

du soleil, que ça existe
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Written component part of an MFA thesis project
Submission date 10.02.2024



Summary

The thesis project *du soleil que ça existe* comprises both an artistic and a written component that reflect on themes of fragmentation, identity, and perception.

The artistic portion is an audiovisual installation that incorporates film, sound, and space to explore human connection with natural elements, particularly water, while evoking a sense of longing and existential contemplation. Central to the installation are concepts of fluidity, both in water and identity. The images feature abstract visual compositions, such as slow pans of landscapes, close-ups of body parts, and shimmering water-like textures, which invite the viewer to reflect on the nature of human perception. The audio component, with dialogues in both French and Finnish, further complicates the discernment of a single identity, as the same voice appears to belong to multiple people, emphasizing themes of fragmentation and multiplicity.

Technically, the artistic work employs experimental film techniques like solarization, producing images that blur the boundaries between drawing, painting, and film. The result is an evocative play of textures, light, and darkness that contributes to the emotional depth of the work. The overall project weaves together personal reflections, dream logic, and references to literary figures like Marguerite Duras, creating a meditative experience on the fluidity of time, space, and self.

The written component of the thesis serves as a meta-narrative that continues the dialogue of the installation. It consists of fragmented dialogues between unspecified voices engage in philosophical discussions that explores the themes and conceptual underpinnings of the installation, such as the connection between bodies and water, the subjective experience of time, and the elusive nature of identity. The text reflects my experimental approach to both language and form, resisting linear narratives in favor of a fragmented, poetic style that mirrors the conceptual focus of the installation.

Overall, the thesis project *du soleil que ça existe* is a multidisciplinary exploration that uses the visual and textual mediums to question and deconstruct the notions of identity, inviting the audience to engage in a reflective dialogue on the nature of self and perception.

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Special thank you to Essi Pellikka, Antti Markkanen and Saara Karppinen for participating to my work and A.Hunt for the conception of the water box.

Oneiric thank you to my friend JJ Houle—who claims not to exist. This work is dedicated to you.

Thank you to Anna Karima Wane, Guillaume Vallée, Joel Hilska-Heikkine, Mikko Kuorinki, Sofia Haapamäki, Tuomo Rainio, Jani Ruscica, Ewa Gorzna, Lasse Vairio, Milja Viita, and every technician that helped during the installation.

INTRODUCTION: ON BEING FRAGMENTED

1. I was given a sweet name. One that stirs expectations. Always the one who says yes, always the one who pleases; existing solely for the whims of others. At twenty years old, a thought pierced me like a sudden shock. The possibility of changing my name crossed my mind. It was a procedure I embarked upon swiftly.
2. In changing my name, I chose a life in fragments. By choosing Charlotte, I became not merely a character but the entire play itself.
3. My essay revolves around my identities. To write in fragments is to make sense of who we are.
4. Linear writing eludes me, or perhaps I elude it, as it bores me. What I offer is a dialogue—more or less continuous, an engagement between unnamed voices. You will read this dialogue without knowing who is who, who speaks, to whom they speak. You might discern two voices or ten. I do not know. In this thesis, I wanted the unnamed voices to refer to my work *du soleil, que ça existe*. They are having conversations about it, giving sometimes vivid descriptions, sharing their philosophical views on the subject matter, and establishing parallels with other artworks and authors.
5. My thesis is a prolongation of my master's project. It is a continuation of my installation, now taking the form of writing, to convey the same essence as *du soleil, que ça existe*. It was crucial for me to find pleasure in my writing. I sought to experiment and discover an original way of writing, a way that resonated with me. Hence, I chose a dialogue with unspecified voices. This choice mirrors my master's project, where a single voice on the soundtrack may refer to multiple people. In other words, it is challenging to identify the speaker, the number of speakers. For instance, in my installation, a dialogue in French and Finnish is performed by a single person. This aspect also nods to theater and play. To the play of characters.
6. For practical reasons and to maintain the same poetic essence across languages, I utilized Chat GPT for translating much of my thesis. I attempted to write directly in English many times, but my vocabulary fell short.



Stills from *du soleil, que ça existe*. Clermont, Charlotte. 2024.

CHAPTER I: IT IS ABOUT SWIMMING, ISN'T IT?

The sun had already prepared to set for several hours, leaving a milky orange layer in the sky, tinged with fresh air. Their bodies were tired, lying on the rocks still warm from drinking in the sun's rays.

I was watching their cold bodies. Close enough to not touch each other's skin. I knew they felt cold, as I was observing the little bumps, at the beginning of their hair, indication that their system was trying its best to warm them up. I was watching the wind kissing the trees. In the same way, I was watching the waves paint themselves into false water, seeming to belong to a virtual world, a world where they don't belong. They were longing for analogue water—where to swim.

Swimming—you never know whether you'll survive or not, reminiscences of when you are waiting for someone to meet you. Unpredictable to know the events, whether they will show up or not. Impermanence, death.

— What is swimming?

— To love, under.

They were looking at the sea. It was the first time one of them was experiencing it; this jelly-like green, blue, black, grey, translucent, iridescent, opaque liquid.

— It is about holding back the tears in your eyes, so they blur your vision. They must not fall.

— They stay at the brim of your eyes.

— Yes, swimming is also about immersing your body in this vast volume of water. It's about feeling in harmony with the element, with the matter.

— I know tears, but I do not know the sea.

— If you know tears, you also know the sea. They are both salty.

— I thought once: « If I drink water, I am afraid it will come out of my eyes ».

— That seems to be a fair thought. How can we absorb water from within ourselves without it leaking out through all our bodily fluids, sweat, urine, tears, saliva?

— When I had this thought, those things became clearer: I could well be a flower. Everything is interchangeable. My body is water, it needs and produces water, you and all the others are born in amniotic fluid. It is an aquatic cycle, a different form of logic. «Water as body; water as communicator between bodies; water as facilitating bodies into being. Entity, medium, transformative and gestational milieu.»¹ Water as a means to exist, to collaborate, to feel, to create. Water used as a glue for images and language. As an attempt at cohesion.

— I have never seen the sea, but I have heard it. I have heard it and each time I have heard it, it came with dialogues. Voices, that seemed to be one and multiple. Identities were merged. Or separated? I heard water acting in ways—as white noise echoing the distant sea, as soft tapping rain, and as washing up against rocks.

— Then, what is the difference between the sounds of the sea and the sounds of the rain? Isn't the water all coming from the same place?

— I only am certain that the water always comes with voices.

— What are the voices saying?

¹ Neimanis, Astrid. 2012. «Hydrofeminism: Or, On Becoming a Body of Water.» in *Undutiful Daughters: Mobilizing Future Concepts, Bodies and Subjectivities in Feminist Thought and Practice*. Eds. Henriette Gunkel, Chrysanthi Nigianni and Fanny Söderbäck. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 87.

— They are whispering, along with the rain. They are saying, in a foreign language: « *En nae sinusta enaa unia. Lakkasin uneksimasta sinusta, koska pelkään heräämistä. Siinä vaiheessa kun muistan, että olemme valtameren valisia. Nukun huonosti, mieleni on kiireinen etsiessä sinua rajamailta, sieltä, jota sanot, ettet tunnista. Uskon sinua. Siellä missä et voi olla. Olen ajatellut kaivaa silmäni ulos, jotta en erottaisi rajaviivojen jalkiä. Mina myös. Ja korvaisimme ne kissankelloilla, nailla kukilla josta hanen hajuvetansa koostuu, hajuvesi joita vihasin. »²*

(sound of the waves, crushing)

² Clermont, Charlotte. 2024. *du soleil, que ça existe*. English translation: I no longer dream of you. I have stopped dreaming about you because I am afraid of waking up. That phase when I will remember that we are transoceanic. I sleep badly, my mind busy looking for you on the border, the one you say you do not recognize. I believe you. Where you cannot be. I have thought of gouging out my eyes so that I wouldn't distinguish the traces of borders. I too. And we would replace them with bluebells, those flowers which composes her perfume that I hated.

CHAPTER II: METALOGUE AND UNSPECIFIED VOICES

As I was watching them, I wondered about those borders. I recalled: « The space between ourselves and our others is at once distant as the primeval sea, yet also closer than our own skin – the traces of those same oceanic beginnings still cycling through us, pausing as this bodily thing we call 'mine' »³. Borders designed for defining identities, for nomenclature of bodies of water, for nomenclature of what separates any form from another. We were even given, usually, voices with different, if not unique tones to establish clear boundaries between who says what. As I gazed at them, I felt myself getting lost in their breaths, I became the air they were breathing, distilling myself into them.

My head was balancing itself, doing its soft dance, held by my neck. I had taken a few sleeping pills, so I began to feel the heaviness of my eyelids, gently pushing to meet the other end of my eyes. From this moment, I might make a few mistakes, recalling the events. Nonetheless, I was careful enough not to fall (asleep), and they never noticed my presence. One of them moved their arms, which had begun to sting already a few minutes ago, lying under their head for so long.

— To whom do these voices belong?

— To Essi.

— Is that the same Essi than in your film? In your film, there is one voice. The language shifts from French to that foreign language, there is a voice and another voice. Is that so?

— It is so. There is Essi's voice and Essi's voice.

— Ah, two Essi(s).

³ Neimanis, Astrid. Ibid, p.85.

— One in French, and one in Finnish. The foreign language you are referring to is Finnish.

— I wish I had learned it. It hurt too much.

(silence)

— I feel confused. Do these voices belong to the same person?

— They are the same and they are not. I have heard those voices, the text that they are forming ...of the language that changes. Their dubbed voice. The only exception is that they are saying AIKA (time in English) in both versions. The first time I have heard their voices was through these televisions. Then, I thought « Televisions are boxes ». These boxes are linked by sounds, dialogues of sounds, echoes of textures. Essi speaks as if they are by themselves, possessing two languages—one born and one learned. This give the impression that Essi are two different people, but almost too close to each other.

— That explains in some ways how I felt the expansiveness of language, as well as the expansiveness of landscape; for example, by creating spaciousness in the dialogue and viewing landscapes as bodies. I keep seeing those two shots: a slow panning of the mountains, almost white because burned by the sun, difficult to discern; and this same slow panning method, where lower parts of a body are shown, in a velvety darkness, where flickers are gently moving on the legs.

— I did not see the images, but I have heard the voices. I agree. Somehow, the slightly clipped ways of speaking to each other—that the dialogue is at once a dialogue between two, and a dialogue where two people are talking to themselves at each other—gives way to the slow time that has a width to it. It seems that two people are involved, one that speaks Finnish and one that speaks French. It also gave me the impression that Essi was playing two roles. And this writing style can refer to a metalogue—a term coined by Gregory Bateson to describe a particular form of discourse that goes beyond conventional dialogue. In a metalogue, the conversation itself

becomes a medium for examining abstract concepts, patterns of thoughts, or the nature of communication itself. I had the thought it really was a metalogue.

— Why French and Finnish, though?

— Because I lived there and here. And that here became there. When your hands are under running water, and your brain takes a second to understand if it's cold or burning, when you realize that those opposite temperatures are not that far apart. Connections and disconnections inhabited me, tides of closeness and solitude, not knowing if was freed by this gap of communication or being crushed by it. It depended on the moments.



Still from *du soleil, que ça existe*. Clermont, Charlotte. 2024.

CHAPTER III: THE SEA FROM THE WINDOW FROM MARGUERITE DURAS

Some of their eyes were more humid than others. They had nothing to wipe off the excess of water. Instead, they could only wait for it to evaporate. I kept staring at them, as if I were a specialist, a birdwatcher. Meanwhile, one of them had the kind gesture of passing around a bottle of water, for all of them to be hydrated.

— It is about longing, no?

— And distance, and language. I have seen and heard the work. It is a whole installation that seemed to examine the temporalities of how the body forms, stores, and creates that which we translate as the real.

— It circles back to identity, how to define oneself, how to detach ourselves from others, how our mind is part of the collective unconsciousness, perhaps. Or a collective body of water.

— It is about longing, yes, but also subjective experiences. How one moves through the world, how the body is affected by geographical distances and how it touched by its interactions with others. There is this one citation from Yann Pocreau⁴ that I have learned by heart: « Even though I had very specific questions about light, standing at the top of the mountain, I realized that my actual experience was one of wonder, of cosmic vertigo, of a great oceanic feeling. » (pause) I enjoy learning quotes by heart as a process, so I can feel the words living inside of me.

— Perhaps it doesn't come across through my work. By using words and by altering the film's materiality, I was hopeful to transmit this same oceanic feeling. A sense of boundless connection, or a profound emotional experience of oneness with some kind of mystic universe; the very one universe I am trying to create. I was searching to reveal this thin space at the limit of feeling dissolved and overwhelmed.

⁴ Yann Pocreau is a photographer, whose images comes from an analogue process, transposing them into a dream-like space. Their strong aura evokes profound beauty and a quiet space-time. The quote is from the artist himself, from his book *Les épreuves élémentaires*.

— I can understand the words « dissolved » and « overwhelmed ». In my experience, I felt something poetic and introspective. A dance between memories and forgetting, as parts of the dialogue oscillate between the past and the present. Forgetfulness is present, but it is never complete. The idea that « *vaikka unohtaisin sinut, en unohda, ettäetsin sinua* »⁵ reflects this constant tension between the two. I felt the absence and the reunions. Some reminiscence of Marguerite Duras' *Agatha*⁶. I felt the void and the sea. The void becomes a central image; metaphorically, through the dialogue, but also in the images. They embody the void through their immensity, those all-white spaces, almost erased by burnt of overexposure. On the other side, the void is revealed as a black hole, a thick and welcoming black, with very few recognizable objects or human presence onto it. I felt an emotional and philosophical ambiguity. A kind of existential contemplation, with the sea as another metaphor for this emptiness or infinity that is related through the dialogue. There is a want to fill this void through the voices' exchanges or by inventing a common world to look at.

— The overall feeling of the installation made me think of Marguerite Duras as well, this time with *La Maladie de la Mort*⁷. At the end of the book, she describes how a window overlooking a dark sea at night becomes a central element for the theatrical adaptation of her novel.

Someone laughed. They remained silent for a moment. Their fatigue became more palpable to me. One of them yawned, creating a chain of yawns, mouthfuls of bubbles, and droplets of saliva. Some of their eyes were semi-closed.

⁵ English translation: Even when I forget you, I don't forget that I'm searching for you. Clermont, Charlotte. 2024. Excerpt from *du soleil, que ça existe*.

⁶ Duras, Marguerite. 1981. *Agatha*. Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit.

⁷ Duras, Marguerite. 1982. *La Maladie de la Mort*. Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit.

CHAPTER IV: THE EYES

— Has anyone else seen any of these images? Other than the voices?

— No.

— Yes, but I can't remember the details...

I heard one of their bodies moving brutally, changing their lying position to sitting. I heard his voice, speaking with a mechanical rhythm, almost as if rehearsing.

— With my eyes, I see textures reminding me of fog, an all-white space that seems damp. Silky air, mountains far away. The sky and the sea can be made out: they form a void. Separate. Together. The camera moves slowly horizontally, the shot getting longer and longer. In a moment, I perceive a very luminous circle against the mountain. Is it the sun? It seems small and gets lost in the filamentous atmosphere. Other images appear: a mound, barely outlined, and a rock, overgrown with wild plants. I can only discern them at certain instances when the tones of the film become darker. There's a rapid rhythm. Bursts of brighter, more defined images alternate with the same images, almost erased. The outlines of everything seem to be drawn in charcoal. Yes, the film looks more like a drawing—or even a painting—in motion than a film. As if every frame is penciled on sophisticated quality paper. The paper's grains remain there, sensual. It hurts my eyes a little, but it is attractive. I keep watching with interest and fascination. Later, there is a sequence with hands. They are on top of a rock. The shot is a close-up, the hands are busy cutting their nails. They are doing it in an elegant manner, with some unknown small scissors.

(pause)

There is something else, but it is impossible to remember. The latter images I have just described, I have seen them before on televisions. I remember other images, projected inside a steel box of water. Here they come...

(with the same mechanical, descriptive rhythm)

Seashells gently scroll across a black background. They pulsate from time to time. There is that strange visual characteristic again, those silvery tones. It is all black and white, but I feel it is a lie to define it as black and white. It would be more accurate to say grey and silver and white. I see objects that are difficult to understand. I can imagine that they are fossils, or stones, or the remains of some hard material found on the beach. I don't know what they are. They are positioned side by side, resembling symbols, or a cryptic language. I don't know what they mean. There are hands, but this time you can see the body up to the elbows. The hands seem to be dancing above a pile of shells—are they shells? The hands dance, as if touching a surface, just above the pile of things/shells. The hands are graceful and protective in their movements.

Then, there is a face, all the way down to the shoulders. Against a black background, again, all the images are against a black background. The person is holding an object in their left hand, moving it slowly against their lips. The movements are round and slow. I imagine a foamy liquid on the object and the lips. It is indistinct. The eyes are closed, I can't see the eyes. Then there's a body, with little sparks that shimmer on the skin. The body is silent, it doesn't move, it is as still as the objects. I feel the shapes, even if they sometimes fade into the darkness. Their presence also pulses. I want to touch the skin. I wonder if these reflections, these shimmering particles, are a result of the water's reflection. Will they die at my touch, as corals are killed by human touch? I am trying to locate the body in these non-places. I cannot.

(pause)

— I only watched this dark part with images of the frozen sea, holding into its water blocks of heavy ice. Then, images of blocks of ice against a black background. It looks like a non-place, just as you have described it. A place where one cannot project anything familiar because there is nothing to hold on to.

— You understood what to do with your eyes. Giuliana⁸ would be relieved to be by your side.

— What else?

— I have once met someone, an artist. We have met twice. He suggested that we talk, for an entire afternoon, about one color of our choice. He also knew by heart the soundtrack of *Sunless*, directed by Chris Marker. To fall asleep, he used to put the film on and listen to the soundtrack only. I wished I had fallen in love with him. Unfortunately, I could not.

— And which color did you choose to talk about?

— Blue. And yellow. They share similarities, even if opposites.

— The images I have just described, the ones you filmed...

— Yes?

— I said they had these silvery tones, but somehow, my mind still screens it as blue.

⁸ Giuliana is the main protagonist of the film *Red Desert* (1964) by Michelangelo Antonioni. Essayist and poet Louise Warren refers to Giuliana's in her book *Interroger l'intensité*. In a scene, Giuliana says « What do they want me to do with my eyes? And what should I be looking at? » For Warren, it implies that we are expected to understand an artwork rather than experience what she calls « *dessaisissement* »—which could be translated as a deep state of strangeness that remains in the body for a long duration of time.

— That you remember it as blue makes sense. As few of you mentioned earlier, it is true that the film emerged from the sea and from Marguerite Duras. When you are facing the sea at night, for example, and you are aligning with its abstract underworld. These moments can provide access to the realm of unconsciousness. Within the depths, dreams, fantasies, and memories intertwine with the fluid dynamics of the sea. The sea, considered as an immersive environment, imparts a sense of security, with its expansive nature resonating with notions of freedom. However, in its paradoxical nature, the sea introduces a dualistic aspect. Beyond being a haven for solace, it also represents a potential avenue for self-inflicted demise, given its unknown and formidable nature. The sea becomes a locus for existential contemplation, embodying the delicate interplay between life and mortality.

— According to many of her works, the sea seen from the window is a repetitive motif. It represents themes and emotions, such as love, desire, and the human condition. Duras often uses the sea as a metaphor for the vastness, emptiness, and incomprehensibility of the existence. I remember that the characters are staring at the sea, looking into the unknown. The endless expanse of the sea is a symbol for the inexplicable, reflecting the existential questions that are present in the novel. The contemplation of the void mirrors the emotional emptiness lived by the characters in their need for connection and meaning. The sea, in this context, becomes a backdrop for the internal struggles and existential crisis faced by the characters.

The weather changed drastically. It was a day full of sunshine. It was a day of sudden change. As I felt colder, I looked up at the sky: a multitude of small clouds had spread out, turning the sky into a hazy veil, though still clear.



Still from *du soleil, que ça existe*. Clermont, Charlotte. 2024.

CHAPTER V: TIME

I had been watching them for some time now. I had no idea how much time had passed, as time had always been a mystery to me. I didn't eat or sleep regularly. I had just learned to close my eyes when they did, following the force of their nature. I had been flirting with hypnagogia since early in my life. I was lost in those thoughts when their movements pulled me out of my own reality. Only then did I realize how many of them there were. They began to take each other's hands and formed a circle.

— Earlier, one of us described your work as paintings or photographs in motion.

Some of them closed their eyes, while others were squinting. Simultaneous, they remembered and chanted:

« Slow cinema has a fundamentally different attitude toward time. The promise of motion pictures was that of a river on which you could float images. Photography through time. »⁹

— *(laughing)* We could associate the minimal, static shots of your films with this movement, which your work can relate to, for example, in terms of its qualities of slowness and contemplation.

— *(in a playful tone)* What is your relationship with time?

— Decelerating, suspending...creating a sort of time distortion. Regarding *du soleil, que ça existe*, my attempt to control time, or at least to create a space-time of my own, was to embody the transitions of life, along with the passage of time associated with them.

Someone told me that the exhibition space borrowed from the theater, where the entire set of projections was choreographed; that is, the images move from one device to another, creating short intervals of silence

⁹ Schrader, Paul. 2018. Rethinking Transcendental Style. In *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1-34.

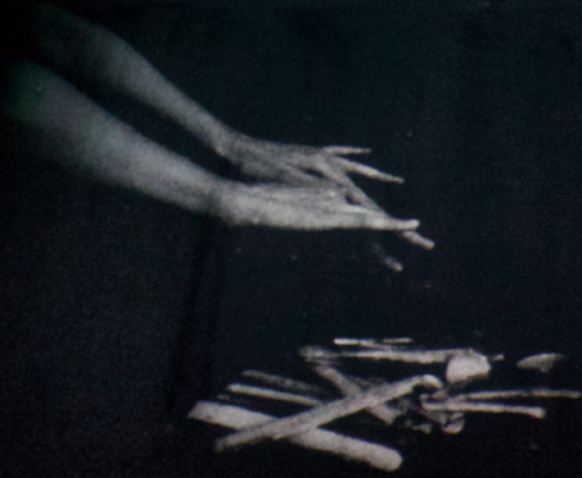
between them, similar to intermissions. In this sense, I am interested in the spatio-temporal relationship between each visual and sound element, as well as the presence of the body in space. By transitioning the images from one projection to another and leaving intervals between them, I seek to direct the viewer's gaze and attention, reflecting not only on the movement of the images but also on the movement of the body, which in its own way participates in this choreography.

— *(in an academic tone)* What is your relationship with time?

— I am used to feeling boredom. I am used to waiting.

— *(in an apologetic tone)* What is your relationship with time?

— Water. Its tides.



Installation view of *du soleil, que ça existe*. Kuvan Kevät 2024. Water box made of steel and half-filled with water, video projection, 05:37. Photo by Charlotte Clermont.



Installation view of *du soleil, que ça existe*. Kuvan Kevät 2024. Two synchronized monitors, 03:54. Photo by Charlotte Clermont.

CHAPTER VI: COLORS AND THE DARKROOM

I was focused on their micromovements. They were barely moving, and when they did, it was so slow that it seemed imperceptible to my eyes. A part of me wished I could touch their sweaty, shimmering skin. I couldn't tell how old they were; their faces and bodies seemed somehow timeless.

— Are colors important to your work?

— Colors are central to my work. They form a language of their own, with the role of evoking emotions, sensations, and memories. The films you saw are in black and white, but there is space to discern the colors with which you wish to associate yourself.

They began to whisper, without getting agitated. They discussed their impressions almost silently, at least for those who had seen the images. I heard them say that it reminded them of the sun and the muffled words « dark » and « sublime ».

— I agree that there is a way to treat black and white to infuse it with color. In your case, solarization and its effects give intensities to your work—it adds temporal layers, subtle chromatic shades derived from silver. However, it is most likely the imagery in the text that tints the film in blue and yellow. Your language is that of collage. The inside and the outside, the intimacies and the extimacies¹⁰.

— When I see your images, I think about processes. There is a physical experience happening when watching your films, an experience that pertains to the haptic.

— (*glancing at each other's*) Do you still use a flashlight while developing your films?

— Solarization, it's a technique born in the early 20th century. It emerges, quietly at first, in the shadows of photography, and then later, it spreads to film. It's not just an effect, it's a rupture. A rupture with the familiar, with

¹⁰Bracher, Mark. *Lacanian Theory of Discourse Subject, Structure, and Society*. New York: New York University Press, 74-87.

the safe contours of reality. It distorts, reverses, throws light where darkness should be, darkness where light should reign.

Man Ray, Lee Miller—they're the ones who, in the 1920s, took this process and turned it into an act of defiance. It was no longer just about capturing the world as it is, but about revealing something hidden beneath the surface. This was surrealism, after all. A world where logic dissolves and what remains is the sensation—the disquieting and the beautiful, both at once. Solarization doesn't just challenge perception, it unsettles it. It insists on the strangeness of reality, on the truth of its instability.

I thought it would connect to this project, *du soleil, que ça existe*, since solarization is semantically related to the sun. For example, it translates to *sōlāris* in Latin. Solarization is associated with yellow, and as I mentioned before, yellow corresponds to blue—the sun and the sea. Working in the darkroom is always risky, and briefly exposing the film with a flashlight is both frightening and exciting. In those moments, I feel submerged by intensities. It is one of my favorite parts of the process.

— There is a dichotomy with this workflow: working in the darkness and working with the light. As if you were drawing with the light...

— I use experimental techniques, such as solarization, to leave a large place to chance. The image reveals itself through what is missing, through its flaws. I need this interaction with the chemicals; they impress me as much as they impress the film. The moment I lift the film from the tank, from the water, is almost unbearable. It is like giving birth—the film, incubated in these fluids, emerging into the world. I unroll it slowly, carefully. Sometimes, I witness miracles. Streaks of blue, patches of pink. I become obsessive, possessive. I carry the film with me everywhere, always in my backpack. I sleep with it beside me, so that when I wake, it is the first thing my eyes can rest on.

The sun started to fade. Two of them hugged each other, whispering to their ears « I would rather be the object you use to fall asleep. Rather than being myself. »

— I am fascinated by how my eyes must adapt to the dark. I consider myself gifted in this regard. I've always had large pupils, which proves useful in low light, much like a nyctalope¹¹. At first, in the darkroom, it is impossible to see anything. Sometimes, I even feel scared—I'm still afraid of ghosts, unnamed monsters, or even people. I need to place all the objects in precise locations so that my hands remember their positions. I touch them for a long time, tracing their contours. Once I recognize them, I can use them. It is as if my eyes become an extension of my hands.

— Is that the reason for your images to feature hands?

— I had never thought about it, but hands are definitively an extension of eyes.

— I perceive in hands a more enigmatic nature, a language that allows me to encode things. Whereas if I filmed faces, it would not be possible: eyes are too personal, they speak too much. When we look at hands, we can wonder where they come from and to whom they belong, without ever knowing. Gradually, we focus on what they do; their movements, and what they touch.

— Things are interchangeable in certain contexts.

— Do you keep your eyes open or closed, while in the darkroom?

— Closed.

— When I see your images, I think about processes.

— As a child, I used to draw. My caretakers were unaware of the wide range of artistic mediums. They gave me what they could afford: pencils. Eventually, I became curious about acrylic paint and started drawing and

¹¹ In English, nyctalope refers to a night-blindness. In French, it refers to an individual (often an animal) characterized by an excellent night vision.

painting. I grew up observing people's facial expressions and tuning into emotions, whether they were expressed or not. Today, I transpose the inherent qualities of drawing and painting onto film. I'm fascinated by film's malleability and how the movement of my hands and chemicals can alter the film's emulsion. While I thrive on unpredictable methods, I still need a certain degree of control over my images.

There is no point in representing reality. It is a place of suffering. I think we normalize the act of waking up in the mornings. The moments when I realize I've left my dreams behind for good and must face reality are difficult for me. One way I make sense of my existence is by creating a parallel universe. In this space, everything around me originates from me, as if I had brought everything I see into existence. This is how I feel at home. I never wanted the leaves of the trees to be green, and as a result, I will soon learn how to dye them using a technique called toning, for my upcoming films.

The blue of the sky changed once more, shifting to a muted, steel-blue, a shade borrowed from Iceland. It was cold, yet so profoundly moving that my tears sprang abruptly to my eyes upon seeing it.



Still from *du soleil, que ça existe*. Clermont, Charlotte. 2024.

CHAPTER VII: DREAMS & THEORY

— It is unfortunate. I feel I was born in the wrong era. I wish I would have been born as Diane Arbus¹², Francesca¹³ Woodman or Maya Deren. Maya Deren died because she preferred to feed her cat's body instead of her own. She was poor. Diane Arbus committed suicide around 40 years old. If I remember correctly, she experienced some depressive episodes. Francesca Woodman jumped out of her window loft after being disappointed romantically. She also received a rejection letter from a grant application. Chantal Akerman committed suicide, as well.

— Francesca Woodman was inspired by the Surrealists. I see in Maya Deren's works, for example, *Meshes of the Afternoon* and *At Land* some psycho-dream influences.

— It is true that my way of creating images draws from the Surrealist. I have had a close relationship to my dreams, since childhood. My need to create my own images is central to my work. I could work with found footage, but this urge to infuse images with inner meanings is essential. As part of my creative process, I have come to use materials found in my immediate environment with the aim of associating them with gestures or body parts—mostly arms, hands, head. (I am particularly interested in elbow creases.) For enigmatic purposes, these found objects are often difficult to identify, giving somehow a general sense of being organic, through their shapes and textures. It is then true to compare some of the cryptic elements in my work to the Surrealist movement. My logic to create images and to put them together is internal and associative, quite personal...

¹² I started my bachelor in Painting and Drawing, then changed to Photography. I wasn't the type of person to wear gloves, when manipulating my prints. After a year or so, I discovered film. Nonetheless, photography did shape some of my influences and artistic views. I admired Diane Arbus, whose work revolves around portraiture and documentary approaches, for her interest in people who were marginalized by society. When photographing people, she would create an intimate relationship with them, which would be then translated into her work. Themes of identity, difference and the boundaries of societal norms were central to her practice. I remember reading about her dream, which she described to be « an emergency in slow motion ». That always stayed with me, as I could relate to the passage of time as such.

¹³ At the same time, I discovered Francesca Woodman's uncanny photographs, often relating to the Surrealist movement. She mostly used self-portraits, distorting and blurring time, space, and the body, aiming to create ambiguous and enigmatic images.

— You refer and give different perspectives to dreams. Dreams, as they are, but also as a state of mind, and as vessels for communication. I sensed that the voices in your work uses dreams to share their most intimate thoughts. As if the voices themselves come from another channel, if I must say. Channels such as frequencies emitted through the televisions' speakers. As a faraway mean of communication. Even the sound shower seemed distant. As if the voice was leaking from a walkie-talkie, or a landline telephone.

— One could say you work with dream logic: your work is enigmatic and oneiric. As you mentioned earlier, through collages methods, it brings together field recordings, text—included in your work as a voiceover, and therefore, as sound—, and images.

— Yes, perhaps I am drawing from my own dreams to make room for my unconscious in the process of creating images. I allow my obsessions and recurring themes to take center stage. The sea, for instance, occupies a vast, almost unrestrained space in this landscape of creation.

— (pause) Dreams reminds me of *The Sleepers*, from Bill Viola. It was in 1992. Do you remember? They were those white, plastic-like barrels, with televisions inside, their screen facing the ceiling. The barrels were filled with water. At the very bottom, you could contemplate the televisions, which were showing people lying on pillows. They were sleeping. Although I felt like a voyeur, it was a moment when I could observe the sleepers in all their vulnerability. It was only later that I realized I felt closest to the people I loved when they were asleep. Witnessing the rhythm of their breath and the collapse of their bodies was the truest form of affection for me. I believe that if someone falls asleep beside me, it's because they feel secure enough to do so. I recall kissing my friend, and as our lips touched, they fell asleep. I knew they had fallen asleep when their lips stopped moving. I stopped too.

— Television—there's something alluring in the word itself. Tele, by distance. Vision, sight from afar. That's why I believe my images belong inside televisions. They come from another time, another rhythm, a space where everything moved more slowly, a time that reminds me of childhood. There is a certain fascination I feel when images are held within something solid, enclosed. Inside the box of a television, they transform, they are no

longer just images—they become *image-objects*¹⁴. Tangible. Something you can almost touch, like a memory captured, suspended.

— In my view, your work *du soleil, que ça existe* does not simply inhabit the timeline of childhood but instead references it through the television, that mnemonic device of a distant past. With televisions, you reach back to a temporality entwined with your own, evoking a certain innocence. This object, a reminder of a pervasive absence. You remember the times you watched television to escape the sadness left by those who cared for you, who were but empty shells. Now, you are fixated on shells—yet when you film them, people do not associate their shapes with anything familiar. The television, too an empty shell, awaits to absorb your images and sounds, ready to become a vessel for what you have captured.

The air had changed to become silky, felt on the skin and eyelids like a summer sheet. I felt at ease. Soon, I saw that their bodies had become heavier, though motionless. I could see how gravity was stretching them even more flat against the rocks, now glowing with orange hues. It was a magnificent sight. The sun bathed everything in a soft, pink, and silent glow.

— *(in a faint voice)* I see the images return to me: a box of water, lying on the ground, in the dim space of your exhibition. The film projected inside that box shimmered, hues of iridescent violet playing along the wall to the right. The first time I entered that room, I was immediately drawn to the box, somewhat phosphorescent in the half-light.

I am drawn to things that hold water; they remind me of swimming pools. The pools were the only places where, as a child, I felt safe from danger. Beneath the surface, I could escape, shielded from the sounds, the

¹⁴ The concept of the *image-object* is something I conceived. I use objects, physical, tangible, as surfaces for my images to rest upon. When the light of the film meets these objects, something happens—my images seem to absorb their properties, as if the object and the image enter into a secret exchange. A symbiosis is born, something unsaid, unseen. The meaning of the object, its history, its weight, overlays the images themselves, becomes a veil over their material presence, a silent layer that shifts the way they are perceived.

voices I did not want to hear. In that circle of water, I became untouchable, beyond the reach of certain people. Water became my sanctuary, a place where I can feel both deeply alive and utterly dead, all at once

— (in a tired tone) *Kerro minulle minne olemme menossa, kerro minulle minne olemme menossa, tapan sinut, rakastan sinua*¹⁵.



Installation view of *du soleil, que ça existe*. Kuvan Kevät 2024. Water box made of steel and half-filled with water, video projection, 05:37. Photo by Charlotte Clermont.

¹⁵ English translation: Tell me where we are going, tell me where we are going, I will kill you, I love you. Clermont, Charlotte. 2024. Excerpt from *du soleil, que ça existe*. This sentence embodies the complexity of the feelings of love, that are very close to those of hatred.

Something shifted. The waves grew loud, heavy, echoing that white noise I adored. Their voices, weary, frayed, merged into the sea, a tapestry of grey flowers unraveling across the water.

— *(barely audible)* Water can love us. Water can kill us. It holds both within it, the power to embrace or to destroy. There is no difference, really—just the same force, shifting, deciding.

Losing myself in the muffled sound of their voices and breathing, I pulled a piece of paper from my pocket, on which I had written with ink my favorite excerpt from Louise Warren's book. I read it:

« I could have chosen the sea, but the sea is immense, both in its depth and its horizontality. Boundless. One does not know where it begins or where it ends. In the sea swirls an overflow of madness that is foreign to me [...] Moreover, the sea is so deep that one loses track of the bottom. Similarly, one easily loses sight of its surface, unless one looks far. And at that moment, one no longer sees the sea but the horizon. From then on, one no longer knows whether one is gazing at the sky or the water. No surface because the waves are constantly in motion. »¹⁶

Their mouths had been exhausted from talking for a long time. Even though the sun was disorganized, the sea, on the other hand, remembered that its tides depended on the moon, regardless of where the moon was or whether it was visible. Gradually, time moved what belonged to the sky, and I saw their bodies being licked by the waves, gentle at first. They had fallen asleep, of course, after so much conversation. It was touching to see them together but separated by their dreams—or perhaps they were dreaming collectively. I remained there, suspended in the branches of my tree with pinkish scales. The tide grew stronger, submerging their bodies, heavy with sleep, some now drifting. I witnessed the end of their lives, and their beginning.

¹⁶ Warren, Louise. 1999. *Interroger l'intensité*. Montréal: éditions Typo, 35. Original text translated from French through Chat GPT.



Stills from *du soleil, que ça existe*. Clermont, Charlotte. 2024.



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