable matrix in a slow dance; a morphing across spacetime; recognition of the Alien inside; the curious encouraged by beauty as a form of sentience; the ideal alchemy of the abject into love; the innermost; to nurture the mutation the id as a mirror: a variation in pulse-width; an ever-oscillation, self-aware—conscious of mystery; both bound and held apart by a movement between two dimensions: faith transcendence as a möbius strip; the silent cycling of forms once thought to be impossible;  
in this celestial shimmer the force of life is palpable; intuition both as pattern-recognition and irrational artifact; entropy; that quantum instance; to behold the primordial mystery of rebirth in the midst of the thrash metal solo of the universe seen as a flow between states; evermorph throughout the translucence of time; a wish; a prayer;  
&&&&&@&@&@^&^^ a Mutant;Faith]}

Lucas Ferraço Nassif

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# Missing Links: A book in ten sessions

02

بَارَاكُونَان  
BARAKUNAN

Lucas Ferraçõ Nassif

0 **Epigraph**

1 **Task Attempt: What am I doing?**

2 **Chantal's Rendez-vous.**

Who am I calling? To summon, triple chiasm. Tempo.

3 **Full of Missing Links.**

A poem from three quotations. Title song: Chantal Akerman, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Anne Carson. To underline their text: cinema, poetry, philosophy.

4 **How Ruin Nested Inside Each Thimble Throat.**

The dangers of description. Colonial description, Sud, non-performance.

5 **To Describe One's Life and Death: Part 1.**

Reinvented autobiography, Red, facts.

6 **To Describe One's Life and Death: Part 2.**

Desire and tectonics.

7 **Chantal Akerman par Chantal Akerman.**

First time describing one of Chantal Akerman's films. The film described. Chantal Akerman par Chantal Akerman.

8 **Anna Meets Her Mother in Belgium.**

The mother. Erasure, time.

9 **It's Not Permission I Crave, But Possibility.**

Music and description, representation, experience. Ghosts.

10 **Without Even. The end, in bed—to sleep or to die?**

Dwelling and desert. Tricked, arrived by desire.

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

\* in free association.

*Chantal Akerman* From place to place, filmmaking, the work on a reinvented biography.

*Ludwig Wittgenstein* Has prostate cancer and decides not to treat it.

*Anne Carson* Professor of Greek and else.

*Anna Silver* Full of messages at home. Her answering machine is a whole film. You will never see any image or listen to any sound she recorded.

*Fred Moten* A radical who relays the case of Betty.

*Gilles Deleuze* Repetition.

*Félix Guattari* Difference.

*Geryon* Growing up in a gay love triangle.

*Nora Durst* A woman whose whole family disappears in the sudden departure.

*Jeanne Dielman* Just killed a man.

Cut. Cut. Cut.

*Quentin Compson* Carries a pocket watch. The south.

*Kaworu Nagisa* Final messenger. Soul against nerves. It is always the mother.

*Antigone* To say no and to die.

*Sigmund Freud* His book on dreams from 1899; he will say it was released in 1900. The unconscious! You remember what you forget.

*Eduardo Viveiros de Castro*  
Anthropologist.

# Epigraph

(  
vimeo.  
com  
/ 382741917 )

link

1 Frank Bidart,  
Half-Light:  
Collected Poems  
(1965-2016). pp.  
17.

2 Jaques Lacan,  
Seminar IX. (1961-  
1962). pp. 235.

*Love Is The Distance  
Between You And What You Love*

*What You Love Is Your Fate*<sup>1</sup>

Frank Bidart writes. Writing is a constant force.

The child goes to school. When he comes home, there is a message written in lipstick on the bathroom mirror. It is not for him, but it is too. There: the text: this desert where you walk in language. So the whole day passes with the child around this thing. Until, through the dense silence of the apartment, finally, he writes back in his handwriting, with lipstick, climbing the bathroom sink to reach the bottom of the mirror. Climbing to respond to something that was not meant for him; though he is still not quite sure it was really not for him. Like iPhone icons when you double-click the screen. Nevertheless, it was there where he could read it. Should he not have read it? At home he is in intense movement, traveling in intensity to another Earth.

You come to the conclusion that maybe you should not have read it. That you had to read it.

This scene is desire in its unfinished business.

Jacques Lacan.

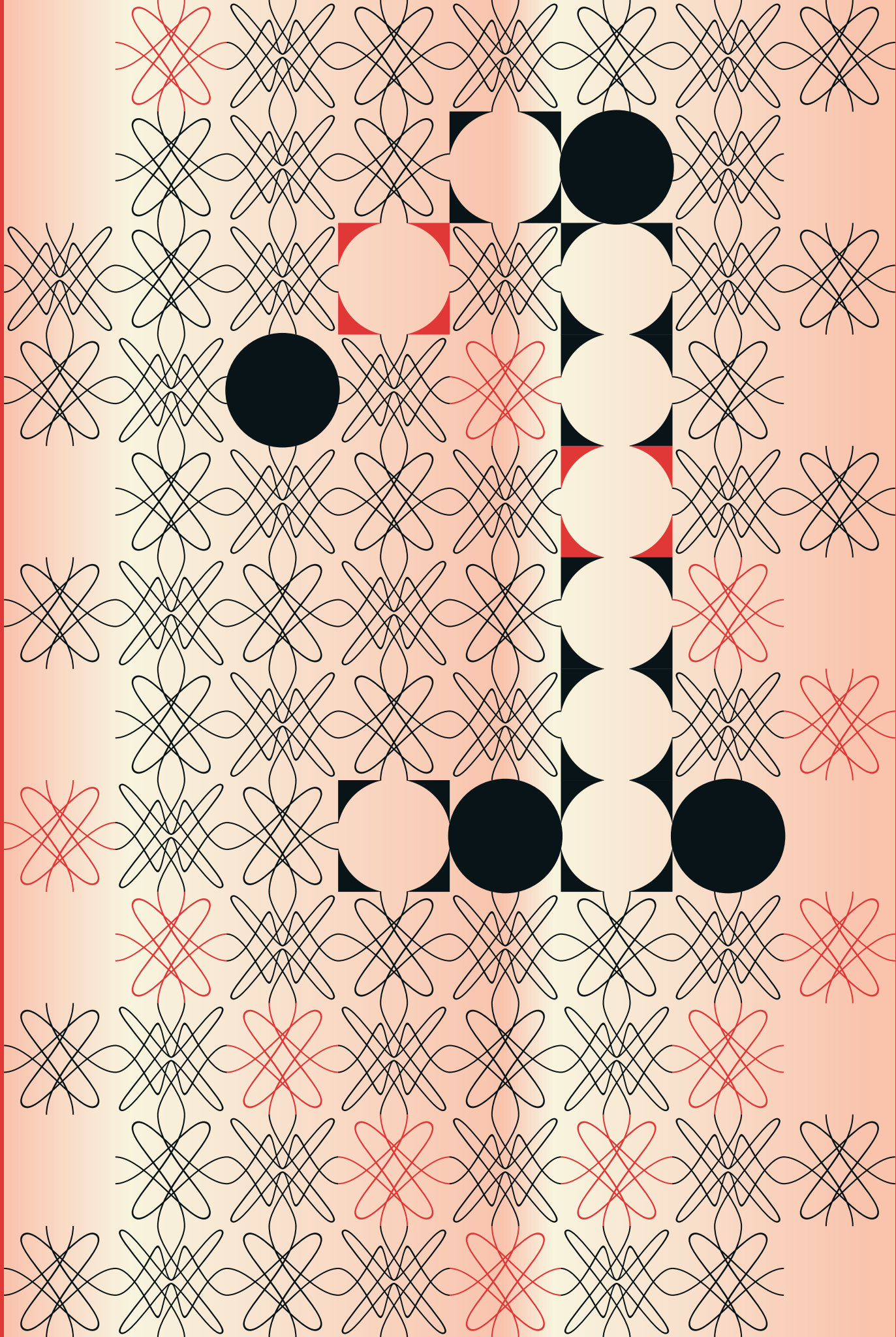
*Remember that it often happens that the bottom of the desire of a child is simply the fact that nobody says: "that he should be as not one, that he should be my curse on the world".*<sup>2</sup>

This book is unfinishable. Is it enough? Did it say what it had to say? Yes, no. FULL – OF – MISSING – LINKS. To write on the mirror with lipstick is a literary machine. It is not theory enough, not poetry enough, not autobiography enough. At the same time, it is too much and it feeds the unfinished business of desire. Baroque. Baruch. Precariousness. Affect. Producing possibility, the possibility of production.









## Task

1

I went to see *Le Mépris* at the Portuguese Cinematheque. It was the end of 2018. These are the film credits spoken by Jean-Luc Godard's voice-over:

*Based on the book by Alberto Moravia.*

*There are Brigitte Bardot and Michel Piccoli.*

*There are also Jacques Palance and Giorgia Moll. And Fritz Lang.*

*The cinematography is from Raul Coutard.*

*Georges Delerue wrote the music.*

*The sound was recorded by William Sivel.*

*The editing is from Agnes Gillemot.*

*Philippe Dussart was in the production with Carlo Lastricati.*

3 Jean-Luc Godard,  
Le Mépris, 1963.

*It is a film made by Jean-Luc Godard.  
It was filmed in CinemaScope and  
developed in color by GTC Joinville.  
It was produced by Georges de Beauregard  
and Carlo Ponti for the society Roma-Paris  
Films, Concordia Films and Champion  
Cinematographic Company.  
Cinema, said André Bazin, replaces our  
gaze for a world more in accordance with  
our desires. Le Mépris is the story of  
this world.* <sup>3</sup>

11

We see a film crew following the movement of a traveling camera, coming from the back of the street in an open-air cinema studio, the Cinnecittà. The cameraman films an actress, her profile; she is walking, reading a book towards the fourth wall. Finally, the camera turns to the front; it films the cinema screen from the other side: us, its audience. Godard's voice spreads itself across the arc of this initial segment. The film ends. The beginning of the book—that I thought I was not looking for—found. Someone says that we do not look for things, we find them.

Does cinema end in us?

I do not think so. Cinema is a constant response to worlds that live together, that also die together. A constant response to worlds that live together in struggle. Worlds that create themselves, degenerate themselves—worlds that sometimes contaminate each other. Thus,

it is beyond our desires. Cinema exists in the tension of desires contained by the game, in *how* the game vibrates. A monstrous multi-world full of monsters; many of which cinema itself gives birth to as a response. Response: responsible. Not exactly in order to promote any agreement with previous desires but to make vibrate, in unpredictable ways, what is in the game.

Game-machine: language-game-literary-machine. A game is a living form. A form of living together, of placing things together in intense multiplicity. Crossing desires traversing in a scene ask, *what is possible? How is it possible?* To play this game. Its aesthetic category is one of possibility.

If what is in the game concerns desire, it is necessary to recognize the object desiring as multiple and dispersed. Someone tells me they read the following in the newspaper: *In this exact moment, there are minuscule organisms having sex on your cheek.* Desiring creatures on my cheek. I am made of an enormous and infinitesimal number of others' desires in struggle, in turmoil, in love. Gabriel Tarde says we need to curb this anti-democratic spirit that *blows out, in a way, all the lights of the world in benefit of its lonely spark.*<sup>4</sup>

The light of the projector, I believe, does not come to bring a world more in accordance with our desires. No, it multiplies, disperses, and vibrates desires in the game. It makes howls proliferate.

Howl to a how: how to howl.

5 Chantal Akerman,  
Monographie:  
Bande(s) À Part,  
Bobigny. pp. 140.  
6 Ibid.

We can put ourselves to the task of describing desires—ways, modes, forms, manners, gestures, movements, *hows*—and also, therefore, in a certain measure, worlds. Not by the functionality or the efficiency of description but by what the act of describing operates, triggers, opens, makes possible and impossible.

We can put ourselves to the task, for instance, of describing Chantal Akerman's cinema.

At fifteen, she decided to pursue cinema after the thrill of watching Jean-Luc Godard's *Pierrot Le Fou*. Once a filmmaker, her relationship with Godard becomes tense; she rises against his heteropatriarchy, mansplaining, and anti-Semitism. It is possible to notice this tension in an interview Godard conducted with Akerman in 1980.<sup>5</sup> He criticizes her for making a *big producer film, a Gaumont film*. She contests him, resists, and makes visible the impeditive judgment in Godard's speech. The film in question is *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna*.

Chantal Akerman defies Jean-Luc Godard: *For me, Les Rendez-vous d'Anna was still a free film in which size or crew or money did not hurt my relationship with Aurore Clément.*<sup>6</sup> If *Le Mépris* was, for Godard, a documentary on Brigitte Bardot's body, in Akerman's filmography, elements of documentary are present in her almost horizontal relations with the actors and her crew. There is a difference in their games. To recall: Brigitte Bardot dies in *Le Mépris*; Delphine

7 Aurore Clément,  
interviewed for  
the film *I Don't  
Belong Anywhere:  
The Cinema of  
Chantal Akerman*.  
Dir. Marianne  
Lambert, 2015.  
8 Chantal  
Akerman,  
*Autoportrait en  
cinéaste*. Centre  
Pompidou, 2004,  
pp. 60.

*Seyrig kills in Jeanne Dielman 23 Quai du  
Commerce 1080 Bruxelles.*

Aurore Clément and Delphine Seyrig were the actresses who worked most frequently and deeply with Chantal Akerman during her career. *But her cinema is she, she is her cinema. And the people who are with her too*, says Clément in a statement for the film *I Don't Belong Anywhere*.<sup>7</sup> The relationship between Akerman and her two main actresses is one of direct participation in each other's choices—on set and off. Production comes from desires that meet and get lost. It is what is illuminated when we read these lines, remembrances of forces in contagion.

*One day, I told Delphine, look I do not really know why, but I do not feel the same as before when I make a film. It is not so strong anymore. I do not feel so transported the same way. Sometimes, it comes back. Sometimes it is not there. Make it she told me. Make it, it is still there, a little less on the surface but it is there. You can feel it. This passion you still have it. It is just that it expresses itself in a different way. You are not a teenager anymore. That is it. I am a teenager no more, how is that possible?*<sup>8</sup>

Chantal Akerman invites her actresses to a project, makes propositions. Her characters redefine themselves; her films become experiments. Forms of life embodied by the actresses and other collaborators such as Babette Mangolte, Claire Atherton, Sami Frey, Paulo

Branco, and Eric De Kuyper are told in her cinema. All those partners, alive or dead, actively discuss, give interviews, preserve and spread the word of the filmmaker.

The cinema Akerman produced until she died at sixty-five exists in the tension of desires within all aspects of the game. Her attitude and, mainly, her attention to the cinematographic work bet on tension. Her fiction is a documentary of forces. *Something else I want to say is that there is no difference between documentary and fiction. There is not*, she speaks loud and clear in *Guest*, a film from 2010 directed by José Luis Guerín.

Interested in forces in tension, I propose a specific task: to describe *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna*, a film Chantal Akerman released to the world when she was twenty-eight years old. I was almost twenty-eight when I started writing this here. Now I am thirty-one. Thirty plus one.

How to describe it or anything?

What is describing able to do?

What are the forces at play in describing?

Questions that will, intentionally or not, never cease.

This is an inventory of attempts, an effort to answer these questions that are refusing answers. Answers are taken as reactions, not solutions. A work in constant re-do: re-editing: re-writing. A work that does not solve itself, that folds, bends itself in multiples. *Hows-cosmos*. A cosmology of hows.

Howl. Howl to a cosmos.



9 Anne Carson,  
The Beauty of the  
Husband. Vintage,  
2009, pp. 123  
10 Ludwig  
Wittgenstein,  
Anotações sobre as  
cores. §257.

How to describe not only what we see in a film but also a film's set of facts? How to renounce that lonely spark that blows out other lights? How to consider what we hear: dialogues, monologues, the rhythm of questions and answers, sentences, words, steps, train lines, the life of sights and stares, the music that plays, songs, silences? Also: what we feel, what inscribes itself while we write and starts to move with us. Something that brings us closer to Yvonne Rainer, dancing and filming, when she decides to call her autobiography *Feelings Are Facts*.

How to describe a surprise, a perception, an amazement, the time? Roughly: approximately. Is it possible to describe with eyes closed? To describe could take the same path as to paint. To peel the paint off the wall, the skin, sunburn, allergy. The first of many times in pages to come, I go to Anne Carson and to Ludwig Wittgenstein because they were also encouraged by such questions.

*You see me, you see my life, see what I live on—is that all I want?*

*No. I want to make you see time.*

*How shadows cross a wall and go—*<sup>9</sup>

*Try, for example, to paint what you see when you close your eyes! And yet you can roughly describe it.*<sup>10</sup>

Who is the poet and who is the philosopher?  
To describe is to treat texts and works in

living flesh—flesh like that of man. Flesh that exists before and beyond man. The works Chantal Akerman made are texts: a life that can provoke other lives. So, I try to describe—to think and to feel description, to live in mystery and intrigue, in the turmoil of describing. Open to what can be opened, to the possible, and to what becomes possible.

What is lost in description?

What is found in what is lost?

•

Necessity: not explaining but paying attention. It is necessary to be aware of being aware of images, of the sounds around images—to go back and forth, to pause, to be mistaken, to be fooled, to believe, to lose memory. The memory of what we have forgotten. Try to keep up, to recover even if there is no success, to desire. Describe what happens, what moves through the screen, and what propagates itself—extending, prolonging, experimenting through materials—and reaches our bodies. And what stays in our heads: that is too body.

John Thackery, the doctor played by Clive Owen, performs a surgery on himself. In front of an audience. He will die. Seppuku.

*This is it. This is all we are.* <sup>11</sup>

A plot that includes—as the epigraph stated—writing: filming: wording: talking: thinking: imaging: sounding. I am attempting a work that *I ask to be taken seriously*. I am hoping that something comes out of it, that from its

juxtapositions jump essays. Like one of these contemporary anthropologists who, thinking about natives, says it is necessary to invent, to come up with new modes of taking something seriously, modes less engaged in explaining and making something intelligible and more open to experimentation and to multiplicity. To take the savage thought seriously.

What I propose as a movement is a movement towards tension.

Sega stopped producing the Dreamcast too soon. *A millennial formalism* on Melancholy Hill. The *pathos*. To which future? From burned pasts and a poor definition of why I need to describe a film from 1978 made by Chantal Akerman. An important, frivolous, melancholic act of inheritance: to write from the Other, to write from the world while facing it in its radical otherness. This is a study that does not have to find anything big. I go for little findings in the game; that is the matter. To talk about a game, to show a game being played. To prove the existence of a game being played in our lives and deaths—in text. Something that shows and that can even trigger a move in the language-game. Language is the measure of this. Worlds: limits: lives: deaths. Try to describe it. What we tell and what we are told. How we tell and how we are told. Our desires facing each other—struggling, conflicting.

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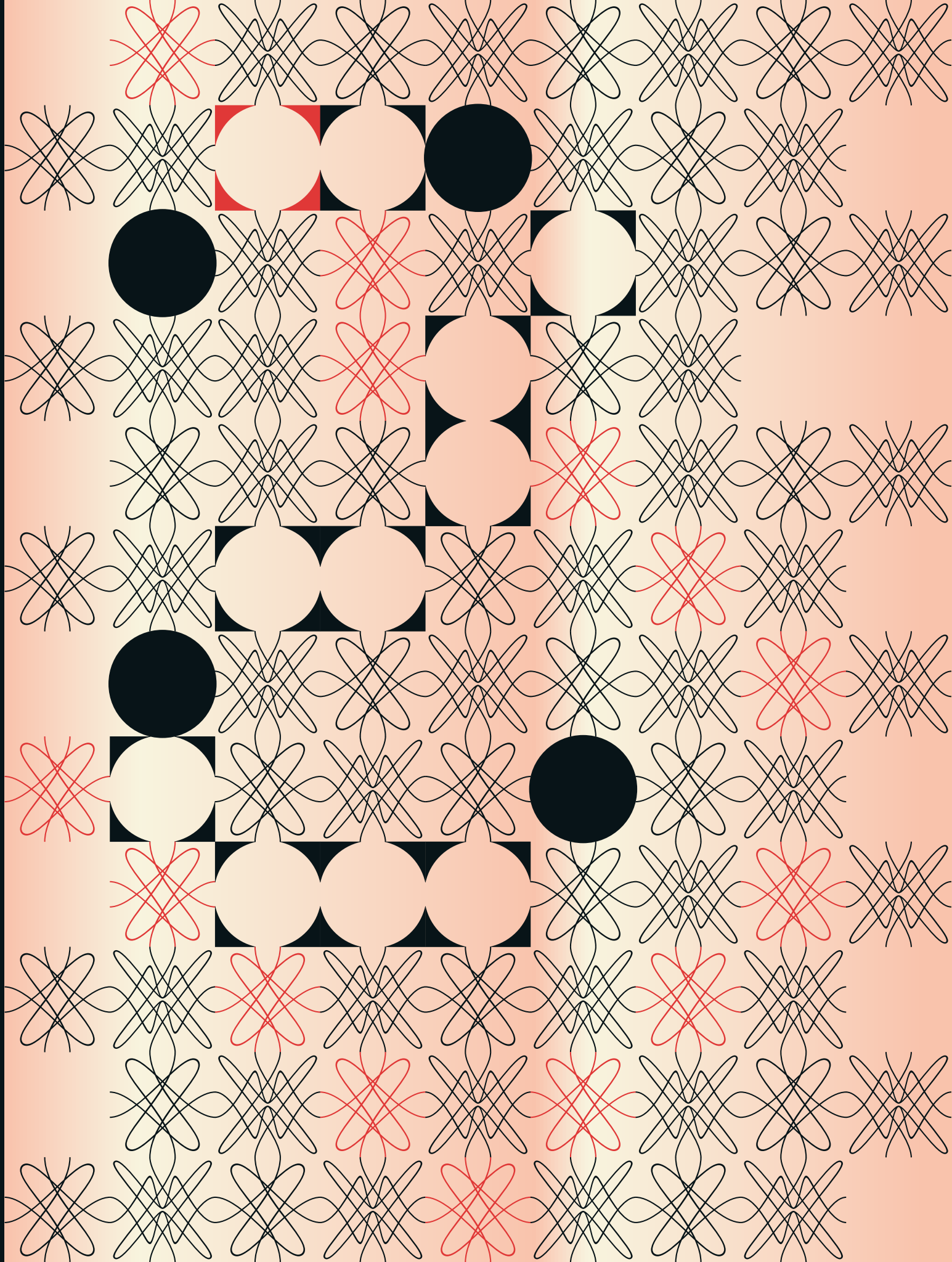
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)

- These are the initial pages where I introduce the task, and I say that to introduce, to set things up, is already to experiment. Another first exercise: exposing in another move the desire for my trajectory: to describe *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna*. Beginning at the end, the end is at the beginning. Let's talk or dance this dance. The music is in our eyes—not for them. The sunlight coming from the projector, reaching your face: directly.



## Chantal's Rendez-Vous

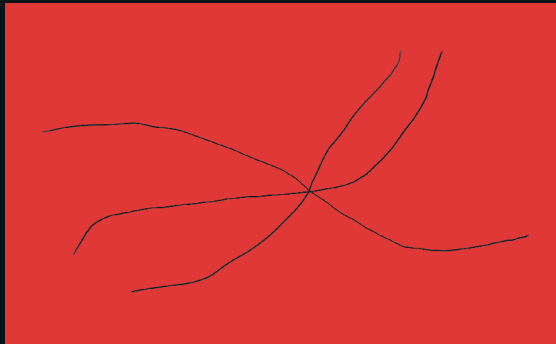
2

Anna's rendez-vous will be regularly interrupted by a rendez-vous between Chantal Akerman, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and Anne Carson.

Not ignoring these two intercessors' privilege happens by chance; I think of the meetings of the three as a matter of fate in the sense Paul Valéry gave to the word *fated* in his text *Choses Tues. Gazes that meet, giving birth to strange relations, producing a chiasm of two "fated"; setting up some kind of simultaneous reciprocal limitation.*<sup>12</sup> In our case, maybe strange chiasms of three gazes-fates, limiting reciprocally: simultaneously: each other.

12 Paul Valéry,  
Oeuvres, Tome II.  
p. 1430

21



•  
A point where these three gazes-fates can meet, where they can limit themselves by a reciprocal and simultaneous attraction, a point which, I believe—through meetings—could give birth to strange relations. This is their interest for description.

In her interview with Jean-Luc Godard—made a few years after she released *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna*—Chantal Akerman talks about her writing routine and how she works in order to make a film.

*Do you try to write more than to take pictures? But in the end, the film will consist in taking pictures?  
Yes, but I write very precisely what I want to show, with all the details. I write what I see in my head more than I take pictures.*

*Do you think we can describe what we see?*

*No, we cannot, but we can get closer.*

*You do not think you are mistaken? You think you can get closer and not that you distance yourself instead? Have you learned how to write?*

13 Chantal

*Yes, I learned how to write.*<sup>13</sup>

Akerman,

Monographie:  
Bande(s) À Part,  
Bobigny. pp. 137

Ludwig Wittgenstein tells us, in a lecture on the foundations of mathematics that *Any rule can be imagined to be a description of a mechanism—even the rule which says that a pawn must not be moved in a certain way.*<sup>14</sup>

14 Ludwig

And Anne Carson, in a performance she made in tribute to Gertrud Stein, called *Lots of Guns*, said the following:

Wittgenstein

*What are you doing?*

Lectures on the  
Foundations of  
Mathematics,  
Conference 30.

*Calling the police.*

15 Anne Carson.

*Why?*

Decreation:  
Poetry, Essays,  
Opera. Vintage.  
2006, pp. 112

*To give them a description of your gun.*

*How do you describe it?*

16 Ludwig

*Thin, dark, rather nervous, almost birdlike.*

Wittgenstein,  
Philosophical  
Investigation.  
§23.

*You have entirely misunderstood my gun.*

*Do you want to talk to the police yourself?*

*No.*

*Then be quiet.*

*My gun is not nervous! My gun is not birdlike!*

*Sit down please.*

*My gun is on continuous alert status!*<sup>15</sup>

Do we take pictures so we can have a screenplay?

Between two filmmakers, Akerman and Godard, is the desire to be closer to what we see. Who is right and who is wrong? Is it we who move closer or is it moving closer to us? Yes. In a screenplay, who goes to whom? Who bothers and who intrudes on the other's life? Is it the filmmaker that makes it or is it the film that desires itself, thus prompting the filmmaker? Is it the film allowing itself to be described so that it can be in the game? How to describe knowing you can be described? I follow the tangling, engaging questions of description. They are in the differences between Akerman and Godard: a confrontational relationship of tribute, of fortuitous and important disagreement around making: around making films.

To make films is a *language-game*. It is an activity, in multiplicity, which could be added to the list we find in *Philosophical Investigations* when Wittgenstein insists that *the term "language-game" is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the speaking of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life.*<sup>16</sup> He invites us to imagine multiple games through instances.

*Review the multiplicity of language-games in the following examples, and in others:*

*Giving orders, and obeying them—  
 Describing the appearance of an object, or giving its  
 measurements—  
 Constructing an object from a description (a  
 drawing)—  
 Reporting an event—  
 Speculating about an event—  
 Forming and testing a hypothesis—  
 Presenting the results of an experiment in tables and  
 diagrams—  
 Making up a story; and reading it—  
 Play-acting—  
 Singing catches—  
 Guessing riddles—  
 Making a joke; telling it—*

*Solving a problem in practical arithmetic—  
 Translating from one language into another—  
 Asking, thanking, cursing, greeting, praying.*<sup>17</sup>

17 Ludwig  
 Wittgenstein,  
 Investigações  
 Filosóficas. §23

18 Ludwig  
 Wittgenstein,  
 Philosophical  
 Investigation §499

23

What do we do when we describe a language-game?  
 When we describe a mechanism? An inexorable mechanism,  
 in a vacuum? More a mechanism that could fail, therefore, a  
*machine* that is meant to fail. A *void* more than a vacuum.  
 When we describe the rule that says a pawn must not be  
 moved in a certain way, is it not—justly—our life that we  
 are describing? A life that includes chess: the board, queen  
 and king, horses, towers, players. Interdiction exists in the  
 game and in life, not outside of them. To describe could be to  
 reinforce the interdiction—or it could not be. Try to attempt  
 something else.

*But when one draws a boundary it may be for various  
 kinds of reasons. If I surround an area with a fence  
 or a line or otherwise, the purpose may be to prevent  
 someone from getting in or out; but it may also be part  
 of a game and the players be supposed, say, to jump  
 over the boundary; or it may show where the property  
 of one man ends and that of another begins; and so on.  
 So if I draw a boundary line that is not yet to say what  
 I am drawing it for.*<sup>18</sup>

If there is a fence, to play could be to jump it. Wittgenstein tells  
 us that rules of writing and interdiction describe a mechanism.  
 We describe under the rules of writing and interdiction. So  
 how to move? One option is to describe the gun. Where Carson  
 aims at describing, we bother intruding to dispute, teasing our  
 description into someone else's description.

To call the police to report the presence of a gun  
 indicates that we are framed by that same institutions—by  
 law and violence. We describe limitations with limited,  
 permanent, and indestructible desire, with constant and



limitless drive. Within boundaries, we can draw the space of desire. Our desire emerges from a boundary, a limit, an image from the past. In limitation we drive in paradox, beginning with a rule of interdiction. What establishes the movement is also what orders and forbids, what draws a limit that must not be crossed.

A rule that describes a mechanism. The possibility of working. The clinic: language on language. Language in the body and out of the body. The drive: it is neither somatic nor psychic—it is open; it opens over these frontiers.

Description operates in the clinic of language.

To drive in language. The body is attacked by swarming signifiers, chains of metaphor, and metonymy. Words, sentences, things, gestures, images, sounds driven complexly to their limits, complexing other limits. That which is experience and that which is representation. To occupy a representation in instances, in objects. Jacques Lacan goes to the meetings of Sigmund Freud and Claude Lévi-Strauss. He puts his sights on incest—on desiring the mother—to connect unconscious and structure. The most enigmatic, irreducible barrier between nature and culture is desire that must not satisfy itself. Satisfied desire would end the whole world of demand.<sup>19</sup>

19 Jacques Lacan. Seminar VII (1960-1962). pp. 75

24

I do not bring up psychoanalysis in order to unveil some relationship between Anna Silver and her mother in *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna*, or even between Chantal Akerman and her own mother, Natalia Akerman. Interpretation must be poor. The matter that matters is talking, thoughts that reveal themselves absently. The unconscious is structured as language, as interdiction. We work on that work.

Orphan unconscious? Orphic unconscious.



For instance, let's describe a meeting of Anna's. In a train station, on a platform bench, Anna and Ida talk. Ida is a friend of Anna's mother who she meets briefly before leaving Germany and going back to Belgium and then France. Anna will meet her mother in Brussels. They talk, Anna and Ida. It is cold. Ida wears a heavy and elegant coat; Anna does not. It looks cold at least. Anna listens, and answers without many words; Ida is her opposite.

They, prior to this moment, met on another platform—or was it the same? They walked through the station; I listened to the steps, to the movement of people and trains. Anna says she is hungry, but when she arrives at the restaurant, she gives up eating there or at any place. Ida does not ask why she gives up. Maybe it is not really cold since they decide to talk on the platform and not inside a restaurant. I would choose the restaurant. But we are not talking about me.

Children: that is what they talk about. Ida's son, Anna's ex-boyfriend and fiancé. They are talking about Anna getting back together with him and breaking up again, about their almost marriage. Ida now lives in Germany. I do not know her son or where he lives. Ida left Belgium and speaks German now. Anna understands a bit. Ida opens pathways into Anna's past, into things I did not know or—better—that were not already mentioned.

It is not a matter of revealing any secret but of exposing ordinary, everyday life. If Anna did reveal any of the information that Ida had told her, it was not for mystery. This is another order; her going and leaving are from another order. She speaks too little. Ida speaks more—maybe to compensate, maybe not.

That is what I remembered, what I was describing from memory.

Is to describe from memory the same as to describe while witnessing images and sounds from the film? I will try another way. I will describe while the film is playing on my computer screen. On the same screen are the film and this file where I write.

More from Anna and Ida. Now I see and listen to them at the same time as I write my sentences. I write towards a future editing.

City landscapes pass from inside a train that arrives slowly at a station. The film had already begun, in Germany, over thirty minutes ago. Anna goes out and down the stairs from a platform in the center of the station. Unsuccessfully, she tries to call someone in a phone booth inside the post office.

*Post*

appears in sight. A frontal shot framed symmetrically.

Anna is inside the phone booth and we are close to the camera, looking at her through the window from the outside. I am impressed by the symmetry of the other plan, by the station's architecture, by the people passing by. I say that because even after the cut I still see it, keeping it in mind: the image.

There is a man talking in the next phone booth. Anna gives up afterward and goes to the attendant, telling him the number she tries is busy. He gives her back her money. *It is busy. In Italy, it is always busy*, she says and he replies. A formidable sentence that I also keep—resonating—for the rest of the time: *In Italy, it is always busy*. This is not the first nor the last time Anna calls Italy. We remain tense, wondering whether there will be an answer.

Anna meets Ida. Traveling, the camera follows Anna walking a corridor in the train station until she walks up the stairs, heading to the platform. I hear steps marked through the corridor and walking up the stairs. Silence is rhythmized by the steps of Anna and everybody else. Then a shout. Someone calls Anna, seeks her attention while she is walking up the stairs, almost at the platform: Ida. They meet. They look glad that they have met. The next sequence is closer, so we can see them. Anna receives a package from Ida; they talk. Unrelenting footsteps cover the station.

While they talk, I remember Ida was not waiting for Anna at the top of the stairs of the platform. It is the opposite; Ida goes to Anna, calling her, reaching for her, touching her left arm. Maybe Anna did not care to meet Ida; she did not wait for her and went to the platform to take the train. Or maybe they told each other to meet at the platform, and Ida saw her first and wanted to scream her name, to call her. No cellphones in 1978. It is interesting to think that Ida saw Anna while we could not. For how long did Ida see Anna before we see her?

I do not see the package wrapped in white paper anymore; Anna was holding it. Now I do not know where it is. Did Anna open it? There is a well-known saying from Anton Chekhov: *if in the first act, you show a gun on the wall, it must be shot in another act. Otherwise, it should not be there*. With Chantal Akerman it is not like that. There is a package here and also in *Jeanne Dielman*. A cousin from Canada sent it by mail; Jeanne Dielman goes for the scissors, so she can open it. It is all announced—the end. Packages linking Anna and Jeanne.

The train is late. Anna is hungry. She says she is hungry. On the way to the restaurant, she also says she needs to use the phone. Cut. *I guess I am not hungry anymore*, she says as they arrive at the restaurant. *Let's go back, we never know*, replies Ida.

Steps, stairs, back to the platform. They talk. The shot is frontal. Ida speaks for a long time and Anna listens to her speaking. Ida monologues and Anna moves her head, observing. Her voice, we hear it for an instant.

From Moscow to Paris. Train track. I notice a sign, not big, next to the entrance door. It is not central in the frame; I can see only these two words in capital letters: *Moskova* and *Paris*. Above them, a text impossible to read—under them, something with a parenthesis, maybe saying that this train goes through Brussels. Some soldiers get in, running, not in a hurry, playing; others, not soldiers, advance towards Anna and Ida. A German voice in the station informs passengers; Anna is getting in and Ida looks at her. Inside the train, at the door, holding the doorknob from the inside—looking at Ida looking at her—her back to the camera. Anna says something before the whistle, before the door shuts. What did she say?

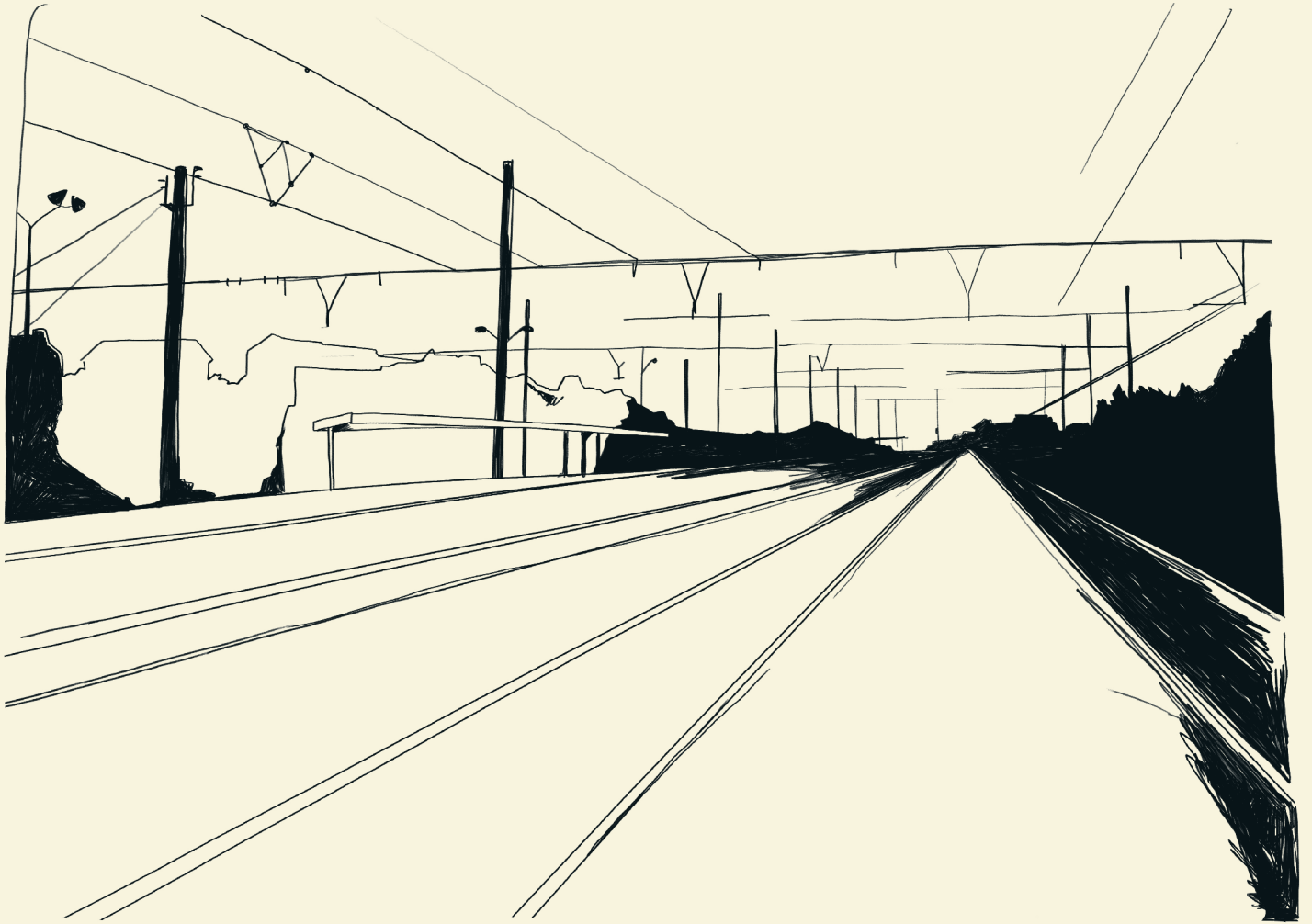
What she says is like the package.

From the left goes the train and to the right of the frame goes Ida; they all walk in the direction of the cut. *It will be alright*: this I can hear Anna saying to Ida at last. Or maybe to herself.

This film makes me imagine one cohesive 1970s Europe; I compare it to Europe nowadays and the world nowadays. Ida talks about unemployment in Belgium; that is the reason she left for West Germany, she says. I do not know what to say about unemployment in Belgium nowadays nor is there a West Germany anymore. It has won, and the European Union and all the world is in debt to it. The train Anna takes goes from Moscow to Paris: history. And the lights, the buildings filmed, the image quality and the sound recording reverberate Kraftwerk songs. This is not the soundtrack from the film, but the one in my head.

I look at the pictures from when the film was being made. I found them at the archives of the French Cinematheque – Archive Roman Goupil in September 2018. Found production materials: the making of *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna*. Pictures, locations, sceneries—where the film will take place, where it will be shot in a future film: anticipation. They activate memory in a temporal paradox that contains that which I already saw and heard, but that—at that moment—had not yet been done. Pictures that show actions I now try to remember, and describe while seeing and hearing. Now the pictures are pictures of pictures taken with my old cellphone; you can see its reflection.

Afterwards, I learn there are not only production studies for set design and locations but also screenplay studies. *Scénario*: a false cognate full of opportunities. Chantal Akerman says, *To make Les Rendez-vous d'Anna*,



*I only started to write the screenplay when I was on the  
20 Chantal way to Germany and would take pictures.* <sup>20</sup>

Akerman.

Monographie:

Bande(s) À Part,

Bobigny. pp. 140

21 Ludwig

Wittgenstein,

Philosophical

Investigations.

Part II, i.

The scenery, therefore, is in the screenplay of the film. I can say the scenery inscribes itself in Akerman's text. Could *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna* be made outside the train tracks connecting Germany: Belgium: France? We know it could not.

Chantal Akerman describes the meeting of Anna and Ida. In *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna*, on a platform of a German train station, Ida, a friend of Anna's mother, asks her, *Do you want to have children?*

Yes, answers Anna.

*You see that? I have always told you.*

Anna remains silent.

So Ida continues and as in a psalmody or in a wailing prayer, she adds *your father will be very happy. How many times have I heard him say he was not sure he would see his grandchildren before he is dead. Besides, you know, when the parents are dead, if you do not have children, what is left in life? Nothing. When you do, the children are left.*

Ida, she has known much of life. Maybe she has even known a little bit too much.

Anna has also known much of life, but not the same much.

The stories they tell, because she is passing by, will never fill this lack. I imagine her story is full of holes, full of missing links—as I said in English—and she does not even have children.

*Full of Missing Links*: a story full of missing links. The expression appears in English, in a text written in French, as if to indicate an unbridgeable, impassable hiatus between languages. It is an expression that, in its most common use, talks about another hiatus—the absence of an intermediary form between man and ape, between the human world and the animal world. In the story of the same life, the life of Anna, are missing links: absences: lack of forms, of intermediary forms of life. Missing links between Anna and other characters, her director, her spectators. Missing link between Anna and others now: nowadays: immediately. An absence also between her past and her future.

Distinct forms of life in the same life. For instance: the lives of people, lives of animals. This brings Ludwig Wittgenstein to the scene. *A dog believes his master is at the door. But can he also believe his master will come the day after tomorrow? —And what can he not do here? —How do I do it?—How am I supposed to answer this?* <sup>21</sup>

Life of dog: a form of life devoid of *the day after tomorrow*, or of *Tuesday*, or of *2020*. Separated from

abstract concepts of death and of life. Between man and animal are different times: missing links. The story of Anna is full of holes, *full of missing links*. In the same life, in the life of Anna, in our lives, in a film such as *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna*, is the possibility of co-existing with no intermediary and hierarchical form or distinct temporalities. How to describe that, the force that it has?

Richard Burton's voice in *Equus* is that of a psychiatrist who recognizes being lost. He is lost. *The only thing I know for sure is this: a horse's head is finally unknowable to me.*<sup>22</sup>

22 *Equus*, Dir. Sydney Lumet, 1977.

23 Roberto Corrêa dos Santos, *O Livro Fúcsia de Clarice Lispector*, pp. 9

24 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. Part II, § 527.

The shared time-space of a horse, of *Equus*, of Anna and her meetings, of Chantal Akerman, and of me and you. The possibility of interpenetration without hierarchy. All that there is as promises in the tears: cracks: breaks of the missing links.

We need to use the coincidence of the word. In music, *tempo* and time also mean the velocity, the course, the rhythm of a piece. In the possibilities of the same word—*tempo*—distinct temporalities and rhythms promise to coalesce, to be together or in variation according to the day: interpreter: player. Thinking on that, with Chantal Akerman, we could say as does Roberto Corrêa dos Santos, with Clarice Lispector: *Let's be poliexistent. Transrhythmic.*<sup>23</sup>

To join the imperative we find in Corrêa dos Santos and Clarice Lispector, to describe it, inscribe in it, let it be inscribed in us and describe its inscription. To try at the very least to enter the place of trying is our task—in our music, in our texts, in our lives. Wittgenstein goes to that place.

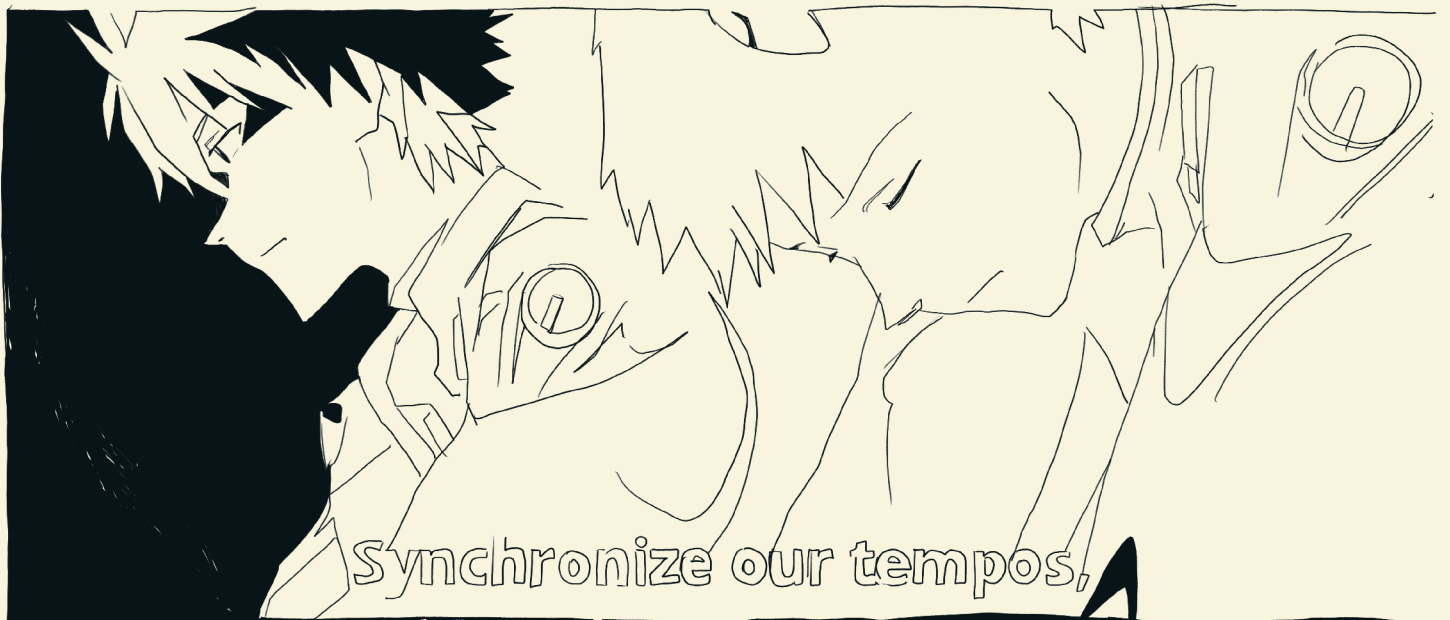
*Understanding a sentence is much more akin to understanding a theme in music than one may think. What I mean is that understanding a sentence lies nearer than one thinks to what is ordinarily called understanding a musical theme. Why is just this the pattern of variation in loudness and tempo? One would like to say "Because I know what it's all about". But what is it all about? I should not be able to say. In order to "explain" I could only compare it with something else which has the same rhythm (I mean the same pattern). (One says "Don't you see, this is as if a conclusion were being drawn" or "This is as it were a parenthesis", etc.)*<sup>24</sup>

In a simple conversation, in a common conversation that happens in, for instance, a train station, there is—for Wittgenstein—much more music than what one supposes there is. Convictions, conclusions, parenthesis, things usually in the field of intellectual life are here hijacked as a musical experience. For Wittgenstein, the meaning of a word,



of a sentence, is not *a fixed something*. Meaning is its *use*—regulated, partially erratic, partially unpredictable. Meaning is the flux of life and of the game. Language is action and interaction, it forms life. Thus, there is more music in our interactions than we suppose.

Course, rhythm, velocity: the *tempo* contained in and of words and phrases that play with the *tempo*s of ourselves. Do we know the meaning of what it means? Each word and sentence? How is it possible that we know how to sing words and sentences without properly knowing what they mean?



Synchronize our tempos,  
**just like when playing a duet.**

Björk is playing in my headphones.

*A juxtaposition in fate*

*Find our mutual coordinates*

[...]

*I only wish to synchronize our feelings, our feelings, ooh*<sup>25</sup>

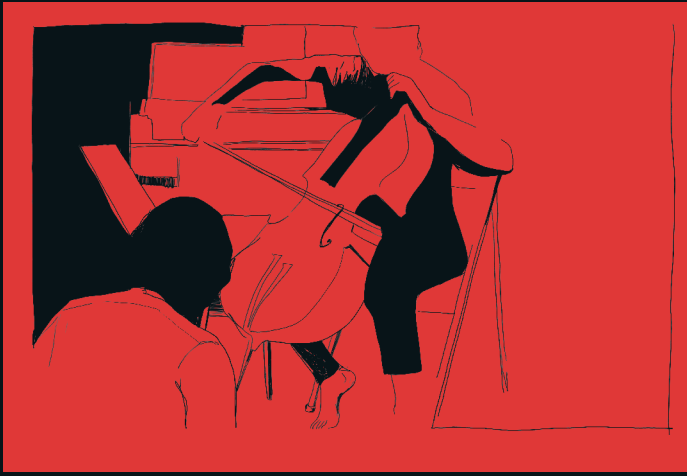
25 Björk,  
“Stonemilker” from  
Vulnicura, 2015.  
26 Anne Carson  
interviewed by  
John D’Agata,  
“A \_\_ with Anne  
Carson.” The Iowa  
Review 27(2),  
1997, pp.13.

Distinct times coexist in one’s life—poliexistence—a form of living together and in cannibalism, of contagion between distinct *tempo*s. *Tempo* is something deeper and more complex than meaning; we keep trying to describe it. It has to do with Anne Carson’s approach to the *fact* in an interview she gave at the Iowa writer’s workshop:

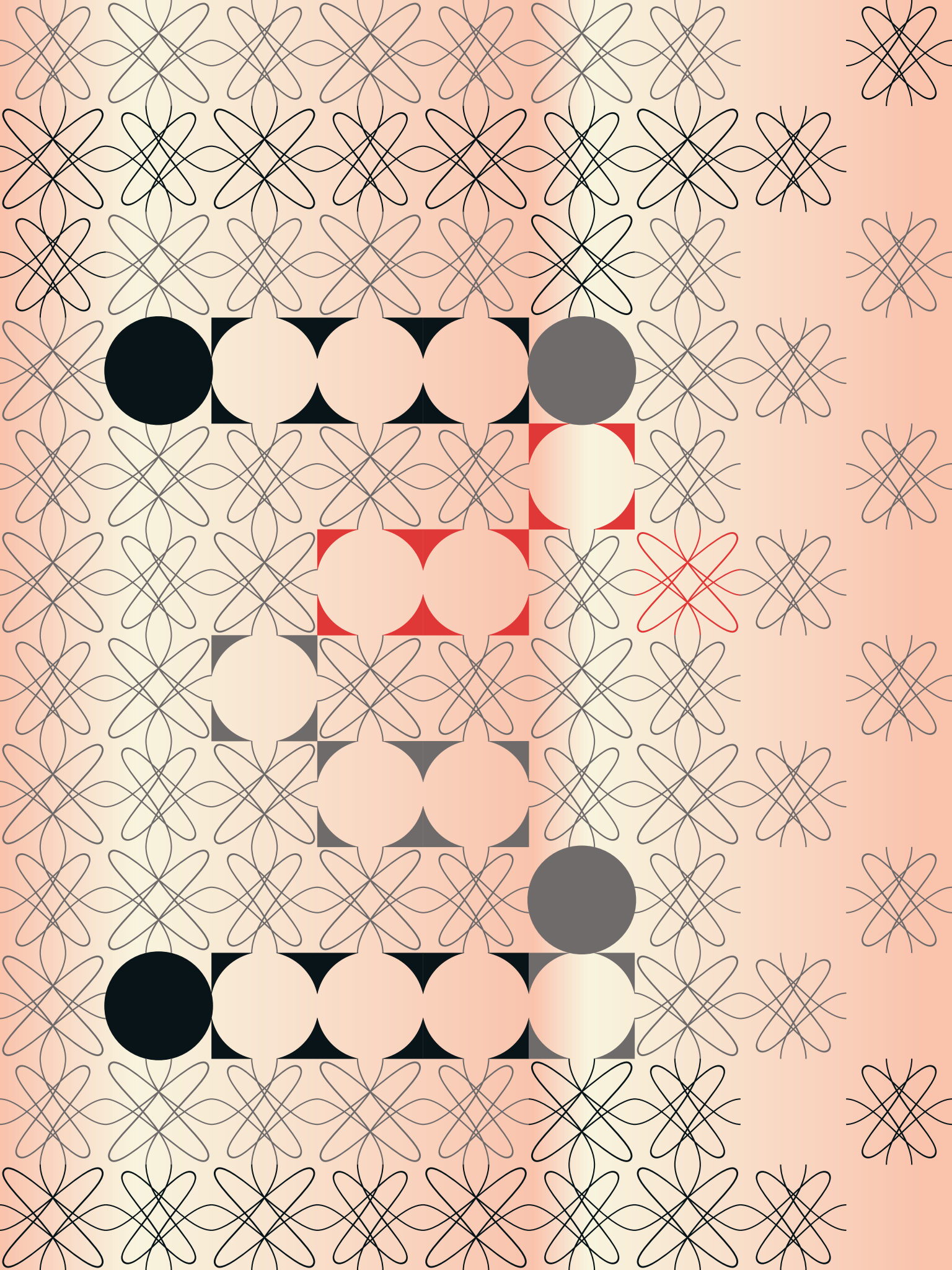
*I think that that is a pure moment, when you see that a fact has a form, and you try to make that happen again in language. Form is a rough approximation of what the facts are doing. Their activity more than their surface appearance. I mean, when we say that form imitates reality or something like that it sounds like an image. I’m saying it’s more like a tempo being covered, like a movement within an event or a thing.*<sup>26</sup>

Form does not imitate reality; it responds to what facts are *doing*. Facts are not done, they act. Someone surprises us with facts, and a form tries to make the surprise happen again. To make it happen again in language, to make it receive a form in language is a pure moment. In this pure moment, it is not about giving an image to a surface, but to give news of and to cover a certain musical *tempo*. To translate is to respond. We would say translation is about to make it happen—a certain velocity, course, and rhythm that before was muffled in the middle of other *tempo*s.

Let’s try another time, another way to form a description. I wrote a poem; this poem comes in the next session. Akerman, Wittgenstein, and Carson co-exist in a poem that came from playing with three quotations. To dare a poem: to play the cello—an attraction to the image of the instrument being played. Listening to Sonia Wieder-Atherton in Akerman’s *Portrait d’Une Paresseuse*.



•  
How to hold the instrument? How to move my body with it?  
How to make some music? How to take this seriously? You  
can laugh but take it seriously. Try it, please. Thank you: you  
are welcome.



*Full of  
Missing Links*

Understanding a sentence is much more akin to understanding a theme in music than one may think.

I think.

In *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna*, in a platform of a train station in Germany,

Ida, a friend of Anna's mother asks her, Do you want to have children?

*Enfants* children or sons and daughters?

To have children: to have a son or a daughter: maybe there is a difference.

To say I will have children maybe it is not the same as saying I will have a son or a daughter.

What I mean is that understanding a sentence lies nearer than one thinks.

That which is pure moment,  
Yes, answers Anna.

To what is ordinarily called understanding a musical theme.

When you see that a fact  
has a form  
,

We try, you see that? I have always told you.

38

Why is just this

the pattern of variation in loudness and tempo?

The question placed here and there is about variation: the musical theme comprehends its variations in volume and tempo.

Translated in bad translation as

Sonority and what?

Loudness.

A pure moment, when you see that a fact has a form,

And you try to make that  
Happen again in language .Bad translation.  
Actual retranslating .Bad answer spoiled  
child.

Bad use miss-using do you have any idea what you  
are doing? Actually not but  
you learn from repeating. Forcing it.  
Write again describe again  
wait a while. Some feedback so you write  
again.



So Ida continues,

And as in a psalmody or in a wailing  
prayer, she adds your father will  
be

very happy.

I should not be able to say

“Because I know what it’s all about”.

40

Form

is a rough approximation  
approximation  
approximation

of what the

facts are doing. One would like to say “Because I  
know what it’s all about”.

But what is it all about?

I should not be able to say.

So we have a pattern of variation repetition

*Repetition is inexact*

: Hanna Sullivan

A w hole that means something, a meaning

I should not be able to say.

Anna remains silent.

How many times have I heard him  
say  
he was not sure he would see his grandchildren bore  
before he is dead.

I wrote it bore before wrong mixed  
them then saw it

Form is a rough approximation of what the facts  
are  
doing.

Their activity more than their surface  
appearance.

But what is it all about?

42

I should not be able to say

I mean, when we say that form imitates reality or  
something

like that it sounds

Like an image.

Besides, you know, when the parents are dead,  
if you do not have children, what is

left  
in life

? Nothing.

In order to “explain” I could only compare it with  
something else which has the

same

rhythm

(I mean the same

pattern).

Rhythm as concept such as theme. Tempo. And  
description.

To compare, meanings? To other patterns put in  
game one with another.

Hijacking from music loudness *tempo* course  
velocity. That

means.

To give news to cover to describe is to give news to cover. Possibilities of variation. In game.

## Playing

From each day from reach person.  
An inventory of forces of description. Estate inventory is what someone makes when someone dies.

Themes and variations in game comparing.

I'm saying it's more like a tempo being covered and *tempo* is time in my

44

Mother tongue :

: : my mother's tongue

: la-la-la:

:

—Coincidence of words. Coincidences work.

When the parents are  
dead, if you do not  
have children,  
what is left in life?  
It sounds like an image.

When we say that form imitates reality or something  
like that

It sounds like an image.  
I'm saying it's more like a tempo being covered.  
Tempo is *tempo*. Mother tongue, etc.

Besides, you know, when the parents  
are dead, if you do not have children, what is left in  
life? Nothing.  
Children children son daughter.  
(I mean the same pattern).

One says “Don’t you see, this is as if a conclusion were being drawn”.

I’m saying it’s more like a tempo being covered, like a movement within an event or a thing.

Ida, she has known

much

of  
life. Maybe she has  
even known a little  
bit too  
much.

46

Anna has also known much of life, but  
not the same  
much.

And for sure it lacks her  
even a much.

“This is as it were a parenthesis”, etc.

—

I'm saying it's more like a tempo being covered, like

a

movement within an event or a thing. Anna has also known much of life, but not the same much.

And for sure it lacks her even a much.

And all these stories they tell because she is passing only by will never fill these much.

47

I'm saying it's more like a tempo being covered, like a movement within an event or a thing.

Do we need clues facing the missing links? And for sure it lacks her even a much.

And all these stories they tell because she is passing only by will never fill these much. Also her, I

imagine, her

story is full of holes, *full of missing links*, as I said in English, and

she does not

even have children.



Ida, she has known a much of life. Maybe she has  
even known  
a little bit too much.

Anna has also  
known much of life, but not the same  
much.

And for sure it lacks her even a much.  
And all these stories they tell because she is passing  
only by will never fill these much. Also

her, I imagine, her story is full of holes, *full of*  
*missing links*, as I said in

English, and she does not even

have children.

Do you want to have children?

Yes, answers Anna.

,  
(One says “Don’t you see, this is as if a  
conclusion were being drawn” or “This is as it were  
a parenthesis”, etc.) cover that.

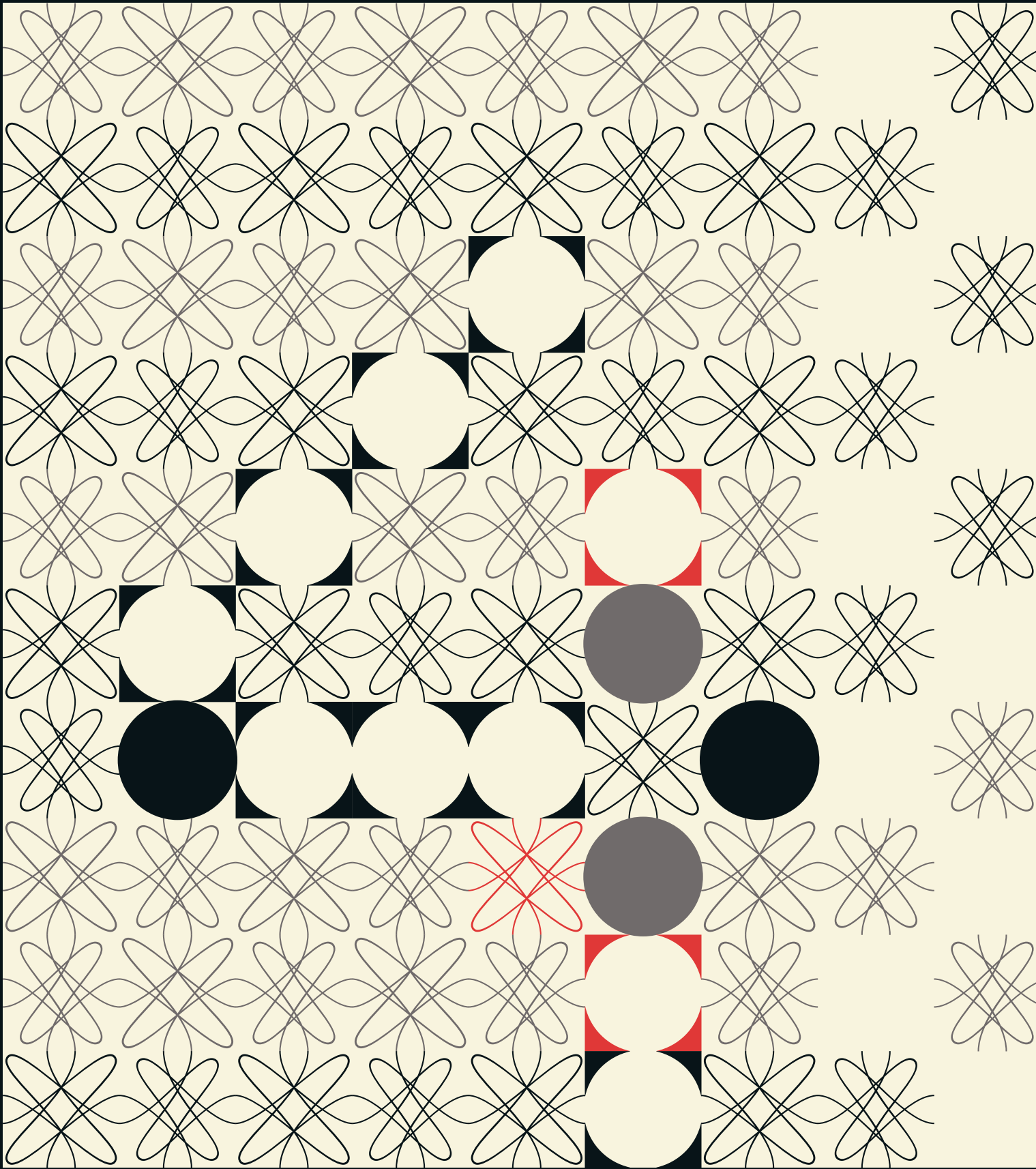
Cover that You see that? I have  
always told

you.

Each day each  
person tempos

the possible in the impossible the impossible in  
the possible.

the impossible in the impossible the  
possible in the possible.





## *How Ruin Nested Inside Each Thimble Throat*

51

For several moments, with little strength, in the melancholy and tachycardia of sleepless nights, this text was forming. Little strength that was, finally, consumed with no truce by the fire at the Brazilian National Museum. Not only the first museum in Brazil, with enormous anthropological importance but also a part of the University—the place where, for instance, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro works. We write within these wrecks, in them among others. We are inscribed in these ruins; we are a part of them.

In the beginning, and even later, Chantal Akerman would do as she could. She was able to make her films by getting money through a scam

she conjured. Tearing in two gay porn film tickets, at a box office where she worked, and selling each for full price. She would take the money and put it into making her film. That is how she managed to begin. By stealing money.

I would like to have some courage. To have some.

To do what she did?

No, I mean, kind of. It is not exactly that.

I hear that a lot: that: to have courage. During the last days of October 2018, the Sun is in Scorpio. My birthday is getting closer.

*Courage!*

But actually, I am fully afraid of *disappearing, to lose someone, to lose the house, to die.*<sup>27</sup> This sentence, I stole from Pedro Costa. I read it in a statement he gave about a notebook he made for his film *Casa de Lava*. See *Marilyn's image I put there, for example*, he goes.



This is not the Marilyn found in Pedro Costa's notebook. In this one, she was photographed by Richard Avedon in 1957. As if about to breathe out. Caught unaware, no pose. The equation between eyes and shoulders is insoluble. What does she see? Maybe she did not know Avedon was going to take a photograph at that moment. Some would say this is the actress not acting, not performing. Or none of this. This Marilyn awakens several understandings, too much understanding, actually, too much richness in understanding. But understanding, and interpretation, must be poor—it is *Arte Povera*. Understumble.

What matters?

Enough. I do not know. What matters is what is at stake. The objective is not to understand this photograph, It is to be in front of it, living our lives towards our deaths.

Fire, flames, the heat of the lava. A volcano in a wall, looking at us. *I am red meat*, writes Sylvia Plath.<sup>28</sup> I look at her—Monroe, but Plath is also there—we are together, trying to live in this house of lava. House, dwelling, home: red, warm, threatening, disformed. In difficulty, we deal. We are trying.

We are performing a task in hostile weather, in the heat of circumstances. Ocean Vuong has something to say about it.



*refuse me. / Our faces blackening / in the  
photographs along the wall. / Don't laugh.  
Just tell me the story / again, / of the sparrows  
who flew from falling Rome, / their  
blazed wings. / How ruin nested inside each  
thimble throat / & made it sing*<sup>29</sup>

At least in part, I believe it is with ruin nested inside my throat, with blazed wings, that I try to fulfill this task of describing (singing). In *Autobiography of Red*—a text written by Anne Carson and included in my epigraph and that appears many times, with increasing clarity, in this text—there is a scene where the characters confront themselves facing a volcano:

56

*Pass down an alley then turn a corner and there  
it is. Volcano in a wall.*

*Do you see that, says Ancash.*

*Beautiful, Herakles breathes out. He is looking  
at the men.*

*I mean the fire, says Ancash.*

*Herakles grins in the dark. Ancash watches the  
flames.*

*We are amazing beings,*

*Geryon is thinking. We are neighbors of fire.*

*And now time is rushing towards them*

*where they stand side by side with arms*

*touching, immortality on their faces,  
night at their back.* <sup>30</sup>

Lava both destroys and forms; it disciplines subjects. In the task of describing, there is also the possibility of becoming an object because objects cause. The neighborhood of fire, threatening eruptions, talking about a time that is not ours but the time of an active volcano. Waiting rules, duration, laws of co-existence, and constant attention are to be dealt with.

The characters' arms touch one another and themselves. Is this desire or coincidence? Desire, noticed by a coincidence. Men's desire, a whole world that exists away, out of human time—a space so eternal and anachronistic as an active volcano.

When Ingrid Berman's character decides to escape Stromboli to cross the volcano's mountain, how could it—at that time—erupt? In the film, she does not give up. Corners of my eyes to Ludwig Wittgenstein. The belief that fire will burn me is of the same nature as the fear that it will burn me. <sup>31</sup>

It is necessary, if possible, to walk with fire—to believe it does not burn. Necessary not to be afraid, at least for now, even if it does burn and you escape in ruins. It is hard to be under constant threat. To sing the heat. We try—here, in these circumstances—to hold onto something.

<sup>30</sup> Anne Carson, *Autobiography of Red: A Novel in Verse*. Vintage, 1998, pp.146.

<sup>31</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein. *Philosophical Grammar I*, §67

House: ruin. *House-ruin*. Here, to deal is to produce a concept—a description.

I find in Stefano Harney and Fred Moten a way of seeing *concept* and its use that is closer to what I want to do here. In text, concept is inscribed in life. They advocate for a notion of *study* that allows works such as this one to be made. Their book, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study*, showed me some operations I try to embrace in writing. Concept, and its trajectory, *are ways to develop a mode of living together, a mode of being together that cannot be shared as a model but as an instance.*<sup>32</sup> By concepts, therefore, we are able to desire new, other ways of living. Forms, objects. Objective: to trace or to improvise a way that modifies other ways—to show something in multiplicity and difference. Concept: multiplicity: texts: possible worlds able to describe and to be described, to cause.

Harney and Moten propose a metaphor for concept: more of a toybox, less of a toolbox.

*There are these props, these toys, and if you pick them up you can move into some new thinking and into a new set of relations, a new way of being together, thinking together. In the end, it's the new way of being together and thinking together that's important, and not the tool, not the prop.*<sup>33</sup>

32 Fred Moten and Stephano Harney, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study*. Minor Compositions, 2013, pp. 105.

33 Ibid. pp. 106.

That is how they think concepts, and terms—  
toys are not objects with a correct use. *They don't  
play with them the right way a sword is what  
you hit a ball with and a bat is what you make  
music with.*<sup>34</sup> The most important thing is to  
set things up in the game, to play. And the most  
important in playing is interaction.

*Study*: a notion of speculative practice that  
comes from walking with, working with, dancing  
with, suffering with. That which you do with  
other people. *With*: how: one can come from  
another. Speculative practice comes from *study*  
in movement. It is to talk about ideas, but also  
about what to eat, about an old film, about a dog  
passing by, about a new love. Also to talk in the  
middle of something. A going through, whether by  
invitation or interruption: across bodies, spaces,  
things. *Across*.

Anne Carson translates a fragment from  
Sappho. Fragment 181, a fragment which, across  
many centuries, arrives in a papyrus with a single  
word: *crossable*.

Something that is crossed? That crosses? This  
could also be a *study* in movement. Something  
about that, around that. A word of courage in a  
situation of paralysis against *no trespassing*.  
This word: *crossable*. If we put together fragments  
181 and 182 in a sentence, we get: *crossable, I  
might go*.

Some trust in the crossing?

*181 Crossable*

*182 I might go*<sup>35</sup>

60 The second session from *The Undercommons* is called *The University and the Undercommons*. Harney and Moten think about *theft*, and, with *theft*, I am able to contextualize the notion of *study* a little more. A *theft for the university*, knowing that the society that makes universities is the same society that makes prisons. It is necessary to lose the trajectory that compares, qualifies, and names the academic and the non-academic, the doable and the undoable, the professional and the unprofessional, the naïve and the non-naïve. From that comes *study*—the notion, crossing it, notions escaping without answering: also not asking the questions: going to the underground, the underworld of university. *Undercommon. Theft for the university*, theft towards *study*.

*One can only sneak into the university and steal what one can. To abuse its hospitality, to spite its mission, to join its refugee colony, its gypsy encampment, to be in but not of this is the path of the subversive intellectual in the modern university.*<sup>36</sup>

Harney and Moten say the only possibility is the one of going underground, to the underworld, to the *undercommon*—an act of *theft*, a criminal

35 Anne Carson, *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho*. Virago, 2003, pp. 351.

36 Fred Moten and Stephano Harney, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study*. pp. 26.

act. A criminal act: the one possible only to the ones willing, the ones at war, the ones that escape and hide. *Theft*: a non-programmatic choice. To steal instead of having, instead of owning. In order not to forget, not to deny. They read and write with Frantz Fanon.

*The defensive attitudes created by this violent bringing together of the colonized man and the colonial system form themselves into a structure which then reveals the colonized personality. This sensitivity is easily understood if we simply study and are alive to the number and depth of the injuries inflicted upon a native during a single day spent amidst the colonial regime. It must in any case be remembered that a colonized people is not only simply a dominated people. Under the German occupation the French remained men; under the French occupation, the Germans remained men. In Algeria there is not simply the domination but the decision to the letter not to occupy anything more than the sum total of the land. The Algerians, the veiled women, the palm trees and the camels make up the landscape, the natural background to the human presence of the French.* <sup>37</sup>

61

It is important to underline the connections between the act of describing and the colonial regime. This regime is actual. It is an inheritance in perpetual update. It is the maintenance of power in action. It is deciding who is the master and who obeys. These conditions raised by Fanon need attention. To describe is to dominate. A world established in oppressive description by the words of the settler. The danger of describing. Domination and description. Dominating by describing *how* something or someone is described. Scenes of a colonial regime that come from descriptions that subject inhabitants, merging persons and lands, allowing expansion. The conquest of people and territories.

62

At war. Relevant *study*. *House-ruin*. Ruined house: where to dwell: so to sing for *a world to come*. Chantal Akerman made a film that touches on these considerations.

*I went to, crossed Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and Georgia. Not mentioning Jasper, Texas. At the beginning, I almost did not see anything. The south does not give itself this way, it is necessary to ride a lot and walk and let go by fugitive impressions, but that repeat themselves.* <sup>38</sup>

The Southern United States is not only the south of the USA. In her 1999 film *Sud*, Chantal

Akerman addresses our inhabited world. That south is the world in which we live, in tension. The structure and silence of our lives: the structure and silence of society. Lots of silence and some shouting and *shut up*. I read Akerman's writing on her work in *Sud*; I went to the trees she filmed in the American South. *These are not just trees*, she seems to tell us by bringing up James Baldwin, who sings with Billie Holiday: *Never seen so many trees. So many trees that evoke so many hanged bodies.* <sup>39</sup>

Two sequences. I want to place one next to the other. They describe one another. Opportunities to listen to something.

63 A sequence of songs sung in a protestant church, filmed in what looks like their entirety. A homage to the memory of James Byrd Jr.—a black man brutally murdered in Jasper, Texas.

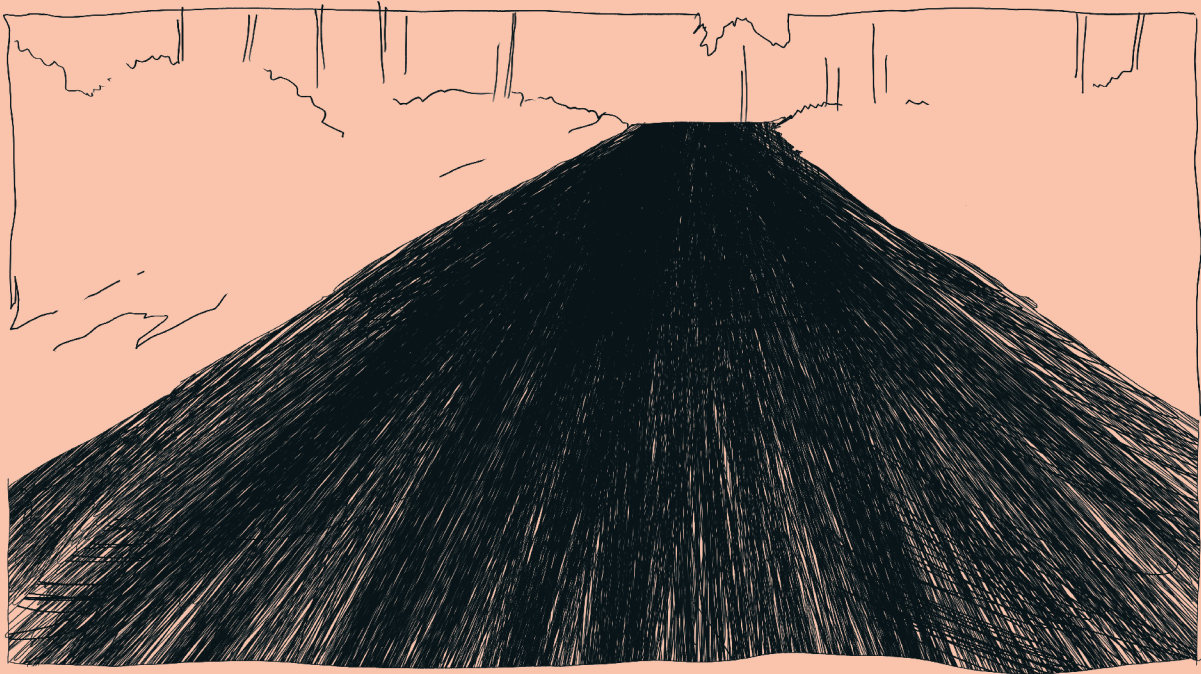
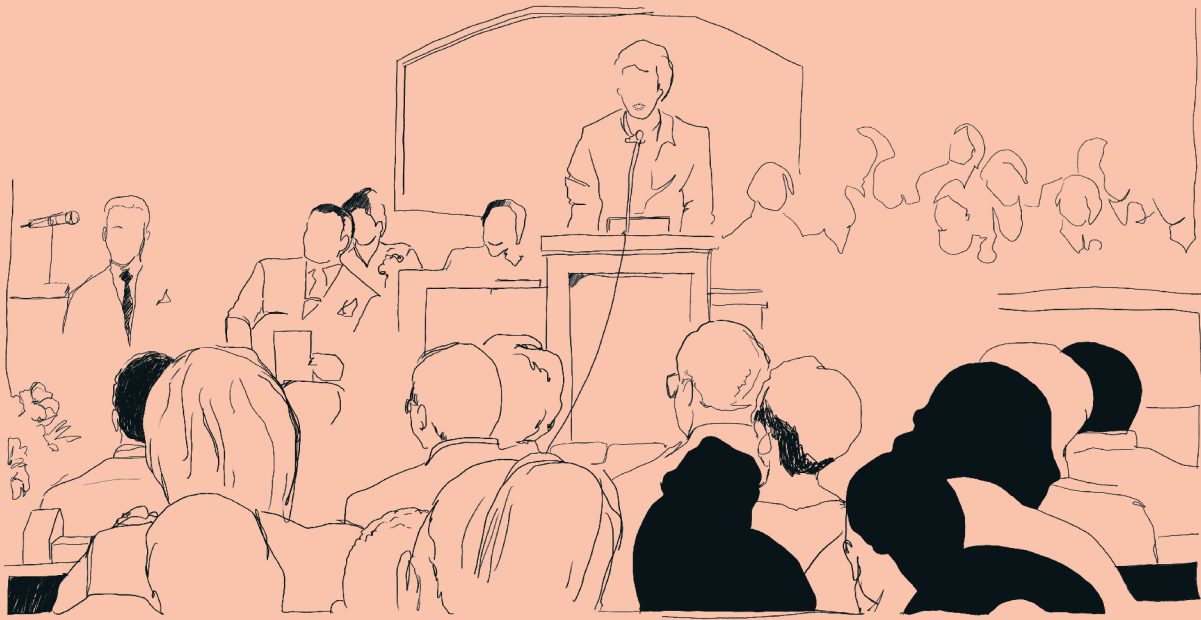
The filming of the road where James Byrd Jr. was murdered, tied to a car, and dragged.

These scenes co-exist in that city. They are both long and intense. Music and silence: from the church, the congregation singing, and from the road, the lynching of another black person. Akerman quotes Baldwin: *The silence of the south. A heavy silence, tense. Lead silence. A silence that should be more than what it is. We watch the scream that will break this silence. We worry the day it comes.* <sup>40</sup>

39 Chantal Akerman, *Monographie: Bande(s) À Part*, Bobigny. pp. 47.

40 Chantal Akerman, *Monographie: Bande(s) À Part*, Bobigny. pp. 47.





One next to the other, the scenes of music and silence. Maybe it is possible to call music in the face of silence a response, a resistance. Life against death: persistent death: the constant threat of murder. Has Fred Moten ever seen *Sud*? Has Chantal Akerman ever read *Giovanni's Room*? I ask these questions in lieu of Baldwin's quote, thinking that the *scream that will break this silence* is already here. A song being sung, music being played and improvised. *Blood on the leaves! Blood on the leaves!* Nevertheless, the break does not happen as we expect, as we imagine. Elaborate. Forms vary. The break happens every day. It *takes some form*. *Undercommons*: across underworlds, in the underground of racist, anti-black institutions.

Responses from the *undercommons* are informal, non-common. They are always escaping, running, transforming. They are hard to identify, but we can try to describe some form of the informal. *Music was already being made. So, what emerges is not music in some general way, as opposed to the non-musical. What emerges is a form, out of something that we call informality. The informal is not the absence of form.*<sup>41</sup>

Akerman, in montage, produces a description of an instance. The filmmaker describes an experience of response, of reaction, found in Jasper, Texas. Fred Moten also did that, for instance, when

41 Fred Moten and Stephano Harney, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study*. pp. 129

he spoke at the MoMA in 2015. In a lecture called *Blackness and Non-performance*, he introduces Betty—a slave woman who traveled with her owners to the state of Massachusetts. Coming from Tennessee, she could, in this other state, ask to be free. Although she was led to a judge by abolitionists while in Massachusetts, Betty decided to go back to Tennessee with her owners.

Moten talks about Betty’s decision, claiming that it was an act of *freedom against freedom: the freedom to renounce freedom*:<sup>42</sup> a performance against all performance. Against slavery and anti-slavery laws. Against contracts of place and people who determine who is free and who is not. Betty could say to a judge, *I want to be free*, and then she would be. Would she? What sort of society drafts this law, demands this performance—this speech act—in order to allow someone to be free?

In “Antigone”, written by Jean Anouilh in German-occupied France, she says, *I came here to say no to you and to die*.<sup>43</sup> Here is Antigone, in a scene with Anne Carson’s Kreon. Here she can say *no* to him, stand against his verbs and nouns.

*Kreon: here are Kreon’s verbs for today*

*Adjudicate*

*Legislate*

*Scandalize*

*Capitalize*

42 Fred Moten, “Blackness and Nonperformance” for AFTERLIVES, MoMA Live, 2015.

43 Jean Anouilh, *Antigone*, 1944.

*Here are Kreon's nouns*

*Men*

*Reason*

*Treason*

*Death*

*Ship of State*

*Mine*

*Chorus: "mine" isn't a noun*

*Kreon: it is if you capitalize it* <sup>44</sup>

And, in the same text, in a poem-introduction she calls *The Task of The Translator of Antigone*, Anne Carson describes her Antigone. A character who, because of her act of translation, is also her own.

67

*Antigone, you do not,  
any more than John Cage, aspire to a condition of  
silence  
you want us to listen to the sound of what  
happens  
when everything normal/ musical/ careful/  
conventional or pious  
is taken away  
oh sister and daughter of Oedipus,  
who can be innocent in dealing with you  
there was never a blank slate* <sup>45</sup>

44 Anne Carson, *Antigonick*. New Directions, 2012, pp. 5.

45 Anne Carson, *Antigonick*. New Directions, 2012, Introduction

Antigone traces a limit and defies Kreon. Makes us *listen to the sound of what happens*, to have the courage to give in to her desire, to *aspire to a condition of silence*. Something that Betty achieves in her non-performance. *Blood on the leaves! Blood on the leaves!* Actions are too tough to understand, so we describe. Antigone and Kreon: her *no* to him—in constant revisitation. Retranslation.

The *no* could be part of a previous *fugitivity*. Fugitivity, blackness, life that comes from life—the concrete struggle for representation, not abstraction. *Fugitivity* against white masks too. Frantz Fanon shows us instances of *fugitivity* against colonial power. As a Martinican, Fanon worked as a psychiatrist in Algeria during its war for independence. He studied subjection and the subjects of colonial forces, frames and repetitions, descriptions, and interruptions. His PhD thesis was rejected in Lyon; it was *Black Skin, White Masks*.

Fanon is accurate to stage the white masks at the title of his debate. He moves from the borders, from the colonized to the metropole. Who wears the masks: who was already wearing the masks? He describes them, describes how they learned language and were introduced to a world.

It brings to mind (and thus, to body) Toni Morrison's sentence: *Oppressive language does*

*more than represent violence; it is violence; does more than represent the limits of knowledge; it limits knowledge.* <sup>46</sup> Also, maybe, Ludwig Wittgenstein: *The limits of my language mean the limits of my world.* <sup>47</sup>

From the border, Fanon works in text, in life. Thinking from the border to the center. In study—to say no is an inflexion. To study the forces and the defying forces situated against one another. The difficulty, fear, risk of saying no to the metropole as the colony. In life, there is fugitivity. Fact: authors and characters face and resist. Exist. To scream, to be shut up. To live and the world. To die and the world. And in. Inside: in conflict.

We do not know for sure what Betty said in Massachusetts. Moten says her words were not transcribed by the men dealing with the case, observing Betty. Among them was Herman Melville's father-in-law: Bartleby. Music is being made. Betty's decision is riddle and instance. Her *no* echoes, resonates, and reaches you.

Catastrophe: is non-performance a catastrophe? In her text, *Variations of the Right to Remain Silent*, <sup>48</sup> Anne Carson puts forth that the catastrophe is an answer, at the same time that the cliché is a question. She studies Joan of Arc's trial and her words that shuttle to silence, that stay foreign, that cannot be owned.

46 Toni Morrison's Nobel Lecture, 1993

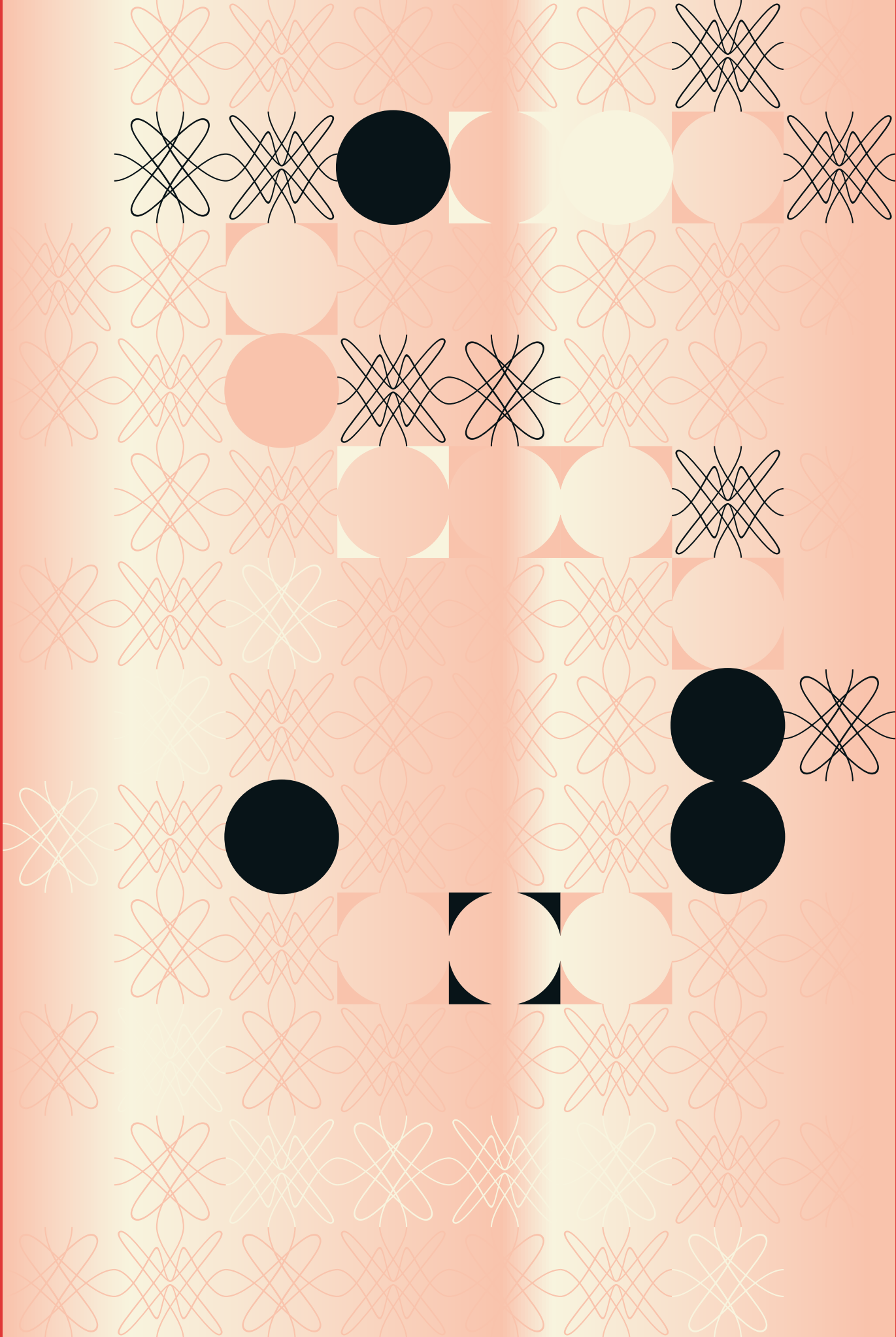
47 Ludwig Wittgenstein. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. §5.6.

48 Anne Carson, "Variations on the Right to Remain Silent." *A Public Space*, 2008.

By asking, inquisitors wanted the cliché, while Joan extinguished the usual relation of question to answer. She produces a catastrophe when she refuses to give her judges—in ways they could understand—names, bodies, descriptions of the voices guiding her military and morally. Inquisition wants a vocabulary of recognizable religious imagery and emotions in a conventional narrative that is susceptible to conventional disproof. Instead, Joan of Arc made up something new: sentences-strange-silences that Anne Carson noted when reading the process's documents. And when the judges forced her to define the voices as singular or plural, Joan of Arc most wonderfully said, *The light comes in the name of the voice.*

70

We are part of it. Is it possible not to be part of it? The difficulty of non-performance. To think and feel in non-performance against performance. Language world: where we are. There is the desire not to be part of some world, some language. At the same time, it seems impossible, even though it is thinkable. But what do you think? What is on your mind when you think of this thinkable impossibility? Extreme action. Radicality. Betty is an instance. Fred Moten shows in her case a force, an instance. A speculative practice that operates, that triggers—in *study*—that puts things together, next to one another. Closer to inscription. Write with it here forth.





*To Describe One's Life and  
Death:  
Part 1*

5

**DELPHINE SEYRIG**

This is not enough; it is no reason. Explain it to me, please, why longer.

(Silence, the camera moves smoothly)

72

**CHANTAL AKERMAN**

I do not know.



Ackerman and Delphine Seyrig in "Jeanne Dielman (1975) behind the scenes." (All other quoted dialogue in this chapter is from this video unless otherwise notes.)

VIDEO

Then think. <sup>49</sup>

•  
 In a video found on YouTube, which I saw for the last time on September 26th, 2020, Delphine Seyrig and Chantal Akerman talk. Delphine is the actress who plays Jeanne in Akerman's film, *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles*. This conversation could have been filmed during the making of the film; I do not know exactly. There is no further information in the YouTube description. I know only that its title is "Jeanne Dielman (1975) filming", that it has 18,949 views, and that lachambreverte is the username of whoever uploaded the video. The video is four minutes and thirty-two seconds (almost John Cage). It includes some cuts. It is shot in black and white, as opposed to the film.

We start in the middle of a dialogue when we arrive late to the cinema and insist on going in. Everybody is already properly seated; the lights are off and the film has already started some minutes ago. You feel embarrassed for passing in front of other people, avoiding their feet, apologizing and excusing yourself.

There is something tense between them. The beginning, which depicts a dialogue already in progress, makes the tension grow, demanding attention. A certain discomfort. A certain being

lost. It is not a problem that makes you give up; it makes you work more. It is, after all, a good start, which makes you hang on to something you do not understand very well and then move a little. Face your computer screen.

The audio and image are not good. The feeling is of losing, constantly; pieces of understanding slide past. Was the camera just turned on, or had it been on for a while? Based on a look from Akerman at the camera, I would say it was always on; she also, at one point, thinks that it should be turned off. She looks, to me, bothered. Later in the video: loud laughter, part of a sentence. She appears to have understood how to deal with the inconvenience, how to face the making of a machine.

If it is true that the camera was already on, in any case, it was decided by someone that this cut of the video would have this particular starting point. A dialogue in progress. Someone, in a final cut, decided on it.

*Why longer?* Chantal Akerman's silence (something she could have learned from her mother) and the time she takes to answer Delphine Seyrig's question contrasts with the noises on the set. *Think*, says Seyrig. Whoever is holding the camera moves slowly, following the conversation. The camera lingers on the actress's interrogative face until only the director is left on screen, silent. She finally speaks, and when she does, she is

almost no longer framed by the camera. Besides Chantal Akerman's right arm, invading the first shot here and there, we see Delphine Seyrig listening to her.

Akerman must be twenty-five years old, almost the same age as me when I first thought about writing this text, the age I used to think I still was when I would forget I was already twenty-seven. (I am thirty-one now, and twenty-five seems long gone. It is not the age I think I am anymore, not the age that I answer by mistake when someone asks *how old are you?* In dreams perhaps, I sometimes think I am that age.) Her hair is black. It is not long, nor short. She looks like she could be embarrassed, uncomfortable, even annoyed. She did not want to give these answers, to be put in that place as a director, as the one who explains. For her, maybe, film is not a place for *that*. For what? Explanation? Her referent could be other. Should I say she is unsure? I do not know. She insists on giving unconvincing answers to anyone who asks her such questions. She prefers not to offer these answers. Delphine Seyrig, during her turn, insists on questioning her director, to ask for instructions, ways, manners, meanings. *Why longer?* How to do that? By brushing her hair in a scene: the hair of Jeanne Dielman. The simple action of brushing her hair.

The actress is eloquent, and talks in a way I never thought Jeanne Dielman would talk.

Delphine Seyrig is probably forty-three and very well known. Her body, her posture, the way she inserts herself in the dialogue are the manners of an actress who believes in her doubts and needs answers in order to represent her character. She does not look for Jeanne Dielman's written lines in a screenplay; she wants the meaning of her gestures. Although dressed as Jeanne Dielman, it is Delphine Seyrig who speaks. She wants to know how to play her character. Nevertheless, this representation will be the result of other processes that are not easy answers to her questions. Processes that traverse non-answers, silences, and frustrations.

Representation is the result of refusal. Refusing to give answers, refusing to explain clearly, refusing to specify directions.

Sitting, Seyrig talks while looking into Akerman's eyes, not giving up, continuing to question. She speaks directly, points out that she is not afraid to ask what she wants to ask, teasing her director and insisting on her answers. Answers from Delphine Seyrig or from Chantal Akerman? One playing *with* the other's uncertainty. One playing *in* each other's uncertainty. The director takes time to answer the actress, who asks for explanations and insists. So the silence and the noises from the set occupy my computer screen.

When she listens to the questions, Chantal Akerman laughs in a low voice and smiles while lowering her head. She looks at the camera and gesticulates vaguely as if demanding the shooting stop. This idea is a forgotten one since there is no further action that says the camera should be off. Akerman's right hand touches her left cheek. It is a weird gesture that seems practiced. She could have thought about this movement. She could have foresaw the image it makes when her hand goes for the opposite cheek. Or not. Does it matter?

CA

*Delphine... (Exhaling... This shot follows the speakers).*

*I think it is not the case of being ready to do something, to want to do something. It is more something of brushing your hair, let your hair be brushed.*

(She motions as if to brush her hair)

DS

*But when you do it like that you do not do it very different than me.*

CA

*I think it is different.*

DS

*Then show me. (In a more insistent tone)*

•  
The audio is bad. The words are almost impossible to discern. Did Chantal Akerman say Delphine or Le film? If it is Delphine, we have a simple motivation; once more, the director is trying to call the actress to accept the way she directs, to leave for a bit all the questioning. But, if it is Le film, would Akerman be talking about Jeanne Dielman, her film's title and main character? Maybe Akerman is attempting to explain why her lack of explanation of her mise-en-scène marks a position. Mostly, Akerman speaks quietly, avoiding clear answers in contrast to the clear questions asked by Seyrig.

(Chantal Akerman takes the hairbrush and demonstrates how to use it.)

DS

*I do not see it.*

CA

*I am exaggerating.*

DS

*Fine, I will make it faster. What you want is for her to be dreamier?*

CA

*No. Try now less abruptly.*

DS

(Practicing how to brush her hair).

*That is what I did the last time.*

CA

*Last time was better than the first.*

DS

*I did it slower.*

CA

*The important thing is it to have something irregular.*

DS

*That is what I do not understand. Sometimes you are sure and then you change.*

Their sentences collide once in a while. The camera moves while the dialogue occurs. It goes to Seyrig's back. We can see her frontally in the mirror with Akerman by her side, but not as a reflection. Behind the actress, now as a reflection, there is a ladder. Mirror and ladder: two very meaningful elements that, here, do not mean anything. Do they? Seeing them after reading Wittgenstein and Lacan, for instance, is not so easy.



What does Akerman want when she directs the actress?

What Seyrig wants is more evident.

CA

*Listen. Maybe it is true. I told you. For me it can be like that, slower or faster. It is not a problem.*

DS

*But this is not the question. It is that I do not understand.*

CA

*It is not dreamy. It is a resting instant for her.*

80

DS

*That. Now you are saying something.  
Now we are talking.  
Now we are talking.*

CA

*You saw that before. I put it in the screenplay that she locks herself in the room.*

DS

*But that says nothing.*

CA

*A time only for herself.*

DS

*If you tell me it is a moment when she rests, alright. This is something else. When I say she dreams, it is that. It is her energy, her own peace. This tells me something. You see, when you want to explain, you are able to. It is that you do not want to explain. Well, her own peace.*

The dialogue continues until a cut. A cut that announces itself is a cut; a smooth or unnoticeable cut is not a cut at all.

Delphine Seyrig uses an expression in English that emphasizes that, now, Akerman is talking to her. They were talking for a while, but, for Seyrig, the conversation just started. Her interlocutor is now saying what she wants to hear. The direction demanded by Delphine Seyrig was there the entire time in what she knew she wanted to hear. A puzzling anticipation.

What is to be understood or known in order to represent a character? Chantal Akerman denies *this* direction. She refuses, as a director, to direct in another way. Her *mise-en-scène* is another path, another desire. In tension, we find Akerman and Seyrig desiring.

CA

*Imagine this. Imagine you finished cleaning the make-up from your face. You are going, quietly, to brush your hair before going to sleep.*

DS

*But that does not say anything. That you said before. You understand? I understood what you want.*

CA

*So, great.*  
(Laughs loudly).

People on the set, filmed by the camera. A woman who I believe to be the one who prepares the hair, the make-up, and the styling for Jeanne Dielman is also in the image with the actress. The ladder is there. Also the mirror. Chantal Akerman laughs again—now loudly—and looks at the camera from the corner of her eyes, facing Delphine Seyrig. She got it—how to react. Her laughter pushes away Seyrig, the camera, and us. The laughter is an answer from a distance. An answer that is the lack of an answer, something left missing. A laughing answer to address a need that, really and always, is not enough. This is about another kind of enough.

The laughter is a direction that loudly goes in many directions.

With this loud laughter, the director—recorded during the *making of* her film—also answers me, someone who writes with her and from her many decades later. Some *enough* to me and to Delphine Seyrig. And also a *keep going*.

Some inscription that, by frustration, makes us desire: movement. I wanted Akerman to explain a little bit more, but I also did not want that. I want to stay with her work because my work does not exist without hers.

My text is ambiguous because it exists after her texts, avoiding an excess of interpretation. Where should I go? When to stop? Should I go back? Describe, describe, describe. Describe to avoid and work on the void.

DS

*I understand. She has pleasure with that.*

CA

*In my first idea, which I thought was over, it was another character. In the morning, she would wear another gown. And at night, she would wear a gown that was not convenient for the character. Afterwards, I thought it would not work, it was too much. You locked yourself inside the room. And you will wear a robe that does not match yourself. That all I removed.*

DS

*Oh, now you are talking.*

*How do you want me to play if I do not know her secrets?*

*No, but it is true, Chantal.*

CA

*Now I forgot why I told you that. But I have an image.*

DS

*But look for it.  
If you reflect, you are going to find.  
If you let out a word, something.*

Delphine Seyrig's last sentences, above, are like a refrain from a song reverberating in my head-body; they are what guides a child in the gloomy lights of a room at night. In their tension, the director and actress—one who wants to say less and the other who wants to understand more—work. Delphine or Le film: I still cannot confirm what I heard before.

These last sentences made by Seyrig works for her and for Akerman. Also for me and for you, in acceptance and refusal. They work as reactions to this strange freedom in Chantal Akerman's *mise-sen-scène*, to that which she proposes and projects. In the limit between wanting to say and wanting not to say, between being able to say and being able not to say. Talking, even in silence. What do we desire? The link? An inventory of links—linking through talking.

Akerman and her partner—the cello player Sonia Wieder-Atherton—visit Seyrig close to her death.

*She said with difficulty, In three days I will be better. Sonia and I, we had this terrible desire to believe her.*

The ending is a motive here. The measure of our lives: forms of living and dying, possible and impossible forms. How to describe a life? And a death? Only by brushing someone's hair, your own. There it is. Description. It talks already about the outcome in some form. Chantal Akerman and Delphine Seyrig were friends all their lives. The actress died in 1990. The director would die twenty-five years later, in the same month, ten days earlier.

How to describe a chunk of life? Jeanne Dielman brushing her hair. A conversation between an actress and a director. *A making of.*

From a fragment of another conversation, found in Anne Carson:

*I: Description can we talk about description*

*S: What is the difference between a volcano and a guinea pig is not a description why is it like it is is a description*

*I: I take it you are speaking formally what about content*

*S: No difference*

*I: How about your little hero Geryon*

*S: Exactly it is red that I like and there is a link between geology and character*

*I: What is this link*

50 Anne Carson,  
Autobiography of  
Red: A Novel in  
Verse. Vintage,  
1998, pp. 149.  
51 Ibid. pp. 6.

*S: I have often wondered*

*I: Identity memory eternity your constant  
themes*

*S: And how can regret be red and might it be* <sup>50</sup>

This dialogue, with its exact lack of punctuation, happens in the pages of *Autobiography of Red: A Novel In Verse*—a book in which Anne Carson turns to the Greek poet Stesichoros, the one who retold the battle between Herakles and the monster Geryon. A red monster, the owner of a desired red cattle, and the inhabitant of a red land. Geryon also has a dog, a red dog. Stesichoros retells the story of this battle but from Geryon's perspective: *If Stesichoros had been a more conventional poet he might have taken the point of view of Herakles and framed a thrilling account of the victory of culture over monstrosity.* <sup>51</sup>

Stesichoros escapes from being a conventional poet. Anne Carson answers this unconventional poet of monstrosity and his *Geryoneis* (*The Geryon Matter*) with a book that includes an essay, a translation, a novel happening in the present, and, finally, an interview by a certain *I* (the narrator, a random interviewer, the eye?) to a certain *S* (from Stesichoros and also from Stein, another voice that speaks with Carson—*He came after Homer and before Gertrud Stein, a difficult interval for a poet*).

Geryon, the novel's main character transported from Stesichoros, is described by his link to the volcanos; he is also red—a color—at the same time a noun and an adjective. A red monster who will be killed by Herakles. This is the fate of Geryon in Stesichoros. And Herakles does not kill only Geryon, he kills his red dog too. Why does he kill his dog? Cruelty? Just violence? The importance that comes with the riddles of supposedly gratuitous things. Their desires. In Carson, Geryon is a young man who falls in love with Herakles—his tormentor. Maybe? What from Geryon do we find in Herakles?





I keep imagining Geryon's dog in Stesichoros because he disappears from Geryon's life in Anne Carson. Jean Anouilh's Antigone has a dog, different from Sophocles's I remember.

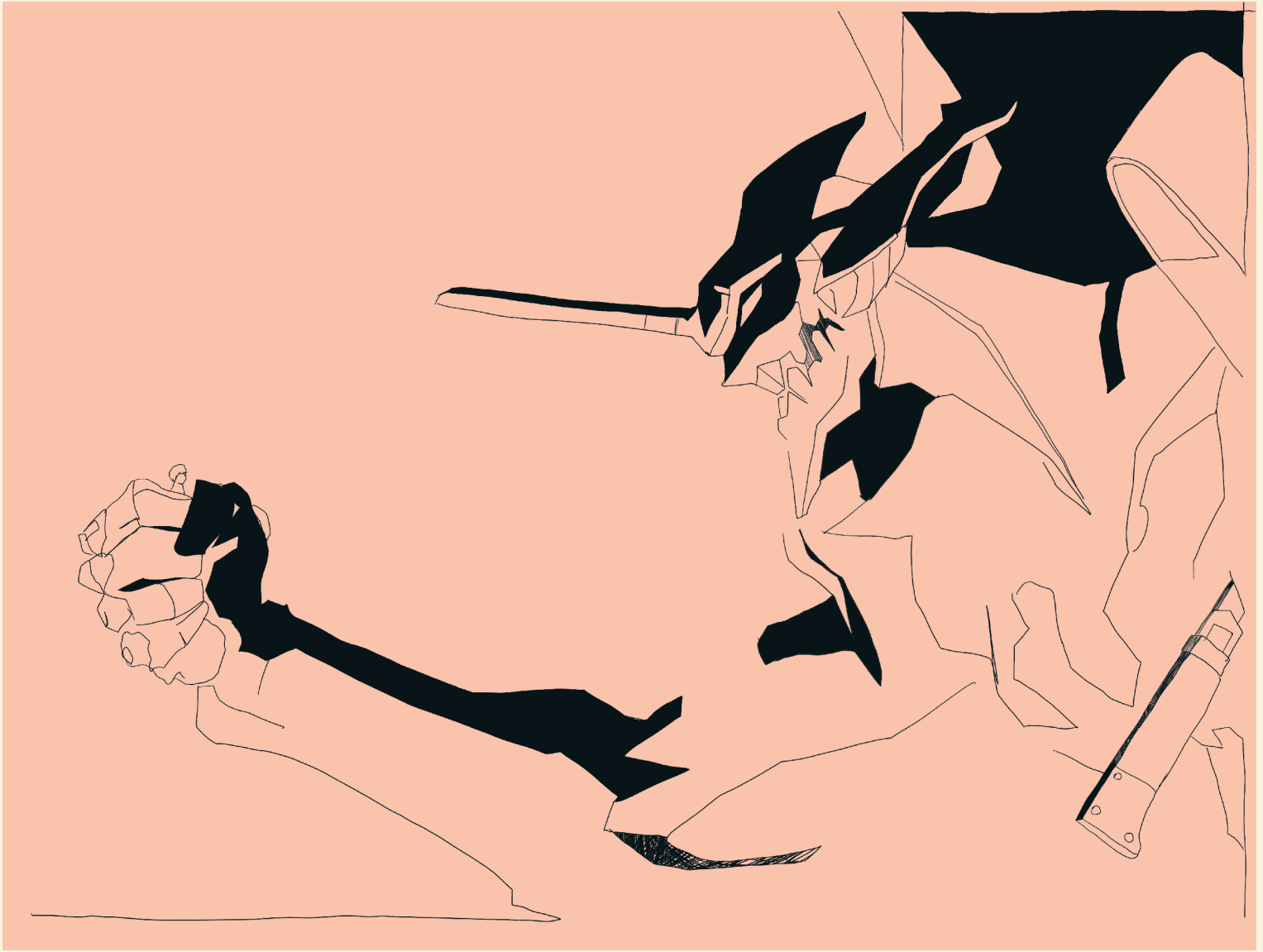
The young Geryon, brought up by Carson, hides his wings to go to school in a t-shirt. He goes to the university; he writes his autobiography in pictures and in sculptures made of diversified materials: his mother's cigarettes, ashes, money, food. We follow him from childhood to young adulthood in this sophisticated and unusual novel that I read and revisit constantly. Geryon falls in love, goes abroad to Argentina in an exchange student program, and enters a love triangle with two other boys. They are Herakles—whome he will meet again in Buenos Aires years after their fling—and Ancash—Herakles's current boyfriend. Together, the three will go on a journey the couple had already started to document the sounds of volcanoes in South America, trying to record nearer and nearer to the lava.

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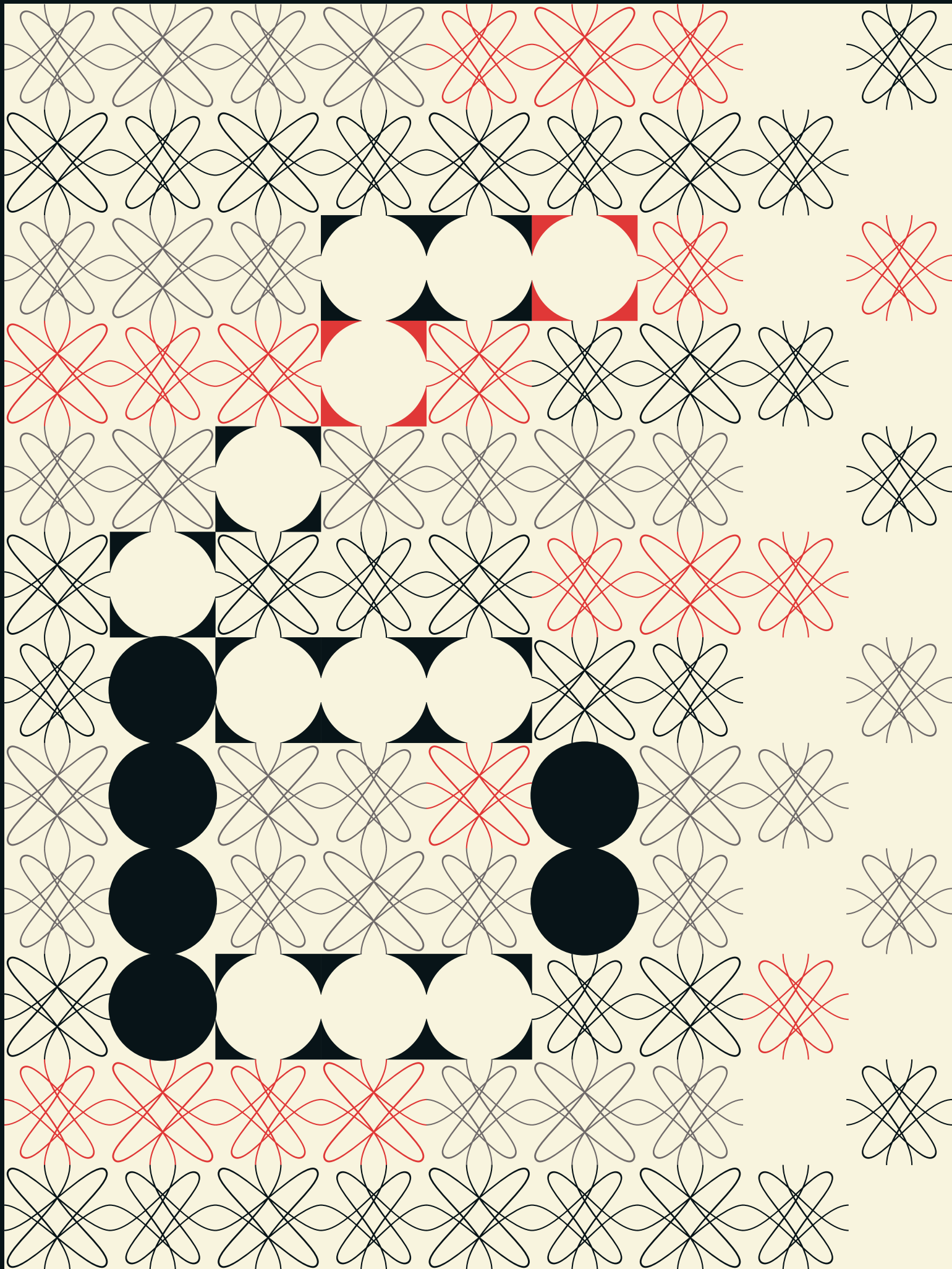
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Geryon *is red that I like*. Anne Carson reintroduced me to the queer boy from my teenage years. A very strange familiarity of homosexual love affliction, of the most difficult time glowing in vulnerability, melancholia, loneliness. And a desire to *study*. To know the world, to touch, to get out of an average Brazilian conservative midtown in the 90's and 00's. *RuPaul's Drag Race* was not yet a mainstream success. Any action involved uncertainty. Hard to talk, to feel what was being felt. Herakles and philosophy, for Carson's Geryon, attract him to the world and take him to a volcano crater in a distant land. This volcano is an old one, known to Geryon and the foreigner in him, the hostile in him. *Unheimlich*: the familiar house has its strange and dangerous secrets; the character carried his geology all along and even before he was born. There is death; something will be missing. Identification is somehow of eternity.

Sophie is dead. Arca is on my mind.  
*Autobiography of Red* inspired a film I made in 2017, excited by the perplexities and findings from that book. With the title *Rosegarden Dreams*, this film tries to describe some possibilities of Geryon. His image: that of a piece, between painting and sculpture, made by a friend, the artist Arthur Chaves. When I faced it, exhibited on a wall, it became Geryon to me. It would walk in red. It was not a young man, but a monster in the imagination of a young man. Imagination made from its own flesh. Red meat. Story in blood.



# To Describe One's Life and Death: Part 2

Scenes from the last episode: Delphine Seyrig insists on asking questions, says the answers are not enough. She needs more explanations, she wants to know more of Jeanne Dielman's secrets. Chantal Akerman does not want to tell.

Regarding the insistence of Seyrig and the refusal of Akerman, the interview found in *Autobiography of Red* resounds: *What is the difference between a volcano and a guinea pig is not a description why is it like it is is a description.*<sup>52</sup>

52 Anne Carson,  
*Autobiography of  
Red: A Novel in  
Verse*. Vintage,  
1998, pp. 149.

95 *Why is it like it is: the like between is it and it is. A mirror? What is within the lack of punctuation marks in this text—phantom limbs? Not exactly: more phantoms and ghosts than phantom limbs. Or maybe the lack contains the libido as an unreal, not imaginary organ/blade that will articulate itself to the real/incarnate, always escaping and scalping and pointing out that we need to deal with how to read the sentences. From an is it to an it is, there is a like—this common thing that is a like. Not in their difference, I say—from Delphine Seyrig to Chantal Akerman—but in what is common between them—reading beside the names. What happens on the common ground? This game happens on this common ground—actress and director: volcano and guinea pig.*

*A study more in the order of the sentence, not only in the names. A noun that is also an adjective and even a verb. Every word from a class of words is already derived from all the classes of words. And, above all, a word is already a sentence because it always happens live and in the common area, not in the dictionary—at least not in a dictionary that is not in someone's hands, that is not locking nose and eyes. It is like when Ernest Fenollosa spoke of the wonders of the Chinese language: about its mobility and the genealogy of its words: about its poetic energy.*

*A true noun, an isolated thing, does not exist in nature. Things are only the terminal points, or rather the meeting points of actions, cross-sections cut through actions, snap-shots. Neither can a pure verb,*



*an abstract motion, be possible in nature. The eye sees noun and verb as one: things in motion, motion in things, and so the Chinese conception tends to represent them.* <sup>53</sup>

53 Ernest Fenollosa, Os caracteres da escrita chinesa como instrumento para a poesia. pp.116  
54 Ibid. pp. 128  
55 Anne Carson interviewed by John D'Agata, "A \_\_ with Anne Carson." The Iowa Review 27(2), 1997, pp.18.  
56 Oswald de Andrade, "Manifesto da Poesia Pau-Brasil." 1924.

Fenollosa says that metaphors—words and poetry, as he places the Chinese written characters—come from relations, links, and natural processes. *Metaphor was piled upon metaphor in quasi-geological strata.* <sup>54</sup> The literality of the world. Poetry in facts: the concrete of magmatic rocks.

Chantal Akerman's loud laughter: a direction in many directions. Jeanne Dielman is not simply the *name* Jeanne Dielman. She goes in several directions that interact, face, and defy; she comes from them. Possible and impossible descriptions of a character, conflicting. Desire, desire, desire. The set: something not to be pacified. Jeanne Dielman is Delphine Seyrig's insisting and Chantal Akerman's refusing. She is *sentence*: noun, adjective, verb, all at the same time, on all occasions. She does not exist as an isolated thing but as the working point of work, of action (things in movement: the movement of things).

Red is a color in the world and also a character. The main one, the one who writes his autobiography—the title and the task of Anne Carson's book. To describe a world is to be open to describe characters as worlds, forms that form themselves in complex and strange ways beyond humanism. So we describe instead of explaining.

Description of all that is not name, that is *sentence*, that keeps writing an autobiography. Less of a subject and more of a predicate. Go for the object and its force of causation; to turn into an object is the process. Characters are described as facts in the world, in their links. Surprising sounds from which you offer news.

Before *Autobiography of Red* was published, Anne Carson spoke to John D'Agata.

D'Agata: *Then what about the autobiographical element in your writing? How autobiographically are we as readers meant to take that "I" of yours?*

Carson: *Just a part of the facts in the world. You know, like I'm a set of facts, the river's another set, these steps are another set—and just use them all in some kind of democratic fashion. I don't know how autobiographical I am.* <sup>55</sup>

So the river can also be a character and can have its own autobiography. The same for the steps, for me and for you. All sets of facts in the world. We can describe these links, put them in a scene, make a plot out of them, underline dialogues.

Oswald de Andrade will say in his *Manifesto da Poesia Pau-Brasil* that *Poetry exists in facts.* <sup>56</sup> And

Ludwig Wittgenstein will open his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* in a similar way.

1 *The world is everything that is the case.*

1.1 *The world is the totality of facts, not of things.*<sup>57</sup>

Chantal Akerman's strategy of refusal could be failing because Delphine Seyrig does not give up. Actually, I would say it is in failing that her scene occurs. Their scene. Much more democratic to aim at the set of facts of making a film. What matters is the *matter of making*: the fact of making. This imperative: *to make a film*.

Less what Jeanne Dielman feels or thinks and more what Jeanne Dielman does—the actions and gestures of Jeanne Dielman. In what she does: then: what Delphine Seyrig feels and thinks, interrogating what Chantal Akerman proposes. Possibility of the text to represent. They write this character together in *sets* that matter. In the limit of words and sentences, between saying and not saying, talking and what is troubled in talking. Maybe it is a *decreation*, some paradox of representing and not representing, of a subject that leaves the subject for text to become an object. A representative? This path to the object needs to pass by the subject. *Decreation is an undoing of the creature in us—that creature enclosed in self and defined by self. But to undo self one must move through self, to the very inside of its definition. We have nowhere else to start.*<sup>58</sup>

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Akerman, along the way, in a text for a catalog, debates autobiography.

*It is with no doubt because of that the films about a silent daily life, to take from that silence some truth. Reinvented truth. To a child with a history full of holes, it remains to make up a memory for herself. That I am sure. What there is of autobiographical in all of that can be, thus, reinvented.*

*Autobiography is always reinvented, but in that case, in this history full of holes, it is as if there is not even a history. So what do we do? We try to fill these holes, I would say even that hole, for an imaginary nourished by what we can find, in the left, in the right and in the middle of that hole.*

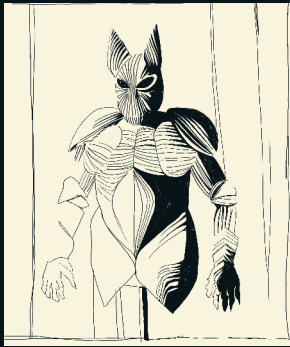
*We try to create an imaginary truth for ourselves. This is why we ruminate. We ruminate and ruminate. And sometimes we fall into the hole. Let me know the truth. Tell me your history. I cannot.*<sup>59</sup>

An artistic and theoretical operator, a concept. Through the description is the *reinvented autobiography*, the handling of sets of facts in the world. Possible and impossible

57 Ludwig Wittgenstein. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, § 1 and 1.1  
58 Anne Carson. *Decreation: Poetry, Essays, Opera*. Vintage. 2006, pp. 179.  
59 Chantal Akerman, *Autoportrait en cineaste*. Centre Pompidou, 2004, pp. 30.

autobiographies are ways of writing texts, directing actors, and staging scenes. Ways of making characters, montages, films. Ways of inscribing. Tensely, we face explanation, find descriptions that open ways.

To describe is to write, to inscribe, to link.



Some Roland Barthes in a camera.

*The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here, the duration of the transmission is insignificant; the photograph of the missing being, as Sontag says, will touch me like the delayed rays of a star. A sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze: light, though impalpable, is here a carnal medium, a skin I share with anyone who has been photographed.*<sup>60</sup>

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60 Roland Barthes,  
La Chambre Claire:  
Note sur le  
Photographie.1980,  
pp. 121.

61 Chantal  
Ackerman quoted in  
Ivone Margulies's  
Nothing Happens:  
Chantal Akerman's  
Hyperrealist  
Everyday. Duke  
University Press,  
1996, pp. 176.

A commonality, between the bodies of the photographed and of the viewer, is light. There, in light, passes a history—a link that happens in a present, that is directed to a future and that is already a past. When we see Jeanne Dielman brushing her hair, we reach Delphine Seyrig's body and share with her a chunk of life. In this simple gesture that Chantal Akerman tried to describe with her actress, in their tension of working together, there is some kind of immortality. Seyrig links herself to Jeanne Dielman.

*You will never know what is going on in her mind and in her heart. I do not know neither. This is not Jeanne Dielman's secret, it is Delphine's secret.*<sup>61</sup>

If the insistence for explanation dwells in Delphine Seyrig's speech, she is not alone. We sing along with her. There is something we want to understand better. Filling the holes. Going by the links. Does the desire to explain exist as much as the desire to remain silent? I question my question of this

difference because, even in silence, we can still look for an explanation. But then, if you say something, a difference in explanation can appear; let's talk about this difference.

To describe comes as a path, an act among many countless others with countless values and effects. An act that is very important to me because it opens ways that the anxiety of explanation prevents. Ludwig Wittgenstein states that *we must do away with all explanation, and description alone must take its place.*<sup>62</sup> It occurs, here, that description is not the result of an observation—of someone supposedly *above* or *outside*. Description is an act: a move in the language-game. Capable, though, to change the game? A game that is always changing, sometimes unnoticeably.

*You must bear in mind that the language-game is so to say something unpredictable. I mean: it is not based on grounds. It is not reasonable (or unreasonable). It is there—like our life.*<sup>63</sup>

Akerman's cinema proposition is positioned between the literal and metaphorical, between documentary and fiction. It takes place within a realm of insurgent fiction. A realm. I choose to speak what is seen and heard in her films instead of explaining. I detain the *study* to what could be thought of as a mere first step. First: to describe and only then to go to what really matters, to the point, to what is valuable—to explain. So I am stuck in the middle with a description of what is gratuitous—a strange value. Our task is here, in this first step; we stay here underlining what description operates upon: inscription and links.

I find here a rhythmical coincidence when I imagine the restless Ludwig Wittgenstein angrily turning the pages of *The Golden Bough*, a famous treaty written by Sir James George Frazer. Frazer did not detain himself when facing strange lives. Lives as strange as those that emerge from, with, and in Chantal Akerman's cinema.

No. Frazer rushed and interpreted too much. Explained and measured with a ruler.

*Frazer's representation of human magical and religious notions is unsatisfactory: it makes these notions appear as mistakes.*

*Frazer cannot imagine a priest who is not basically an English person of our times, with all his stupidity and shallowness.*<sup>64</sup>

Thursday we just adopted a Parson Russel Terrier. She is called Zora. We have not slept the night since.

62 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. §109.

63 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*. §559.

64 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Observações sobre o Ramo Dourado de Frazer*. pp. 193,196.

*Frazer seems capable of believing that a savage dies out of error.* <sup>65</sup>

To detain yourself within a strange life is an attitude linked to the Wittgensteinian imperative demanding that one must stop *craving for generality*.<sup>66</sup> And that requires a willingness to renounce explanation or at least to change it with some *how* in the benefit of description. Frazer sees acts and rites as errors and mistakes (explainable according to a train of thought that sets the savages in a previous stage of epistemological progress that has Western civilization as its logical culmination.)

*A religious symbol is not grounded in an opinion.*

*Error only corresponds to opinion.*

*One would like to say: This or the other event took place here; laugh if you can.* <sup>67</sup>

65 Ibid. pp.99.

66 Ludwig

Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books*. pp. 47.

67 Ludwig

Wittgenstein, *Observações sobre o Ramo Dourado de Frazer*. pp.195.

68 Ludwig

Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. § 241.

69 Ludwig

Wittgenstein, *Observações sobre o Ramo Dourado de Frazer*. pp. 202.

70 Ibid. pp. 194

71 Ibid. pp. 194.

About an opinion, we can say that it is wrong. But about life? Died by mistake, the savage who lived this and that way, who did this and that. Laugh if you can.

*It is what human beings say that is true and false; and they agree in the language they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in form of life.*<sup>68</sup> Also: *a whole mythology is deposited in our language.* <sup>69</sup> (Western language?) For our mythology, one can say it is not a question of opinion but of form of life. In mythomachia, in a clash of mythologies, the craving for generality should dissipate. *One can only resort to description here, and say: such is human life.* <sup>70</sup>

We can only describe. *We can only*. That is an expression that tends to trigger another one: *but, unfortunately, we cannot do that*. Nevertheless, Wittgenstein's force of thought does not instruct simple *satisfaction with what you can get*. It is not (only) concerned with the (nowadays tired) critiques of metaphysics. It is instead more interested in facilitating a form of confrontation: *look what you lose* when you meet a stranger, for instance, if what dominates you is a willingness to explain. Look what you lose.

*Compared to the impression that what is so described to us, explanation is too uncertain.* <sup>71</sup>

Can you live with this uncertainty instead of craving for generality?

In Wittgenstein's *Remarks on Frazer's The Golden Bough*, there is a desire to make more sensitive possibilities. Possibilities are *surprisingly* less certain. Unsure possibilities linked to description. His disagreements are provocations; Wittgenstein writes them in the typical form

of the notebook; therefore, it seems more like a sensitive preparation than a critical discourse. Maybe I could call them undisciplined propaedeutics. But discipline is everywhere.

*Again and again I must submerge myself in the water of doubt.*

*If one sets the phrase “majesty of death” next to the story of the priest king of Nemi, one sees that they are one and the same.*

*Every explanation is a hypothesis. But someone who, for example, is unsettled by love will be ill-assisted by a hypothetical explanation. It won't calm him or her.*

*The environment of a way of acting.* <sup>72</sup>

72 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Observações sobre o Ramo Dourado de Frazer*. pp. 192, 194, 195, 209.

73 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*. pp. 61.

I see a parallel between Frazer's impatience and precipitation and the impatience and precipitation of many spectators irritated with the monotonous and discontinuous lives found in Chantal Akerman's films. To describe the savages, to describe the films is to be attentive to the environment of a way of acting. To be unsettled: not settling in explanation, respecting the majesty of death—and love—to submerge again and again in the water of doubt.

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The *reinvented autobiography* highlights reinvention as experimentation in life and in the world. And life and world are the places of description—this act in the game, where we play, from the inside, in the materiality of sets, of facts and from facts. Places to work on sensibilities. How we read and how we write.

*It is not by any means clear to me, that I wish for a continuation of my work by others, more than a change in the way we live, making all these questions superfluous. (For this reason I could never found a school.).* <sup>73</sup>

Forces of description are a measure of life. Perhaps life and the world are not the *places* of description. Perhaps life and world *are*, in fact, describing. Actively inscribing, linking, dealing.

Forces of description I notice too when Wittgenstein, in his preface for *Philosophical Investigations*, tells us his book is just an album of philosophical remarks or even several landscape sketches born in long and involved exploratory journeys, in every direction, through a wide field of thought. Album: from images or music? Wittgenstein begins with a principle that shows the nature of his investigation: every

direction instead of one direction. There is something missing—unfinished, constant and inextinguishable—in his journey. Images fall, old and full of empty, blank spaces.

An album does not need an end because it is in daily use.

Manipulation. An opening and closing. A group of temporary results. Posting and deleting. A collection of times.

We inherit an old album, full of images, from someone in our family who just died. We take it and other things—a nice lamp, some cutlery—before the apartment is put on the market and sold.

A lack of certainty, reluctance, and insufficiency. A way of being, of missing, of responding to facts in the world.

To represent in sentences: the text. Wittgenstein proposes to think and to follow his project of what he produces in attempts. Lots of experimentation.

*I make them public with doubtful feelings. It is not impossible that it should fall to the lot of this work, in its poverty and in the darkness of this time, to bring light into one brain or another—but, of course, it is not likely. I should not like my writing to spare other people the trouble of thinking. But, if possible, to stimulate someone to thoughts of his own. I should have liked to produce a good book. This has not come about, but the time is past in which I could improve it.* <sup>74</sup>

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74 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. Preface pp.4.  
75 Anne Carson. *Decreation: Poetry, Essays, Opera*. Vintage. 2006, pp. 180.

In his preface, Wittgenstein undermines his own philosophical authority, the authority by which he attempts to make us, his readers, understand the world clearly and, thus, hierarchically. Confusion is necessary to make thoughts of your own. So, he strategically provokes—his cause as an object—events, happenings, existences in the world of which he is part. *Tempos* in this landscape album of a life.

Anne Carson.

*We need history to remain ordinary.* <sup>75</sup>

Maybe through the ordinary, it is possible to respond to the world and call into existence other worlds, to cover—giving news—of a desiring world. Decreating an author and subjects full of certainty in favor of objects in the world—a book, a film, a text. We are facing this album of landscapes together, moving its pages, touching its links, talking, describing. Prophesizing. We leave open the possibility of a response. We favor uncertainties, counter-efficiencies, and the unfinished, so as to emphasize sensibilities, availabilities, and surprises. What it is there: but it is not. The accurate in the inaccurate and vice-versa. The force of inscriptions, the force of links. What is missing makes a move.

Frank Ocean sings,

*We'll let you guys prophesy  
We'll let you guys prophesy  
We gon' see the future first  
We'll let you guys prophesy  
We gon' see the future first  
Living so the last night feels like a past life* <sup>76</sup>

76 Frank Ocean,  
“Nikes” from  
Blonde. 2016.

77 Ludwig  
Wittgenstein,  
Culture and Value.  
pp. 11.

78 Ludwig  
Wittgenstein,  
Philosophical  
Investigations.  
§19.



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Constantly, Chantal Akerman puts herself in a scene—her body and what sprawls from it: letters and telephone and Skype calls. On the internet, for instance, we see her and her mother. Akerman says that there is no distance in the world anymore (or maybe between life and death?). Do not interpret too much the fact that she is often onscreen. I believe she is on screen, especially, because she desires to make her films. No matter what—so you go to your own matter.

At the same time, the director makes it explicit (in the literal sense of her presence) that she is playing the game. Putting in the scene she who puts in the scene. The player is playing. And, if one says that the image of the maker is the implicit condition of the video art genre, is it possible to pass over the subject and her image so that we do not stick to her expression? Does passing over constitute a move towards decreation? Can it open spaces for other possibles in other forms: art, life, world, text? In tension and struggle, writing and inscription are stretched to their limit and are more fully engaged at their limit.

*We are struggling with language.  
We are engaged in a struggle with language.* <sup>77</sup>

*And to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life.* <sup>78</sup>

A matter of survival: language is not a tool or an instrument—it is struggle: it is the object of the struggle: it is the struggle itself.



To the ladder, not the building stairs where we used to hook up as teenagers. Terry Eagleton, when writing about his completely altered screenplay for Derek Jarman's *Wittgenstein*, says that the ladder is a *self-*

79 Terry Eagleton, *Wittgenstein: The Terry Eagleton Script : The Derek Jarman Film. British Film Institute, 1993, pp. 6. 80 Ludwig Wittgenstein. Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus. §6.54.*

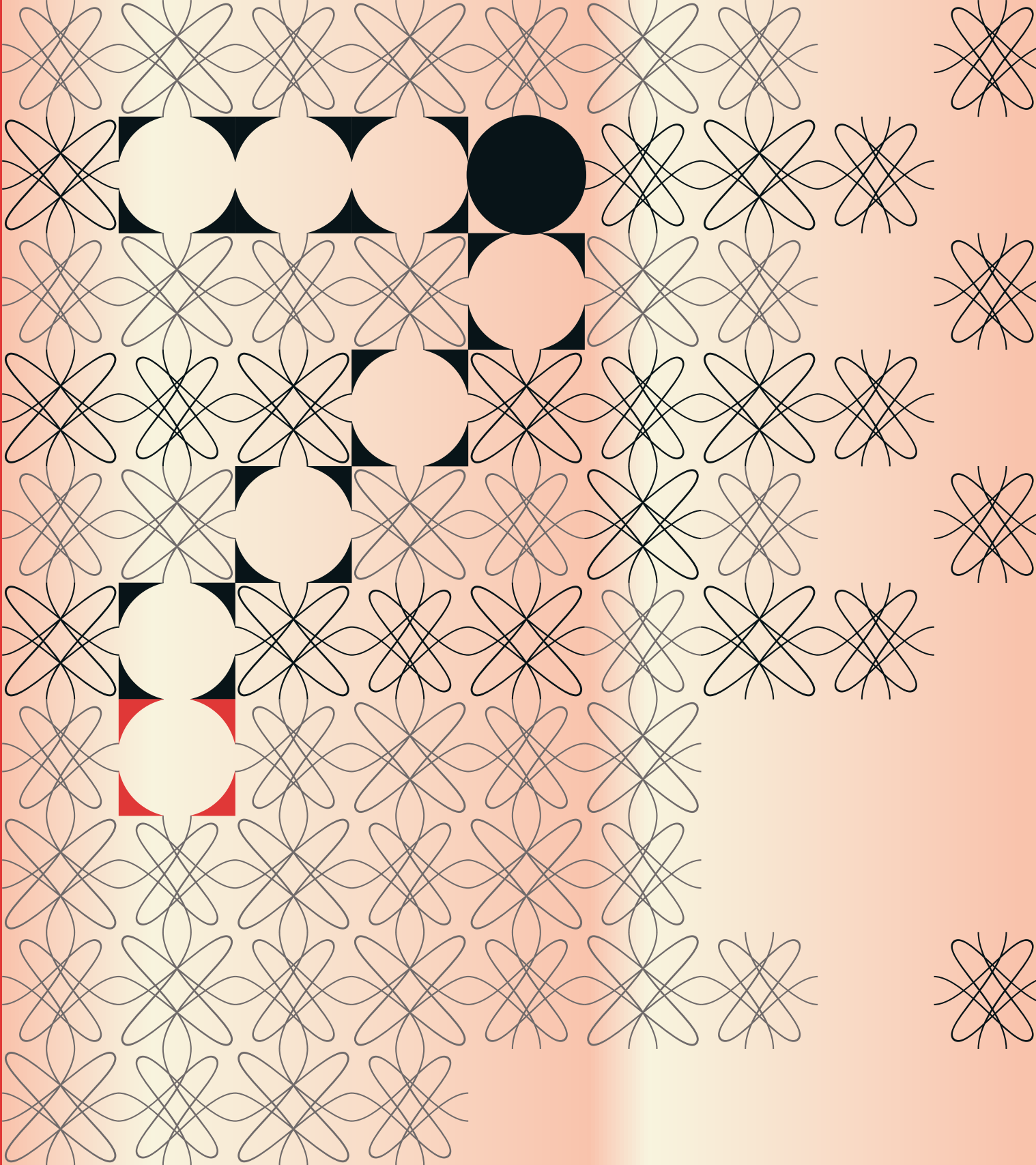
*destructive device.* <sup>79</sup>

*My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them—as steps—to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.)* <sup>80</sup>

Ladder: an operator of insufficiency, refusal, reopening. To reread the text you just read. To consider it again. With a *self-destructive device*, Wittgenstein asks you to rethink. Anti-hegemonic, anti-expansionist, and, I daresay, anti-colonial philosophy. His language is concrete, not abstract. A living language in the concrete because domination values abstraction.

The philosopher does not want to colonize those who meet his work. He does not want to expand through his readers, dominating their minds and bodies with abstract concepts. His particular desire is not that. He complicates philosophy, and, in turn, complicates the place of the philosopher and the philosophical text. Wittgenstein takes a risk by becoming an object, letting his readers remain in an embarrassing freedom.

To change the way we live is not to establish a new school of thought. In his texts, between the moving barriers of form and content, Wittgenstein exposes and operates upon the philosophy he studies. He reveals several ways and non-authoritarian choices. The ladder, a metaphor, acts on the literal realm of thought and attacks: thought-body-red-meat.



*Chantal Akerman par  
Chantal Akerman—and me*

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7

This is my first attempt at description. This was the first text written for this book. I tried to describe, in a breath, with no theories or notions.

Description for description. Describing for describing. Wordy rock: walking on dry ground.

This landscape: outside under the high sun.

Unagreeable. Almost a desert. Desire is a radical and deceitful gesture of doing because by doing you are preserving a part always unknown.

So you trigger something, looking for the fore in front of and also back, previously and still to happen. Some form, a shock. To write a film's duration. Running time: time is running. *Chantal Akerman par Chantal Akerman*, 1997. Her film is her retrospective.

How do we know if something is enough or not enough? How do we take both seriously?



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- *Tension is a problem—it must go away*, Chantal Akerman tells me (thus tensing everything I thought, wrote, and spoke about regarding her work). But what should I do if she says something different from what I said? This tension does not go away. There is no pacification. So I have to know that I do not believe her. I do not give up tension, and I believe that Akerman does not either.

A living room. I am able to think it is Chantal Akerman's apartment. I am able to think it is where she lives. So much intimacy. Nevertheless,

it is also a place to work. It is where she works. A dog, a coffee table, a wooden floor. In the back—curtains and windows. I can see the neighbors through the window facing the camera; the other is on the left, blocked by a curtain. I can only see clarity. There is a computer on a desk, closed off to the wall on the left. All the chairs are black. Another computer, now in front of the wall that is facing the camera, and beside it—a lamp. Her dog is fluffy, not so large. I am amazed by the softness and calm. I cannot see the dog's face.

Should Zora, my dog, be able to walk freely in the house when I receive an analysand? Dog and intimacy.

Chantal Akerman enters the room. She wears black shoes, black pants, a white shirt with black stripes and a jacket. She sits down, crosses her legs, picks up a cigarette. The chair squeaks when she sits down. She accommodates herself before she starts to speak. Her hands take the cigarette in a strange way: beautifully. The dog looks at the camera (at me, at you?).

She speaks of how she decided to make this film.

•  
Cinema of the skinny cows, of nothing, from and in Brussels. The Jewish daughter. The second commandment. To make films and the difficulty of writing. She says: *I make films because writing was a very difficult challenge*. She says that

others say: *She makes films because she makes films, because she makes films.* <sup>81</sup>

While Akerman speaks of how she decided to make this film, there are some small cuts. The image gets closer to her from cut to cut. Until I am in a very close shot of her. Her neck, her face, and afterwards, without focus. Another cut, not like the other ones, takes me to a black screen.

*Autoportrait.*

Followed by *avec, par ordre d'apparition.*

Listed are the names of the films which will be part of the montage Chantal Akerman announced. The montage that is this new film. Also: a list of the films which will not be shown. The subtitles, in Portuguese, talk about the lack of subtitles in this next part of the film. There will be no further subtitles.

While transcribing, I am bothered by my voice reading all the names of the films listed on the black screen. So I fast forward past with *command + shift + 4*. I print and decide to paste these black screens here. Text over text.

So it appears: the first scene in this montage. From a boat, the camera swings in rhythm and films enormous buildings. It is New York. I know even though I have never been there; I know that because of other images I have seen, not only those in Chantal Akerman's films. A *voice-over* I cannot understand very well, with a strong French accent, says something in English. I am in the sea or in a

river, drifting. A boat passes by the one I am in. Classical music plays, a moving cello. The cello is more moving than the other instruments. The *voice-over*—maintaining its strong accent—tells the story of a tree, of a forest, of a grandfather and a grandson, of children. Swinging, the camera rolls. The image is mostly blue; the buildings are almost black. Yellow dots—the buildings' illuminated windows—and some green.

People walk in a cold, icy landscape. I hear the ice cracking when they walk. A road of asphalt in a landscape. Five people walk in a line. Brown, cold-weather vegetation, dead or waiting for the spring to turn green. The rhythm of the steps by the ice steppe. Almost everything is white, and the earth, as it is framed, looks wider than the sky. It fills it all—a collage on white paper. Everybody walks, not towards the horizon of the frame, but from the left to the right. All snow, almost. And some contoured shapes.

Jeanne Dielman is the most well-known character created by Chantal Akerman. *Created by her*. Should I consider the characters from book adaptations as also hers? I could say I see an unknown woman, but I know she is Jeanne Dielman. It is impossible to say *I see a woman*, so I say: *I see Jeanne Dielman*. In a frontal frame of the kitchen, she sits facing left to right, sideways, stiff. Her arms are on the table; her breath is not so rhythmic. Jeanne Dielman drinks

from a small cup. When I wrote this text for the first time, I used to drink lots of coffee, and at that time, I always said I should have made more coffee—a whole pot just for myself. The reason for my gastritis? I used to say it is always better to have more coffee than less coffee. It all changed; nowadays, I have no coffee at all. Normally, I used to have big mugs full of it. I kept thinking I should have another, a third one. I would go to my kitchen. Jeanne Dielman would not be there. The scene is slow, not noisy until a cut takes me to a road where cars and trucks pass; two women are on the other side of this road. It is very cold, but the coffee I fetched is hot. Jeanne Dielman is back, still alone, fixed, and now seen in a frontal shot. She will make something for lunch or for dinner. On the table are ingredients and utensils. Let's make some food.

I stop transcribing: an excuse for another coffee. But instead, I lay face down on my chest. Left cheek on the cold floor made of stone. I stay there for a while, looking for nothing, not avoiding the dust, though recognizing that I need to clean my dirty apartment. My mother will visit and she will talk about that.

So this is really physical? It is not about anatomy.

After seeing Jeanne Dielman prepare something to eat, a cut goes to another woman, in another kitchen—a kitchen that seems Jeanne



Dielman-like. She drinks coffee or tea. And listens to some music, coming from another room. Maybe the living room. The action of drinking from this cup is performed for the camera; the woman tries to find a rhythm for it. Cup, saucer, hand, and mouth. She responds to the music with a smile.

A well-dressed man wearing a black suit. He is in a hotel room, sitting in an armchair. A comfortable one, it appears. He is charming in the way—my description says and I transcribe—he sits. Afterward, I am already tired of describing. The cut: from the man to a ballroom where many people dance and some are sitting. The camera is fixed and observes the people moving from a short distance. Someone sings—a woman—in a language I do not recognize, on a stage with a band. A refrain repeats itself and goes on. Their clothes are strange: I notice, and I like them. People dance and sit, talking, going back and forth in the picture in pairs, always a man and a woman.

With her son at a table, his profile, and her facing me—Jeanne Dielman is going to read a letter that she takes from her purse. She reads too fast. It is not meant for you to hear, I guess. Not even for her son. What is as constant as the reading is the light, some neon from the street outside. It blinks, stops sometimes, and keeps on. Jeanne Dielman finishes reading, folds the paper where it was already creased, and puts it in its envelope again and then inside her purse. A little gift (something sweet?) is also inside her purse; she takes it out and gives it to her son.

Chantal Akerman is lying in bed, actually, almost sitting, covered by a brown blanket that leaves her eyes and hair exposed. Short hair. The cut starts with a strident sound. She says: *pour faire du cinéma*. She will stand up—to make cinema. In her white pajamas, she gets out of bed; she needs to put some clothes on—to make cinema. The picture is of a blank wall; at the bottom appears a woman who is not Akerman but also wears the same white pajamas. This woman could also be Chantal Akerman; is she not? It is the same actress who plays Anna, and Anna is also Chantal, or is she not? She looks at the camera (to me, to you: constant doubt) and says, *I need to dress up*. While she is leaving the picture—the room—but before she has left entirely, someone cuts the scene.

The sloth experimental filmmakers possess.

Some lettering: *Saute ma Ville*, Chantal Akerman's first film. She is an actor and a director. So young, a teenager. I do not like it; I do not like her clowny films, her Chaplin-like ones. Maybe this is a problem in my sensibility. Black and white, foggy scenery. In the back—sounds of construction work, of traffic. *Recit* is written on the screen. Tale, story, narrative. And a voice chants some mocking melody, comical, cartoonish: *la la la la la*. Very constant. Constancy is a thing. Sometimes calmly, sometimes a little faster, but always there, sticking to the montage. The director is the actress. She enters the building, sees what there is in the mailbox, runs up the stairs, and never stops singing. The elevator is also going up. They are in a race against each other. I speak of the difficulty of describing this scene; it happens too quickly to point out what I see and hear, and I am troubled by this song that never stops. It invades the space of the description; the recording I try to transcribe. The music itself prevents me from speaking of it. My thinking and talking are hindered by this persistent music. Tired and breathless, the voice keeps singing. The voice and the mouth have no relation in this film, no certification. *La la la la la*. She opens the door, goes inside the house, tosses the mail, and sits down at the kitchen table.

Two girls (maybe the same age as the girl in *Saute ma Ville* or a little older) in black and white, one next to the other, frontal frame. One is going to smoke; the other takes a lighter and lights her cigarette. They smoke, passing the cigarette to one another. *Tenho filme; Tenho fome*: I hear them say and describe it so in my transcription. A mistake: it is, correctly: *Tenho frio; Tenho fome. I am cold; I am hungry*. One is the answer to the other—hunger answers to cold. They talk fast with agitated voices in contrast to stiff bodies filmed from the front. Do not look at each other; look towards the front, outside the picture, listening and answering. And they sleep in the same bed, turned to the same side (to the camera). The smaller girl still smoking the cigarette. Lights off. *I am cold; I am hungry*.

Several people at a bus stop, waiting for a bus—I guess, and I laugh to myself for guessing such an obvious thing. A car parks and a young woman says, *Bye, Dad*. The car is dented. In a traveling shot, the camera follows the young woman. She enters a train station. She wears a white shirt with blue stripes, carries a briefcase, reads a newspaper on the floor; her pants are dark blue. Classical music invades the space; the camera keeps following the young woman. It goes after her as she walks. The music is still playing and now she is in a café. She smiles and prepares to take some things out of the briefcase. She holds the briefcase upside-down and lets everything inside fall onto the table. Picks up a cigarette, smokes. Someone serves her table. On a piece of paper, she writes. With the same hand, she writes and smokes. In one hand she holds—at the same time, in a strange and attractive manner—pen and cigarette. *Please, excuse my daughter Michelle, she has the flu*. The young woman speaks out loud what she writes in her note, intensifying the rhythm that she is speaking. *Excuse my daughter, Michelle, she is at a funeral, her grandmother died; Excuse my daughter, Michelle, she is at a funeral, her aunt died after the death of her uncle; Excuse my daughter, Michelle, she is at a funeral, her dad died*. She says while looking outside the picture: *She died*. So many deaths.



The beginning of a paragraph bothers me. It is always kind of hard to begin, to decide when to stop one paragraph and start another. Too many words, maybe not creative enough. Describing is difficult. This is not about creativity; it is about the hardness of stones. A person, a place, an action. Some simple sentence, then a comma, searching for some details and characterization. Such as Delphine Seyrig. For instance: Jeanne Dielman's kitchen, wearing a robe. Nevertheless, I ask myself: who wears the robe? Jeanne Dielman or the kitchen? She is going to make coffee; I have that thought because she boils some water. She will also shine her son's shoes. Newspapers, grease, brush. The sound of the things in this calm environment. Focused actress. Focused character.

Sitting on the floor of another kitchen, Chantal Akerman in *Saute Ma Ville* also shines her shoes. Rough gesture. Strong, abrupt. She does not shine only the shoes but also the socks and legs, marking the movement, densely, heavily. However, her action is not more powerful than Jeanne Dielman's when shining the shoes of her son. It is different but not *more* because both are intense. I could actually say that I find calm in the rough gestures of Akerman shining everything once I find the rhythm to embark.

In *Saute Ma Ville*, sound and image are slightly desynchronized. Briefly, in less than a few seconds, I hear what I just saw and see what I just heard.

The two girls. They stand up from where they were lying down, talking quickly, always. Also moving quickly. In thick winter coats, inside their room. There is no heating. Eyeliner in hand, putting it on. When they leave the apartment, there is light, but, soon after, it is night. Where could they eat? Do they look for a place to eat? They enter a restaurant and start to sing: *La la la la la la la la la*. Again. It bothers me. Some melody of ups and downs, badly synchronized. Perhaps they did not practice. The maître kicks them out. Am I closer to the maître or to the girls?

A very colorful film and another woman looks at the camera, frontally. In this frame, she is sitting in a chair behind a white table in a garden that looks to be outside a restaurant. There is a tablecloth and hanging lamps. She drinks coffee, maybe a cappuccino. Or maybe it is a milkshake. Yes, it is a milkshake. She looks up and out: daydreaming. Disturbing: what I am now describing are sirens from outside my apartment, on the street. Cars rushing past each other after the traffic lights turned green. I am annoyed by the daydream-like style of this scene and by the noisy street where I live.

Another open space. Now, a man. Not in a garden but in a lot on the side of the road. He wears a grey suit. A woman enters: *What are you doing?| I am waiting.| What are you waiting for?|There is nothing to wait for in this world.| Are you dancing?|Are you asking?| I am not asking; I am dancing.* She touches his arm and they leave the frame. He carries a suitcase. To answer by dancing or to answer with a dance?

Leaning against the wall, a woman smokes a cigarette. She looks up. I am interested in how she holds her pack of cigarettes, using both hands for that purpose. She looks outside the frame, smoking, standing there. I hear steps; I only hear them. This woman is older and someone says from somewhere: *Maman*. I do not see this person, the daughter who says *Maman*. But I know this is Akerman's mother; I have seen her other times. Briefly, her eyes coincide with the camera, discreetly, timidly. The cigarette is finished; she turns back and goes inside through a door that squeaks when opening.

Music. Loud music and many young people dancing in a circle. A party. The main character is that young woman I do not know the name of—the one who said she dies, with her father, uncle, aunt, and grandmother. I remember: her name is Michelle. *La Bamba* plays. In the middle of the circle, there is the camera. The loud music increases the difficulty of describing. She dances in the middle of the circle with another woman I have never seen. They kiss each other in greeting or farewell. The other young woman leaves Michelle to dance with another young man. *La Bamba* keeps playing and Michelle seems to have fun. From the middle, she looks at the others dancing. Looks at the young woman she danced with and decides to ask her to dance again. She is flirting, I believe. The music ends. Some silence. The characters look around. Another song begins: *This is a man's world*. The camera moves closer to Michelle's face. She breathes deeply, thinks. People dance in the living room and outside the house. She looks to some place, but I do not know where. There is no cut that allows me to say what she sees; I can only speculate. She leaves the room.

Chantal Akerman's voice and a yellow fruit. *This is an apple*. Strident violin. Again. And the yellow fruit on the table that is blue: a composition as loud as this violin. Green apple. Orange. A red rose—its petals.

Singing, a woman is conducted by Chantal Akerman. They both have headphones on and Akerman wears a white t-shirt, loose, with folded short sleeves. A recording studio. Back to the camera, the director conducts this actress's singing. But she does not know how to conduct. Conducting as a joke, a touching song—pretty, joyful, and a bit melodramatic. *Love is stronger than everything* is sung in French.



*My name is Aurore*, says a woman after the cut. After: dancers. Several dancers. People behind two women. One dressed as a bride, crying, and the other comforting her. They dance. The dancers, men and women, move slowly, in colorful clothes. Melodrama is everywhere: in dialogues, in the music, in the gestures. Another cut: everything is very dark, some pilots, as in a studio—still, the same music from the last scene now with piano, violin, and saxophone. Variations, repeating through the scenes, joining them together. Music occupies the space. People walking in a dark place, the studio, the solidity of their steps finding a rhythm. They dance; they know how to dance. They dance together—dancers, professionals.

When the scene changes, the image quality also changes. It is the documentation of a performance; the quality of the image is other, different. A documentary on Pina Bausch. Akerman would say Bausch is *sadism through plastics*, something like that. A woman is filmed from the back; I see her as she sees people seeing her. I do not see her face but theirs. The image triangulates towards this woman, her back to the camera. With each line, the audience reduces a little, so she is at the top of the pyramid. Her clothes are fit for a gala and the music is dramatic, deep, and instrumental.

Anna. This character I meet constantly. The filmmaker Anna, moving through Europe. On the train, it is dark, and I almost cannot see her. I hear the voice of a man, but I do not understand what he says. Her cigarette is not finished; there is still a lot left at the end. She throws it out, anyway. Sleepily, someone opens the cabin door: it is the conductor asking for IDs.

A film that has not yet appeared. Chantal Akerman is in the corner of a room. She writes letters, sitting on the wooden floor. Loose, comfortable clothes for the winter and for staying at home. Her hair is long and black. While she writes, she eats a packet of sugar. A very wrinkled packet. She eats the sugar with a spoon directly from it, obsessively. She writes and eats without looking at the spoon. What does she write? Is it a letter? The attention is on the act of writing, like the act of shining shoes. Before the cut, she looks at the camera.

Either a building with many apartments, or a hotel corridor. Red carpet where a woman walks. Anna. Once more. I want to know more of her. A hotel. She stops in front of one of the doors; there are shoes there, outside the room, and a tray with a plate full of peas. Food: nevertheless, I remember only peas. Anna eats from the plate with her hands. I want to eat peas more and more after this scene—with my hands. The consistency of the peas—a little squashed by my fingers. My fingers in my mouth, chewing the peas. Meat prepared by Jeanne Dielman (this scene already passed but was brought to her again; meat I do not want to eat.)

Men wearing suits in different shades. And a woman on the stage, in a dress. A car passes again, loudly, in the recording of my description. Above all, the men wear black and grey; it is not very colorful. They smile a bit, and put their hands in their pockets, on their ears. Men and women dance like that. This is dancing. Repeating the same movements on a stage that looks like a ballroom. Also in a circle, slowly: a promenade. I do now want to speak—only to see them dancing like that.

Sigmund Freud.

*Time-consuming business.* <sup>82</sup>

Anne Sexton.

*This business of words.* <sup>83</sup>

82 Sigmund Freud, "Analysis Terminable and Interminable." 1937, pp. 1.

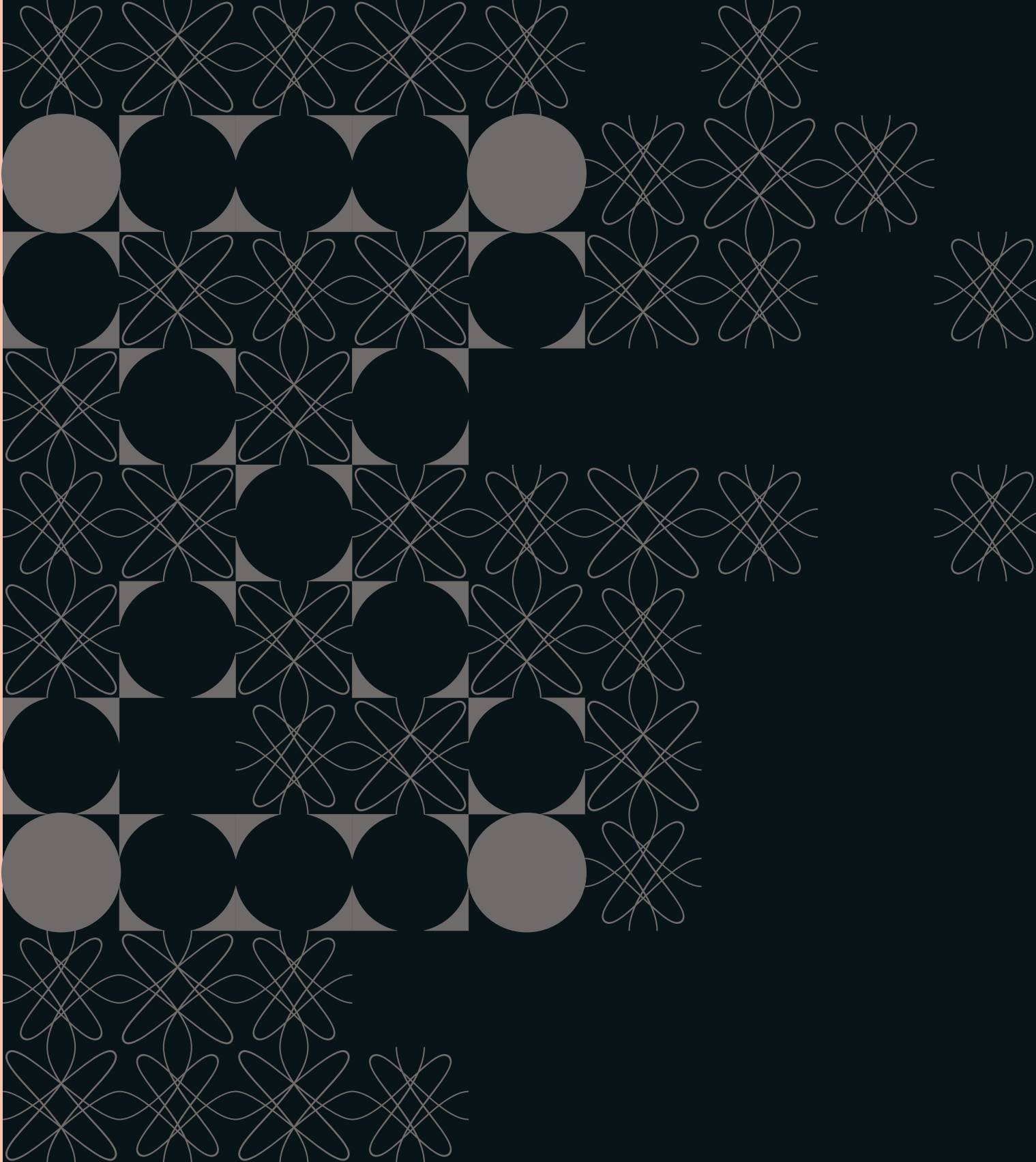
83 Anne Sexton, "The Ambition Bird." Anne Sexton: The Complete Poems, 1981.

Traveling. Lots of people on a long and large sidewalk, maybe at a bus stop. They are waiting. Lots of people. It is somewhere in Eastern Europe. Many roads, passing cars, and sidewalks where people wait and walk by. They wear heavy coats and variations of accessories to face the cold weather: hats, scarves. Some look at the camera. Some do not.



Distant: the camera films a diner. Benches, a counter, metallic surfaces, and the Coca-Cola logo. Probably, while describing the film in audio that I now transcribe, I could see a sign saying *Donut Shop* because I say, simply, *Donut Shop*. Cars and buses that pass take up the first sequence of the picture. Fixed camera. A voice-over by Chantal Akerman, almost whispering, says something I cannot understand. It is not enough for me to say what she says. Words fail. Akerman's voice is so resistant it surpasses the cut and goes over another image. Now, in this other scene, I see a broken fire hydrant. The end of an afternoon, dusk. Summertime in the northern hemisphere. Children play with the water from the broken fire hydrant. It is hot, I believe. Street noises, cars, people passing by. Hydrant, water, children playing. The voice goes on.

Cut. Chantal Akerman speaks, reading the paper in her hands. Looking at the paper and at the camera. At me and at you? Looking into the future always with this doubt: who are you facing when facing the camera? Returning doubt: someone looks at the camera. There is no correct answer, no definition. Sitting in this armchair, the director is in an interesting position; she is filmed from the side of this armchair, not sitting frontally in order to answer frontally. Maybe she is comfortable and relaxed—not tense?—and content, I daresay. I do not know why I say she is content. I just daresay. There is, perhaps, a soft smile of joy in showing a new film she made from years of work. Another experiment from her experiments. Akerman says, *Last attempt of self-portrait: My name is Chantal Akerman. I was born in Brussels. And that is the truth. And that is the truth.*



## *Anna Meets Her Mother in Belgium*

Between Germany and France, Anna meets *her* mother. Or Anna meets *the* mother? Is it the same thing as saying I broke *my* arm? The mother: part of the body. And the daughter sleeps naked beside her mother.

At night.

Deserted train station where you hear, mostly,  
Anna walking.

Anna, her back.

Another woman, her back.

Anna, from the front, looking at her—the woman  
looking back.

The other woman, her mother, looks at her and they meet.

One facing the other.

They say something I cannot hear.

They walk together, holding hands.

Silent restaurant.

I hear their steps in the silence.

Now they sit one next to the other.

I can hear this conversation.

They talk, looking at each other.

Facing one another.

The mother looks younger than I thought. Maybe Anna  
is younger than I thought.

The mother looks younger than Ida; I would not think  
she is Anna's mother.

Anna says something, and her mother asks her to repeat  
it; she did not understand.

They speak calmly.

Anna looks at her; their eyes follow in dialogue, even  
though I do not see them—

the picture is only of Anna.

This is not a monologue like the rest of the film where  
Anna speaks very little. Anna speaks more now. There is a  
different rhythm in silence and breath, between who speaks  
and who listens and who responds.

*There are curtains everywhere*, says Anna after her  
mother asks, *How is Germany?*

Cigarette.

I do not see them eating or drinking the coffee they ordered.

Walking on the street and the sidewalk, traveling. Anna and her mother see through the windows of bars and restaurants. Some music plays—the piano—probably from one of these places.

It rained; the asphalt is wet.

*No bathroom in this hotel room*, the receptionist informs them.

They do not go home, where they would meet the brother and the father.

The mother is sitting in bed—larger to the left side of the frame—while Anna is also sitting, further away at the extremity of the bed's other side.

*Let me look at you a little*, says the mother.

They have not seen each other for almost three years.

*But you were there; I will not always be there.*

Anna wants to call Italy. But there is no telephone in the hotel room. She does not make any movement towards going to the reception in order to make a call.

With no clothes on, Anna lays in bed and covers herself.

In front of us: mother and daughter—in bed together.

The mother goes to sleep with her necklace and earrings on. Probably, with her rings too. She is not naked like Anna.

Lights off. In the shadowy environment, the room is illuminated by the outside.

*So, tell me.*

Anna relays to her mother her adventures in presenting her film, how these adventures can be sad, and how she feels foolish.

Anna also tells her mother about the Italian woman she met. She went to her hotel room after they saw her film and had some drinks.

*She told me about herself, and I told her about myself.*

The cafés closed and they looked for a place to keep talking.

*We did not want to leave each other.*

They went to Anna's hotel, lay in bed, went on talking. By accident, they touched each other and then kissed.

*I felt bad; it was too late; I did not know anymore, but we kept kissing.*

*I did not know it was like that with women.*

*You know, in a strange way, I thought of you.*

Now it is Anna who monologues. Her mother listens to her like Anna did to others during the whole film.

They do not see each other again, but they talk on the phone.

*Have you ever loved a woman?| I do not know.|  
Are you sleeping?| No.| Me neither.*

Her mother's perfume is still the same as it has been for a long time. Since always.

Anna hugs her mother and the mother accepts her daughter's hug.

On the following day, the mother, at the train platform, says, *Anna, tell me you love me.*

They stand in front of each other; they look at each other, and Anna grabs her suitcase and leaves the picture.

•  
Archive: erasure. Mother, time, death. Again, *ainda*, forever, always: the facts. And Fred Moten.

*Over the past three or four years, in the course of finishing this book, I have often returned to Stanley Cavell's words at the end of A Pitch of Philosophy:*

*"Am I ready to vow . . . that I have the ear, that I know my mother's mother tongue of music to be also mine?"*

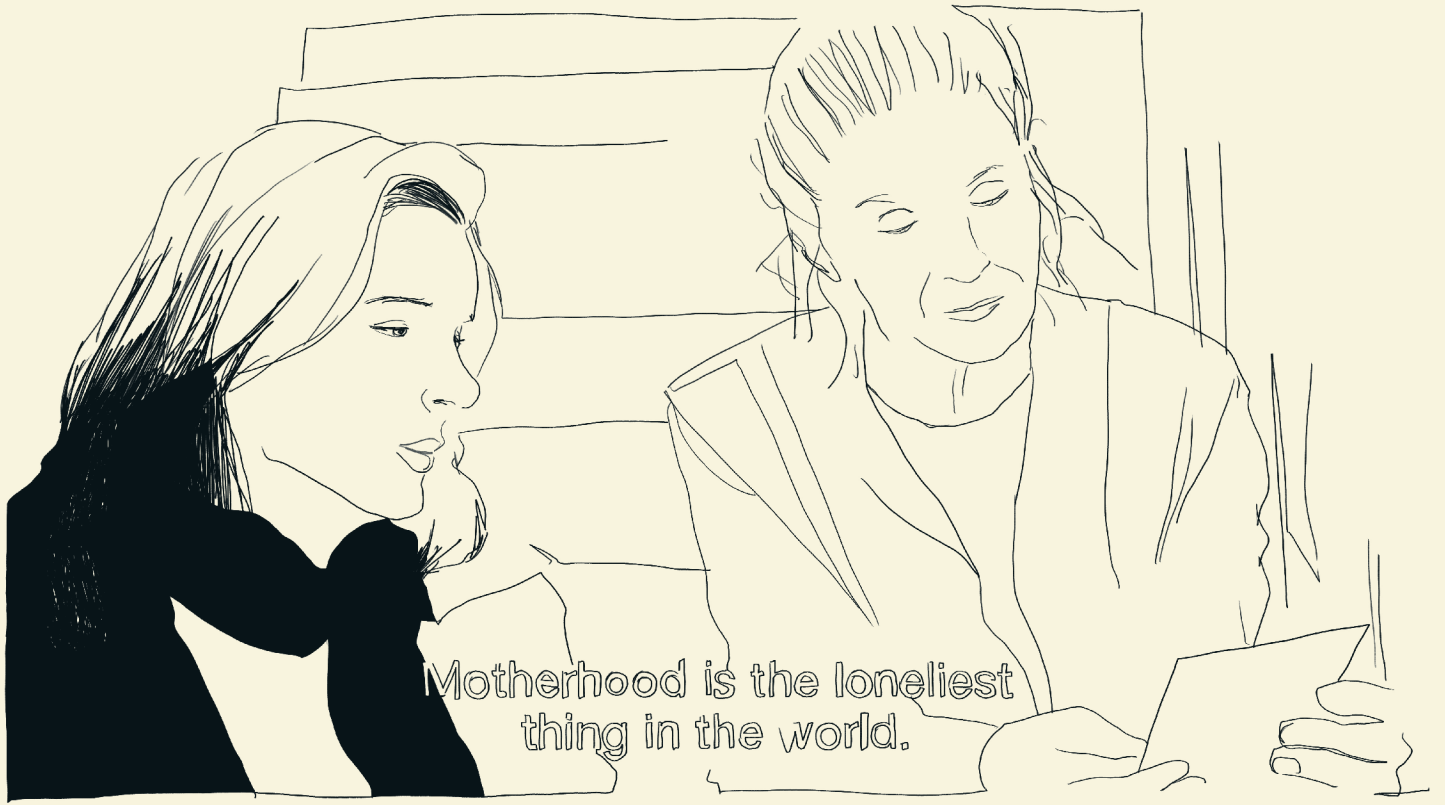
*My mother, B Jenkins, taught me the value of trying to reach for something and in her "absence" that*

*value, the essence of her tradition, dawns on me every morning in a different way as old and new desire.*

*I want to go as far out from where she was as she wanted me to go, all the way back to her ground and line. All my work is dedicated to her with all my love.*<sup>84</sup>

To sing a song, the mother does not sing. Facing the mother's silence. Like Chantal Akerman and Fred Moten, Anne Carson—while finishing her book, *Men in the Off Hour*—writes about her mother who had died during the making of that book. In *No Home Movie*, in *Une Famille à Bruxelles*, and in other films, Akerman's mother assumes a structural position in her work. A reason to work? Questioning the silence. In a 1976 interview she gave in Chicago about *Jeanne Dielman*, the filmmaker spoke about the importance of her mother visiting the set during the shooting. Her film would come from the relationships she had with her mother and her aunt, from their lost traditional and daily rites, from their homes. Akerman would also say that if her mother died, she would not know what to do with her life. In another interview,<sup>85</sup> she described her filmography using a few sentences for each film. For *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna*, she chose this line: *Tell me you love me, Chantal. (Always, my mother.)*

84 Fred Moten,  
In *The Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*,  
Minnesota University  
Press, 2003,  
Acknowledgments .  
85 Chantal  
Akerman,  
*Monographie: Bande(s) À Part*,  
Bobigny. pp. 61.



*Les Rendez-vous d'Anna* is more about the mother. Ivone Margulies tells us <sup>86</sup> that this project was originally about a surprise visit of a mother to her daughter who lives in Paris. The mother would, then, discover the world of the daughter. This film does not tell this story; nevertheless, the meeting between mother and daughter is still at its core, literally, as the meeting with the mother underlines all of Anna's meetings. Belgium, where they meet, between Germany and France, is the beginning and the end of the screening.

Mother and daughter meet, uncovered in drama. This is when Anna talks about her telephone calls to Italy and the woman she fell in love with, about how she thought of her mother while with her. She talks much more than her mother, exposing herself in a way I had not seen in the film until then.

In the conversation between mother and daughter, the ending of the film is announced by the answering machine. The message in the answering machine: it stirs my loneliness even when I think I am not alone; it makes me sink deep into my armchair. *Anna, dove sei? Anna, where are you?*

*And now I have no one, I thought,* Carson writes in *Men in the Off Hours*. She goes to Virginia Woolf's diaries and finds some comfort: *Why are these pages comforting? They led her, after all, to the river Ouse.* She also finds pleasure in reading Woolf, a pleasure that comes from colliding, shocking words and order. *Forming such shocks into words and order.* <sup>87</sup> And it is Time, with a capital T, that she thanks for this pleasure.

*It is strange that the sun should be shining; and the birds singing.  
For here,  
it is coal black: here in the little cave in which I sit.  
Such was the complaint of the woman who had all her faculties  
entire.  
She did not not sufficiently. She had no grasp of* <sup>88</sup>

With Virginia Woolf, Carson arrives at something that happens between erasure and death. *Crossouts*. This line erases another line. Double-crossed.

*They are like death: by a simple stroke – all is lost, yet still here. For death although utterly unlike life shares a skin with it. Death lines every moment of ordinary time. Death hides right inside every shining sentence we grasped and had no grasp of. Death is a fact.* <sup>89</sup>

86 Ibid. pp. 95.

87 Anne Carson,  
*Men in the Off  
Hours*. Alfred A.  
Knopf, 2000, pp.  
165.

88 Ibid. pp. 165–  
166.

89 Ibid. pp. 166.



Fred Moten.  
*everything is (in) erasure,* <sup>90</sup>

Erasure, mother, death, life—nothing is separated. In  
Time: where we are and where we go and where we move.  
Everything hides (in) everything.

Anne Carson.  
*Antigone: we begin in the dark  
and birth is the death of us  
Ismene: who said that  
Antigone: Hegel  
Ismene: sounds more like Beckett  
Antigone: he was paraphrasing Hegel  
Ismene: I don't think so* <sup>91</sup>

Kendrick Lamar.  
*Love's gonna get you killed  
But pride's gonna be the death of you, and you and me  
And you and you  
And you and me  
(And you and you)  
(And you and me)  
(And you and you)  
(And you and me and)* <sup>92</sup>

90 Fred Moten,  
In *The Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*,  
Minnesota University Press,  
2003, pp. 42.

91 Anne Carson,  
*Antigonick*. *New Directions*, 2012,  
pp. 9.

92 Kendrick Lamar,  
"PRIDE" from *DAMN*.  
2017.

93 Chantal Akerman,  
*Monographie: Bande(s) À Part*,  
Bobigny. pp. 136.

144

I find in the archives of the French Cinematheque a screenplay for *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna* full of erasures. There are also erasures in my copy of *On Certainty*, from Ludwig Wittgenstein. The editors kept them there. The scenes erased from the screenplay are not in the film I saw. However, how to describe now and not think of what I read that is supposedly not there? We should not separate what is shot from what was written and once erased.

Chantal Akerman never made her film on the Middle East, which would have traveled from the Iberic Peninsula to the desert to Syria and Lebanon—from where part of my family comes. Although she never made the film, she wrote a lot about it, which is why I could see Akerman's film that was never shot. Her work is there, in text. <sup>93</sup> Text as expanded cinema. *Not a film at all*. The lines of writing and erasure. Time. Syria, before and after the war, recorded by Akerman. A recording that both was and was not. A war that was already there in her willingness to record, just as the USSR was already ending in *D'est*.

Maybe this is a path of anxiety and anticipation.

Nevertheless, it is sensed to nonsense, towards  
experimentation and essaying. To play and attempt  
collisions. The shock from words to some order. This  
is not a resignation; it is a work on the difficulty of living.

94 Chantal  
Ackerman quoted  
in Maria João  
Madeira's Chantal  
Akerman: As Folhas  
da Cinemateca.  
Cinemateca  
Portuguesa, 2019,  
pp. 29.  
95 Ludwig  
Wittgenstein, On  
Certainty. §203.  
96 Ludwig  
Wittgenstein,  
Tractatus Logico-  
Philosophicus,  
§6.4311.

*Complicate it a little bit.* <sup>94</sup>  
Crossed-out Wittgenstein.

*[Everything that we regard as evidence indicates that  
the earth already existed long before my  
birth. The contrary hypothesis has nothing to confirm  
it at all.*

*If everything speaks for an hypothesis and nothing  
against it, is it objectively certain? One can call  
it that. But does it necessarily agree with the world of  
facts? At the very best it shows us what  
“agreement” means. We find it difficult to imagine it to  
be false, but also difficult to make use of.]* <sup>95</sup>

•  
Facts do not depend on what is right or wrong. Facts provide  
an order that is not about right or wrong. Do they depend on  
their confirmation? Maybe yes. Sometimes we have to accept  
to go beyond the human to the non-human to find facts. We  
may have to go to the writing of the shock, the inscription  
of the shock, to erase some limits inside the limits of our  
language and our worlds. The erasure does not erase limits  
but makes them more visible; the erasure opens and marks  
to describe again, always. *The limits of my language mean  
the limits of my world.* When you place a line over a line in  
a discourse that accepts complications—the unconscious,  
for instance—the lines, one over another, highlight what is  
also there. Both lines exist. Co-exist. One line complaining  
over the other, thinking over thinking. A risk. What is there?  
Attention: sentences on sentences, writing on writing.

*Death is not an event of life. Death is not lived through.  
If by eternity is understood not endless temporal  
duration  
but timelessness, then he lives eternally who lives in  
the present.  
Our life is endless in the way that our visual field is  
without  
limit.* <sup>96</sup>

This intriguing visual field is without limit.

Oswald de Andrade.

*Screenplays. Screenplays. Screenplays.*

*Screenplays. Screenplays. Screenplays.*

*Screenplays.*<sup>97</sup>

97 Oswald  
de Andrade,

“Manifesto  
Antropofágico.”  
1928.

98 Charles  
Bernstein, *Near/  
Miss*, 2018, p. 46

99 Patrizia  
Cavalli, *My Poems  
Won’t Change the  
World*. pp. 6.

100 Chantal  
Akerman,  
Monographie:  
Bande(s) À Part,  
Bobigny. pp. 68.  
101 Ibid. pp. 50.

102 William  
Faulkner, *The  
Sound and The  
Fury*. 1929.

146

Is it Time that marks the limits? Concepts, concepts, concepts: screenplays, screenplays, screenplays. Screenplays of worlds, of lives. Where will my death happen?

Charles Bernstein complicates the understanding of Time: *Time wounds all heals; Time bleeds all wounds.*<sup>98</sup> His words operate poetically and give Time a strange use. Strangeness is, therefore, poetry. Another screenplay for this concept. Time wounds heals and makes them bleed. This work is not about therapy.

Towards which world and the limits?

Patrizia Cavalli.

*Together eternity and death threaten me:  
neither of the two do I know,  
neither of the two will I know.*<sup>99</sup>

Going for the limit while being threatened by it. The border between death and eternity. She approaches the limit a little by talking about it, which is not the same as accepting it totally. The enigmatic place between death and eternity is a present that maintains the past. Does the limit contain endless temporal duration or timelessness? What and whom do I believe in? Our willingness resounds for a visual field without limit, a life that will happen in the field of the Other—eternity.

There is duration, but I want timelessness. I do not want the abstract concept. I want the concrete. Chantal Akerman on Michael Snow: *I am not in the pure experimentation of an idea, I search for something else, I do not know what, but I do not stay in the concept, never.*<sup>100</sup> The conceptual is not enough; we are still searching for what is.

Ryuichi Sakamoto made his 2017 album, *async*, after treating his throat cancer. *Andata*: is it a mourning song? An organ on display? To survive death is something that happens in life. Note: there are complications to surviving.

The mothers, Virginia Woolf, the Wittgenstein family, Chantal Akerman’s death. Akerman included so many that died by suicide: her aunt Ruth, the mother of Amos Oz, Sylvia Plath. *They commit suicide everywhere.*<sup>101</sup> Insisting on work, persistency. Hard task: living. How to deal with forming shocks into words and order? A clinic.

Quentin Compson carries a pocket watch.<sup>102</sup>  
A broken one.

What Time is it?

Anne Sexton talks about an ambition bird.

*The business of words keeps me awake.* When I read her poem, I knew I would die. I needed to go to the hospital.

Angst attacked me. I did not die; I am writing this. It is very difficult to go to sleep, to withstand all the dreams that are actually nightmares, and with no guarantee I will wake up.

*So it has come to this –  
insomnia at 3:15 A.M.,  
the clock tolling its engine*

*like a frog following  
a sundial yet having an electric  
seizure at the quarter hour.*

*The business of words keeps me awake.  
I am drinking cocoa,  
the warm brown mama.*

*I would like a simple life  
yet all night I am laying  
poems away in a long box.*

*It is my immortality box,  
my lay-away plan,  
my coffin.*

*All night dark wings  
flopping in my heart.  
Each an ambition bird.*

*The bird wants to be dropped  
from a high place like Tallahatchie Bridge.*

*He wants to light a kitchen match  
and immolate himself.*

*He wants to fly into the hand of Michelangelo  
and come out painted on a ceiling.*

*He wants to pierce the hornet's nest  
and come out with a long godhead.*

*He wants to take bread and wine  
and bring forth a man happily floating in the  
Caribbean.*

*He wants to be pressed out like a key  
so he can unlock the Magi.*

*He wants to take leave among strangers  
passing out bits of his heart like hors d'oeuvres.*

*He wants to die changing his clothes  
and bolt for the sun like a diamond.*

*He wants, I want.  
Dear God, wouldn't it be  
good enough just to drink cocoa?*

*I must get a new bird  
and a new immortality box.  
There is folly enough inside this one.* <sup>103</sup>

103 Anne Sexton,  
"The Ambition  
Bird." Anne  
Sexton: The  
Complete Poems,  
1981.

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Full of erasures: the screenplay of *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna*. What this film is. What it could also be. I knew through the internet that this archive was at the French Cinematheque. It was enough to send some emails and to arrive on the day scheduled. They believed I was a researcher even more than I did; I simply said I was writing about Chantal Akerman. I did not know how to research, and, even more, what to search for. The material was there, available for my consultation. I could touch the papers and photographs without gloves for as long as I wanted. So I stayed there for a while: pretending.

The erasures in *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna* are missing links from this character's story. Details about her life and what she does were erased, so there is no contribution to any analysis of Anna that could start from her past or from the meetings she had and has not had. Now, her, the meetings, the film.

In the images—photographs I made and put here—we can read that a newspaper article would have introduced Anna. It would talk about the filmmaker, Anna Silver, who is passing by Germany. It would be a tool to give the audience some information. Chantal Akerman leaves this idea in the screenplay's papers. We do not see in the film a picture of Anna, no picture of herself or her film. This film she directed has no title, no audience of its own, no inside of the theater where it screens. The only cinema we see in *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna* is from the outside. This is the material of the cinema: concrete architecture.

I talk a lot about inscription and description. Anna inscribes the cinema she makes—the cinema Chantal





The architecture of this hotel, the color of the images, the aspect of the sound: it all exudes the 1970s. Symmetrical pictures, frontally framed. Anna enters the lobby and says she has a reservation. We are in West Germany, and in this brief dialogue, Anna is introduced. This happens after the film's first scene when, on a platform, several people get off a train and go down the stairs to the corridor that connects the platforms and station. From among these people, Anna remains there, at the platform, alone; she is in the telephone booth making a call. After, she also goes down the stairs.

I will only know in Brussels who Anna was calling in that telephone booth.

*I think there is a reservation for me, Anna Silver.* When she goes inside the room, Anna opens the curtains. While she does this, the camera moves laterally, following the action. In this synchronicity, between opening the curtains and the camera's movement, there is an effect: I stop breathing for a second. This scene is a dance. Actress, objects, crew, equipment: they make me think of how I breathe. I hear myself breathing. The sound of the curtains opening in their track. Excess in synchronicity. Suddenly, Chantal Akerman speaks of what I see and what she does with a simple gesture: opening the curtains.

Inside the wardrobe, there is a forgotten tie. Instead of leaving it there or even stealing it, Anna calls the reception. Perhaps the tie belonged to the man we saw in the lobby. There is no sense in this forgotten tie. It says someone was already there in this room; someone slept there, used the toilet.

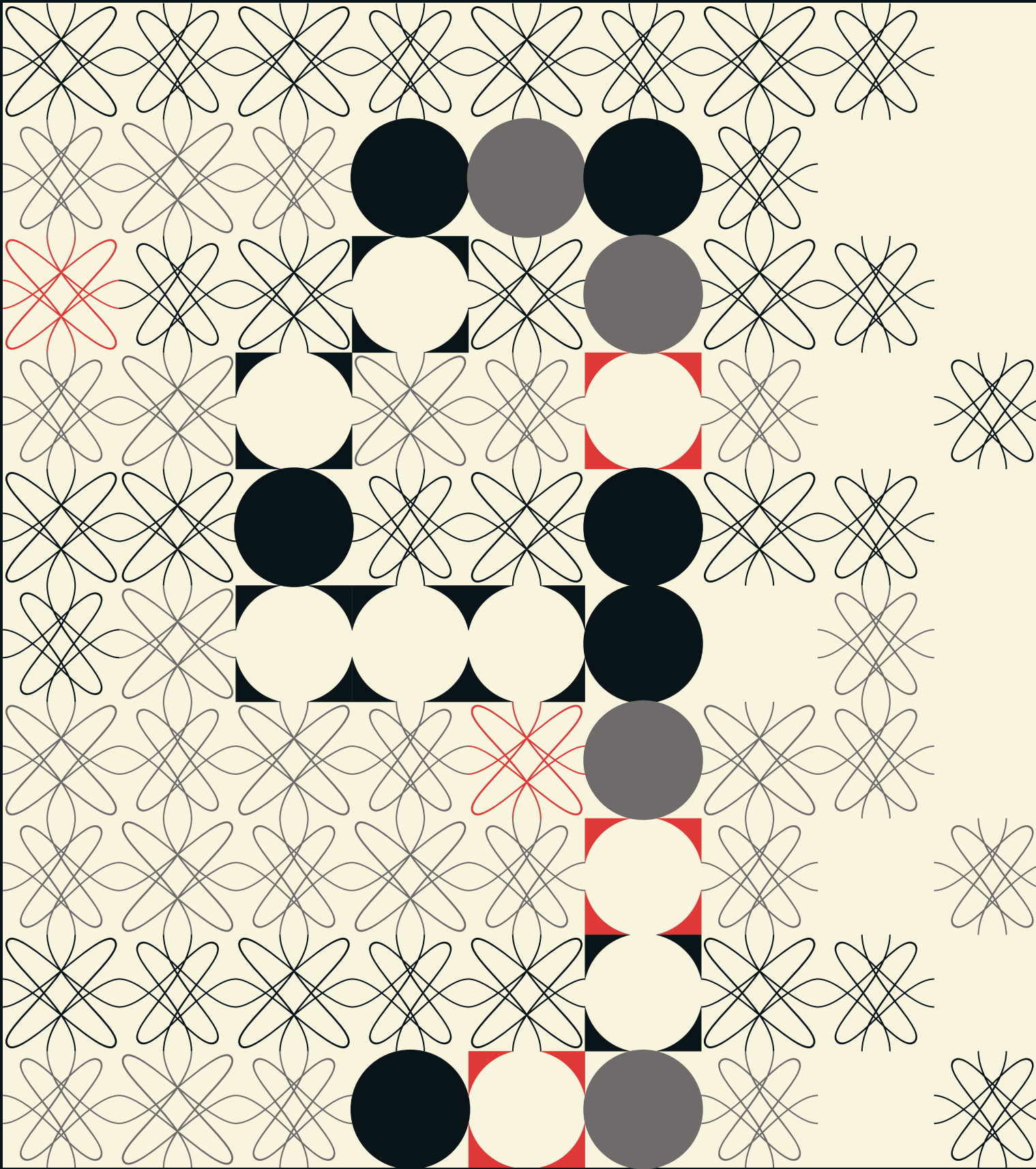
Anna calls the reception to say someone forgot his tie. A man, probably. I find Anna completely boring for doing so. Just leave it there or take it.

Ellipses, empty spaces, and movements without answers. One could say: just leave this photographer there, taking Anna's picture. But that is too much.

I know Anna was engaged. So what? What else is gravitating around the *else*, around Anna? In *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna*, we find pieces we could montage; nevertheless, they do not have any special place. Attempt. Describe that. The complexity of Anna's history is in the story. The *else* is in her meetings, in meaningless conversations. A piece as a whole play, as a move to fortune. Limited unpredictability, bet, and desire. Insufficient information.

Where does Anna go? Where did Anna come from? From Akerman's mind? Elsewhere. The mystery and the anxiety of meeting someone and being interested. We want to meet again. We are Anna: trying, all the time, to call Italy unsuccessfully. Maybe the Italian woman is ignoring her. Ghosting her. Speaking of dating apps, my friend would say in Portuguese, *o boy que some*.







*It's Not Permission  
I Crave, But Possibility*

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Chantal Akerman on Moses Und  
Aron, directed by Danièle Huillet  
and Jean-Marie Straube:

The subject makes me  
profoundly passionate. It was  
really beautiful, attractive,  
intelligent, a beauty that does  
not want to be beautiful and that  
is when you achieve it. <sup>105</sup>

Before that film, I had seen—mostly listened to—only one other made by Danièle Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub: *Chronik der Anna Magdalena Bach*. It was strange and, therefore, for me an important film. It was the most concrete, material relationship I ever had with cinema. It is not abstract; it is not abstract; it is not abstract; it is not about abstraction—never once. Rocking collides.

In *Chronik der Anna Magdalena Bach*, music is what orders. The music of Johan Sebastian Bach—played live and recorded within the film—carves an immense space. The film is a documentary composed of documents read aloud by the supposed voice of Anna Magdalena Bach, who tells the story of her life, her family, and her husband's work and music. I do not know if the music played is really live, if it was made during the making of the film, and recorded there, but I want to believe that it is for the appeal of music played by musicians playing musicians.

Facing this film.

Myrtle Gordon – Gena Rowlands – John Cassavetes.

*The reality of the reality.* <sup>106</sup>

*Reality is a sound, you have to tune in to it not just keep yelling.* <sup>107</sup>

106 Opening Night. Dir. John Cassavetes, 1977.

107 Anne Carson, *Autobiography of Red: A Novel in Verse*. Vintage, 1998, pp. 60.

*Moses und Aron*, too, is ordered by music. Actors are musicians; they dance and sing the opera of Arnold Schoenberg. We do not see the orchestra, but the ones in the frame sing the entire time. And, when they are not singing, they are dancing.

*Audiovisual* is a word that implies a sentence: to see it is necessary to hear. The *Wavelength*,<sup>108</sup> *Là-Bas*.<sup>109</sup>

Gene Youngblood.

*Expanded cinema isn't a movie at all.*<sup>110</sup>

It is what propagates through the material and lasts through it too. A hearing for that, so that. To think: to hear.

What is concrete and material is at play as a theme in *Moses und Aron*. Repeated and varying in form: to represent or not to represent? A question that goes, for instance, how to represent music in cinema? Or, how not to represent while still making cinema? Or, what is that cinema can do?

Chantal Akerman.

*The materialism of the Straub allows them to take from the religious what is vital for us. It is all there, the Law, the broken law, the end of slavery, the idol. We are always there and we still do not understand all from that.*<sup>111</sup>

108 *Wavelength*. Dir. Michael Snow, 1967.

109 *Là-Bas*. Dir. Chantal Akerman, 2006.

110 Gene Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema*. 1970, pp. 41.

111 Chantal Akerman, *Monographie: Bande(s) À Part*, Bobigny. pp. 69.

The conflict between the brothers stages conflict. Moses says that God cannot be represented since He is from the other side of known concepts. Yet Aaron, in the absence of Moses, makes an idol—the image of a god to be adored. This is the Golden Calf—a god but not the God of Moses.

Chantal Akerman quotes the second commandment:

*Thou shalt have no other gods before me.  
Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven  
image.* <sup>112</sup>

156 There are several places of contact between Huillet and Straub and Akerman, such as making cinema that is not a metalanguage, that contains in itself what it is to make a film. Not being in metalanguage requires showing the means, talking about talking without depending on other productions. Films that are projects that leave business unfinished. When first seeing the films of Huillet and Straub, Akerman's *Les Années 80* came to my mind. This could be a bad insight, a mistake; this film is very different from *Chronik der Anna Magdalena Bach* or *Moses und Aron*.

Nevertheless, there is contact and resonance. *Les Années 80* comes from music. It is not a *making of* of her later film, the musical, *Golden Eighties*, yet it looks for rhythm and a tempo, the

tempos of the 80s. *Les Années 80* was released the same year as her film, *Un Jour, Pina A Demandé*: 1983. I was not yet born.

*Les Années 80* is an object for itself. Sufficient in its insufficiency that does not depend on understanding. It feels like a project for another film, and it is. Perhaps it is the most experimental work Chantal Akerman directs our attention to, including within it entire scenes of a future film. She plays with autonomy; she plays a cinematographic game with the montage of another film: its goods and raw materials. We see and listen to her in repetition, conducting interpretations, as she is recording songs, dancers, and singers.

157

What Chantal Akerman does is in the order of *The Preparation of the Novel* by Roland Barthes.

*The product is not distinct from its production.* <sup>113</sup>

*La préparation du roman* is a seminar in the preparation of a novel to come; yet, this novel will never be written. It will haunt the writings of who reads it, and—in retrospect—the writings of Barthes himself. Like Akerman, Barthes dies soon after his mother. Was it suicide or an accident? And, like Antigone, Akerman and Barthes dig the graves of their loved ones with their own hands.

To dig the link to write.

In these processes, they inscribe themselves. Scriptures. Annunciation of their deaths to come and their short attempts at being alive after someone else's death.

Like Kreon to Antigone, Huillet and Straub made one too.

*The war is over. Now we can forget.*

Then there is what Logan Roy says, a possible representative of Kreon, in the contemporary series, *Succession*.

*The future is real. The past is all made up.* <sup>114</sup>

The scriptures we find in Barthes and Akerman defy this Kreon. Is defying a challenge and a definition? Some mother's photograph we will never see, that remains pulsing the whole time, saturated in holes like in *Camera Lucida*. <sup>115</sup> After her fall in the middle of the living room in *No Home Movie*, Akerman never stops filming the last days of her mother's life. She does not allow her mother to fall asleep, so she falls instead. Akerman insists so she could say a little bit more, so she could hear more of her history. Maybe one detail escapes the silence.

Charles Bernstein.

*It's not permission I crave, but possibility* <sup>116</sup>

114 *Succession*. Created by Jesse Armstrong, HBO, Season 2, 2019.

115 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, 1980.

116 Charles Bernstein, "Catagchresis My Love." *Near/Miss*, University of Chicago Press, 2018.

The struggle to survive is something that happens in the memory of what we forget. In language, we struggle. In possibility too. Our own mouths and bodies—  
attacked.

Bertolt Brecht.

*The memory of humanity for sufferings borne is astonishingly short. Its gift of imagination for coming sufferings is almost even less. It is this callousness that we must combat. For humanity is threatened by wars compared to which those past are like poor attempts and they will come, without any doubt, if the hands of those who prepare them in all openness are not broken.* <sup>117</sup>

159

Without the *meta*, language is exposed. We live in language; we do not live in metalanguage. The *meta* is to expose language. You take off the *meta* in order to talk about it, out of it, into it. Language talks about itself while in practice.

Time matters. We are here debating anticipations, anxieties, angst. A film of a film or a film itself? I find in *Les Années 80* a strange relationship to the ready. Accept the experiment towards some future. Describe towards some future. Not through narration; do not demand that. Use a strange timeline.

117 Bertolt Brecht quoted in *The Antigone of Sophocles After Hölderlin's Translation Adapted for the Stage* by Brecht 1948. Dir. Jeane-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet, 1991.



Akerman asks: *Pina, how do you see your future?*

Pina Bausch replies: *I, I do not know.* 118

If you see *La Chambre*—a silent short film—you could ask, which is its narrative? What is the story? But could you justly describe it? How justly? Perhaps a little more than simply. It is so hard to describe a silent and enigmatic film with no apparent story without asking too much. A story is a future we want. I go. Who is this woman there? Is she waiting for someone? Why is she there? A riddle not to be solved. Then I think, actually, who is this filmmaker who makes and acts in this film? Does she play a character or herself? The mutism of an actor–director in a scene.

Frank O’Hara.

*Interior (With Jane)*

*The eagerness of objects to  
be what we are afraid to do*

*cannot help but move us     Is  
this willingness to be a motive*

*in us what we reject?     The  
really stupid things, I mean*

*a can of coffee, a 35¢ ear  
ring, a handful of hair, what*

*do these things do to us? We  
come into the room, the windows  
are empty, the sun is weak  
and slippery on the ice And a  
sob comes, simply because it is  
coldest of the things we know* <sup>119</sup>

161 In a scene, objects are eager; they put forth questions. They act over the characters and are characters themselves, such as in *La Chambre*—a story organized around objects' desires. Desire: an image from the past. Do objects have a future? Do they want a story? Desire is turned into atmosphere and action. Objects weigh. Over Frank and Jane, over Akerman. Over us while seeing the film, reading the poem. It is, nevertheless, not soundless. We listen to the silence, intermissions, my dog barking.

An atmosphere of desire operates as a soundtrack. Taken by the melodrama: attracted, I move.

Adrienne Rich.

*A whole soundtrack of your silence  
a whole film* <sup>120</sup>

119 Frank O'Hara. *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara*, 1995, pp. 55

120 Adrienne Rich, *Collected Poems: 1950–2012*, 2016, pp. 326

Anne Carson.

*I take inspiration from John Cage who, when asked how he composed 4'33", answered "I build it up gradually out of many small pieces of silence"*<sup>121</sup>

162  
Objects sing; they remain in their place and describe the scene's atmosphere. It sings: a chair, a cup of tea, curtains and fruits. Window, kettle, stove. Brick wall. Wardrobe. This messy bed, where Chantal Akerman is moving her head slowly. Does she look to the camera? Light comes through the window. Nightstand. Clothes hanging and a calendar. Sink with unwashed dishes. Exit door. Again: another turn.

Afterwards, Akerman will be laying down, her arm covering her face. Moving her body. Masturbating, convulsing, having a nightmare or a feverish delusion? Finally, sitting, she touches her face as if waking up from her sleep.

*La Chambre* was made by the same filmmaker who made *Je, Tu, Il, Elle* years later. A film in which a character, played by Chantal Akerman herself, is always in the picture. In the beginning, we are in a room, an apartment with furniture that will be moved and dragged from one place to another—as happens in haunted houses—

until the space becomes empty. Only the mattress will remain; even clothes will get lost.

First image: there is furniture in the room; she gives her back to the camera, sitting in a chair. I could not see her face. Later, in the back of the image, I see her far away, closer to the table. Until she is in bed, lying down, head in one closed hand, facing whoever is shooting. Kendrick Lamar tells a story: *The one in front of the gun lives forever*. The thing is: Akerman shoots and, at the same time, is shot.

She drags the furniture. Makes the space empty. Takes her clothes off. The noise of the furniture being dragged aggravates the silence. She starts writing just after the room is empty as if she has to choose between furniture and writing. Naked, Akerman's character writes letters. One or several letters? The papers are on the floor. She also eats sugar with a spoon from a packet of sugar. I feel sick. Frivolously, I think that instead of crying, she eats sugar. Obsessively, she writes in this empty space facing blank sheets of paper.

Inside this apartment, she is sheltered from the cold. I noticed because of the windows to the outside. All in black and white. Her body naked. Will sentences dress her up? There must be a heating system in this apartment. At a certain moment, a man looks at her from a glass door. Maybe she is a ghost in this place—died there and

cannot leave—stuck in time writing letters and waiting for answers back.

The name of the biography someone wrote on David Foster Wallace from his how words: *Every love story is a ghost story*.<sup>122</sup>

I dare ask the question: is she a ghost? Is Anna a ghost in *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna*? Waiting for a telephone call that never came. Anna Silver, a ghost like many others moving in the borders of Germany, Belgium and France?

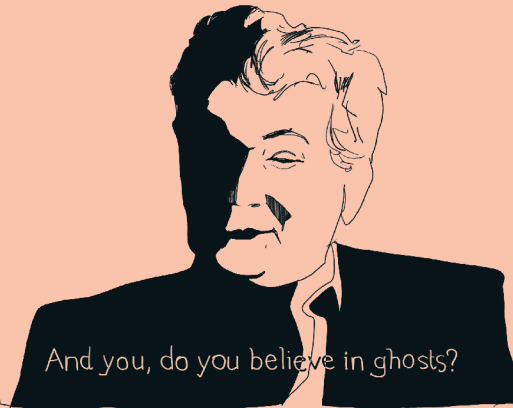
In the film *Ghost Dance*,<sup>123</sup> Jacques Derrida plays himself and is invited to talk about ghosts. He talks to the main character, a woman played by Pascale Ogier. The actress would die very young, in the year following the film's release.

122 D. T. Max, *Every Love Story Is a Ghost Story: A Life of David Foster Wallace*. Penguin Books, 2013.

123 *Ghost Dance*. Dir. Ken McMullen, 1983.



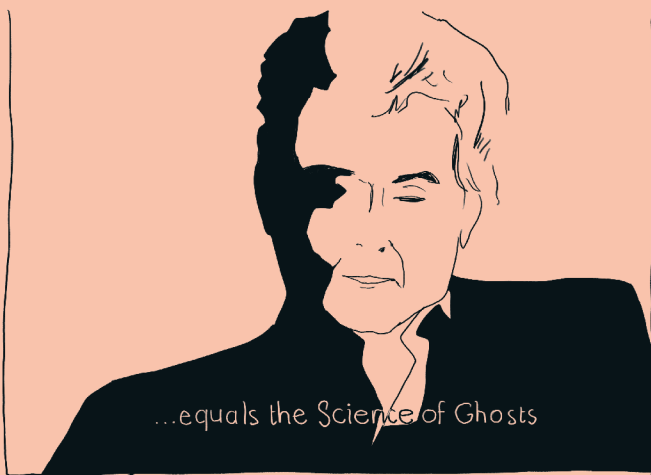
The cinema is the art of ghosts,  
a battle of phantoms



And you, do you believe in ghosts?



Cinema plus psychoanalysis...



...equals the Science of Ghosts

## Phantasy Star.

*Je, Tu, Il, Elle* could be a cinema of ghosts. All films are a cinema of ghosts. From the broken heart, the haunting, the love story that is a ghost story. A battle of phantoms. Chantal Akerman's character empties the apartment, writes letters, addresses ghosts. The letter is addressed to this other one. A woman, the ex-girlfriend, the lover we will meet in the last part of the film. In a flashback or is it in the following days? They have an intimate meeting, lacking in dialogue and understanding, but full of sex. A scene that looks like a battle.

The film ends closer to where it started. The apartment where she (je, elle...) writes letters. An empty apartment, blank sheets of paper on the floor. The sound of paper being written on.

I tried to make a film on ending things with someone. However, it was with music that I wrote my letters and described the ending. In film experimentation, in constant melodrama. *Time has taken its toll*, they sing in one of the songs. I thought the world would only spin forwards when this relationship started, but it did not.

Prior — Tony Kushner.

*We won't die secret deaths anymore. The world only spins forward. We will be citizens. The time has come.*

*Bye now.*

*You are fabulous creatures, each and every one.*

*And I bless you: More Life.*

*The Great Work Begins.* <sup>124</sup>

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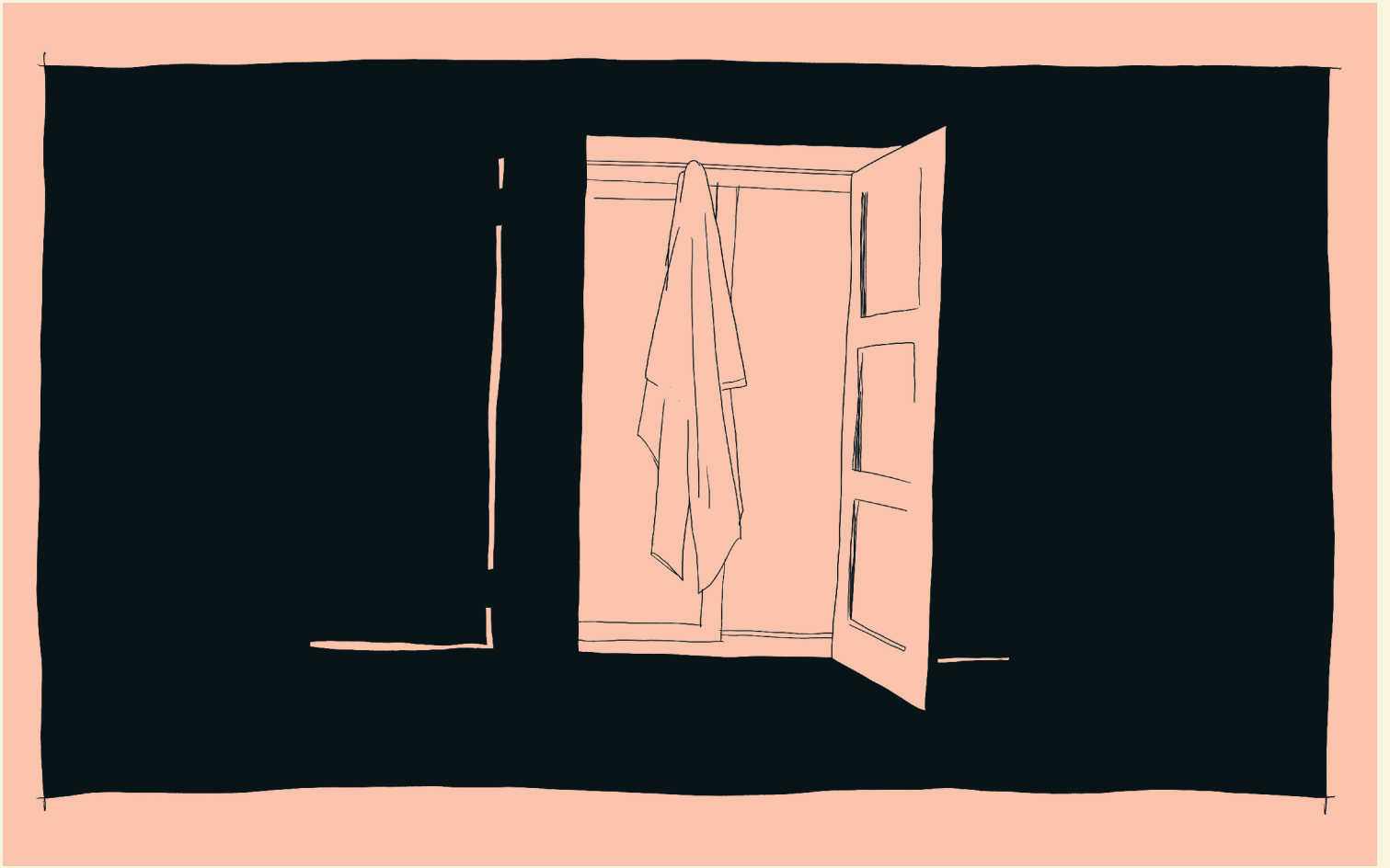
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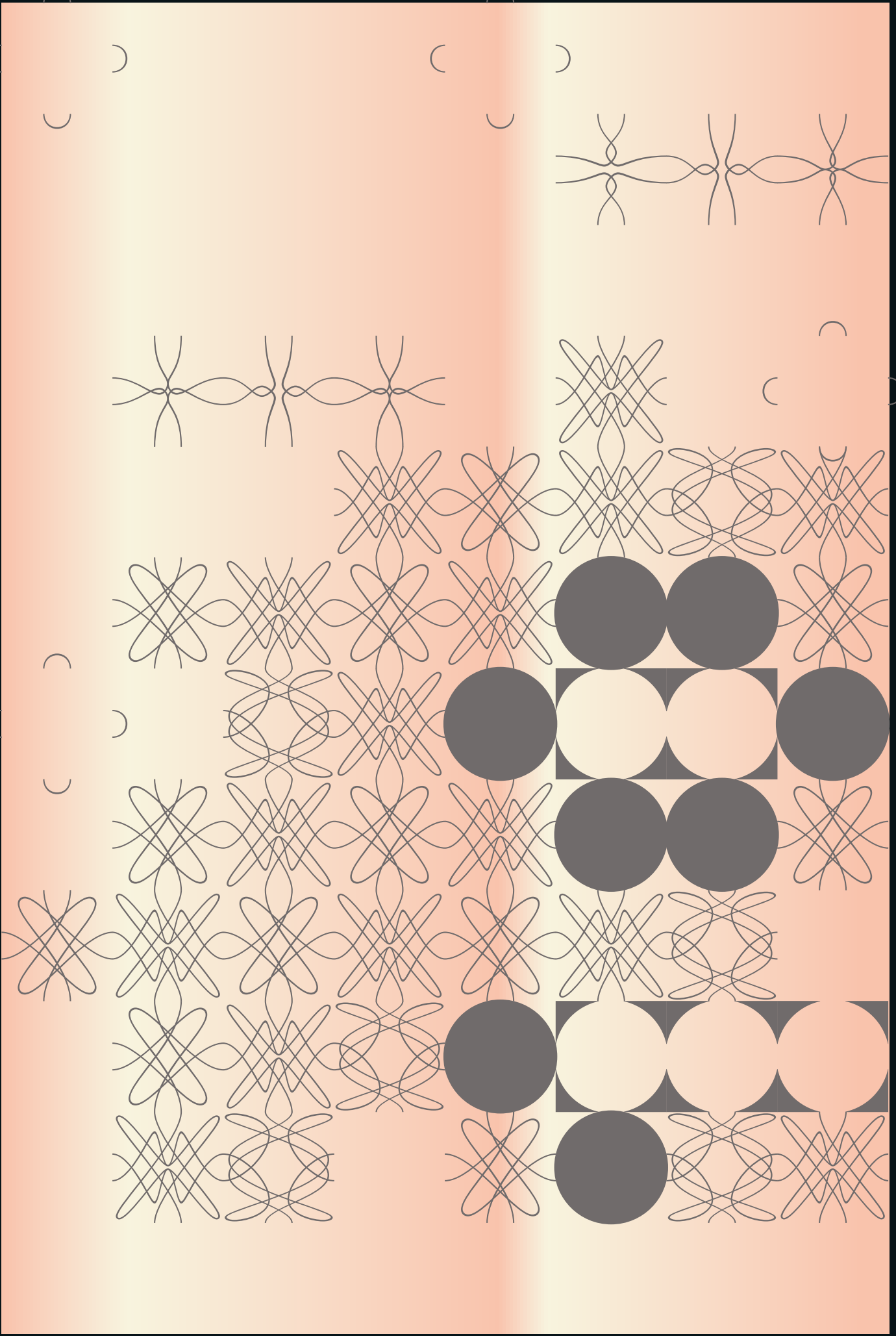
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There is hope and direction in Prior's speech. Something difficult to find right now. How to measure life as we get older? It is scary to measure life as we get older. Or is it not? My film above, *Useless Ghost*, is an exercise in frivolity, in frivolously facing speech. Language is the measure of life. It is the haunted debris of a story.

As a frivolous work describing this worn-out text of a broken heart, *Useless Ghost* became a challenge against the cliché. Through the paths of experimental cinema and poetry, I dealt with this cliché. The film is its soundtrack—a collaboration with the musician Bernardo Girauta—in a new house, where the montage of words and rhythms try to overcome image. *Tempo*. State of description. Ghost tattooed on the skin. A body attacked, written over. To cover by reacting, by responding with a soundtrack that is a letter.



*Without Even*

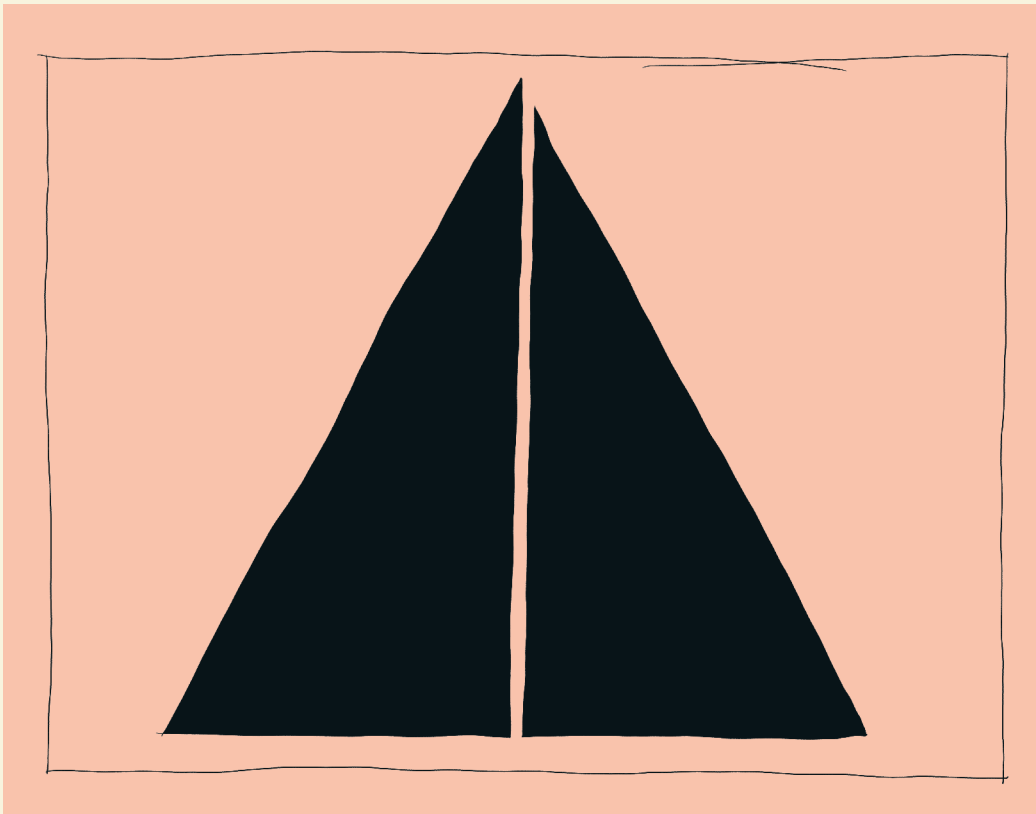
171



I face the photograph of *Jericho*, a 1969 painting by Barnett Newman of a giant black triangle with a red line that passes perpendicularly through its center. At the top, I notice that the red line is actually a little more to the left of the triangle—leaving, by a whisper, the halves uneven. This uneven decision makes an impression and, at the same time, elicits a strange feeling. All the flat black or dark blue and the red line, also flat, that decided not to end right in the middle, but a little more to one side. Since it is a straight line, this was a decision made at the bottom, at the base, in the beginning. The line does not curve. At least, I do not see it curving.

It is not abstract, *Jericho*. I cannot avoid asking: What does it mean? Jericho, the name of this painting. Which sentences do this

combination of forms and a name bring us to say? Does it have something to do with the Palestinian city? Or the French painter? When I ask these questions, I notice my investigation—which was already in motion when I looked up Newman's images on the internet—and now get a certain conscience of this silent investigation that was already forming in my head. Maybe because of *this* combination, I stopped in front of the photograph of *this* painting among the others. My interest just in *this* one.



- The critic Emily Nussbaum writes for *The New Yorker* an article on *The Leftovers*' third season, a TV series made by HBO. The article is called

*The Apocalypse According to The Leftovers.* <sup>125</sup>

Nussbaum begins her text by bringing up a eulogy that Adrienne Rich made for the poet Anne Sexton, who died in 1974. In *The Leftovers*, one day, a small but significant percentage of Earth's population disappears with no reason, with no answer. Where did they go? Are they dead? Was it a rapture? The series, in its three seasons, will never give an answer to what happened. It is not about discovering or finding a reason that explains what happened with the departed. The series is about being together with the characters that search, or not, for an answer in the turmoil provoked by the departure while they try to figure things out as leftovers. In the series, we witness the effects of the departure—on families, cities, and persons—without ever knowing the reason for this event. Spectators, with the characters, will have to accept and *let the mystery be*: the series' main theme song.

*Anne read—in a very quiet vulnerable voice—Little Girl, My Stringbean, My Lovely Woman—setting the first-hand image of a mother's affirmation of her daughter against the second-hand images of death and violence hurled that evening by men who had never seen a bombed village.* <sup>126</sup>

125 Emily Nussbaum, "The Apocalypse According to "The Leftovers"" in *The New Yorker*, 2017.

126 Adrienne Rich, *On Lies, Secrets, and Silences: Selected Prose 1966-1978*. pp. 121.

The eulogy, written by Adrienne Rich, points out that during a protest by poets against the Vietnam War, while men talked about bombed villages, about Napalm, about blood and fire, Anne Sexton decided to talk about her daughter's body and about herself as a mother seeing her child grow up. Sexton is blunt to choose to read this poem in the context of the other poems read. Nussbaum says that *The Leftovers* follows the same path of indirectly evoking and reframing the question of what makes art political. The series, like Anne Sexton's poem, does not explain but exposes without making explicit, without clarifying or revealing. Between the lines, nevertheless, everything is underlined. We are able to feel something in a very quiet, vulnerable voice. Like when we see a train that goes from Moscow to Paris in *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna*. We know Anna's journey is more than a filmmaker's tour for the release of her work in Germany, the same journey made by European Jews and members of Akerman's family not even four decades prior. We know Anna is in *D'est*. We also know something is about to occur in *Jeanne Dielman* when she gets the scissors to open a package that has arrived from Canada and, without certainty, we face the last days in a routine that will be tragically broken. Imprecise passages of thematic imprecision, of politics, of

form and also of meaning. To notice how to show or to bring something to the debate, to talk about how to approach something, and to link.

It is a rhythm, a compass. We know something from the ear, from a noise far away that repeats itself for a while. We do not identify it very well, even when we are facing it. Someone is singing in the back. The neighbor is listening to some music. I want to be their friend. Maybe it is Marina Lima, a Brazilian singer from the 80s, with her hoarse voice: *I'll follow the call. Where is it going to lead? Where is it going to lead?*<sup>127</sup> Sometimes we get what Marina Lima sings, in a snap of fingers, out of nothing. Sometimes we do not hear well, not correctly but justly. It is possible to take a sketch of a song, an outline. To draft something. Was it only in my head? Marina Lima in Lisbon? It could be. This noise says something too impossible to be sure, but people can talk about it, describe it, hum the melody, the lyrics—even if they are wrong. What is it? What did she want to say? I think she meant that.

To hum is to describe. Imprecision leaves us in constant speculation, describing in direct relation to the time we share with the work. Therefore, we recognize that this time together is bigger than me and the series, me and the film, me and the poem. This time is a composition of both of us—the work and I—in a world, sharing history. Imprecision



makes me go directly to it—in it. I appeal to the world and the history we share, co-existing, so that I can be with that which I see and hear.

An experience of being with an object, by imprecision, amplifies time. I want to consider the running time of a film, of a series, of a poem also as the time of a world. Time in which we live together. What we inherit: we and the work.

David Foster Wallace.

*My parents' words and feelings became my own as I took on the responsibilities of my role in the family drama.* 128

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The inheritance is crucial because we gain *understanding* from it. It is a source for research and of forces, of potentialities in us. We carry it throughout our lives; we share it.

Miles Hollingworth, Ludwig Wittgenstein's biographer.

*You see, Wittgenstein came to realize something very important. When you are born and you open your mouth you are actually screaming yourself into destiny.* 129

Inheritance could be that destiny that we scream ourselves into; it shows passages, desires and confrontations between pasts and futures.

128 David Foster Wallace, *The Pale King*. Little, Brown & Co, 2011, pp. 256.

129 Miles Hollingworth, *Ludwig Wittgenstein*. Oxford University Press, 2018, pp.76.

Between our world and other worlds, even impossible ones, in which we inscribe ourselves at the same time that we are inscribed. We survive: accepting, refusing, inheriting a language: a world.

When we interpret in these conditions, representation exists as a more complex action. We are taken to another understanding of what it is to interpret: to face the *missing links* or the *unfinished* representation. Interpretation and experience interfere with one another, and relationships with imprecise objects are exercises with no obvious result or temporality. There is a correct definition always lacking, escaping, incomplete, and too variable in what we find. Impossible verification, assurance, accuracy, total trust. To trust the speech by its slips. All uncertainty is certain, such as the acts of describing, of talking about, or listening to someone explain their dream.

*Cinéaste; Enfant d'une rescapée de la shoah.*

This is the inscription on Chantal Akerman's grave. The last bit is harder to read because of the moss covering the stone. Delphine Horvilleur, the rabbi who wrote and performed the eulogy at Akerman's funeral, had her text published in *Film Quarterly*.

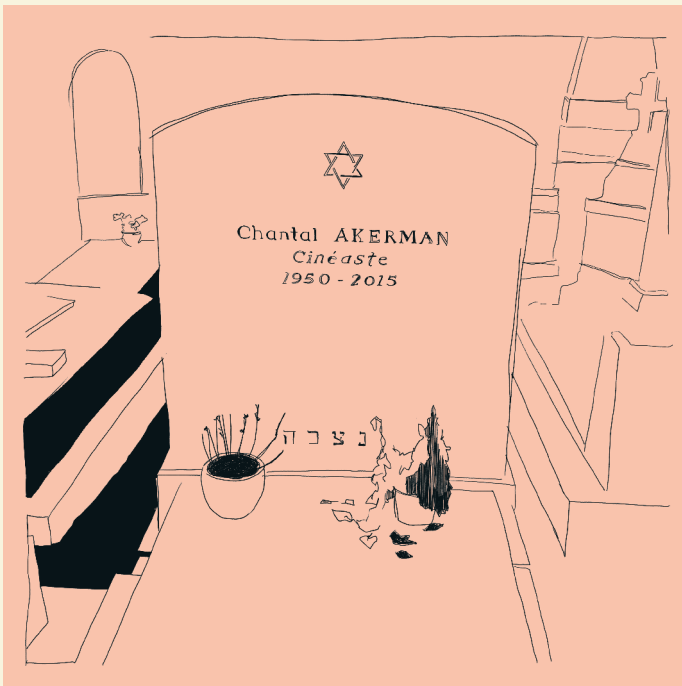
*In this place (the cemetery called in Hebrew "The House of The Living") each*

*of us becomes conscious that life and death sometimes achieve a strange cohabitation. And then certain beings don't need cemeteries and know it as if by instinct almost from birth as if from the beginning life and death the vigorous and the morbid were in a mutual dialogue at the heart of their being. It seems to me that Chantal was one of those beings those who know however alive they are that death gets sometimes to speak in them that it haunts their dreams their plans and that it leaves its mark.* <sup>130</sup>

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Horvilleur observes that the filmmaker carried in her the co-existence of and dialogue between life and death. The eulogy tries to indicate the intensity of this dual force in Chantal Akerman; a force that is not in the order of comprehension, but of acceptance of that which we can only try to describe. A force that is a dialogue between one film facing the mother's silence. A mutual dialogue that passed between them throughout the years, passing through silence. And to film is to talk about this dialogue, even if it is more by touch than sight or sound. To film is to represent this dialogue, tense and tender. This family. *Family was always our sacred mutual mission*, says Björk in her song, "Black Lake" (a title I first wrote mistakenly but correctly as

*Black Hole*.) To describe the difficulty. The *Shoah* and the Jewish diaspora. To visit and to be visited the way Chantal Akerman does when she makes a film about elderly Jewish ladies.<sup>131</sup> She goes to their homes, lets herself be fed, and accepts to watch TV, to fall asleep under a thick blanket, to spend dead time with them, to do approximately nothing.



- The eulogist's name was Delphine. Delphine Horvilleur, Delphine Seyrig. Coincidence? Let the coincidences do their work. Death speaks and haunts; we know it is there. It was there the whole time, death, and Akerman knew it by instinct, says Horvilleur. The filmmaker tried to share it with us. Make us feel: make us think: make us talk.

To be a survivor or the child of a survivor.

What does it mean to inherit survival? The inheritance is necessary for the survivor. I feel that necessity deeply when I find myself reading an Instagram post from *The Aids Memorial* account, posted on September 7th, 2018. Reading the internet like a scrolling book. Nearing sleep with my head on the pillow while passing through images on Instagram. Then, caught.

Inheritance: frequency: a frequency of inheritance: a frequency of survival. The post made me think and feel by this beat because I am the gay son of those who died and those who survived in the 1980s and 90s. This post resonated with a difficulty I keep trying to describe. The image is printed here as a testimonial, like a pop song that brings us together, engaging us in a shared language, in a world. Facts and answers. People died. People survived. You are alive. What are you going to do with that?

In February 2018, after a tough 2017, I tried to make a film. It is called *Unfamiliar Ceiling / THE BEAST*. In it, I appropriated the audio track from *The Leftovers*' last episode. The last episode begins with the departure of its main character. She will go into a machine in order to depart. In this scene, a structural film-like sequence, she tells the date of her birthday: November 18th, 1979. My birthday is also on November 18th. We have a decade of difference.

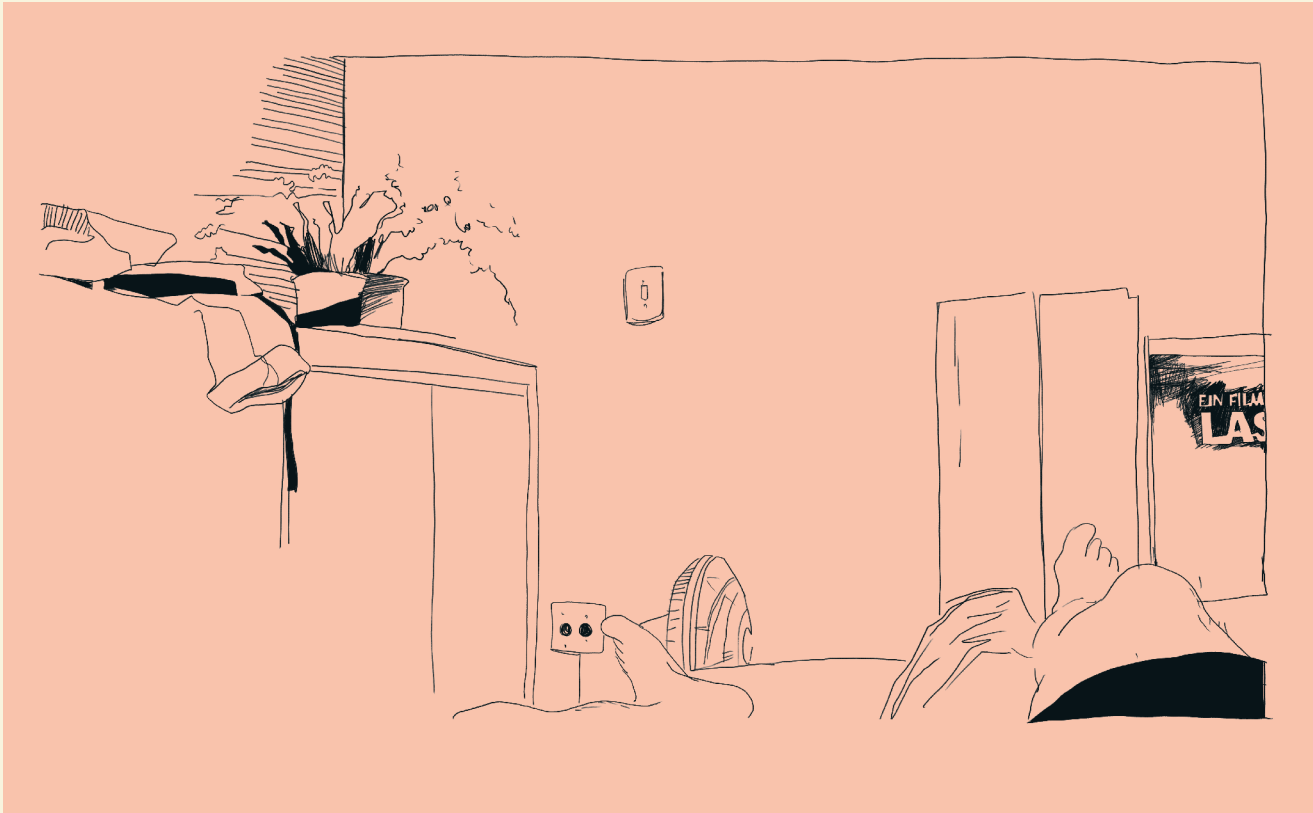
Let the coincidences work. I was following Nora Durst for three seasons, and I did not know we had the same star sign.

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I took some notes while making this film. I wrote that I was uneasy with how to survive in the world at the moment, at that time. I was concerned with what remained of the world; I tried to figure out what I desired, even though desire is usually too unclear to grasp. What remained of my link with this world? The possible and the impossible.

When a world ends, it is also the ending of a perspective. The end of a world is always near. And to lose a link, to feel the loss so near, is what paradoxically makes the link more intense, what makes it vibrate even more. The pulse accelerates; the heart goes to the mouth. How to live? How to describe living? To describe what surprises us, what we notice, what we cover up or cannot grasp. We are moved by desire, by certain fears or resistances. Without these links, what are we? Ghosts? The ghosts are the translations of our symptoms. Description as a concept is a space

where we can be together, an opportunity to hold onto something or someone and to look for others who can also think and feel in dialogue.



*Unfamiliar Ceiling / THE BEAST* happens in a room I am unable to leave. Inventory: the possibilities of a room. The limit is the room and I am powerless. Still, I cannot leave it. Maybe I will never be able to leave. So I describe—describe that room but only that. Describing is not only an only; there is a whole world in description, corners that escape in song. We live in a world with threats, threats of ruin. To describe is to work sensibly, attempting to talk about this world. If it ends, perhaps somebody can find something in its remnants: a film.

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari.

*The possible as aesthetic category (“the possible or I shall suffocate.”)* <sup>132</sup>

We see dead hours; we describe the lack of action, and we take it seriously. Grey was the color of the day, although the film is red: almost pinkish. It was the summer, and summers in Rio are getting warmer and warmer. When I was making the film, it rained a little, but it did not get cold. Would I be able to make a film inside my room? I was trying to make you see time, and I was also worried about the fact that the end of a perspective is the end of a world. I had seen *Wavelength* and *La Chambre*. This film exists after them, after their cinematographic experimentations, after their desires.

So Anna arrives home, in Paris. The end of the film. Anna lying in bed in her room in her apartment. After all the meetings, and the journey that we followed, finally she is at home. There is nothing to eat in the fridge, only a bottle of water. The last sequence of the film is marked by the signals coming from the answering machine—voices with no faces, ghosts who leave short messages—one of them especially memorable. This message is now following me as I was following Anna and still am. It is following you too, maybe,



after the screening. A meeting that Anna did not have, but that was there with her, all the time. Some sensation, some feeling as hard as lost but not forgotten, is in me. I do not know if it is in Anna too.

*I called you  
It was my birthday  
I wanted to spend it with you . . .  
for the next year.*

In *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna*, the Italian woman with whom Anna tries the entire time to be in touch, with no success, does not leave the above message saying it was her birthday and that she wanted to spend it with her. In the film, she says simply in Italian, and then in English: *Anna dove sei?; Anna where are you?*

When I read the screenplay, however, I mixed it up. Could it be the Italian woman who leaves this message? Actually, it is another person, a man, I believe, the one Anna met previously, in Paris, before coming back home. She is always delaying her arrival home. Akerman makes this choice to not let the film's last words be spoken by the voice of the Italian woman with whom Anna tried so constantly to speak. Instead, the Italian woman says these two sentences—precise and surgical—that fully hit our desiring bodies.

The message the Italian woman could have left in the answering machine, as I thought she had left after reading the screenplay, hammers through the projection, mixing memory and desire. Some T. S. Elliot, on April's cruelty. Stays, keeps, sticks, slips. Whirlwind in your belly. Punches, perhaps. Creature of desire: me, facing another creature of desire: the film. We collide, and now this is a song from FKA Twigs. The mixing disturbs the legitimacy of my description and at the same time exposes another legitimacy: the one of my desire. The devil appeared spotlighted in the dance it was dancing.

And my task was not to allow my desire to occupy, to dominate, and to make believe that the world of the work of this film takes its form from what I desire. What you read is, therefore, a failure.

What could have been just pulses between the lines of the film's two hours has now lasted so much longer.

A hauntology of Anna's meetings: the missing one, the meeting she did not have with the Italian woman. The one she had before the film started and that she wished to repeat.

*IX. SPACE AND TIME*

*Up against another human being one's own  
procedures take on definition.*

—

*Geryon was amazed at himself. He saw  
Herakles just about every day now.  
The instant of nature  
forming between them drained every drop  
from the walls of his life  
leaving behind ghosts  
rustling like an old map.* <sup>133</sup>

*We might say, the color of the ghost is that  
which I must  
mix on the palette in order to paint it  
accurately.  
But how do we determine what the accurate  
picture is?* <sup>134</sup>

Anna meets without meeting; she meets through this meeting on the page, through recorded voices, phones, and messages left inside the answering machine. Inside the machine, a ghost resounded, linking itself to me, touching and haunting. I confused the screenplay and the film. While reading the screenplay, the film was in my head, in my imagination and fantasies. The

133 Anne Carson, *Autobiography of Red: A Novel in Verse*. Vintage, 1998, pp. 42.

134 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on Color*. §233

film watched through the screenplay started to be another thing, something much harder to me and also much more dramatic than what Chantal Akerman chose for her film.

What is harder: drama or restraint? My insistence on the dramatic that goes against the restraint of Akerman's work makes me see and hear things that were not there. If I describe using my memory, images and sounds that I did not face in the film appear. But they were there to be faced nonetheless, not by my eyes and ears but by my desire. In my description, there was a charge. I was exposed to frustration and expectation by what I wanted the film to say that it did not say.

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I confess: I desired for it to be the Italian woman's birthday, for her voice to be the film's last. Not the man's, but the voice of the woman for whom Anna searched. Too much? Yes, it is even more painful, suffering in the order of melodrama. *Anna dove sei?; Anna where are you?* It was already enough.

But the pain and the suffering open a space for the link, in that to represent makes our links stronger, more aware. Anna does not cry or share what she feels at the end of the film. In the film's shadowy last scene, I barely see her face and her breathing does not change. I am the one assuming, whirl winding and mixing her feelings with mine.

This mixed feeling. I am next to Anna; she is lying in bed. Between sleeping and dying: fearing the fare well.

Charles Bernstein.

*No harder road ever did I see  
Than the road you're on, so far from me  
Do me a favor, sing me a song  
Time's almost over, day's been long*

*I don't know whether we'll meet again  
Maybe we will, somewhere in hell  
I can't say how and I don't know when  
So fare thee well, fare thee well!* <sup>135</sup>

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We find groups, join forces, mix our lives and the lives of those we meet. Modified by trespassing, passing through, crossing over from fiction to the real, no longer distinguishable when linked by representation and experience. Fiction and real desire. Desiring worlds converge and collide. Our biographies reinvented by the characters we meet. To think and to feel. To talk with musical speed and rhythm in the same heartbeat. Pulsing red meat. Breathing to fall asleep after this message. Knowing that tomorrow there will be a new trip to another city, another film tour; it is hard to rest.

No time and another message, announcing another leaving—soon, early, brief.

Another Ludwig.

Prince Otto, brother of Ludwig II, King of Bavaria, visits him in Luchino Visconti's film, during the war. He is in the front for that war and tells his brother the King that for a long time he does not sleep. The scene is in the shadows, some owl-light, while Ludwig observes the passing moon phases in the ceiling, using some kind of pre-cinema apparatus, a magic lantern. My eyes hurt: points out Otto: I am afraid I will not be able to sleep. I dream and in my dreams I dream I am not able to sleep. Where is the beginning and the end of a dream? Where is the beginning of death? Ludwig opens the curtains— light enters the room: the show is over; Otto will go mad soon, in the near future, and will die. <sup>136</sup>

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Dream and death belong to the same family. Some twilight of rest. Horses of disaster plunging in heavy clay; vanity of sleep; hope, dream, endless desire: parts of a W. B. Yeats poem. <sup>137</sup>

*Wittgenstein* by Derek Jarman, 1993. In bed—going to sleep, or on his death bed? Look at his face; try to describe this face. What can you see from his eyes in the gloomy lights; photograph from the photograph? Like Marilyn. What does he see? Wittgenstein loved to go to the cinema; Carmem Miranda was his favorite actress. What comes now that I am going to sleep? What is the next word?

Anne Carson.

*Antigone: the next word  
is death* <sup>138</sup>

Please remember that our life is endless in the way that our visual field is without limit. Will I sleep? Will I wake up? The fear of dying could be the fear of never being able to complete that call to Italy that I was the whole time trying to make. In Italy it is always busy, they say to Anna in *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna*. In Italy, where, in the West, we have started social distancing.

All locked down, at home, quarantined. Bats take revenge. In Anne Carson's *Red Doc*, a follow-up to *Autobiography of Red*, we meet the drawing

137 WB Yeats, "Michael Robartes Bids his Beloved be at Peace." *The Wind Among The Reeds*, 1899.

138 Anne Carson, *Antigonick*. *New Directions*, 2012, pp. 31.



of a bat. Right in the first pages. Propheying a future: ours?

Seeing films locked down at home, using the internet. Unlimited streaming.

Filming the house while in it and from it.

It is important to take films seriously. There, possibly, we can find the endlessness of life.

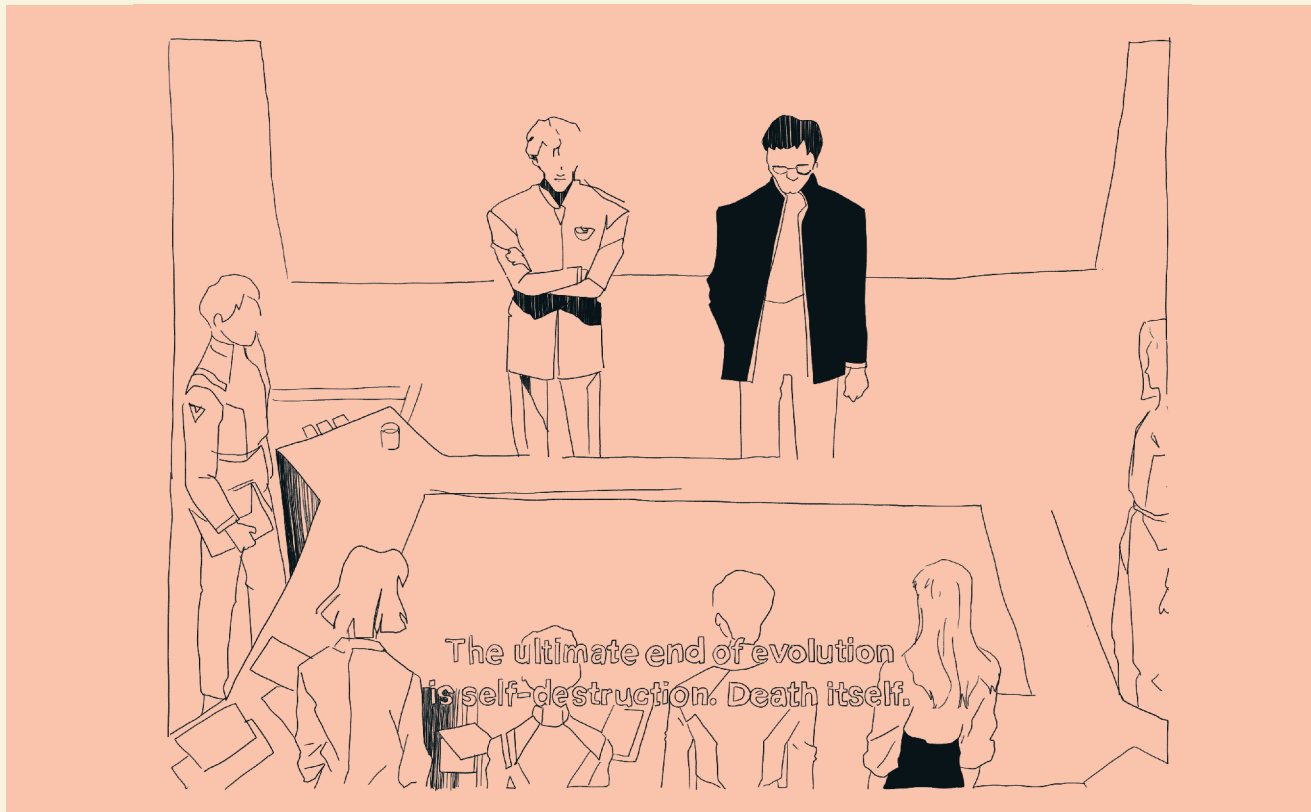
All of Chantal Akerman's films indicated her last. Not on purpose, but something was sensed. In *No Home Movie*, there is a storm of wind and sand. The desert. A mystery: a riddle not to be decoded, that stays here pulsing, vibrating, and describing. The energy that preempts and follows images and sounds. We work on pace. On a portal. A time capsule to the past, the present, the future—and to other worlds too? That desert, the landscape, is not that strange. It is, somehow, familiar after all that Chantal Akerman has made us realize. *No Home Movie* talks about her cinema. The *no* beside the *home* and the *movie*. In the title, the filmmaker says it all, where all the work will be done—like the address where Jeanne Dielman lives.

*No Home Record*. Kim Gordon sings in her album, made after Akerman's film title: *And the wind chime strikes| And you dead stare strikes* <sup>139</sup>

Even though it is a film about her mother's death and dying days, there are several *tempos* and films contained in her last film. Chantal

## Akerman's talks to Jean-Luc Godard:

*I filmed my mother, who was going inside a big building and opens a mailbox. I was excited by the willingness of doing something afterwards out of nothing. This became steady, as an obsession, it became steady in cinema. Then once you start . . . I did not question why or how, I did not put this willingness in doubt, I kind of followed it blindly. And I don't know why... 140*



Shall all paths move towards self-destruction:  
death: what we were before we were alive? From  
each cell in the body which keeps in itself the  
memory of when it was a unicellular organism.

This unicellular organism is closer to death than to life, closer to the absolute rest of death than the necessity of internal balance and external factors enabling pluricellular form. <sup>141</sup>

In meetings, *here and there*, we leave the history of our lives that resisted full of missing links. In many forms, life tries to resist its path, its death. Life is tense when facing death, and from this tension comes life's force.

Some things *here and there*: films, writings, gestures, etc. Oh, and falling.

Ending in the end of creations. Beyond the pleasure principle and because of the pleasure principle. They stay, or—better—they remain.

Incursions of a desert landscape. One that is not so strange in *No Home Movie*. A twisted tree stands, losing its leaves to extreme wind and loud noises. However you try to mind the sand, it will penetrate you, your mouth, your eyes. This film has other films within it; we knew it already. We watch them sliding transversely. Quicksand. *No Home Movie* accumulates all the time passed in all projects made or not made by Chantal Akerman. Like the sand residing in you after the storm, it is where you did not know it was, it got inside. You just did not see it.

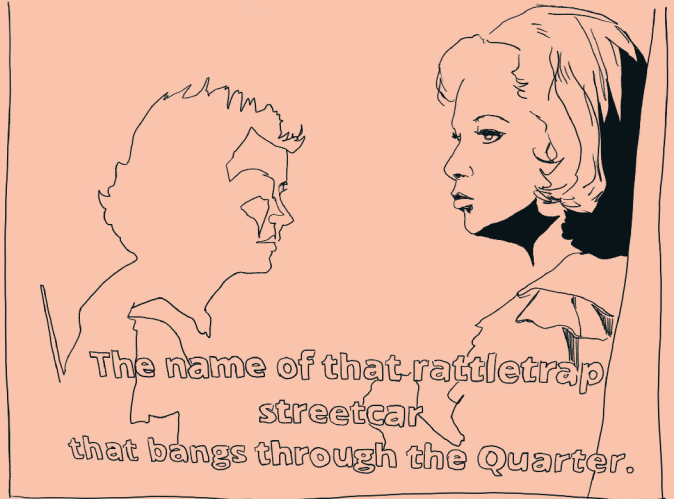
There are several metaphors in this film: the mother, a tree that resists, the supposedly unsheltered, the *un-dwelling*. Akerman always

makes a formidable leap from the tension between the literal and metaphorical. She floods her documentaries with fiction and vice-versa. We jump from a comfortable European house to a place with no shelter or apparent dwelling, where this twisted tree resists. Nevertheless, this other place, the desert, juxtaposes the European home to become its own type of home. The filmmaker must be protected from the weather. She must be filming and recording sound from under some roof, within some shelter, that protects her, we just cannot see it.

Cinema, thus, *finds forms of dwelling* even if temporary or improvised. This is what I desire to end with, holding on for now. We talked about this the entire time. I think these are the forces we try to describe.



What you're talking about is  
desire,  
just brutal desire.



The name of that rattletrap  
streetcar  
that bangs through the Quarter.

The turn you did not count in your description.

The object falls from the body when it is occupied by language, and you eat it. Desire is the most intimate link to the object. From the object is born the desiring machine that makes the war machine.



Credits

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Lucas Ferraço Nassif.

Publisher  
Barakunan

Copyeditor  
Sylvie Robinson

Illustrator  
Alexandre Matos

Graphic Design  
João Pedro Nogueira