

O

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## O – A Film Project

*Fear meaning to humans the feeling of direct or abstract threats or danger aimed against the individual or the individual's world. Fear is not necessarily either true or justified even though the individual perceives the sense in itself as true. When we try to further analyze the emotion fear from a wider perspective, we can see that it can restrict an individual's behavior. In some cases the reaction will be total apathy, in other an irrational action that differs between each individual. In some cases fear turns to destructivity, when negative light paths affects the individual to the extent that she believes, and perceive that everything is working against her. By humans this is referred to as paranoia.*

Virlani Hallberg and Jennifer Rainsford  
(Excerpt from script 2020)

Emotions, the imagination and more generally, 'sensuous knowledge', are irreducible facts of human existence and integral parts of reality. To appeal to these aspects of reality through fictionalization is what I aim at with my art. It is absolutely necessary for me to reach beyond commonly accepted 'human reason' – those attempts to contain, or brand as 'irrational' the aspects of reality that are outside the rational, or are commonly referred to as unconscious, or belonging to some 'primitive' layer of humanity. I am interested in power structures and how they affect an individual subject, its mental conditions, economies of desire and social behaviour. The central theme of my work is systematic violence on the micro-level of everyday life, our understanding and relation to "evil", and the conditions behind it. I wish to address the relation between these micro-levels of experience and individual action with larger questions regarding the history of modernity – the power structure and social order of the modern state and its regime of identity and identification, set against the backdrop of a haunting colonial past and post-colonial present-day reality.

I understand film – the moving image – as a medium of sensory experience that appeals in a direct way to the human mind. It enables us to experience well-known or completely strange states of mind and reflect on them, thus creating new awareness of our own position and behaviours, which enable new forms of self-knowledge. Film speaks to all that is 'unconscious', and it makes it possible to observe human behaviour in new ways, to understand the driving forces behind individual action and the self. Fiction is for me a way to enter into these realms of reality, to bring to the foreground those aspects that are normally inaccessible, or consciously or unconsciously hidden or repressed in the name of social order or common sense – in order to then return in the form of structural violence. I see the process of making art as a ritual, as a performing act – something magic or religious, a diffusion of energy and flow, through which it is possible to overcome destructive patterns. I am ultimately aiming at creating new forms of self-knowledge and awareness – but such that precisely escape, for instance, the localization of

“evil” in the individual alone, and instead seeks to articulate – and create narratives, images and experiences for – the relation between systemic patterns and individual behaviour. Such self-knowledge, I believe, is the key to everything good and the only way for us to move forward and break loose from repetitive behaviours, systems and the shadows of our own heritage. Individual and collective trauma – the effects of violence –, whether conscious or not, keeps us bound to repetition. And yet there is always transformation in repetition, too. To make this transformative power available, the appearance of “reality” as “real” and “given” has to be challenged – which can be achieved through fiction.

Art is a language I trust. Images in general and moving images in particular are where I find freedom to express direct and non-censored emotions. Film captures not only the imagination and sensuous experience, it is also a medium where we directly enter into, and shape, thoughts. It is capable like no other medium to manipulate the viewer – to enter deeply into ‘structures of feeling’ and the rationalities of social order – and above all, to experience, become complicit with, and negotiate certain critical borderline conditions. This manipulative power of film is what I seek to use. I have begun already in previous works to use this power – as when hijacking the viewer, and tricking her or him into experiences of mental borderline conditions and systematic violence.

*Sertaline, 50 mg. Insomnia worsened, severer anxiety, anorexia, (weight loss 17 kgs,) increase in suicidal thought, plans and intentions. Discontinued following hospitalisation.*

*Zopiclone, 7.5 mg. Slept. Discontinued following rash. Patient attempted to leave hospital against medical advice. Restrained by three male nurses twice her size. Patient threatening and uncooperative. Paranoid thoughts – believes hospital staff are attempting to poison her.*

*Melleril, 50mg. co-operative.*

Sarah Kane, 4.48 *Psychosis*

By making film I explore different kind of social relationships and try attempt to understand mental processes. The close study of human behaviour is my means - since it is through performative behaviour in all its conscious and unconscious, explicit and implicit aspects that we *generate* and *shape* the relationships to others as well as ourselves. My interest is in particular focused on drawing attention to the interplay between control and desire, failure and imperfection, and to the ambivalence of identity that permeates all concepts based on the idea of identity.

I am generally interested in that which is hidden and repressed, in the ‘dark’ or ‘shadow’ side of things, and the negative or evil that flows from it. I am interested in how this dark, negative side is not a given, but *produced* by the institutions of social order and history, and how it is not some deplorable, unfortunate aspect of reality, but constitutive to the dominating ideas of order.

For instance, a “rational subject” is qualified through successful repression or control of everything that in a given moment falls under the category of the irrational. In the creation of my characters, I am particularly interested in how this ‘negative’ side manifests itself in the form of a ‘shadow self’ – a shadow self that is consciously or unconsciously hidden or suppressed.

In my art I am interested in visibility as an inter-subjective and political structure, where aesthetics always already form a bridge between the individual and society, and where thus the individual and its psyche can rejoin its communal roots. From this vantage point I emphasize the complexity of human beings, and the very contradictions, and hypocrisy, at the heart of individuality.

My new film project *O* is a Family Drama. It deals with class, psychological and physical abuse, exile and abuse of power. By means of the genre of the Family Drama I want to show how the values and forces of surrounding society become manifested on the micro-level of the family, and how they produce conflicts between individual, personal domains and more general levels of society. *O* tells the story about close relationships between several members of a Swedish upper-class family who have become the object of each other’s desires and needs. With this project, I wish to further explore how systematic violence and suppression could be presented visually.

This Family Drama is simultaneously set in Sweden and in India. With the introduction of “India”, I intend to create a sort of mirror-situation – addressing colonial rule as a ‘macro mirror’ to the very ‘micro power structures’ played out in the Swedish family. This dramaturgy of a mirror-construction also derives from my personal background. Being born in Jakarta, Indonesia, a former Dutch colony, but adopted and raised in Sweden, the history of the relation between East and West, and the colonial past and present, are an immediate backdrop to my own experience and identity as ‘hybrid’ and ‘in-between’. Using “India” as a site for this new film project is a means for me to displace and articulate these questions within a different frame, while also taking a look at contemporary East-West relations, post-colonial realities and the long shadows of the colonial past. Part of this dramaturgy is that the frame of this mirror-construction must by necessity encounter its own limits, partly because the complexity of post-colonial India cannot be reduced to a colonial mirror of sorts, but also because much of the history of colonial relations and colonial violence remain implicit in today’s reality and are thus not ‘visible’ as such. A key question to me is how to shape and narrate new and different histories, such that can encompass the experience of systemic, structural violence on micro- and macro-levels.

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## Tools – A Brief History

Nikon – my first camera.

Pentax – experiences – not good enough.

Hasselblad – oh yes!

Dark room – this was the point in life where I started to be sensitive to light. Or so I imagined.

VHS – editing – wow! – moving image for the first time.

8mm – fun years of sentimental obsession of catching everyday life.

16mm – expensive – I never got the chance to use it myself but people in my life did.

Introduction to digital photo – drowned by pictures - mass production.

Stopped taking pictures.

Observed the change from taking to making a picture. Lost my interest and got bored – switched to moving image.

DV – first part – video sketches of me, my friends and my near surrounding.

I started out doing interviews – shit relational aesthetics – fuck – stopped.

Printmaking – mediation.

Bookbinding – wow – papers.

<< REWIND – PLAY // PAUSE – FORWARD >>

<< LIFE // NO LIFE // FUCK LIFE >>

– *Loosing myself to presence and dissolution.*

BASTARD – there are no words yet.

SOUND – IMPORTANCE – ABOUT 90 % OF HOW WE EXPERIENCE FILM  
– *Something for your mind, your body and your soul.*

HD – Availability = 100 % Contemporary – trying to figure it out.

Analog techniques – RETURNING.

8mm – again.

16mm – soon.

Nikon – have to find my old one.

Large format camera – I want to learn now.

CONCLUSION = ANALOG AND DIGITAL, A PARALLEL HYBRID PROCESS.

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## SOME PRODUCTIVE QUESTIONS AND NOTES ON PRODUCTION

I always end up returning to the artistic means of expressions that can reproduce a double, an exact copy of the original.

The perspective of digitalization in general ... Today it's all about total access and sharing of copies. We watch a massive amount of video clips on YouTube etc. I'm thinking about how things are spreading through the digital and how it changes the ways to experience art. Art becomes casual; you can watch films both on YouTube and in a gallery.

Sometimes it's actually preferable to watch the copy on YouTube, rent a mass produced film or look at reproduction of paintings or photos in a book. Some people don't like to see art in a gallery and I can understand that, though I as a professional artist want to see the works in reality and in the context they were made for. How many original works have we seen, really? It is quite big part of the 'knowledge' on art that we have gained only through copies (books or movies). Still, we have been able to form a relationship with these works without seeing them, a kind of interpretative relationship in which the copy is not really a copy but implies a change, a difference – an interpretation.

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The idea of the film I'm now working on is divided into several productions that are developed in parallel. A series of isolated works will be made for different contexts (a multi-channel installation for the art/gallery-context, and a single channel narrative film for the cinema-context) and function as extended versions of each other, focusing on different kind of questions and problematics, although touching the same thematic: Various takes on evil and the conditions behind it. This parallel multi-production is a way for me to keep my artistic process independent and critical, but also challenge myself.

I like to tell stories that take place in different settings of exile and in relation to nature. There is something very interesting about the self-chosen internal and external exile that I want to examine. Why do we choose different positions of exile? And is it even possible to return from exile once you have maybe for years led your life in a state of exclusion?

What is the relation between exile and nature? What is the relation between the experience of nature versus the experience of urbanity today? What is

“nature”?

How is it possible to break through the often self-fulfilling prophecies of individual suffering and create an awareness of the psychological mechanism of the “double bind”? And how do we articulate today the relation of “self-consciousness” and “self-awareness” to all that belongs to the non-self? As the awareness of one’s own position *and* the awareness of social structures?

– Virlani Hallberg October, 2011

## **THREE SECTIONS OF THE FILM**

Author's note

Punctuation is used to indicate delivery, not to conform to the rules of grammar.

A stroke (/) marks the point of interruption in overlapping dialogue.

Words in square brackets [ ] are not spoken, but have been included in the text to clarify meaning.

Stage directions in brackets ( ) functions as lines.

### **EXTRACTS FROM SCRIPT:**

#### **ACT ONE**

##### **SCENE 1: THE HOUSE (THE BODY)**

It is morning and summer, the leaves are blowing in the trees, the house looks peaceful.

[Presentation: Picture of the house with the path surrounding it, drawing a circle around it, like a cluster, a loop, like the letter o.]

##### **SCENE (1B): INTRODUCTION OF KATHARINA EXT. MORNING. WHEAT FIELD**

Katharina raises a finger to her lips, as she wanted someone - Henry, her children or the viewer - to keep a secret. She crouches in the wheat field to pick up something from the ground.

##### **SCENE 5: THE SERVANT B IS GRINDING THE DULL KNIFE IN THE KITCHEN INT. MORNING. HOUSE**

The servants (A and B) stand in the kitchen with their backs against the viewer. Servant A (woman) is standing in front of the stove stirring in the pots. She looks at the knives in front of Servant B. Servant B (male) takes a step back and starts to grind the dull knife with his right hand against a stone.

**SCENE 6: THE DAILY ROUTINE, HENRY CONTROLS THE  
MEDICATION.DINING ROOM IN THE HAVELI/PALACE INT. MORNING**

Henry, the father, rounds the table with a stack of paper bags, opens each of them and starts counting the pills. He puts them down on each family member's plate on the table and leaves the room.

Alt. Henry the father, rounds the table with a tray of medication cups in his left hand. He looks into the cans, double-checks by counting the pills once more. Henry puts down each medication can for each family member on the table and leaves the room.

**SCENE 8: THE FAMILY BREAKFAST IN THE DINING ROOM. INT.  
MORNING. HOUSE.**

Katharina and the children steps into the dining room. He sits down to have breakfast together. Henry enters again watches John and Esther intensively, his gaze sweeps over the medication cans, and with a nod he urges them to take their pills.

In a synchronized movement Esther and John picks up the medication cans in front of them, both with their left hands, and pour out the pills in the right. Esther takes the right hand to her mouth and places the pills on her tongue; John follows his sister's instructions and does the same. Both lift their glasses and wash down the pills with water. Kathleen takes her pills with her right hand and swallows the pills in the same way as her children do.

**ACT TWO**

**SCENE 10: KATHARINA SITS ON HER BED, STARING OUT IN  
THE ROOM. INT. MONING.HOUSE.**

Katharina is lying on the bed, turns several times to find the right position. She cannot sleep and sits up in bed with her legs spread, leaning forward with her sharp elbows on the thighs. She comes across her own reflection in the mirror opposite the bed, petrified by the image. She avoids her own gaze, but cannot let go of the reflection. After a while she looks down at her left hand and anxiously touches the wedding ring.

**SCENE 12: HENRY THROWS KATHARINA INTO THE WALL.  
INT. HOUSE**

Inside the house Henry and Katharina walks down the stairs. She turns to him, try to kiss him, he recoils, looks hard at her, turns again and hastens her steps. Suddenly out of nowhere, Henry pushes her in front of him and she falls against the wall in the hallway.

**SCENE 14: HENRY & KATHARINA ARE STANDING ON THE TERRACE  
EXT. MORNING. TERRACE**

Henry and Katharina are standing on the terrace, she is viewing the garden. Henry enters from right, he moves slowly and walks up to her from behind. He grabs her and kisses her on the head; they stand close together, his chest against her shoulders, his right arm around her waist. His cheek touches hers; she falls into his arms and holds him tightly. He strokes her head and he kisses her face gently, pulling her closer to him. He acts like a shell trying to protect her.

**SCENE 40: HENRY TALKS WITH HIS FRIEND FROM THE CAR. EXT.  
AFTERNOON. IN THE CITY (INDIA)**

Henry is sitting in the driver's seat of his car with the right hand on the steering wheel. His friend is standing on the street leaning in through the window, listening to Henry's monologue.

**Henry:**

It's shit, you know. Now I  
have to drive in to the city to  
buy me the bloody newspaper! You  
see my friend, nowadays they  
don't sell either The Bengal  
Gazette, The Calcutta Gazette or  
The Madras Courier at the local  
news stand in the village anymore.  
Well, have to leave now, work's  
not waiting for me.

He starts the car and his friend takes a step back.

**Henry:**

Are you coming over for dinner  
tomorrow? I'm sure that Katharina

would appreciate your company. Also, you and I have to continue our discussion about the lack of decent newspapers around here, haha. No seriously, there a lot of important issues to discuss and I really think I need your opinion on some stuff that I have to consider.

By the way ... I think I'll be leaving for Kerela next month, for a couple of days just to relax. Maybe I bring Jeana ...

His friend responds with a nod, Henry raises his hand to say goodbye and drives away.

## ACT THREE

SCENE 12: KATHARINA GETS IGNORED, PUNISHED (NOT BEING SERVED FOOD) AND THROWN OUT OF THE ROOM BY HENRY DURING THE LUNCH. INT. NOONHOUSE

Servant A enters the dining room ; Henry meets the gaze of servant A and expresses the unspoken request of one more round of food.

HENRY:

Ja tack. (Yes Please)

Katharina smiles at the servant and as Henry gets a new round of food, she eases the pressure of the situation pulling her dress by its neck/ or by correcting herself, sitting up straight in the chair. She expects to be served after her husband



Snälla Henry! (Please, Henry!)

This time Henry throws her out of the room,

**Henry:**

Gå då! (Leave!)

[This is what is happening but not shown in the picture; to focus and follow Katharina, not Henry:

She reacts/screams and he shuts the door. Henry sits down to eat again, sighs, raises his wine glass to drink, suddenly he stops eating, stands up and rushes out threw the terrace doors.]

**SCENE 13: HENRY AND KATHARINA OUTSIDE THE HOUSE.EXT.NOON**

Katharina walks fast out of the house. She reaches the corner on the left side from her point of view and heads for the main road. Henry walks after her, he walks even faster, and as he reaches her on the path in front of the house he grabs her and long struggle begins [it seems like a brute fighting]. He tries to force her to return by pulling her back to the house. Finally she gives up, reluctantly accepting her destiny of now being led back by her husband to the house, but as they reach the stairs to the terrace, she breaks loose of his firm grip and walks up the stairs, indicating her independence. Alone she walks into the house

**SCENE 15: CHURCH I. EXT. AFTERNOON. CHURCH**

Katharina walks through nature and accidentally finds an old abandoned church. She approaches it and inspects the area with attention. She finds the entrance door unlocked and steps inside.

**SCENE 16: CHURCH II. INT.AFTERNOON. CHURCH**

The church is abandoned and obviously hasn't been used for a long time. She starts to focus on details. She touches certain objects and strokes her hand over the walls and the benches. She takes a cross and puts it in

her pocket.

**SCENE 17: KATHARINA IS SITTING IN FRONT OF A THE FIRE PLACE. INT. AFTERNNON.HOUSE**

Katharina watches the fire burning. She sits with her right hand pressed against the fireplace wall, slowly she sways.

**SCENE 17: KATHARINA FEELS A PRESENCE/ DEMON/ MARA IN THE ROOM. INT. AFTERNOON HOUSE**

Katharina sits in front of the fire half asleep. She is dreaming (of a car standing with the engine running, a boiler, herself, henry) and her body feels heavy, as if a demon/Mara sits on her chest. Suddenly she feels an intrusion and turns her head slowly. She notices a presence observing her. She looks again but it has disappeared. She looks around compulsively shocked.

Alta Trinita beata, da noi sempre adorata, Trinita gloriosa unita maravigliosa. Tu sei manna saporosa e tutta desiderosa.

(High and blessed Trinity, By us always adored. Glorious Trinity, Marvelous unity, You are savory manna and all that we can desire.)

**SCENE 18: THE TUNNEL, RAPE SCENE. INT. AFTERNOON. HOUSE**

Servant A (women) is putting the laundry into the washing machine in the basement. Katharina walks down the stairs and then pushes the servant.

**KATHARINA:**

Vad du slarvar! (You're so sloppy!)

She grabs the servant and pulls her against the wall and slaps her in the face. The servant makes sounds, she whimpers.

**KATHARINA:**

Skärp dig! (Get yourself together!)

The servant tries to break loose but Katharina pushes her again against the wall and reaches out her hand to pull up her dress. The servant pulls the dress down at the same time as Katharina pushes her against the other wall, leaning all her weight against her. Katharina pulls up the servant's dress in a violent way and forces her hand against her crotch. She goes down on her, pulling off her shoes and panties. Katharina stands up, still leaning all her weight against her and forces her hand to the servant's crotch and starts raping her. After a while Katharina pushes her and the servant falls to the basement. She lets the servant's hair down, sits down in front of her and spreads her legs wide and drags her by the hair. She pulls two fingers into the cunt, pinches her until it hurts. Katharina fucks the servant brutally with her fingers. The servant screams and tries to break loose. Slowly the servant gives away and gives in. In the end, she begins to enjoy it.

[We watch it from above, from the top of the stairs. Only half of the bodies are visible. We don't understand if the screams are screams of pain or pleasure].

**SCENE 19: KATHARINA DRESSES UP THE SERVANT.  
INT.AFTERNOON. HOUSE**

Katharina opens her wardrobe and picks some clothes to dress servant A like her [like a conservative upper class woman].

She hangs the clothes on the doorknob and sits down on the bed beside the servant. They are smiling. They sit on the bed. Katharina urges the servant to undress by pulling at the dress and by the same time she strokes her legs. The servant gets up on her feet and undresses in front of Katharina who gives her garment after garment. The servant puts on her pants while Katharina stands up close by her with the cardigan folded neatly over her arm. The servant sits and Katharina takes up the bra from the bed. Katharina gently pulls the bra over her breasts, squats and starts to button it on the back. The servant looks surprised and observes Katharina's gestures. They are having a good time laughing together. She also makes her hair, brushes it and makes a French braid.

**SCENE 65: HENRY AND THE CHILDREN ARE HAVING AFTERNOON  
TEA. EXT. AFTERNOON. ROOF GARDEN, HOUSE (INDIA)**

The three of them sit down to have afternoon tea.  
Esther hides away the pills that have been ordained to  
her and only pretends to swallow them. John imitates her  
moves and does the same.

In the background the verse is to be heard:

You assume that our fate is in your hands  
You cannot keep us down forever.

The weak also have their strength, however strong you  
maybe there is a God.

When your time comes your boat will also sink of its  
weight.