Poetic documentary is this hybrid genre that merges classic, experimental, and essayistic styles of documentary film-making; often lacking explicit narrative (Alexandru 56) – these are the elements that I often find myself combining in my practice of moving image making. Poetic way of documentary filmmaking was an important creative tool in Lithuania during the time of the Soviet occupation – it was a way for Lithuanian artists to discreetly express their thoughts and feelings without openly disobeying the restrictions of the totalitarian regime (Pipinytė). Even though I was born in an independent Lithuania – Lithuanian history is important to me as past and present are strongly entangled. Focusing on the poetic documentary mode of filmmaking in my practice is a way for me to stay connected to my roots. This way of filmmaking allows personal experiences and emotions to unfold by using creative techniques, which are supposed to make the viewers feel a part of the maker's life. The themes of my most recent work mostly come from my personal worries and experiences – in a way it is a sort of therapeutic and liberating process. As my practice is research-based while researching by using various methods such as reading/writing, interviewing, visual and theoretical research I am learning about myself and about the world around me.

While visualizing my ideas I often tend to work with found footage – footage that I find on my hard drives, old phone, or computer archives, or I use footage filmed by my grandfather as he is a filmmaker himself and gladly shares his material with me. This year I challenged myself to collect more material on a daily basis so I carry a handy cam everywhere with me and I document moments that later could be used for my films.
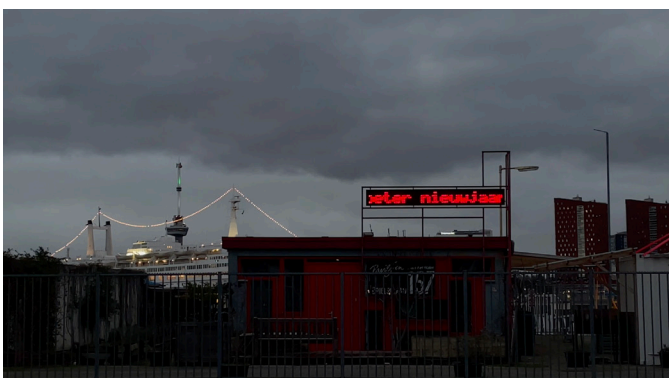
I Think They Are Buildings

Lithuanian identity is often a part of my work. Now that I moved to Rotterdam, I feel like I have two homes - two places in the world, where I feel myself, feel happy, and at home. On the flip side – when you have two homes – something is inevitably lost. You can't have it all and be in two places at the same time. During the Cihad seminar, we read a part of the Ph.D. thesis by Turkish author Nermin Saybasili: Borders and Ghosts: Migratory Hauntings in Visual Culture. After reading the article it struck me - I am like a ghost – stuck in between two worlds, belonging yet not completely belonging in both of them. That being said, my most recent work – 4min. video, I Think They Are Buildings – initiated from this big, perhaps even an abstract word - solitude. To me, solitude is like a metamorphosis of loneliness that is frequently shared between people who have experienced emigration, in one way or another. While trying to unfold this topic to a more personal level I tried to relive the time when I felt the loneliest after coming to live in the new country and re-discover where did I find relief. I used to walk around the city a lot so I took the same, now already well-known, routes around Rotterdam that were unfamiliar 6 years ago. And it struck me – I always found comfort in buildings of Rotterdam – big, large structures, weirdly shaped and colored, I wasn't sure why but I always felt more peaceful and, on a good day even happy to see the landscape of the city of Rotterdam. Apparently, the study of neuroscientist Colin Ellard proves, that the complexity of building facades affects people in a positive way. I was curious to research more about the way how architecture affects people's well-being and I came across the book Poetics of Space by the French philosopher Gaston Bachelard. Labeled as a book about architecture, the author examines the domestic space of our homes through poetry. The book got me to question the notion of home. I asked myself, what and/or where is home to me? What makes me feel at home? Do I need to have a couch to sit comfortably to feel at home? What if I had to leave my home because of war and not because of privilege, where is home then? These all questions got to me during the freewriting (which I found particularly helpful) exercise which revealed the essence of this project. By the influence of the book and the questions I asked myself, I realized, that all the houses/homes that I have ever lived at, all the memories of home that I 'store' within me – make me home myself. I started to realize this piece as a transformation of a person rather than a nostalgia for home. Transformation of a person, who, because of the experience of displacement becomes home for him/herself.

Ideally, if there were no time restrictions this film would have 3 chapters that would each illustrate 3 different stages of the transformation:

1.   Home as a house. The first house that made me feel at home is a base of understanding about a primary feeling of home. My first home is just a place, I did not know any better or worse.

2.   Home as a feeling. All the houses and homes I used to live in taught me and introduced me to different feelings and made me understand what it means to feel at home and what it means to long for home. Home became a feeling, not a place.

3.   I carry all the memories of my previous houses, moods, and people, I know what it means and what I need to feel at home. I house it all within me. Within me I carry all the homes of the past, I bring them everywhere with me. I became a house myself because of all my previous memories and experiences. I feel good in an unfamiliar place because I have it all within me.

Because of a time restriction, I needed to compress these stages into a video piece of 4 minutes so I decided to write a poem that would illustrate the transition between the 3 transformational stages. I wrote the poem by using the cut-out writing method. I have never written poetry myself but since I discovered this method earlier this year, I found it a useful creative tool to use in my practice - a collage of words and sentences, results in rather surrealistic text with intriguing phrases.

Eventually, the poem (see Appendix) became the most relevant element of this project, and it was challenging to accept it - 'I am a visual maker, not a writer, I can't just write stuff on screen and call it a film!'. It took me a while to accept that writing sentences on screen is also a way of image-making.

In the making process, it was difficult to balance it out – I wanted visuals and sound not to overpower the written text. Therefore, I minimized the visual and audible material to a very minimum which resulted in this very elegant and quiet video.

Distant memory between thin walls

"To read poetry is to daydream" (Bachelard 38) - inspired by the book, my attempt was for this video to unfold as if you were reading poetry, as if it was a mind space, therefore I chose the main visual to be an abstract, very zoomed in and slowed down image of snow falling in the background of trees, as if it is your mind space – snowy landscape might bring people back in time – in many places in the world it doesn't snow as much anymore as it did 20 years ago. The image of the snow (the mind space) gets interrupted by short glitches, as it happens daily when random memories just enter your mind. The glitches are represented by the actual archival images from my childhood and the youth of my parents. I wanted this video to evoke a mixture of feelings of nostalgia, displacement, and longing, but also comfort – wanted it to feel like it's really cold but you are warm 'inside' (both literally and metaphorically). I tried to achieve it with a soundscape, but because I minimized it all – it ended up being just a sound of a fireplace on one part and the sound of the city on the other. Now that I look back on it – I could have developed a soundscape better, and made it more layered and more textural. In general, visual and sensory elements could have been developed further to trigger feelings of nostalgia, displacement, and comfort in more people.

WHATS NEXT

As I am stuck between two worlds – I am also stuck in between two languages. My Lithuanian identity and language are important to me – my work has always been in Lithuanian. Because of academic circumstances and my 2nd home abroad– every film that I make that includes language is translated into English. In my most recent projects translated text became a part of the visual instead of being just a functional subtitle. I would like to research it further – to work with texts on the screen as a way to connect two worlds. Experiment with graphic design on the moving image or with moving text on the still image. Work with typography and write more, translate texts into images.

To continue developing my visual practice I am planning to research the essayistic film form of Jean-Luc Godard and other French New Wave movement creators and research the tools used to break through from the classical Hollywood cinema and the shift toward more experimental, personal, and self-reflexive forms of filmmaking.

My way of working mostly is process/research based – without actually having a concrete final goal, I am collecting and adding new material in the process until it reaches a certain point. It is a very comfortable way of working, but during projects with sensitive deadlines - projects might fail to reach their full potential. Therefore, I am interested to engage more in script writing and hoping to gain more power over my workflow. In the near future, I would like to challenge myself to make a fiction film, perhaps it would be a fiction/documentary hybrid. I want to research Lithuanian paganism and mythology to broaden my interest in cultural identity and perhaps it would turn out to be a film about the Lithuanian Goddess of Love Milda but nowadays.

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Childhood home returns at night,

Grows and spreads the walls,

Expands the roof.

At times it would seem that it might not exist at all -

Distant memory between thin walls,

Yet so close to me.

Inside the house I grow and move around,

House breathes in my very depths…

―――

I'm hanging in the air in between two buildings,

My body does not touch the ground.

In the corner of an empty room - Vilnius pigeons.

I breathe in, my vision expands, walls are spreading.

Memory is wandering through the bypass dreams.

Inner confusion is almost gone -

Streets have become streets again.

And I became a house myself

Without any doors,

Without any exits,

While wandering around the bygone dreams,

Around the boundless winter fields and forests,

Will I never have to choose between two homes?

Vaikystės namai sugrįžta nakčia,

Augina ir plečia sienas,

Išplečia stogą.

Kartais gali pasirodyti, kad tie namai neegzistuoja išvis -

Tolimi prisiminimai tarp plonų sienų,

Tuo pačiu ir taip arti manęs.

Namo viduje aš augu ir judu aplink,

Namas įkvėpia mane…

―――

Kybau ore tarp namų,

Neliečiu kojom žemės.

Tuščio kambario kampe - Vilniaus karveliai.

Įkvėpiu oro, plečiasi vizija, sienos tolsta.

Atmintis klaidžioja po praeities sapnus.

Beveik neliko vidaus sumaišties-

Gatvės vėl virto gatvėmis.

Dabar esu vidus,

Be jokių sienų,

Jokių išėjimų,

Kai klaidžioju po praeities sapnus,

Beribės žiemos pievas ir miškus,

Ar man niekada nebereikės rinktis tarp dviejų namų?