

# Beyond the Edges

*A study on how the intangible dimensions of death and dying  
can be made accessible through the language of film*

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For

my parents

*Dr Fritz Jürgen Kroeger und Dr Brigitte Kroeger*

and

my late art teacher

*Willie Strachan*

## *Abstract*

### Beyond the Edges

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*Working with [art] is about letting yourself dig deep into your heart, about having the confidence to be vulnerable and to express that vulnerability, that core of our human-ness, in an honest way.*

[Herbie Hancock](#) (2001)

This practice-based research was inspired from a need to make sense of death and potentially dying from my own personal history and the lack of cinematic/filmic contributions that would have helped to understand the internal turmoil and questions that arose at the time, as well as the connected emotions. The question that emerged was how, through cinematic language, these troubling questions could be made accessible and engage both maker and viewer in the philosophical, metaphysical, spiritual, in other words, the intangible and abstract dimensions of death in a meaningful and thought-provoking way.

‘Moving images’, be that cinema, television or digital media, are the most ubiquitous cultural determinants of our time. However, the subject of death with its philosophical, spiritual and emotional complications is not widely portrayed within these media, and that somehow mirrors the general attitude towards death in our Western society. There is an increasing need for engagement with death in general and from a personal and emotional perspective in particular. Film seems the obvious medium to make this discussion accessible for a wider audience.

Through an autoethnographic approach, highlighting the emotional aspects of death and dying, through engaging with Swedish filmmaker Ingmar Bergman's lifelong struggle with death and loss and his way of expressing himself in his films and through the use of fragments and metaphors, I have attempted to create something that translates something very personal into something universal.

The outcome of my practice-based research and considerations is a series of short films, capable of being seen as a continuum that are presented first and foremost, but not exclusively, as a multi-screen installation. It is a sonic poem with images. At its core it has an awareness of death: its fears, its taboos, its proximity and its unknown quantities. It asks questions about the meaning of life and is ultimately a homage to life itself. My own thoughts, based on my personal experience, are complemented in a fictive dialogue with Ingmar Bergman's thoughts about his lifelong fear of death and loss. This intimate as well as immersive experience is about listening as much as about seeing and it aims to inspire and encourage the audience to ask questions about their own life and its finitude.

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## *List of Accompanying Material*

Chapter II with this text-based document is the film *Beyond the Edges*, the main element of this thesis, providing an answer to the research question. The film is created to be experienced as playing on a loop in a multi-screen installation.

A short extract from the installation is available with this written exegesis.

See: <https://eprints.bournemouth.ac.uk/36596/>

)

The entire film is available for researchers on request from:

[BURO@bournemouth.ac.uk](mailto:BURO@bournemouth.ac.uk)

The following material is part of the appendices:

App 1: Installation Programme (including text of all twelve poems and film credits)

App 2: Audience responses to the installation

App 3: Link to full research blog

App 4: Link to *Voices from the Cillín*, teaser

App 5: Link to *Lullaby for Adults*, teaser

App 6: Link to *Song of Love*

## Preface

*Every great advance in science has issued from a new audacity of imagination.*

[John Dewey \(1929\)](#)

*The idea is to write it so that people hear it and it slides through the brain and goes straight to the heart.*

[Maya Angelou \(cited by Darling 1981\)](#)

Art practice, by its very nature, is exploration. And exploration is another synonym for research. Art-based research, in which the artwork itself constitutes the answer to a given research question, potentially challenges traditional research etiquettes, as the outcome, the artwork, will be subjective, ambiguous and emotive. All of those attributes appear to be contrary to traditional research requirements. Art, so it seems, is the antithesis to solid and provable scientific results ([Cazeaux 2017](#)). Yet, art-based research has grown over the past decades and found its way more and more into acceptance by the world of academia ([Hannula 2004](#); [Borgdorff 2012](#)) and artists have found their own ways to “contribute to the culture of research” ([Sullivan 2009](#), p.43). Also, the contributions to filmmaking in academic research have been on the rise over the past 15 years ([Berkeley 2018](#)). [Nowotny \(2010](#), p.xxi) adds to that notion:

[...] new modes of creating, producing, and expressing ‘creative knowledge’ and new links of communication between the various fields of arts have emerged, but diverse and partly new audiences have also been established, leading to new forms of unprecedented interactivity. What the sciences can only dream of, namely, to establish better forms of communication with society, seems to come much more ‘naturally’ to the arts in their playful and often ironic way of reaching out to society.

How can art and creativity be measured and categorised in the academic framework, how can it be observed and documented? It is usually the job of art critics to analyse, scrutinise and sometimes even deconstruct an artist’s work. But also, artists themselves do analyse, evaluate and reflect on their work with some distance, to use

the findings to create new work. The creative process, however, is a highly individual undertaking and there are probably as many methodologies and methods, as there are practitioners. And these have a tacit dimension that is often hidden even from the artists themselves.

The central question of this study was how cinematic language can be used to engage both maker and viewer in the intangible and abstract dimensions of death and dying in a meaningful and thought-provoking way. It became therefore not just a matter of making a film, which would attempt to give an answer to that, but of equal importance how to go about it as the filmmaker. Approaching an abstract concept, such as the philosophical and metaphysical dimensions of death is complex and difficult as there are not really any rights or wrongs, so one wanders on particularly slippery ground in which everything is possible, and nothing can be ruled out.

[Leavy \(2015, p.ix\)](#) claims that “The arts can uniquely educate, inspire, illuminate, resist, heal, and persuade”. She argues that arts-based research can “move beyond prohibitive jargon and limiting structures that otherwise characterise traditional research practice” and “open up new ways of seeing and experiencing and illuminate that which otherwise remains in darkness” (p.ix). Art-based research takes a different approach from science. It uses different methods and alternative forms of expression and can therefore also be perceived with a different set of criteria. In other words, the art that is the result of art-based research can be viewed with passion and emotion as therein lies its strength and secret. Art can affect people in powerful ways through its immediacy and emotive qualities. It can communicate a myriad of meanings in ways that traditional research papers cannot. It can reach an audience far beyond the academic realm and in that way make academic research accessible for many ([Leavy 2015](#))

Accessibility is one of the core aims for this study. *Beyond the Edges* is a piece of art and entreats the spectator to openness and to space for allowing emotional responses.

## Acknowledgements

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## *Definitions*

**Art** - For these purposes, the word 'art' and 'artist' is used as a term to include every form of creative expression and practice, including film, poetry, painting, music and installation.

**Experimental/ avant-garde film** – For these purposes, a genre of film that questions and re-evaluates film language and suggests alternative solutions

**Film** - For these purposes the word 'film' is used as a short-hand for all moving images, irrespective of the method of capture.

**Intangible** – For these purposes the term includes the meaning of 'spiritual', 'transcendental', 'philosophical', metaphysical and unknown.

**Poetry-film** – subgenre of the experimental film, “a synthesis of poetry and film that generates associations, connotations and metaphors neither the verbal nor the visual text would produce on its own” ([Wees 1999](#))

## Chapter I – Introduction

*How can one express in words those things for which there is no language, those things imprinted on the heart, those mysteries of soul unknown to the soul itself?*

[Gustave Flaubert](#) (2002)

This study investigates how the intangible dimensions of death and dying can be made accessible through the language of film. One possible answer to that question can be found in the film *Beyond the Edges*, which has been created for that purpose and which is presented first and foremost, but not exclusively as a multi-screen installation. This film constitutes the main part of this thesis. The accompanying exegesis reveals and discusses the eclectic influences and concepts that have informed its making.

### A) Background

#### 1) Death

Humanity has historically been trying to make sense of life and death. Death is believed by some to be the origin of religion ([Yalom 2008](#)). In lack of definite answers, however, all we are left with, is the power of our imagination to contemplate it ([Bennett-Carpenter 2017](#)). Although death is discussed by professionals such as doctors, carers, priests etc., it is not something that is talked about much amongst most ordinary people. Perhaps, because we are afraid? Perhaps we just can't? Perhaps because we don't know how? In the BBC series IMHO [In my humble opinion], [Dr Kathryn Mannix](#) (2018) who works in palliative care, claims that "we have lost the rich wisdom of normal human dying" and asks for this wisdom to be reclaimed by starting to talk about death and dying again. In our language, she argues, words like dead and dying are replaced with euphemistic terms such as 'passed away' or 'seriously ill'.

Our relationship with death in Western society has changed significantly over the past 150-200 years. Industrialisation, urbanisation and increasing secularisation have led

to declining engagement with aspects of death ([Ariès 1974](#)). At the same time, it has almost become a commercial enterprise, with funeral industries booming and the desire for a unique individual send-off on the rise ([Meltzer 2018](#)). Nevertheless, our fear of death, of the unknown, remains undiminished, although it might manifest differently for every individual ([Yalom 2008](#)). It therefore seems to be a contradiction that the experience of that fear, whatever form it may take, is omnipresent, yet at the same time in our society it is difficult to talk about it. In contrast to the time when death was a reason to celebrate rather than to fear ([Becker 1973](#)), contemporary Western culture has developed death into a topic that is difficult to engage with and often avoided. Gorer writes as early as 1955 in his seminal essay *The Pornography of Death* that death and sex have changed position and standing in our culture and society. Whereas earlier it was considered absolutely taboo to mention sex or anything to do with that, especially in Victorian England, now sex is openly in our faces all the time, not least in film, where sex scenes get more and more explicit. In a society where we are obsessed with sustaining youth and immortality ([Jenkins 2017](#)), there is little room to acknowledge, contemplate or talk about death, not least because it is awkward for most people. I personally experienced the feeling of awkwardness and embarrassment from people when I was ill myself. The voices, however, who argue for the need to bring the notion of death back into our social consciousness and reclaim our relationship with death through the way we talk about it and engage with it, are becoming louder ([Kellehear 1984](#); [Mannix 2018](#)).

How can one express in words, or any other form of language, the questions, doubts, fears, anger, confusion and all the inner thoughts that might not even be apparent in connection with death? Is there a language that can help us to express, for want of a better word, what we experience, what we cannot access, what is indefinable? Already at this point, the difficulty of finding a suitable language to engage with death and its intangible dimensions, becomes evident. I painfully experienced the inability to make sense of the chaos inside my head when I had to face death myself. It became paramount for me, as an artist and filmmaker, to ask the question of how I could talk about it in a meaningful and thought-provoking way through the language of film.

The problem with death is that no one knows much about it beyond the clinical details. We don't know how it feels to die, what it actually means to die and where death may take us. It is the fear of the unknown that generates the desire to deny it. What cannot be seen is not there. If its existence is not acknowledged, it will disappear ([Becker 1973](#)). When it is impossible to hide from it anymore, however, then answers need to be found.

## 2) Personal Background

In 2008 I was diagnosed with Stage 3 breast cancer ([Cancer Research UK 2018](#)). From one minute to the next my world came apart, was turned upside-down and inside out. Sounds became more amplified, colours more saturated. I was faced, in a blink of an eye, with death. In an instant I became aware of my mortality. My first reaction was numbness, because I didn't know what I was supposed to think or feel. As a result, I approached the questions of treatment in a very pragmatic and logical fashion. To begin with, I didn't even know what treatment I would want for myself. I realised for the first time in this context that it was difficult to hear my own thoughts through the noise of all the good advice given from all sides - medically as well as psychologically and politically. When I decided to opt for traditional treatment, i.e. chemotherapy, mastectomy and radiotherapy, it came from a very strong desire to live.

Perhaps had I had more time to make this decision, I might have chosen alternative treatment or none, but the urgency did not leave space to ponder. And pondering was terrifying. The prospects were too vast, too difficult to grasp. But slowly I began to yearn for an understanding of what it might mean to die.

During the time of chemotherapy, where I had to experience my own physical decline, the prospect of dying seemed very real. At this point I was at a loss as to where to turn. I found help and consolation in my Buddhist practice and recognised the importance of engaging spiritually with aspects of death and dying and ultimately making sense of living, to cope with the prospect. All my knowledge and intellect had so far failed to

equip me mentally and emotionally to deal with the idea of finitude and other more intangible, abstract and transcendental aspects of death. My illness, however, did equip me with the opportunity to look death straight in the face and dare to ask questions. I naturally began to seek answers to these pressing concerns through my medium of film and sound.

### 3) Film: The missing piece

Film is one of the most ubiquitous art forms of our time, because it stimulates many senses simultaneously through combining image, sound and music. Its omnipresence makes it an ideal choice of medium to explore, discuss and contemplate the undefinable aspects of death. As artists with a public voice, filmmakers have the opportunity, through artistic and cinematic means, to express in public what many are thinking about in private.

[Sullivan and Greenberg](#) (2013, p.1) state that “human life is defined by two existential realities: The fear of death and the desire to overcome it”. Moreover, they claim that mortality also includes the human desire to deny it. Scholars, according to Sullivan and Greenberg (2013) have observed that the connection between death and film is important, as cinema has the unique potential to show death and explore the influence it might have on human experience. It is therefore no surprise that filmmakers over the decades have approached the issue in a wide variety of ways and across genres. Indeed, film and television are littered with deaths. However, death in film is most commonly depicted as violent or unnatural. It is described as “alternately romantic, heroic, unexpected, graphic and terrible, but only occasional as a prolonged and tedious experience ([Sullivan and Greenberg 2013](#), p.3)”, as is so often the reality of it. [Berendt](#) (1999) claims that death on screen is merely part of entertainment and murder mostly committed without any consequences, whilst [Aaron](#) (2014) describes death in film as either violent, heroic, tragic or a sacrifice, but notes that “the pain or smell of death, the banality of physical, or undignified, decline, the dull ache of mourning, are rarely seen” (p.1).

But even a filmic description of the 'tedious experience' or 'the banality of physical, or undignified, decline' would not be sufficient. It is not so much a description of physical details that is needed, but rather an exploration of the emotional aspects that come from a fear of death, a sharing of personal experience from either having had to face death or through loss of loved ones, or even just the acceptance that that is the way we all go. It is a question of how it is possible to articulate the intangible aspects, the abstract and transcendental ones, the spiritual and metaphysical questions, because those are the things that are difficult to acknowledge, think or even talk about. How can these things be visualised? Can they be visualised at all? Could it be a matter of creating visual prompts that inspire an audience to come to their own understanding of these faces of death? In other words, how can these aspects be explored through cinematic language and be made accessible for the spectator to contemplate?

Film is a vast category. It would have been too vast to cover all of it within this research. It was therefore important to delineate an area of film to include in this study. The main focus fell on personal narratives and experimental/ avant-garde films from a Western, more specifically Northern European cultural background, including films of Swedish filmmaker Ingmar Bergman. The films that have come closest to what I was looking for, were documentaries by Ed van der Elsken (*Bye* 1990), Briony Campbell (*The Dad Project* 2012), Roswitha Ziegler (*Noch hier Schon da* [Still here, already there] 2014), and Steven Eastwood (*Island* 2017), which have attempted to deal with the intangible dimensions of death. Even more illuminating, however, were films of Ingmar Bergman (e.g. *The Seventh Seal* 1957, *Cries and Whispers* 1972 or *Saraband* 2003), which ask questions without giving any answers. They inspired me to find my own answers, as there are no universal ones, when it comes to the undefinable dimensions of death. And then there were experimental/ avant-garde films that have challenged me through their unexpected form (*The Passing*, Bill Viola, 1991 and *Blue*, Derek Jarman, 1993). All of these films, through their approach, prompted me to think and thereby opened the door to explore something quite inexpressible.

Despite the fact that death is a very frequent occurrence in movies, films that address the intangible aspects of death are rare. Perhaps it has not been the preoccupation of

filmmakers to approach these specific dimensions of death, although it could be argued that most films in one way or another depart from the fragility of human mortality ([Sullivan and Greenberg 2013](#)). Perhaps these are difficult aspects for filmmakers to approach within the subject of death, because of their intangible nature. Or perhaps there is no established formula yet as to how to use cinematic language to make these unfathomable aspects accessible and open for contemplation and dialogue.

## B) Contribution

My contribution addresses this apparent gap through the making of *Beyond the Edges*, which I situate within the areas of personal narrative and experimental/ avant-garde film. It is a sonic poem with images that has at its core an awareness of death, its fears, its taboos, its proximity and its unknown quantities. It asks questions about the meaning of life and is ultimately a homage to life itself. Twelve poems create a fictive dialogue between my own thoughts, based on my personal experience and Swedish filmmaker Ingmar Bergman's thoughts on his lifelong fear of death and loss, as expressed in his films and not least in his diaries and workbooks. *Beyond the Edges*, presented as a multi-screen installation, is an intimate and immersive experience which requires listening just as much as seeing. It aims, by engaging the senses, to inspire and encourage the audience to ask questions about their own life and its finitude. It is one possible solution to the question as to how to make the intangible dimensions of death and dying accessible through cinematic language.

In addition, there is the process of creating. In trying to reveal the cognitive processes, the various steps I made to get from A to B, I hope to give new insights into practices of filmmaking. I focussed specifically on personal narrative and experimental/ avant-garde film, films that engage with the difficulty of expressing the internally felt, intangible dimensions of death and dying; and in more general terms, on how to visualise the internal landscape of an individual. The importance lies in emphasising that it is not just about what to say as a filmmaker, but how to say it so it can be perceived.

In an investigation into how to inspire an audience to engage with the most profound question for humanity, the personal voice cannot be left out. It is, as [Knudsen](#) (2018) argues, the starting point for all desire to create. It is from sharing our personal experiences that we can connect with others, by sharing our struggles, questions and doubts, as that is where others most likely recognise themselves ([The Health Foundation 2016](#)). To open hearts and minds, the emotive aspect cannot be underestimated ([Ellis and Bochner](#) 2000). The value of these contributions is recognised by the report of the Research Excellence Framework ([REF 2014](#), p.96), which acknowledges the value of personal contributions:

The strongest work [...] found ways of rigorously reflecting on personal experience and/or professional practices and extrapolating wider significance from these.

It is important to delineate the reasons for choosing a practice-based project. First and foremost, the answer to the question asked is to be found in a film and thereafter in the process of its making. It was about finding out how to approach a slippery and perhaps rather abstract topic and finding ways to express it. It is not uniquely the topic of death and dying that is the subject of exploration, but rather how to approach it with its intangible dimensions and make it accessible through cinematic language. The practical aspect of the research is important, because the result of the investigation is a combination of the outcome and the process, which could be applied to other elusive, intangible subjects.

By adopting this approach, I hope to contribute another aspect to the growing number of research methods and their documentation in connection with arts-based research.

## C) Aims and objectives

The research question that emerged was:

- How can the intangible aspects of death and dying be made accessible through cinematic language?

Naturally, the aim of this research was to find a possible solution to that question. How can we use cinematic language to talk about 'things', for want of a better word, that are difficult to define, because they are subjective, emotive and often highly abstract? I am not referring to measurable and provable 'things', but 'things' that are perceived very differently by every individual. How is it possible to talk about death and dying, in any language? How can we as filmmakers visualise fear of death or loss and the thoughts and emotions that come with it, without claiming to know the answers?

A second, closely linked aim to the first was to ensure accessibility both practically and theoretically to the whole of the project, including film and exegesis. It was of utmost importance that it could reach an audience beyond the academic community and peers to be able to create dialogue and contribute to a wider public debate

These aims resulted in two objectives:

- Making a film that would be a cinematic expression of the intangible aspects of death and dying in order to make them accessible for the spectator to contemplate.
- Devising a creative process that would provide a method and a structure for filmmakers to approach such an intangible subject.

The film should make the unspoken, the untold, the unanswered questions surrounding death and dying approachable. It should allow time and space to think – it should allow us to feel safe enough to dare to look at all the 'things' we fear or do

not know with regards to death and dying. As there are no universal answers concerning the intangible aspects of death and dying, everyone needs to find their own answers to come to terms with and be at peace with death. In order to find our peace and our own answers, we need to have a space/ environment/ inspiration/ encouragement to dare to contemplate.

In order to create such a space/ environment/ inspiration/ encouragement to engage with inner thoughts, the film needed to be evocative and thoughtful, yes, even emotive, both in image, sound and word. To achieve that objective, I deployed interdisciplinary methods and incorporated personal experiences and thoughts in the filmmaking process as well as the resulting film.

## D) The chapters

Chapter II consists of the film *Beyond the Edges*. It is recommended to watch it after the introduction, after being informed about the reason for this study and its aims and objectives. The film constitutes a possible answer to the gap in the body of films that has been identified.

Chapter III describes the methodologies that guided this study and the methods applied to meet its objectives. I talk about autoethnography and practice-based research and the combination of both. The importance of engaging with Swedish filmmaker Ingmar Bergman is introduced and how his work, especially his diaries and workbooks, which shed light on his own troubles with death, has consequently influenced and inspired *Beyond the Edges*. To crystallise ideas about how the final film could look and how cinematic language could be used, I created a series of film sketches, which will be described and evaluated. I will further recount the influence of work I had done prior to this research.

Chapter IV explores the context in which my film is situated. It gives a brief overview over existing scholarly literature about death in film in general, and in films by Ingmar

Bergman in particular. The main component of this chapter is an evaluation of a selection of films within the genre of personal narrative and experimental/ avant-garde film. This selection illuminates the gap this research is trying to address, about how to make the intangible aspects of death and dying accessible through cinematic language.

Chapter V includes a synthesis and extracts of the blog that I wrote during the research process, in order to document the creative research journey. It includes the cognitive processes as they happened, with all the open-ended questions that were asked along the way and the influences that have shaped the outcome. It gives an indication of the elements that have found their manifestation in the film.

Finally, chapter VI, reveals the eclectic influences and concepts behind *Beyond the Edges*. The notion of fragments has been a significant aspect for the approach to making this film. From brief digressions into neuroscience and how fragments are perceived, to the importance of fragments in romantic art and literature, their impact on some of the choices made in the creation are discussed. We hear about the emotional impact of music and how this helps to direct the viewer and discuss the concepts that have given *Beyond the Edges* its structure and form. Lastly, my choice to present *Beyond the Edges* as a multi-screen installation is justified and why I consider it to be an appropriate format to make the intangible dimensions of death and dying accessible through cinematic language.

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## Chapter II: Beyond the Edges – The Film

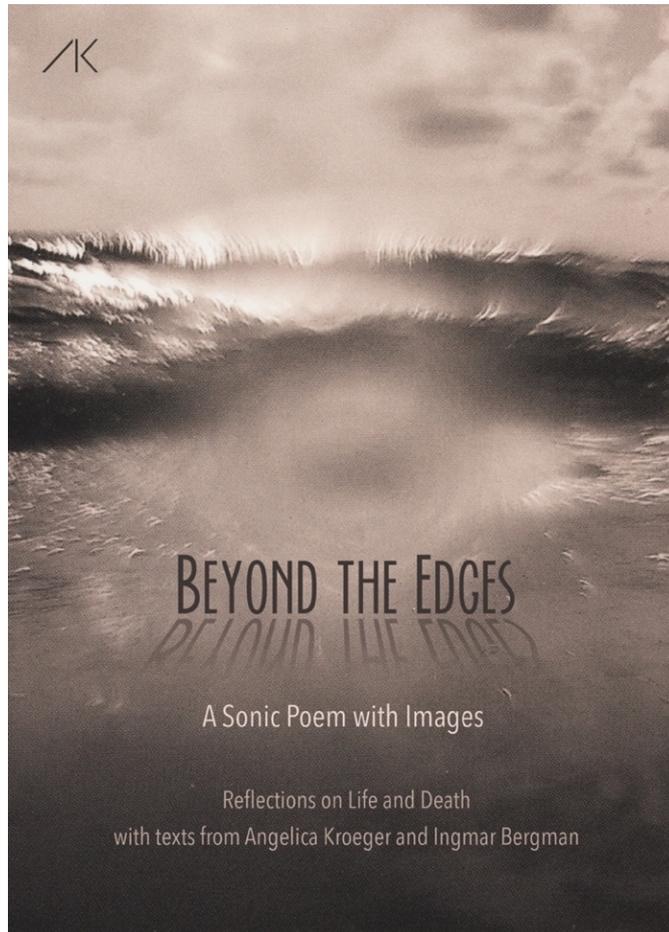


Illustration 1 - Poster: *Beyond the Edges* (Kroeger 2019)

The entire film is available for researchers on request from [BURO@bournemouth.ac.uk](mailto:BURO@bournemouth.ac.uk)

A short extract from the installation is available with this written exegesis:

See: <https://eprints.bournemouth.ac.uk/36596/>

*Beyond the Edges* is created to be presented as a multi-screen installation. In the exhibition space it is intended to run on loop, expressing the cyclical nature of life and death.

*Runtime: 53:54*

## Chapter III: Methodology

*Not all those who wander are lost*

[J.R.R. Tolkien](#) (1954)

A common question that is asked ahead of any creative project is where to start - and how? How to make and what to make ([Batty and Kerrigan 2018](#))? This chapter defines the methodologies that I applied to this project and elaborates on the methods employed to bring it to fruition.

To deal with the intangible dimensions of death and to make something in an academic setting that provides a space of contemplation, the traditionally available methodologies and frameworks only suffice in part ([Berkeley 2018](#)), because of the particularly slippery and impalpable subject of this research. Therefore, the process of making became as much a contribution for this study as the artwork itself.

The challenge of creating a piece of art in the context of a research project is that there is equally as much focus on the process of making and its documentation, the thoughts that go into it and the context in which it is created, as the execution itself ([Cazeaux 2017](#)). Therefore, there needs to be an emphasis on the methodology, something that is often tacit and secluded within the mind of the artist and therefore for many shrouded in mystery, often even for the artist themselves. Shedding light on that mystery is the point of making art as a research project.

Art making is a messy sort of process. Creative thoughts very rarely follow a given structure. Every notion is allowed, because it can end up making a contribution to the whole quite serendipitously, even if only inconspicuously. Serendipity as “confluence of cognitive activity and external stimulation that most often leads to so-called Eureka moments’ for creators” ([Skains 2018](#), p.90), is an aspect of the creative process that cannot be underestimated ([McNiff 2012](#)). Neither can it be exclusively described as

belonging to the land of unpredictability, as it is often a natural, although not obvious conclusion of thoughts that have been in the mix before.

[McNiff \(2012\)](#) argues, that artistic inquiry, often starts with not knowing anything about the outcome. In agreement with Skains, he also emphasises that “the most meaningful insights often come by surprise, unexpectedly, and even against the will of the creator” (p. 13), and he concludes that it is the very process of creation from which meaning emerges.

I have therefore chosen a very eclectic approach to this research project. It is one that makes use of perhaps untraditional ways of contextualising and documenting a research journey; one that gives a degree of access and insight to the inner landscapes of the maker, of the cognitive processes, which more often than not appear chaotic, in random order, seemingly disassociated and so forth, even in the mind of the beholder.

“Chance, chaos, randomness, unpredictability: what do these have to do with creativity?” asks [Margaret A. Boden](#) (2004, p.233). She argues that, although all of these terms appear to be beyond the grasp of science and therefore of no use in the mapping of creativity, they all, on closer inspection, have very organised and complex sides to them and are grounded in previous accountable knowledge and experience.

Whilst there are existing frameworks for mapping the cognitive creative processes ([Skains 2018](#)), I posit, however, that some aspects of the workings of an individual imaginative brain should remain shrouded in mystery. Not everything internal can be mapped and analysed, nor should it be. The outcome of the creative journey should suffice. The freedom of creation needs to stay intact. Waypoints of the cognitive creative process can be marked, but the lines in between need to be drawn and populated by each individual artist.

These considerations about cognitive processes and the finer details of art making shall not deviate from the subject of this investigation, that is how a filmmaker can

engage with and make the abstract, philosophical, metaphysical aspects of death and dying accessible, and thereby inspire an audience to dare to look inside and ask questions.

Defining a methodology for research in the arts provides a challenge, as the field is still relatively recent and not too long established in the academic context ([Cazeau 2017](#)), although a growing amount of academic literature has been published in the field over the last decades (e.g. [Hannula et al. 2005](#); [Smith and Dean 2009](#); [Barrett and Bolt 2010](#); [Nelson 2013](#); Batty and Kerrigan 2018). Artist researchers have been borrowing from methodologies long used and established in the social sciences, such as action research and reflective practice, grounded theory and participant observation ([Haseman and Mafe 2009](#)). But none of these methodologies suffice completely in research in the arts ([Berkeley 2018](#)). [Baldacchino](#) (2009, p. 4) suggests:

Art practice is, in and of itself, a specific and special form of research. In the arts the very idea of a qualitative-quantitative divide becomes irrelevant because by its distinct nature arts research calls for a different set of categories where the arts do not search for stuff or facts, but they generate it. If, for want of a better word, we call this generative stuff 'data', then unlike any form of empirical data, the data that the arts make never set out to prove anything. Rather, art's data set out to make a case by how the arts emerge as such in their acts of doing and making.

Based on that assessment, is making a film to answer a question not methodology in itself? [Cazeaux](#) (2017) lists numerous discussed anxieties from the research communities with regard to artistic research. One of these is the fact that the artefact never can suffice as sole contribution to knowledge but has to be supported and defended by the addition of a contextualising text. [Batty and Kerrigan](#) (2018, p.xii) argue that the tacit nature of art making in the context of research has to be a two-step process, "to haul the implicit privacy of understanding out into the explicit publicity of verbal as well as audio-visual configurations of knowledge". I tend to concur with this. Otherwise it would not be necessary to make art as a research project. The outcome must be more than a piece of art. It must reveal methods that can be replicable and used by others ([McNiff 2012](#)).

For this study two methodologies have emerged as most obvious and practical for finding an answer to the question of how to use cinematic language to make the intangible dimensions of death and dying accessible to engage people in contemplation and dialogue.

One of these methodologies is autoethnography. In dealing with such a subjective topic as the philosophical, metaphysical and spiritual dimensions of death and dying, a personal approach is not only preferable, but indeed utterly necessary. We connect to another person and their experience through their story, which can broaden our horizons and help extrapolate meaning for our own story. This is by far easier than reading through a list of anonymous facts ([Ellis and Bochner 2000](#)).

The other one is that of practice-based research. In order to establish a cinematic language that can articulate the impalpable dimensions of death and dying, creative practice is of utmost importance, as understanding in this instance derives from handling ([Bolt 2010](#)). The insights of creative practice constitute the basis from which the film could be developed.

## A) Autoethnography

Autoethnography tells stories, rather than writing essays ([Ellis and Bochner 2000](#), p.744).

Evocative stories activate subjectivity and compel emotional response. They long to be used rather than analysed; to be told and retold, rather than theorised and settled; to offer lessons for further conversation rather than undebatable conclusions; and to substitute the companionship of intimate detail for the loneliness of abstracted facts.

This illustrates why autoethnography with its inclusion of personal narrative is an appropriate choice as a framework to this study. When doing a research project that is an inquiry into how the abstract and intangible dimensions of death and dying can

be made accessible through cinematic language, one needs to find alternative methodological and epistemological ways, that go beyond the rational of scientific research. Death is something that we meet more often than not with emotions, especially when it comes to own death and death of loved ones. When the outcome of that research is to be a film whose core aim is to open hearts and minds and to evoke emotions, it is important to define a framework that can embrace the less rational and more ambiguous and subjective aspects of engaging with the subject, to make it accessible for people beyond the confines of the academy.

Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse personal experience in order to understand cultural experience ([Ellis et al.](#) 2010, p.1).

Autoethnography emerged to address the lack of suitable methodologies used to conduct research in social science. It applies personal experience to address cultural beliefs, practices or experiences ([Adams et al.](#) 2015). Social science analyses complex ambiguous or controversial matters such as emotions, human behaviour or socio-political issues such as racism, homophobia or disability, themes that touch us all in one way or another. [Ellis and Bochner](#) (2000) argue that we can learn from personal stories, from vulnerabilities, as they expose us to experiences that are potentially unknown to us and gain tolerance and humility. This project engages with the highly personal, highly abstract and highly delicate theme of dealing with death through cinematic language. How can this be possible without a personal approach? This is potentially slippery ground, because personal experiences on any topic vary; they are highly subjective and therefore difficult to categorise in scientific research. However, autoethnography distinctively “acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher's influence on research, rather than hiding from these matters or assuming they don't exist” ([Ellis et al.](#) 2010, p.2).

This autoethnographic approach allowed for my personal experience with cancer and facing death not only to be included, but to serve as basis from which to reflect on the wider social context. The questions I asked at the time and my desire to find some

answers, the way I finally coped with the prospect of potentially dying are at the core of my film, along with the personal accounts of Swedish filmmaker Ingmar Bergman and his lifelong struggle with death ([Bergman 1994](#)). Also, my increasing fear of losing my parents, something most of us must face at some point in life, could be given space and consideration under the framework of autoethnography. Under the umbrella of this methodology, aspects of death – our own death and death of loved ones and all the complications coming with it – could be discussed from a personal angle.

The aforementioned aim to make the study accessible to a wider audience encourages less traditional methodologies. Consequently, autoethnography became an obvious selection, as [Ellis and Bochner's](#) (2000, p.745) assertion confirms:

The accessibility and readability of the text repositions the reader as a co-participant in dialogue and thus rejects the orthodox view of the reader as a passive receiver of knowledge.

### 1) The personal voice

Who has not sat in a conference or panel discussion, fighting to keep one's eyes open, until someone in the panel refers to a personal experience? The collective awakening of the audience usually is palpable. A personal anecdote is certain to bring attention back to the speaker. This illustrates how much we react to personal accounts and how much we need stories to connect. There are studies ([Niederhoffer and Pennebaker 2012](#); [Drumm 2013](#); [Moore 2018](#)) that encourage incorporating personal stories and anecdotes to connect with others. Personal stories are authentic. And this authenticity, as [Knudsen](#) (2018, p.3) suggests, is:

... at the heart of my relationship with others and through sharing these authentic experiences I contribute to building a collective truth whose tentacles ultimately have roots in the personal experiences of us all.

By connecting with an audience through personal narrative, which can reveal a degree of vulnerability ([Moore 2018](#)) and thereby create a bond with the listener on the level

of mutual recognition and empathy ([The Health Foundation](#) 2016), I hope that the difficult subject of dealing with death and dying can be made more accessible and give the viewer the space and courage to engage with questions they may be asking.

The necessity to create comes from an urge to communicate a personal story, or experience, or view, or interest, as [Knudsen](#) (2018) suggests. He further asserts that it is akin to the necessity that drives all of nature to create. The interesting aspect of that assertion is that the starting point in every creative journey lies in our personal experience of the world that we wish to share. We only know the world from our personal perspective. It becomes therefore questionable how we could not make use of our personal voice to explore whatever drives us and simultaneously for the receiver of the creation, the result of our inquiries, to understand what they see from their personal perspective.

For the first assessment during my study of Digital Art, we were asked to create a short animation. It was the strong encouragement from our teacher to tell a personal story, that inspired me. I remember how much I needed to summon courage to express something very personal, without revealing too much privacy and making myself vulnerable, and to create a universal interest in my personal narrative. But working in that way and experiencing the reaction from those receiving my work, was a strong initiation to not only wanting to continue working from that personal voice but needing to and, moreover, needing to perceive others' work with that personal angle.

To speak with famous jazz-musician [Herbie Hancock](#) (2001, p. xiv)

Working with [art] is about letting yourself dig deep into your heart, about having the confidence to be vulnerable and to express that vulnerability, that core of our human-ness, in an honest way.

## B) Practice-based research

### 1) Definition

Research that involves an element of artistic practice has been described in many terms: practice-led research, research-led practice, practice-based research, practice as research, research as practice, artistic research, performative social science to name but a few. Some of these are separated by subtle differences, others are different terms for the same and used interchangeably. [Leavy](#) (2018) has placed these different terms under the overall umbrella of arts-based research (ABR), whilst she has also acknowledged that there are other terms to overall describe artistic forms of research and that the attempts of labelling work in that field have caused some confusion. The existence of this vast amount of terms for ABR illustrates that there is a need for further discourse, as it shows that there is yet no final answer to an appropriate terminology ([Cazeaux](#) 2017).

There is an important distinction to make here, to agree on a satisfying definition of a form of arts-based research and a framework into which to place this study. Contrary to other forms of arts-based research, where the artwork is a means to an end of presenting and disseminating knowledge about a given subject, in this case the artwork is the end and presents knowledge about itself. It means in concrete terms for *Beyond the Edges*, that the film is not made to add knowledge to how we can deal with the intangible aspects of death, but how we can express these aspects and make them accessible with cinematic language. The film itself in its form is the answer to the research question and the new-found knowledge.

I have situated this project in the methodological framework of practice-based research (PBR). [Skains](#) (2018, p.85) describes PBR as such:

Put simply, in practice-based research, the creative act is an experiment (whether or not the work itself is deemed 'experimental') designed to answer a directed research question about art and the practice of it, which could not otherwise be explored by other methods. We create art to connect with others, to connect with ourselves, and often just for the sake of it. We

experiment with our art in order to push boundaries, to ask questions, to learn more about our art and our role within it. This is nothing new. What emerges, then, from this methodology, is the exegesis that accompanies the creative work: that knowledge that has remained implicitly within the artist, made explicit and seated within the context of the scholarly field.

Art Practice, regardless of which form of expression is used, involves an element of experimentation, trial and error. And experimentation is the nature of research applied by scientists and artists alike to gain knowledge of life ([Mc Niff 2012](#)). When trying to make a contribution to the art of filmmaking, it seems appropriate to go beyond the perhaps traditional way of dissecting, analysing and deconstructing films to gain an understanding of the making and instead do the making, especially if the researcher is a filmmaker in the first place.

## 2) Interdependency between creative practice and theoretical enquiry

Perhaps a defining quality of art-based researchers is their willingness to start the work with questions and a willingness to design methods in response to the particular situation, as contrasted to the more general contemporary tendency within the human sciences to fit the question into a fixed research method. The art of the art-based researcher extends to the creation of a process of inquiry ([Mc Niff 2012, p.6](#)).

In this form of research, the creative practice and theoretical inquiry are intertwined. It is not that artwork is produced and then consequently the how's and why's are written about. It is more a process of reading – writing – making – thinking – reflecting - reading again - writing more and so on. The same texts would gain a new dimension when returning to them after the making has taken place. Equally the making would be altered, because of a new understanding from the theoretical research. It is a mutual inspiration between theory and practice that is taking place. Therefore, it has become imperative to make the writing equally as accessible as the creative artefact.

PBR is a discipline that highlights the important interrelationship between theory and practice in contemporary art ([Barrett and Bolt, 2010](#)). Where theory and practice

interplay and integrate, both elements become part of the creative process. [Goddard](#) (2010) describes (from his own experience of having undertaken such research) that the relationship between the practical and theoretical can become a form of dialogue.

This dialogue has taken place between the making of the film and the writing of the contextual exegesis, both of which have informed and inspired each other. Whatever questions the film has been asking, is reflected upon and analysed in the theoretical piece. Whatever insights come from that interrogation have been reflected back into the making of the film. This form of study allows the research question to be discussed within the medium it is intended for.

## **C) Methods**

Within practice-based research, a number of methods have been used to create *Beyond the Edges*. There are the more obvious ones, such as the contextual review and a literature review. But there are others, that have stood out and been the main routes of exploration: the intensive engagement with another filmmaker and the use of a blog to map and preserve the creative journey and the thinking along the way. Finally, and most importantly, there is creative practice itself. Actual making and experimenting with different forms of cinematic expression, through a number of short 'film sketches' have been a major part of this inquiry.

### **1) Dialogue with Ingmar Bergman**

One of the core methods and the one that stood clear at the beginning of this project was the intensive engagement with another artist, their work, their thinking, and approaches to how to create. In my case the artist in question was Swedish filmmaker Ingmar Bergman (1918-2007). He has been a filmmaker that has fascinated me since my youth, one with whom I have always felt a strange kinship. His imagery, the

ambiguity and metaphorical dimensions of his movies and not least his use of music, had early on ignited my curiosity. In fact, at the start of this research journey stood an exploration into how Bergman used music in his films. The recognition, however, that I am not, indeed, a Bergman-scholar, but a filmmaker and that my contribution would not be to the knowledge of Bergman studies, but to the art of filmmaking, directed my focus initially towards how Bergman considered music as a way to connect with the 'beyond' (*Sommar med Ingmar Bergman* 2004) and from there to how, as a filmmaker, I can explore and connect to the 'beyond' and express this with the language of film.

Why Bergman, one may ask. Well, Bergman does search for answers to the ultimate questions in life. "He wrestles and provokes the audience to wrestle with the dark matters of life and death..." ([Hertenstein](#) 2008, p.vii). In one way or another this battle is the driving force for his work, paired with his never subsiding fear of death. It would be simplifying it to say that all of his work is about death, but death without doubt plays a significant role in his output. To say it in his own words: "All my so-called artistic expression is only a desperate protest against death" ([Mosley 1981](#)). [Barrett](#) (BFI 2017) suggests that Bergman "probably more than any other filmmaker" explored personal demons through his work and he refused "to turn away from uncomfortable truths about human nature. [...] He forces us to confront aspects of ourselves that we would rather shy away from." He wanted to create beauty from ugliness ([Brooks](#) 2001) and use the dark aspects in a positive way. In his own words:

I have always had the ability to attach my demons to my chariot. And they have been forced to make themselves useful ([Bergman 1994](#), p.46).

This ambition has undoubtedly illuminated *Beyond the Edges*, where it has been important to acknowledge the darker thoughts and aspects of dealing with death and turning them into something uplifting and perhaps even empowering.

Ingmar Bergman, his work, and not least his writings, diaries and workbooks have been a great inspiration and influence. The intention has never been to make *Beyond the Edges* a film about Ingmar Bergman, but I certainly wanted to make it a film with

Ingmar Bergman. Observing and investigating another filmmaker's way of working, not so much in technical terms and outcome, but to understand how he developed his narratives and what his inspirations were and his thoughts, was a core method in creating my own script. In that sense, Ingmar Bergman became a virtual mentor, someone to guide my progress, someone with whom I 'discussed' what I did. Now, Bergman is obviously no longer alive, so his personal writings communicated his voice. In the foreword to his now published (in Swedish) workbooks, Danish writer Dorthe [Nors](#) (2018) describes a similar sort of process she went through in reading his workbooks. Ingmar Bergman became a work 'colleague', a 'friend' someone who reassured her, when she needed it.

This dialogue has been important as it has eliminated the 'blank page'. It gave me a starting point from which I could begin my exploration and a compass to navigate. The whole process was guided and informed from a personal perspective, the main question being, how I can make something so intensely personal universally accessible.

Bergman's films came from an intensely personal place, although it was never private. Many of them bear references to death. Some of the most notable and well-known are *The Seventh Seal* (1958) and *Cries and Whispers* (1972). In an interview with Dutch Television in 1966 ([Eyes On Cinema](#) 2015), Bergman revealed that he liked people discussing existential subjects from the depth of their own experiences. He wanted to communicate his visions, his dreams and his feelings and it was most important to him with his pictures to enable his audience to access their feelings. This personal aspect of his work and how he succeeded in making it universal, has greatly informed and inspired the narrative/ fabric of my film *Beyond the Edges*.

Does that mean that I was attempting to make a film like Ingmar Bergman? No, that would be preposterous. But I recognised that what preoccupied him, namely his obsession to make sense of death, echoed my own wish to express my thoughts on the subject through the means of cinematic language. Studying his writings and thoughts that resulted in his films, notably *The Seventh Seal* (1957), *Cries and Whispers*

(1972) and his last work for television, *Saraband* (2003), illuminated my own thinking and process and helped me to find my own form and expression. And not least, his deep wish to evoke emotions was matched by my own ambitions.

A main component to my engagement with Bergman was a month-long visit to the island of Fårö, a small archipelago off Gotland, a large island in the Baltic sea, where he had chosen to live and where he shot four of his movies, *Through a Glass Darkly* (1961), *Persona* (1966), *The Shame* (1968) and *The Passion of Anna* (1969), as well as a TV-series, *Scenes from a Marriage* (1973), and two documentaries, *Fårö Document* (1969) and *Fårö Document 1979* (1979). He only came to the island because his producers dismissed his suggestion to be filming on the Orkney Isles as too expensive and asked him to find an alternative location. It was love on first sight he tells us and discloses what his intuition had told him ([Bergman 1988](#), p.208):

This is your landscape, Bergman. It corresponds to your innermost imaginings of forms, proportions, colours, horizons, sounds, silences, lights and reflections. Security is here. Don't ask why. Explanations are clumsy rationalizations with hindsight. In, for instance, your profession you look for simplification, proportion, exertion, relaxation, breathing. The Fårö landscape gives you a wealth of all that.

It is precisely that landscape and the described characteristics of the island that spoke to me in a similar way and that's why I chose to find the images for my film there. I was fortunate to have been awarded a residency by Bergmangårdarna, the Bergman Estate on Fårö, which allowed me the opportunity not only to spend time in this landscape, but also to live in one of Bergman's houses and have daily and free access to his private residence. When I didn't film, I spent time writing, surrounded by the world of Ingmar Bergman. Sitting at his desk, looking out of his windows, watching his films from his extensive VHS library, gave a certain closeness, confirming my sense of kinship with him. Perhaps it also brought some further understanding of him and deepened my appreciation for the artist and his work and how it has come about. It was particularly through reading his workbooks that he became alive and a person with whom 'I had a cup of coffee' across his kitchen table.

This 'meeting' with the intimate world of Ingmar Bergman, through his thoughts and his surroundings, has undoubtedly influenced, inspired and shaped *Beyond the Edges*.

## 2) Research blog

The next important method for this study was writing a blog. Like Bergman I have written diary most of my life, sometimes more regularly, sometimes less, sometimes retrospectively, but often it was about grappling with thoughts and ideas. This and the inspiration of Bergman's workbooks and diaries made it an obvious method for me to hold on to my thinking, to use it as a means to document my creative journey.

A diary is useful during conscious, intentional, and painful spiritual evolutions. [...] An intimate diary is interesting especially when it records the awakening of ideas [...] ([Gide](#) 2000, p.15)

A creative journey is very difficult to document as it is usually very unstructured and unconstrained, which is also its strength. In my case it could be described precisely as 'conscious, intentional and painful spiritual evolution', as it reaches into abstract realms that are very difficult to define and grasp.

Blog writing or journal writing is nothing new. Notably in the arts it has long been known as a "powerful heuristic tool" ([Janesick](#) 1999, p. 506) to accompany research into making, with a diary of thoughts and inspirations. Not to forget the visual journals that are a very regularly used method of artists' creative journeys. Also, in qualitative research it appears to be common practice to use reflective journals ([Janesick](#) 1999). Most of the latter of these journals, however, are retrospective. They contain reflections on processes and key decisions made. Indeed, there exist practical guidelines as to what a reflective research journal should contain to be qualifying as a measure of dependability and confirmability ([Lincoln and Guba](#) 1982). The reflective and retrospective journal, [Skains](#) (2018) argues, can be a rather fallible method, as it relies upon memory and is taking place after, as opposed to during the creative act and therefore "often fails to offer insights into the cognitive processes of creation" (p.87).

My research blog is of an entirely different nature. It is not retrospective or reflective in terms of what I have done, but it is in a sense more prospective and revealing the thoughts I had whilst trying to find a way to approach my film. In a study to aid designers at the conceptual stage the researchers found:

The studies illustrated how, in creative work, exploratory ideas and acts arise during the process and sometimes as side effects rather than from the explicit objectives being pursued at the time. By their very nature, creative acts cannot be described in advance and this makes the modelling task somewhat challenging. In particular, the application of knowledge that is highly expert, distinctive in character and constantly evolving is a feature of the way creative people work ([Edmonds et al.](#), p.3).

The many thoughts I had were ranging from observations of daily routines or at events, to childhood memories, from questions I asked myself to books or articles I was reading. Everything became a source of inspiration. By forcing myself to write all these thoughts down, my awareness of everything around me and what I was thinking about was sharpened. It enabled me to hold on to my thoughts, whatever these thoughts were and to release them from the vagueness and fleeting nature they would probably have had otherwise. The blog entries influenced my thinking and encouraged an openness to any source of input. It preserved the cognitive processes as they happened, with all the open-ended questions that were asked along the way.

An added effect of the blog format is that it is, in theory, a shared undertaking. Comments could have been forthcoming that further could have informed my thinking. As it happened, although the blog was indeed in the public domain, no such comments materialised as I hadn't done anything to promote it. In retrospect, I would have liked to widen the outlook and benefit from the insights and dialogic comments that could have been given.

The parameters I defined for each blog entry were setting a title and then finding an image and a quote that would enhance, illustrate or add to my written thoughts. The most important aspect of this exercise was to apply the discipline to do it regularly.

This gave the exploration a clear and purposeful structure and consistent organisation ([McNiff 2012](#)).

The creative journey has become apparent through the blog. Many of my thoughts, questions and possible answers have found their way into *Beyond the Edges* and are thus at the core of both the film and the contextualising exegesis. It is like [Holmberg \(2018\)](#) describing the reading of Bergman's workbooks, as if one sits next to him in the moment of creation.

A selection of the most relevant entries is included in chapter V. A link to the entire unedited blog can be found in the appendices.

### **3) Creative practice**

Creative practice is the key method of enquiry in practice-based research ([Nelson 2013](#)). It is through making, that answers to a given question can be found. Creative practice consists of two processes, actual making and critical reflection upon what has been made. In the case of creative practice in the context of research, that latter part is given overarching importance. Rule 8 of the rules for teachers and students, attributed to John Cage, but actually devised by Sister Corita Kent, says: "Don't try to create and analyse at the same time. They're different processes" ([Pacatte 2017](#), p.29). In line with that suggestion, I kept both processes apart, not without appreciating that they still informed and inspired each other.

#### **3.1) Insights from previous work**

The starting point for the creative part of this research was looking back at previous work done and the insights that had come from there that could be applied to this project. It became an important piece in the jigsaw puzzle as to how to make a film that engages with the intangible aspects of death and dying. With my collaborator Sheena Graham-George we had created several pieces of work that addressed the

unbaptised infant burial grounds in Ireland and the tragic consequences this custom had for many. The common ground between the work we did and this project, is the delicate and sensitive nature of the subject. Also, we used film, sound and music, poetry and installation as a means to communicate our thoughts. Therefore, I could draw important knowledge from evaluating the experience of making these works and not least the audience response. The main conclusion I drew from these previous experiences influenced my considerations with regards to the presentation.



Illustration 2 Installation photograph:  
*Voices from the Cillín* ([Graham-George and Kroeger](#) 2015)

To accommodate the specifically sensitive nature of the subject in *Voices from the Cillín* (2015)<sup>1</sup>, we had created a space in which the audience would feel safe to contemplate and linger with their thoughts. We had designed a room full of shadow projections, which gave the audience surroundings in which they could feel comfortable to engage with the film that was shown, containing image, poetry, sound and music. In that room we had placed a few chairs, otherwise nothing. Although the film only lasted for about 20 minutes, the nature of that immersive experience encouraged the vast majority of the viewers to stay in the room much longer, often more than an hour.

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<sup>1</sup> A teaser to *Voices from the Cillín* is included as Appendix 4



Illustration 3 Installation  
photograph: *Lullaby for Adults*  
([Graham-George and Kroeger](#) 2016)

We created a space with similar characteristics in our site-specific piece *Lullaby for Adults* (2016)<sup>2</sup> and the response from the audience was the same. Many came a second time, expressing the wish to be alone with the exhibition to be able to stay with their thoughts.

The audience response to these pieces, which was similar at our exhibitions in different venues and countries had made an impact and was something I wished to explore further with this project. It is one of the main reasons why I have elected to present *Beyond the Edges* as a circular multi-screen installation rather than a

linear film experience. I will elaborate further on these considerations in chapter VI.

A third piece we created in collaboration brought a different set of insights, which have impacted on my film. *Song of Love* (2017)<sup>3</sup> is a sound piece, which was inspired by a local Irish farmer and the tradition in which his family has farmed and walked the land for generations. The piece was composed mainly from the sounds of the land and the domestic environments combined with human voices, both sung and spoken. It was performed as a surround sound installation where the audience was seated amongst the speakers and just listened. In conversation with members of the audience after the performances, people regularly referred to the piece as a film, although no images were provided. This very unexpected perception of the piece suggested that recordings of recognisable sounds perhaps might have the potential to trigger images from the memories and personal experiences of the listener. The importance of sound for remembering has increasingly been recognised in the later years, state [Bijsterveld and Van Dijck](#) (2009), who argue that sound and memory are inextricably linked. [Morris](#) (2001) claims that recollection of certain sounds assumes a melancholic

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<sup>2</sup> A teaser to *Lullaby for Adults* is included as Appendix 5

<sup>3</sup> *Song of Love* is included as Appendix 6

relationship to that sound when what is triggers by that evocation is no longer there. The revelation from members of the audience was a notion that I tried to explore further in a series of short films.

### 3.2) Film sketches: trial and error

While many areas of science strive for replication and constancy of results in experiments, the arts welcome the inevitable variations that emerge from systematic practice ([McNiff 2012, p.7](#)).

To find a way to use cinematic language to express the intangible aspects of death and dying, I conducted a series of short preliminary films as experiments with temporary footage and sound/music. These short sketches enquired into various aspects of cinematic expression, such as fragments and discontinuity, the relationship between still and moving image and the role of language and music. The aim was to gain an understanding as to how I could open the viewers' senses to dare to ponder themes around death and dying. I experimented with developing a cinematic language that could access a spiritual and existential dimension, in order to articulate questions on the abstract aspects of death and dying.

For the initial experimental sketches, I determined a number of parameters and then changed one or two of them at a time for the following sketches in the series. On the visual side these parameters were moving image, still image and no image. On the audio side they were music, spoken word, sound and silence. Through these sketches I attempted to explore the following:

- how to express death visually and sonically
- how different sound and music changes the impact of images
- the impact of the use of different voices on the experience of listening
- the juxtaposition of contrasting sounds and images
- separation of image, sound and text
- impact of black space and still image versus moving image

- figurative versus abstract images
- diegetic sound and music
- the use of the sound of clock and sea

The first series I called *Death* and it consisted of three sketches. In this series I explored the use of different types of sound and music, from concrete sounds that would have the ability to trigger memories, to abstract sounds that would have a more inconspicuous impact. I also used different narrators for the same text. That had an unexpected effect. The way the words were spoken by one of the narrators made them sound like a poem. That was the inspiration to writing poems as text for the film. I will talk further about the poem as a form and how it is used in *Beyond the Edges* in chapter VI.

The second series was called *The Sea*. This series also consisted of three sketches. The focus in *The Sea* series was mainly on image. I experimented with contrasting still and moving images, slowly stopping the movement of images and alternating image and black space. Not least I explored the image of the moving sea and what it has the ability to signify and tell. Finally, I examined dynamics with regards to pace and content. What emerged from this series was the importance of space. The more that happened on screen the less there was space to think.

The final series, *Time*, was to investigate the use of figurative images and personal narrative. How much of a figure can be shown before they become a certain person and no longer a placeholder for anyone. Rhythm was the second focus. The ticking sound was an important sonic element, whether in form of a clock, a heartbeat or the dripping of water. I asked the question how far I can go to separate the elements that make the film: image, sound, text, music and silence.

These experiments have played a major part in determining the final form of *Beyond the Edges*. The separation of image, text and sound/music appeared to give each element the greatest impact. The fragments can create that space for the viewer to have their own thoughts. The sparser the image, it seems, the more imagination and

thinking is inspired. The soundscape has the leading function to give emotional signifiers and to connect the separated parts and to create a whole. I used the sketches to push the various aspects of expression in order to test their validity. I utilised these findings in the making of the final film but elected to soften the impact by using them more moderately and subtly, to direct the spectator to receiving the content rather than negotiating the form. I wanted to make the experience more accessible for the viewer and reach a wider audience.

## **D) Summary**

The methodological framework of a combination of autoethnography and practice-based research has given me the opportunity to explore the use of film language to engage with the intangible aspects of death and dying through a personal approach. It allowed for the communication of the subject with emotion and gives that emotional form credit within the academic research. The tacit dimension of art making is given expression and the cognitive processes are made accessible for the reader as well as for the maker. Now the framework is in place, in the next chapter I will review the literature on death in film and analyse a number of films in the genre of personal narrative and experimental/ avantgarde film to put my own work in context and bring attention to the gap in the body of films that I address with this study.

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## Chapter IV: Literature/ Contextual Review

*We dance round in a ring and suppose,  
but the secret sits in the middle and knows.*

[Robert Frost](#) (1964)

Whilst the relationship with death and its representation has roots in every culture, my focus with this study is on what is usually termed as Western culture. This generally means to include Europe and North America. My cultural references and sensibilities have developed from a Northern European, predominantly Lutheran-protestant background, which is a further connection with the universe of Ingmar Bergman.

Scholarly literature on death in film is proportionally underrepresented, when compared with the occurrence of death on screen ([Sullivan and Greenberg](#) 2013). This chapter reviews what is written on death in film and examines how others have presented the subject of death and dying in practice. I will look at some of the most well-known films of my 'mentor' Ingmar Bergman that have death at its centre and underlying theme, and how he might have succeeded in addressing the intangible aspects of it. I will review contributions in personal narrative and experimental/ avant-garde films from a range of artists and filmmakers, to explain why these could hold a key to defining a language that can make the intangible aspects of death and dying accessible and what is still missing.

### A) Death in film literature

Film is a medium in which death occurs on a regular basis, with the on-screen death tolls rising over the decades. Whereas in 1940, according to a study ([GoCompare](#) 2016) about death tolls in best performing Hollywood films since 1940, there was only

one film (*King Kong*, directed by Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack, 1933) with more than 50 on screen deaths. This number has been steadily rising. Now the numbers of casualties in these films are well into the thousands. The last two films of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (*The Two Towers*, 2002 and *The Return of the King*, 2003, both directed by Peter Jackson,) feature combined 4,512 deaths and the 2014 film *Guardians of the Galaxy* (directed by James Gunn) holds a staggering record of on-screen deaths of 83,871 ([Shoard](#) 2016), which would equate to a major disaster in reality terms, such as an earthquake or a tsunami or a global pandemic or such. But in these films, death mostly comes with no cost or consequence.

They are, as [Aaron](#) (2014) reminds us, part of the entertainment industry. Death seems to be bearable as long as it is confined to fiction. Death happens to others and somewhere else ([Blanco and Vidal](#) 2015). The presence of death in mainstream cinema and literary fiction appears diametrically opposed to the visibility of the reality of it in our society. Death is everywhere and nowhere, says [Aaron](#) (2014). It is on the one hand in our faces in graphic detail on posters announcing new blockbuster films and violent crime series, which are increasingly popular, but in real life we try to ignore any thought of death ([Blanco and Vidal](#) 2015). [Gorer](#) (1955, p.51) states:

[...] while natural death became more and more smothered in prudery, violent death has played an ever-growing part in the fantasies offered to mass audience – detective stories, thrillers, westerns, war stories, spy stories, science fiction, and eventually horror comics.

A paper by [Schultz and Huet](#) (2001) investigates death as portrayed in American film. They assessed scenes in which death occurs and recorded reactions to it in a range of American popular and award-winning films. They describe the results as presenting:

... a disturbing picture of death in movies, one described as psychologically obscene. In American film, death is distorted into a sensational stream of violent attacks by males, with fear, injury, further aggression, and the absence of normal grief reactions as the most common responses (p.137).

They conclude that these results, together with the virtual absence of sorrow and crying in the sample of films they have investigated, indicate that there is “an avoidance and repression of death emotions in American film” (p.147) and further:

One must search diligently through the body of American film to find examples in which the treatment of death helps viewers to transcend its experience in reality (p.147).

Drawing on that observation, my claim that there is a need for a cinematic language that can deal with the intangible aspects of death and dying, including the array of emotions that come with the reality of it, is substantiated.

[Aaron](#) (2014, p.155) argues that there indeed exists “a cinematic language of dying, which is rich and multifaceted, but heavily censored.” In her comprehensive analysis, she assesses the cinematic language of dying in mainstream cinema in three parts, from the anticipation of death to the experience of it and finally to afterlife. She suggests there is a “lexicon of cinematic dying” in mainstream cinema, in which ‘triumph’ and ‘futurism’ come top of the list, whereas the brutality and ugliness of the reality of death is rarely addressed in Hollywood film. She argues that the innocuous and poignant representations of death in mainstream film are “potent distancing devices” (p.4) that cover over fears of our own and others’ deaths. She further claims that the consumption of the death of others in film reassures us of our own survival and allows us to forget the reality of our mortality for the duration of watching. Her assessment also highlights that there is a need for a way not to forget the reality of death, but, on the contrary, to be enabled to engage with it.

Aaron’s book is a thorough description and analysis of how cinema’s linguistic is applied to represent dying in a variety of contexts and different forms in mainstream film, but it is always concerning the representation of the physical act of dying. What is missing is how the intangible aspects of death and dying can be expressed with cinematic language.

[Sullivan and Greenberg](#) (2013) argue that prior to their anthology, most of what had been written on death in film, was concerning the depiction of violence and horror. In their volume, various authors explore the cinematic portrayal of mortality, and the fear of it, in films of different genres and cultural contexts and demonstrate that the subject of death is the theme in many non-violent films also, which they suggest deserves more scholarly attention.

[Vogel](#) (2005) observes that commercial cinema either avoids or romanticises death, because a fictional portrayal of death causes anxiety that upsets the order of our daily life and disturbs the illusion of eternity. What is even more significant, he argues, is that documentary filmmakers have not taken up this most universal subject more frequently, which he believes, testifies to it being taboo in contemporary cinema. [Sobchack](#) (2004, p.233) claims that we indeed never see death on screen. If anything, we see dying. "Whereas being can be visibly represented [...] nonbeing is not visible. It lies over the threshold of visibility and representation".

None of these authors differentiates explicitly between the tangible and intangible aspects of death and dying. Scholarly literature addresses physical aspects of dying and its representation. This distinction, however, I deem to be key in finding the essence of what I am looking for in cinematic language.

## B) Death in film

Death with its tangible implications is indeed a subject in many films, e.g. in terms of fulfilling bucket lists before dying, e.g. *The Bucket List* (directed by Rob Reiner, 2007), grief and mourning, e.g. *P.S. I love you* (directed by Richard LaGravenese, 2007) or being around terminal illness, e.g. *The Fault in our Stars* (directed by Josh Boone, 2014). There is death as a media spectacle in fiction (*Death Watch*, directed by Bertrand Tavernier, 1980) or in reality, and I am thinking here of the story of reality TV

star Jade Goodie, who had chosen to document the journey towards her own end for television and was watched with record ratings ([Brown](#) 2009).

But when it comes to the intangible aspects of death and dying, the questions asked, the inner philosophical, metaphysical dealings, the abstract inaccessible world of death, the potentially ugly, dark and fearsome aspects, those which are often unspoken and dealt with - or not - in seclusion and secrecy, there is far less film being made. Looking beyond Hollywood ([Aaron](#) 2014), examples of films that deal with some of these aspects are Akira Kurosawa's *Ikiru* (1952), Michael Haneke's *Amour* (2012) or the 2001 television film *Wit* (directed by Mike Nichols). Still, death is not something most ordinary people talk about freely in contemporary Western society and that is reflected in the way film is dealing with the subject.

At this point it is important to distinguish between different genres of films to narrow down to what is achievable within the scope of this study. As previously mentioned, I am particularly concerned with the personal narrative and experimental/ avant-garde film. And, as he has been the core inspiration for this research, the films of Ingmar Bergman.

As this selection includes both fictional films and documentaries, it may be worth including a word on ethics, in the light of a sensitive topic such as death and dying. [Nichols](#) (1994) claims that documentary arose from the need to counteract the often sensationalised and simplified representation of reality in fiction films. The intent was to enable viewers to operate in and view the world with a "greater sense of knowledge or even a more fully elaborated conception of social structure and historical process" (p.47). It was about finding and representing the truth by producing arguments through audio-visual evidence, which placed the documentary closer to rhetoric than aesthetic. The representation of death on screen, however, still remains a difficult pursuit, whether it is portrayed in fiction film or documentary. [Nichols](#) (1994) argues that death affects us differently in a fictional account, regardless of how realistic the

imagery may be. [Sobchack](#) (1984) makes a very clear differentiation between documentary and fiction:

Thus, while death is generally experienced in fiction films as representable and often excessively visible, in documentary films it is experienced as confounding representation, as exceeding visibility.” (p.287)

Both Nichols (1994) and Sobchack (1984) refer to the representation of the physical and tangible dimensions of death and dying. The intangible aspects, with which this research is concerned, are even more problematic to represent, as they are invisible and highly subjective and therefore defying any category of truth.

### 1) Death in Bergman films

Ingmar Bergman claimed that his entire work was an outcry against death ([Mosley](#) 1981). Unlike many other filmmakers, he addresses the subject, in a philosophical and spiritual manner, in a way that goes under the skin and inspires the viewer to ask questions. His international fame specifically, [Koskinen](#) (2018, p.5) argues:

[...] rests on the fact that he brought to the cinema issues traditionally belonging to the domains of philosophy and religion and which, not long ago, few people thought this art form was capable of.

It is this ability to engage with existential questions of life that made him such an inspiration and ideal ‘collaborator’ for this project.

Death played a significant role in the work of Ingmar Bergman. He said that he had been afraid of death all his life and from an early age ([Bergman](#) 1994), although his statements varied. In 1961 he confided in Swedish writer and director Vilgot Sjöman that having made *The Seventh Seal* released him from his fear of death ([Cowie](#) 2013). After an operation, in which he was unconscious for eight hours, he concluded that when we die, we go from a state of something to a state of nothing, which he felt was a comforting thought at the time. Yet after the death of his last wife Ingrid van Rosen, he felt convinced that he would meet her again in the ‘beyond’ ([Behind Saraband](#)

2003). Whatever his shifting thoughts were on death, it has played a role in nearly all of his work ([Cowie](#) 2013). From an early unpublished novel *A Strange Story* (1938) in which he first describes a man with a skull face and wearing a black cloak ([Koskinen](#) 2002), to the personification of death in *The Seventh Seal* (1957) through to *Saraband* (2003), there are countless references to his obsession with death.

At this point it becomes necessary to reiterate that this exegesis is not a 'Bergman study'. It would therefore go beyond the purpose of this research to engage in depth with the vast, almost overwhelming existing Bergman scholarship, to which Birgitta [Steene](#)'s (2005) monumental over 1000-page long Bergman reference index, or Erik [Hedling](#)'s (2017) more recently published index, bear impressive witness. Instead, I have, as mentioned, studied his personal writings in form of his diaries and workbooks, as they proved to be more relevant to my own artistic practice and did serve as a guide and inspiration as to how to approach making a film on how the intangible aspects of death and dying could be made accessible through cinematic language.

Many of Bergman's films could be referred to that have death as a main or underlying theme. However, there are notably three films, *The Seventh Seal* (1957), *Cries and Whispers* (1973) and *Saraband* (2003) that I want to focus on in this context, as they were particular inspirations for my study. Bergman made these films in three different decades, and they testify how his relationship and consequent portrayal of death has developed over the years. Whereas in *The Seventh Seal* (1957) he portrays death in manifest human form, in *Cries and Whispers* (1973) he shows a woman in a state of limbo between life and death and culminating in his last work (*Saraband* 2003), where death is treated as an invisible transition. I have chosen to engage with a select few texts on these films that have most relevance to my own investigation. [Lauder](#) (1989) centres on the existential and philosophical visions of Bergman's films. He describes them as "a marriage of movies and metaphysics" (p.33). [Koskinen](#) (2008) focusses on the theme of a life beyond death, and [Rice](#) (1975) concentrates on Bergman's thoughts on the fragmentation of a human existence and its desire to become whole. *The Seventh Seal* (1957) is a highly allegorical film ([Steene](#) 1968) that encapsulates most of what preoccupied Bergman's thinking throughout his career ([Lauder](#) 1989). It

is set in the Middle Ages at the time of the plague. A knight returns from the crusades and is met by death. The knight asks for more time, so they engage in a game of chess with his soul as the ultimate price. Bergman impersonates Death quite literally as a pale, black-cloaked figure. This unexpectedly bold and direct representation of death and the uncompromisingly asked existential questions about the silence of God in the film are its particular strength ([Ebert](#) 2000), especially in an age of irony, as Ebert observes, where we might feel uneasy contemplating these existential questions. The title is derived from the Book of Revelation: “And when he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for the space of half an hour” (Revelation 8:1, King James Bible). According to [Lauder](#) (1989), this half hour was for Bergman an opportunity of reflection about human existence. *The Seventh Seal* (1957) is an artistic expression of his philosophical response, a response to the silence in heaven ([Lauder](#) 1989). The film is particularly inspired by Bergman’s own unbearable fear of death ([Bergman](#) 1994) and a collective fear of nuclear annihilation that overshadowed Western society in the 1950s and 60s ([Cowie](#) 2013). The thought of death being equivalent to total extinction was for him a source of horror. This film, according to [Lauder](#) (1989), can be seen as a paradigm for the ever-recurring themes of Bergman’s work, which are God, death, art and love. The scene of the knight playing chess with death “sums up not only this film, but much of Bergman’s work. The human person is trying to find meaning in the face of death” ([Lauder](#) 1989, p. 40).

The presence of death is everywhere in *Cries and Whispers* (1973), which according to [Lauder](#) (1989) is another story about people trying to find meaning with life. At the centre of the story is the imminent death of Agnes, who is surrounded by her maid and her two visiting sisters. Bergman explores the theme of human closeness or the lack of it ([Rice](#) 1975). Human closeness is experienced through the relationship of Agnes with her maid Anna and, in comparison, the lack of closeness through the relationship with her two sisters, who are unable to cope with the threat of death, and even less with their sister’s final moments. The closeness between Agnes and Anna is epitomised in an iconic image of cinema ([Rice](#) 1975), in which Bergman resurrects Agnes from the dead in a ghostly appearance that frightens the older sisters, but calls for Anna, who is the only one who can respond to Agnes’ wish for closeness and

intimacy and she holds her in a pieta like position, warming her with her own body ([Kroeger](#) 2013). Ebert comments:

The feeling in these scenes - I should say, the way they force us to feel – constitutes the meaning of this film. It has no abstract message; it communicates with us on a level of human feeling so deep that we are afraid to invent words for the things found there (Ebert cited [Broman](#) 2012, p. 19).

According to [Rice](#) (1975), Bergman explores the theme of the fragmentation of the human soul and the yearning for wholeness on the basis of the threat of death. Rice considers *Cries and Whispers* (1973) to be the “desire to heal fragmentation between self and others and between separate elements in the individual psyche” (p.148). The ability to regain wholeness, however, is inhibited by the innate fear of physical death. Ingmar Bergman wrote in a comment in the screenplay: “Death is the extreme of loneliness; that is what is so important” (Bergman cited by [Cowie](#) 2013, p.164) and this loneliness is represented by the two other sisters.

Bergman’s last film *Saraband* (2003), made for television, is dedicated to his late wife Ingrid, with whose death he had great difficulty coming to terms. *Saraband* is about the “overwhelming presence of the past, as well as the terrible void, in the absence of a dead woman, in the present”, and “perhaps a wish or hope that there exists a ‘land of the dead’” ([Koskinen](#) 2008, p. 31). Bergman revealed in an interview at the time of filming *Saraband*, that his greatest wish was to see his wife Ingrid again. His life-long friend and actor Erland Josephson told him that if that was what he really wanted, he just had to believe that he would. Bergman was so stunned by the simplicity of this suggestion that he noted in his diary: “I have decided to embrace the thought that I will see Ingrid again” ([Bergman](#) 2018, p.423). In his exploration of the metaphysical connection to the ‘beyond’, he not only imagines seeing his wife again, but also plays with the thought of being already dead himself, which is witnessed by his diary entries at the time of writing the script: “I can now experience myself as already dead” ([Bergman](#) 2018, p.426), and manifested in the character of Johan, who describes the feeling of his isolation as: ‘I’m already dead, though I don’t know it’ (*Saraband* 2003).

The quintessence of *Saraband* is death. [Koskinen](#) (2018) argues that death indeed is the main character of the film. And it is about passage. She describes (p. 34):

It is about gradual disappearance, but it is also about hope for re-birth after death. But in that case no longer in the image of becoming entangled by the big and frightening black cape of personified death, as in *The Seventh Seal*, but rather in the image of gradually disappearing into the soft embrace of a woman.

Bergman used film to deal with his own life and his fear of death. He used it to make sense of his failings and shortcomings and tried to make amends in his narratives, which never appear personal. This, however, should not reduce his films to psychoanalytical exercises ([Koskinen](#) 2018). The questions he asked himself in his films and the questions he gave his audience to ask, have formed the bedrock of my approach to this study.

## 2) Death in personal narrative and experimental/ avant-garde film

Apart from Bergman's films there were a number of other contributions that came closer to what I was looking for when I was faced with death myself. The selection, that I will present here, has been chosen for very specific reasons.

*Island* (directed by Steven Eastwood, 2017) is not only presented as a film, but also as an installation (*The Interval and the Instant*, 2017). *The Dad Project* (directed by Briony Campbell, 2009) makes intensive use of still images. *Noch hier – Schon da* [Still here - Already there] (directed by Roswitha Ziegler, 2014), emphasises the difficulty the carer faces, the person who is not the protagonist, but the bystander. *Bye* (directed by Ed van der Elsken, 1990) is a film following the filmmakers own dying process. These films all belong to the category personal narrative. The last two films I am going to talk about, *The Passing* (directed by Bill Viola, 1991) and *Blue* (directed by Derek Jarman, 1993) are experimental/ avant-garde films. They have in common that they are omitting one element that is usually found in the fabric of a film; spoken word in the case of *The Passing* and images in the case of *Blue*. Both of these films have been

presented in a gallery setting. All of the listed aspects, which I will elaborate on in this chapter, illustrate the gap I am trying to address in this study, and they have been part of the considerations for the making of *Beyond the Edges*. They are holding a key to answering the question as to how to make the intangible aspects of death and dying accessible through cinematic language.

### 2.1) *Island* - Steven Eastwood

British filmmaker Steven Eastwood goes very close to real death in his film *Island* (2017) and the sister multi-screen installation *The Interval and the Instant* (2017). Although he is personally engaged with his subjects, they are not related to him. This gives him and also the audience a comfortable distance that can help the viewer to engage with death. They are patients in a hospice in palliative care, waiting for their time. He focuses mainly on three individuals whose stories couldn't be more different. The images of the people are juxtaposed with images of the landscape of the Isle of Wight, which is the location for the film, the comings and goings of the ferries, that symbolises the passing from one realm into the next and the rehearsals of a choir of Brahms' *Ein Deutsches Requiem*.

Eastwood explained in an interview that he wanted "to be witness to the moment of death [...] to know more about what happens throughout the process of dying" ([Lux](#) 2018). He succeeds in that first endeavour and manages to capture that moment. It is interesting to experience how unspectacular that moment turns out to be. In fact, it almost goes unnoticed. Eastwood wishes to give the dying an image, to release them from the hidden view and thereby give the end of life some public attention. But exactly what happens in the process of dying with the internal landscape of the person dying or of the person observing, we know very little. And it is these intangible aspects of death that I wish to find a way to articulate with cinematic means. Not necessarily at the moment of death, but in the time leading up to it, however long that time may last.

## 2.2) *The Dad Project* – Briony Campbell

Briony Campbell's *Dad-Project* (2009) takes a much more personal route. With a mixture of still and moving images she has documented her good-bye from her dad through the last few months of his life. The personal nature of her project caused her some concern, but eventually she felt that if she made this personal story universal, it could open dialogues with others who are also quiet about their struggle to come to terms with death ([Campbell](#) 2015).

The project for her becomes a way to work with her dad and to work through her grief about losing him ([Campbell](#) 2015). The camera becomes an instrument for her to embrace her emotions. From taking images of her dad, she soon turns her gaze towards herself, trying to show her own feelings, show what was going on inside her. At this point things become difficult. Is it possible to show what is going on inside? From seeing her crying, we assume she is sad. But that might only be a fraction of an array of feelings, that is visible. It is difficult to know and perhaps not even accessible in the mind of the beholder.

Campbell's film is a beautiful and poetic attempt to make sense of losing a loved one. It does talk about fears and it does ask questions, but ultimately it portrays the filmmaker's catharsis. As we are presented with the story of her and her father, she reflects herself (2015), the images of her dad were perhaps more meaningful for her than for the viewer.

## 2.3) *Noch hier, Schon da* – Roswitha Ziegler

Roswitha Ziegler's film *Noch hier, Schon da* [Still here, Already there] (2014) describes a similar process. It is another very personal story, as she joins the journey of her husband from cancer diagnosis to death. It is a very strong account of alternating hope and despair and, as an additional aspect, expresses the difficult situation of the carer, in this case also the filmmaker, who often feel they have to hold back their own emotions to support the protagonist of any given story.

It is a film about disappearance, about how a person retreats further and further into themselves and their own world and loses contact with the world of others long before they die. As for Campbell, the documenting of that disappearance helps Ziegler achieve some form of distance to what is happening and to manage her grief ([Wendländische Filmkooperative](#) 2014). The film does not hide anything. It juxtaposes beautiful images of nature with the increasing frequency of hospital visits. The strongest parts are when the filmmaker herself as the carer reveals how she struggles to cope with the diminishing world of her husband and the demands on her understanding. It is a very strong and very personal film, but as with *The Dad Project* it probably has an even stronger meaning for the filmmaker herself. The internal, abstract and intangible is touched upon, but it seems the main focus lies on the physical journey.

#### 2.4) *Bye* – Ed van der Elsken

Dutch photographer Ed van der Elsken in his film *Bye* (1990) documents his own decline and journey through terminal prostate cancer. It is a brutally honest film about dying, “filled with anger, resentment, sadness, pain, but also joy, hope, even humour” ([Horak](#), 1997, p. 238). It is a story of severe pain, relief when the medicine works successfully and sometimes pride over the fact that he is still able to work. In order to tell the story of his own end, van der Elsken almost objectifies himself, perhaps the only way for him to face death ([Horak](#), 1997). It becomes almost a reading at times, where he reads his own written words to the camera. It is mostly the physical aspects he reveals, and he is shockingly blunt and merciless with himself. But it also becomes clear that he does not know what to expect. He says it only once in words, but many times through the expression of his face ([Roodnat](#) 2017).

Making this film gave him a strong affirmation of his existence, because he was still able to work, as bit by bit his physical abilities diminished. He was trying to leave a legacy in this film and to fight death with the means of its documentation. His last shot is a close up of himself, waving good-bye to the viewer: “I quit. I'm going to say

goodbye. I'm almost there. Love you all right, good luck, do your best. Show who you are. Bye" ([Roodnat](#) 2017, p.36). His partner, who assisted him to make this film, tells us that he wanted to reveal what dying looks like ([Roodnat](#) 2017).

Although both Ziegler's and van der Elsken's films are very strong, they give a sense of trespassing, as what they present in public, appears almost too intimate and private at times.

## 2.5) *The Passing* – Bill Viola

We can find a very different sort of response to the facts of life and death in *The Passing* (1991) by Bill Viola. It is a film about beginnings and endings, about "senses of bereavement, mortality and loss" ([Cubitt](#) 1995, p.114). There are no words, only image and sound. The images can be perceived as being of an abstract nature at times, as they are filmed as such extreme close ups and with such strong contrast between black and white; a sleeping man, images of Viola's son being born and images of his mother dying, a man (himself) floating in water, beautiful images of desolate nature. Some images look as though they are taken from a family album ([Cubitt](#) 1995). The most prevalent sound is that of breathing and that of water. Bill Viola wanted to create a sensory experience. For him "a sensory experience is the means of comprehending and encountering the invisible" ([Viola](#) 1995, p.182). [Cubitt](#) (1995, p. 114) suggests that "Viola pursues irreducible and, to some extent, unspeakable moments of consciousness: limit points of the communicable."

One element, which belongs to the convention of film is missing in *The Passing*: the spoken word. That is the most striking difference in the context of this selection of films. It is that missing element that creates room for thought. There are undoubtedly many ways in which *The Passing* can speak to an audience, many ways in which it can be read and interpreted. But it is precisely that missing element that allows one's own thoughts to come to the fore. The recognition of that brought me closer to what I was looking for in the grammar of film language with which I may be able to access the

intangible dimensions of death and dying. The ambiguity and fragmentary quality of this piece seemed to hold a key.

## 2.6) *Blue* – Derek Jarman

Space to think can also be found in Derek Jarman's last feature film *Blue* (1993), which features only a blue screen for the entire duration. In his swansong Jarman tried to come to terms with his declining eyesight, caused by an infection in connection with his H.I.V diagnosis, which temporarily left him to see only in blue. Ultimately this film is an effort to come to terms with his nearing end. It could almost be perceived as a Buddhist meditation with the sounding bell, and music and narration presenting self-contained episodes that form a whole ([Bennett-Carpenter](#) 2017). Jarman has woven together poetry and prose in a tapestry of blunt anecdotes of hospital experiences and lyrical philosophical considerations, narrated by himself and three other voices. In contrast to the outrage and energy that is characteristic of most of his work, *Blue* is much softer. He seems almost resigned to his fate, expressing obvious grief about his own situation and the loss of many of his friends to the same illness, yet not without a sense of absurdity and humour ([Bennett-Carpenter](#) 2017).

As in *The Passing*, one element of film is missing here. In this case it is the image. The screen is a static blue from beginning to end. That has the effect that one's senses do not need to concentrate on watching an image, but full attention can be given to listening to sound and music and letting one's own imagination unfold. Bennett-Carpenter (2017) proposes that this format could create a much more varied experience for the audience, as it leaves more room for interpretation. This notion suggests that by omitting an aspect of film, by only using fragments of the convention of it, it might be possible to create that space for the audience to think and to open themselves up to thoughts on death and dying.

## C) Summary and interim findings

These films approach the subject of death and dying in different ways. Some of them are very direct, some more metaphorical, some fictive and others very factual. There were a number of conclusions I could draw from watching these films for the making of *Beyond the Edges*.

The documentary format can direct the viewer's attention too strongly on a particular story about a particular person, which makes it harder to contemplate one's own questions. Through disconnecting a personal story from the image of the person telling the story, I found that questions about death and dying could be articulated on a more universal level.

The experience of watching the films that used a different format, by omitting elements of the film linguistic, i.e. the more experimental films by Viola and Jarman, which are playing with fragments in one way or another, seem to open a path that encourages further exploration. Leaving out something allows the viewer to insert something ([Hanich 2018](#)). Both of these films allow the viewer space to do that. Is the answer perhaps to be found in the absence of things? Before I will further discuss the use of fragments in various forms in chapter VI, chapter V presents a synopsis and extracts from my research blog, which testifies to the creative journey, thoughts and investigations that preceded the making of *Beyond the Edges*.

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## Chapter V: Research Blog

*To see a World in a Grain of Sand  
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower  
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand  
And Eternity in an hour*

[William Blake](#) (2007)

This chapter presents a synopsis of the most important fields that were explored in my blog, together with extracts of the most relevant entries. In order to explain how *Beyond the Edges* was conceived and ultimately came into being, my research blog holds the key. It contains many of the questions that were asked along the way and that formed the basis for style and content of the film. It is the essence of my spiritual and creative journey into making *Beyond the Edges* and reveals the origins of my thinking. It is therefore necessary to present parts of that blog, before I in the following chapter elaborate further on the eclectic influences and concepts that have informed and shaped *Beyond the Edges*.

When it comes to creative work there is a lot of thinking and consideration that goes unnoticed, often even for the artists themselves. And even if it is paid attention to, it is very rarely published. Every influence and inspiration count in the creative process, regardless of its origin. That perhaps makes it so different from pure academic research. In the creative process all sources become valuable as they inform the internal workings of the creator and are essential to shape the creative output. This eclecticism was also essential for the approach to this study and the making of *Beyond the Edges*. It informed the writing of the poetry for the film and it helped to determine its form and style, from the role of music to the use of fragments.

The blog was written precisely for the purpose of documenting the internal creative process. It enabled me to hold onto the thoughts, which are otherwise often fleeting and remain in the dark.

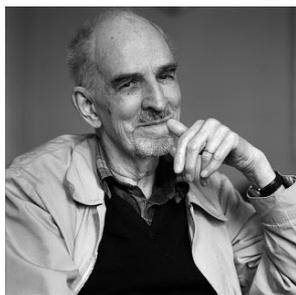
This chapter thus includes a selection of the most relevant blog entries and puts them into the context of my research. They are not written in academic format and presented here unedited. For the purpose of this chapter, I have clustered the selected passages in themes, disregarding the timeline in which they were originally written<sup>4</sup>.

## A) About Bergman

Ingmar Bergman and his films and not least his relationship with music has been the starting point of this study. The following blog entries reveal how through the intense study, not only of his films, but also of his personal writings, I have gained a deeper understanding of the artist and his life. It has defined my connection with him, the influential role he has had and the inspiration he has given to this project.

### *Entry No 2: Why Bergman?*

Tuesday, 22 March 2016



*Illustration 4* Photograph:  
*Ingmar Bergman* ([Bertin](#) 2001)

Watching forty years of my work over the span of one year [for the accomplishment of *Images: My life in film*] turned out to be unexpectedly upsetting, at times unbearable. I suddenly realised that my movies had mostly been conceived in the depths of my soul, in my heart, my brain, my nerves, my sex, and not to the least, in my guts.

[Ingmar Bergman](#) (1994)

Ingmar Bergman has had a deep impact on my thoughts as a filmmaker, not just visually, but mainly for his choice of topics. His films give the audience so much work to do. He asks the big questions about life and death. His films don't give any answers, but leave you with more questions, open up your own thought

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<sup>4</sup> A link to the entire blog in chronological order can be found as Appendix 3.

process on existence. As such I find his films deeply philosophical. The more I read about him and was let in on his thoughts by reading his diaries, the more I recognised a kindred spirit, a seeking soul and I feel very protective of him. Liv Ullmann's foreword to *Bergman Revisited* talks so much about his vulnerability. It is this vulnerability that I can sense, and which connects me with him. [...]

#### *Entry No 6: How to get to know someone*

Wednesday, 8 June 2016

[...] During my visits at the Bergman Archives in November, I had the privilege to start reading his personal workbooks. It was a great feeling to hold in my hand the diaries of my greatest inspiration as a filmmaker. Looking at the dates - 18th June 1998 - when he wrote one of his entries, made me think about where I was on that specific date. His handwriting seemed neat at first glance. But at closer inspection I found I couldn't read a word. It took me three days, before I could even begin to make sense of a few words. I got frustrated and thought I would need help to decipher his diaries, thinking of the limited time I have in Stockholm and the vast amounts of material to read through.

But on second thoughts it felt absolutely alright. No one gets to know another in a matter of days. Getting to know another takes time and effort. My laborious efforts to try to decipher Bergman's handwriting somehow became a metaphor for my endeavour to get to know the person behind the artist. And that made all the hard work worthwhile.

#### *Entry No 17: Private or Personal?*

Saturday, 16 July 2016

The best and most powerful art comes from the guts of the artist I believe. Every piece of art is in some sense autobiographical. This prompts the question again as to where the artist places themselves within their art - a question I stumble

upon again and again without yet having found an answer. I believe one must differentiate between private and personal. Whereas I would define private as viewing only onto oneself, personal uses one's own experience to express a more universal message. This might be a somewhat simple way to distinguish this and it will need some further exploration, but for the sake of this particular blog, it must suffice.

Ingmar Bergman's work appears to me intensely personal, although never private. He seems to be able to strike that balance between personal and private perfectly. The questions he asks in his films, which are so profound and existential are posed in a way that makes them universal. I have not yet grasped what it is that takes his work out of the realm of privacy. He is not appearing personally in his films, yet he is ever present, I feel.

By exploring how Bergman strikes this fine balance, I hope to gain an insight into finding my own way to place myself into my work.

### *Entry No 35: Edges*

Monday, 3 October 2016



*Illustration 5*  
Screen grab: *Bergman och filmen* (2004)

Not only was Ingmar Bergman an island in society. This position is also reflected in many of his films. His characters are on the edges and the settings for many of his films are on the edges too, either at the edge of the sea, between the sea and the land or on islands or on isolated spots. Many of his films are set in isolation to the rest of the world. Is that how Bergman saw himself in relation to society?

Where artist put themselves in the context of their work is a question I have been reflecting on intensively. All art is autobiographical, and it seems to me that Bergman's work is reflecting to the extreme his own position in the world.

It is only a natural conclusion that he finds his retreat and sanctuary on Fårö, the tiny island in the Baltic sea off the Gotland coast.

How can you make art on society if you place yourself outside of it?

## B) About music and sound

Music and sound have always been very important to me, especially in connection with their use in film and art. Hence also my interest in how Bergman uses music in his films. In trying to grasp and make accessible something as unfathomable as the intangible dimensions of death, music and sound seem to lead the way and provide a way forward. These passages from my blog give an insight into how the roles of sound and music with their abstract qualities have been identified to become the leading elements, carrying the emotional signifiers for *Beyond the Edges*.

### *Entry no 25: Sound I*

Saturday, 13 August 2016

How does snow sound? What is the sound of cold? Of loneliness? Of death? In the film *Beyond Silence* (1996), the daughter of deaf and mute parents has to describe for them how things sound. Thunder, snow, ice.

I previously have connected a bell with death in my little sketch. But there must be other sounds that signify death. The sound of cold maybe, because death is cold? Are those sounds, that remind us of things, individual or are they culturally

predefined? Are connections made to cold with different sounds in the West, than in the East, just like the symbolism of colour varies in different cultures?

I want to explore sound in connection with death, faith, time and loneliness and see where it leads me.

### *Entry No 37: The World is Sound*

Thursday, 20 October 2016

What makes us feel drawn to music is that our whole being is music; our mind and our body, the nature in which we live, the nature which has made us, all that is beneath and around us, it is all music; and we are close to all this music, and live and move and have our being in music.

Hazrat Inayat Khan (in [Berendt](#) 1983)

*Nada Brahma - The World is Sound* is a book based on a number of talks given by Joachim-Ernst Behrendt in which he explores the existence of music and sound in a cosmic context. It is fascinating how the rules of harmony are applicable to almost everything from the physical proportions of the human body to the movement of the planets. He suggests that 'hearing, rather than seeing, is the key to a more spiritual experience of consciousness.' The book offers amongst many other things, explanations as to why we respond to harmony, to the 'right' proportions and to the experience of being in nature.

It might seem irrelevant in a discussion about how music is used in films of Ingmar Bergman, however, considering the way Bergman connects with music, that it has some metaphysical qualities for him, makes it interesting to explore. Notably the spiritual aspect I find worth mentioning.

Bergman has been struggling with 'God' and religion all of his life. Maybe he found what he was looking for in music. Maybe that was why music was so incredibly important for him

### *Entry No 40: Picking up the Pieces*

Monday, 23 January 2017

Looking through my tutorial notes today I had this light bulb moment, which seemed to connect the components of my research: Ingmar Bergman, myself as an artist, music and death. I keep circling around the ideas of fragments, the abstraction of inner thought processes and how to find a visual language for that.

Music is the most abstract of expressive art forms. Maybe that's why it is so good to be used to express emotions. Emotions too are very abstract, so is death. Music is a way to make abstractions, emotions and inner thoughts audible.

Bergman had a difficult relationship to music and an equally difficult relationship to death. But he was none the less fascinated by both. Music inspired his work in content as well as structure. So maybe this quality of music was what attracted him to it; that he could express something that words cannot say? His fear of death perhaps?

Maybe that is what connects me to him? Maybe I can relate to what he expresses in his use of music in all its forms?

### *Entry No 52: Sound II*

Monday, 23 January 2017

What really began to interest me was not so much the music that I could write but the states of mind I would experience when I felt musical enough to compose. In those moments, when I became musical, all the sounds around me also became musical.

[Bill Fontana](#) (2020)

Two recent experiences with sound had a great impact on my thinking. The first one was my participation on a film shoot as a sound recordist. What became

clear instantly was that the emphasis and focus lay entirely on the image. Sound was allowed to operate in the background. Any considerations like generator noises or the like were dismissed with 'we do that in post'. What became so apparent was that we take sound for granted. In modern film it is all about beautiful image.

Another experience was our recent sound installation in Dunquin Church in Co Kerry, Ireland. It was a piece of sound only. It was part of an art festival and people were required to listen. It was the first time I've ever worked with surround sound and it was a fantastic experience, because it made the soundscape spatial, three-dimensional and immersive. Not that I didn't know that in theory before, but there is a huge difference between listening and creating. The audience were puzzled to begin with as to what to look at, but many after the listening experience reported of all the images the sound had created for them.

And that for me is the crucial point and one I want to further pursue. Images, as beautiful as they might be, deliver only fragments. They restrict the viewers imagination. They are prescriptive. Sound on the other hand allows the freedom to create images. Each listener will have their own images and makes their own story. Now it is going to be interesting how I can combine images with sound without losing the freedom of imagination.

### *Entry No 53: Watching music and sound*

Friday, 1 December 2017

It is becoming ever more important to me to explore the relationship between sound and image in film. Sound, it appears to me, is a background affair that accompanies the action and 'tells' the viewer what to feel. This is true for many films, if not most.

Bergman gives music a more elevated position, whether he knew what he did or not. Often in his work, when music is played, not much else is happening. The action comes to a hold, so to speak. What he tried to do is to express something that he could not express in words, therefore the dialogue had to stop and be replaced by music. Perhaps unknowingly, but he is on to something there. Images, it becomes more and more clear to me, are rigid, even restrictive. Sound, on the other hand brings some sculptural and spatial qualities, which allow images to form in the mind and therefore in an unexpected way delivers a much more complete picture, as the viewer is contributing their own story to the piece.

### **C) About death**

Death is not the prime subject of investigation in this study. Neither is it how we as individuals or society deal with it. The question is how we can access the intangible dimensions of death with cinematic language. The blog entries in this cluster bring to light my considerations about what the intangible aspects of death might be, what it is we cannot grasp, inspired by my own search for answers during my illness and treatment.

#### *Entry No 19: Fear of Death*

Tuesday, 19 July 2016

When does our fear of death start? When we are young, we believe we are immortal, and the concept of death is not connected to ourselves. This is true for most of us. My fear of death came to the fore when I was diagnosed with Stage 3 cancer. It gave me the opportunity to challenge my fear of dying, look death straight in the face, an experience that was greatly supported by my Buddhist faith. Bergman was only about 12, when he believed that God didn't exist.

God didn't exist. No one could prove he existed. If he existed, then he was evidently a horrid God, petty-minded, unforgiving and biased. (Ingmar Bergman, *The Magic Lantern*, 1988)

He also was afraid of death already then.

I was afraid of death. (...) Death is horrid. You don't know what comes afterwards. (...) death is an insoluble horror, not because it hurts, but because it's full of beastly dreams you can't wake up from. (Ingmar Bergman, *The Magic Lantern*, 1988)

The same fear of death was still with him when he was making his very last film *Saraband*. Music was a way for him to reach beyond death. A consolation perhaps. Would he have found it easier to confront his fear of death had he had a stronger faith?

### *Entry No 29: Death*

Thursday, 1 September 2016

Death is the most profound and significant fact of life (...) The fact of death alone gives true depth to the question as to the meaning of life. Life in this world has meaning just because there is death; if there were no death in the world, life would be meaningless. The meaning is bound up with the end.

Nikolai Berdyaev (in [Calian](#) 1965)

I like the above quote that states that death gives meaning to life. It makes sense that there needs to be an end to things in order to find meaning with them. But it doesn't make it less scary.

Religion was invented to help humanity understand death. It is the one question that unites all humanity. We find it difficult to cope with the unknown. For many, death is just a black void. Philosophers and theologians have been trying to find explanations for centuries.

For Bergman, death was the transition from something to nothing. I find this an incredibly sad and hopeless statement. No wonder he was scared of death all his life. For me, death is a transition to a different, dormant state, in which the essence of us dwells and then returns to life when the time and the circumstances are right. No one is born empty. Everyone comes with luggage. Where does that come from?

The ocean for me is a beautiful metaphor of this. The ocean of life, as I like to see it, contains all life infinitely. When time and circumstances are right a wave breaks on the shore. This is a life. Then the wave returns to the ocean and we return to the big endless pool of life when we die.

This image is comforting to me. It lets me cope with the idea of death. It doesn't matter if it is true or false, or if it can be proven or not. For me it is true and helps me to make sense of my life and to conquer the fear of death.

*Entry No 31: The dividing line*

Saturday, 3 September 2016

Death is a dividing line. It separates the living from the dead. But not only that. It separates the grieving from those who stand by them. Sometimes it is the bystanders who withdraw, because they don't know how to deal with the grieving. And sometimes it is the grieving who withdraw into their own world and can't be reached any longer. They seem almost as far away and gone as the dead they are grieving for. But there is one big difference. There is hope!! Hope that they will come back and join the living, which sets them in everything apart from the dead.

There is always hope!

## *Entry No 32: Living with Death*

Sunday, 4 September 2016

This morning I listened to a programme on the Danish radio, where a father talked about the loss of his young son and how this changed his life and outlook.

He didn't have the power to change what was inevitable and he realised that sometimes we have to succumb to something that is bigger than us. In this day and age, we have the idea that we can change everything if only we put enough belief and energy towards our goals and wishes. This is not true. There are things we cannot change, and it is more valuable to find ways to cope with the unchangeable, rather than using all our strength to change it.

Maybe the dead are gone, but they are alive through us, not just as a memory but as an invisible caring energy, regardless of our beliefs. Sorrow can be a form of spiritual energy. But we live in a society where death and everything connected to it - especially sorrow - is almost taboo. Our relationship with death as a society is denial first and foremost. He asked the question: Where is he now? And finding the answer to that question led him to redefining his whole system of beliefs about society and spirituality.

He talked about sorrow being looked at as something to get over; almost like curing an illness. Society expects us 'to get on with it' and put it behind us. But that's not what sorrow is about in his view. Sorrow is a form of love. Therefore, he does not want to lose it. His sorrow is an expression of the love he now feels for his son. That's why for him it is a form of energy, an energy that has the potential to destroy people, but also an energy which is possible to direct. The energy unleashes regardless, and we can't control it, but we can control the direction it will take. His sorrow has changed his life for the better. He would never say it was a gift, because it was a catastrophe, but as he couldn't change it, he used it. It became a huge transforming energy that changed all aspects of his life and keeps changing him - not straight away, but as time went on.

This resonates deeply with my own life experience of being diagnosed with stage 3 cancer. Hearing that news originally threw me in a deep abyss of disbelief and fear. But as time went on, I was able to direct that energy and take the opportunity to look death in the face. I used it to try to understand my fear of dying. I realised that regardless of how many people are going with you on your journey, the final step you have to go alone. And I realised that I will be able to do that when my time comes.

This experience has changed my life profoundly and it keeps changing, but there is a huge difference between living with your own prospect of death and the death of a loved one. The feeling of powerlessness is overwhelming in a very different way. Loss seems to be even more difficult to grasp than one's own death.

### *Entry No 33: Change*

Monday, 5 September 2016

Everything is in constant change. Nothing remains the same. This is something most of us find immensely difficult. We cling to what we know and fear the unknown. This is at its extreme when it comes to death.

In the last week I walked 10 miles every day along the beach of a small Danish Island in the Baltic Sea. Change did become very apparent. Not one day the beach was the same as before. There was the amount of seaweed in water and shore, but also the very coastline did change. The sea took every day a little bit. A little bit of sand dune where I sat one day was gone the next- taken by the sea.

It made me think about change and our inability to embrace it. But humanity has also an incredible ability to adapt to new circumstances. As difficult as we might find change, we are extraordinarily capable of adjusting to new circumstances.

Change is necessary for development. Change offers new possibilities. Change is the main ingredient of life. As painful as it might be at times, change shapes our lives constantly into new directions.

But change and new directions always include some form of loss. To gain something new, something existing gets lost. And loss can be very difficult.

## D) About fragments

Fragments have emerged as the most important element that has shaped the style and form of *Beyond the Edges*. The following entries reveal where that idea originated and consequently developed.

### *Entry No 28: Fragments*

Sunday, 28 August 2016



*Illustration 6 Photograph:*  
*Murdina goes Percival*  
*Square* ([Ingram](#) 2013)

This is a picture by Andrea Ingram, a photographer I admire greatly for her work, because she captures glimpses in her work, fragments perhaps, something that is incomplete. This is the kind of visual expression I would like to achieve in film.

What interests me in art is the suggestive. Things that are partly revealed and therefore leave room for own interpretation. I like it when things are not clear cut, rather give me pointers in which direction maybe to think; things, that allow me to think and don't immerse me in truths that I can accept or dismiss.

How is the suggestive achieved? I think fragments and incompleteness help greatly to provide questions rather than answers and in that, for me, lies the strength. When it comes to film, I prefer mostly those that leave me with work to do, those that leave me with questions to which I need to find the answer myself and within.

Maybe that is why I am fascinated by Ingmar Bergman's work.

### *Entry No 42: The Notion of Fragments*

Friday, 3 February 2017



*Illustration 7. Painting:  
The Poet* ([Picasso](#) 1911)

Fragments seem to be a more and more important aspect of approaching my film and thesis. Whether it is death, faith or music, all of these are abstract concepts and as such very difficult to put into words or images. At the moment it seems they can only be touched on in the form of fragments. But that is probably a good thing. It is my idea, that by creating a film that consists of fragments and leave the audience to fill in the gaps, the piece becomes more of a whole, than if it was complete. A complete and finished piece might leave the audience dissatisfied, as it does not leave any questions for the viewer to seek the answer to, based on their own biography. [...]

## Entry No 45: Further on Fragments

Tuesday, 14 February 2017



Illustration 8. Painting:  
*Seated Nude* ([Picasso](#)  
1909-10)

I had a discussion about the notion of fragments yesterday. The question was asked how we can visualise a fragmented view of things. Our brain has a remarkable capacity to fill in gaps. [...]

Now, this is interesting in the context of filmmaking. [...] When two scenes are joined, regardless of how disconnected they might be as separate scenes, the brain will link them and create a new reality. This

begs the question how as a filmmaker it is possible to create a fragmented story, which also is perceived as fragmented. Are there visual tricks that can be applied to deceive the brain? What happens for example if we inserted a number of black frames between two cuts? What happens when we show a multitude of fragments simultaneously on screen?

Apart from the technical question as to how to visually disconnect scenes, the brain's ability to fill in gaps has much farther-reaching implications. If the brain completes what is fragmented, do we ever need to show anything that is whole? Is there such a thing as a whole? [...]

If now a filmmaker visually links a number of fragments, and the brain fills in the gaps in between, that would result in as many stories as there are people to watch it, as every brain would fill in the gaps based on their background and culture. And that is, what seems to me, desirable.

## E) About art and the role of the artist

The role of the artist in the context of their art in general and my position within my own art in particular, have always provoked my thinking. It was therefore only natural that questions regarding that subject were frequently reflected on in this blog. I especially contemplated the question of the role of the artist in the context of academic study. Whilst these thoughts are not directly spoken about in the film, they have undoubtedly heavily influenced the film and the written exegesis. I therefore included some entries to that regard in this chapter.

### *Entry No 4: Scholar or filmmaker?*

Sunday, 5 June 2016



*Illustration 9* Photograph:  
*Scholar or Filmmaker* ([Kroeger](#) 2016a)

This is a question I have been pondering over lately in the context of my research. In fact, I have not been thinking about it at all to be honest, but I have been contemplating to which field I actually will add new knowledge, which of course is the purpose of any academic research. Now, I'm doing practice-based research. Can that still be academic or do different rules apply to that? First of all, I am a filmmaker, an artist. Therefore, it seems obvious that art and filmmaking would be the area to which I can contribute best, not to the scholarly knowledge of anything concerned with Ingmar Bergman. There are many scholars out there who would be much better to do that. However, through my engagement with Ingmar Bergman and a way of documenting this in film I will without a doubt be able to contribute a lot to our knowledge of Ingmar Bergman. This revelation, this slight twist in approach has paved a new and fascinating route for me and my research. It is the journey that is the important and will make the destination apparent on its way.

## Entry No 5: Is research in art relevant?

Monday, 6 June 2016



Illustration 10. Painting: *Two Women Running on the Beach* (Picasso 1922)

Art is the lie that enables us to realise the truth.

Pablo Picasso (in [Willard](#) 2019)

So, I'm trying to add knowledge to the art of filmmaking, to how an artist engages with their muse. Is that really relevant research? Does it contribute anything to humanity in light of all the problems that need solving in our world, be it medically, environmentally or socially?

Art and culture are important. They enable us to see things in a different light. They enable us to play, to fantasise and to dream. They allow us to enter a different world, a place to reflect, away from the drudgery of everyday. In this day and age, everyone makes films. Thanks to technology many people are equipped with smartphones, which produce surprisingly good quality footage. But does what makes good quality footage necessarily make a good film? Is every film that appears on YouTube, art? And if not, why not? To answer these questions, research in art does become relevant and so does adding knowledge to the process of filmmaking and engaging with other artists and their ways. Because art is incredibly relevant, and always has been, to connect humanity.

## Entry No 9: The Voice of Art

Saturday, 25 June 2016

It is not the office of art to spotlight alternatives, but to resist by its form alone the course of the world, which permanently puts a pistol to men's heads.

Theodor [Adorno](#) (1962)

[...] I ask myself what the role of the artist is in society. And I come to the conclusion that it is not only an opportunity, but also an obligation for the artist's voice to be aware of what is happening around us and to use our 'voice' to make statements.

As artists we can make things look differently, we can distort them, we can change the angle of looking, we can make ugly things beautiful and the other way around. We can create an awareness for hidden, uncomfortable and awkward issues. And we can ask questions with our art.

Bergman asked lots of questions in his films, big questions, such as 'Is there a God?', 'What does war do to us?', 'What happens after death?', 'What is the role of the artist in society?'. But he doesn't provide answers, he leaves the audience to answer these questions for themselves. That's why his films are not easy going. In fact, they give the audience work to do. But they also leave you behind with these questions, that you then have to find an answer to yourself.

Without a doubt, all the questions came from his own personal seeking of answers, but because he formulated them through art, in his case through his films, these questions are put into the public domain and for the audience to relate to them in the context of their own thinking.

Art, of whatever kind is incredibly important and provides an immeasurable contribution to society. It is therefore, that art is often found threatening by governments, who would like to keep their people ignorant.

As an artist I have to be aware of this powerful role that I can play and use it wisely. My research in that context cannot therefore only be an academic exercise, that just adds more knowledge to a certain academic field, but it must consider how it can contribute to the greater context of society and it must therefore be made accessible for a wider audience and those who don't necessarily have an existing knowledge in the field.

## F) About filmmaking

The following entries reveal thoughts on filmmaking in general that were influential for this project.

### *Entry No 11: A Matter of Angles*

Wednesday, 29 June 2016

The disconcerting ease, with which photographs can be taken, the inevitable even when inadvertent authority of the camera's result, suggests a very tenuous relation to knowing.

Susan [Sontag](#) (1979)

This quote by Susan Sontag derives from a time when digital didn't yet exist, and photography was a craft for those who seriously worked with it and a dependency on photo labs for the snapshots of others. Then, it was not anywhere near as easy to take a photograph as it is now. The question of authority, however remains.

It all depends on the role of the photographer. If they are an artist, the image is an interpretation of the depicted; if they are a journalist it is perceived as the truth.

When it comes to film, a documentary is perceived as truth, but also documentaries are told from the chosen angle of the director and the selections of the editor. Also, research claims to know the truth, until another researcher claims to have found a new truth or added to the old one. But research is also conducted from the viewpoint of the researcher.

My research is about filmmaking and about Ingmar Bergman. I'm making a film. My film will not claim to know the truth about either. It will try to get close to answers about both through my own angle, my personal relationship with film and Bergman and my acquired knowledge. In that sense it will also very much be a film about myself - about my truth. The truth is all a matter of angles.

## Entry No 38: Questions

Thursday, 27 October 2016



Illustration 11 Illustration:  
Arrows ([Gosciny and Uderzo](#) 1969, p. 45)

How to visualise and make audible inner thought processes? How to develop a cinematic language and sound fabric to explore abstract thoughts, fears and ideas? How to make the abstract accessible without restricting it?

As a filmmaker, or indeed any artist you are creating from within. The whole process of creating is somewhat fuzzy. So many different things influence the thought process at any one time. You go off on tangents and follow different paths, that potentially lead somewhere you'd never had envisaged going to before. I find it fascinating to discover what routes you go on to arrive at your destination. It is that creative process that is the most interesting and the most difficult. Once you know what you are doing it is 'only' execution, which can have its own set of problems attached to it, but it is not anywhere near as difficult or as scary as creating. Creating is the most vulnerable process.

So how is it possible to show this, to present it, so that it is interesting to follow and inspiring for other artists and creators? And why is it important to do this in the first place?

### G) About the film sketches

The film sketches were a very important part of this research, where I could test and trial various ideas with regards to form and content. The experiments manifested in practice what I had explored in theory. The entries below give an insight into the initial thoughts that inspired the series of sketches.

*Entry No 10: From Word to Image*

Monday, 27 June 2016

Film as dream, film as music. No art passes our conscience in the way film does, and goes directly to our feelings, deep down into the dark rooms of our souls.

[Ingmar Bergman](#) (1994)

I have now written a number of blogs and I'm getting right into it. It helps me to put out my thoughts and make sense of them that way. It also is a good way to get closer to where I am going with my project, both in terms of content and in terms of form. It helps me to write out what I think rather than considering every word. I might not use any of this in my final film or thesis, but it works fantastically as a sketchbook and a monitor of where my thinking is going.

The next step is to translate these blogs into visual responses, to take the same thoughts and express them visually, rather than with words. It is going to be a challenge and puts me out of my comfort zone to begin with, even though as a filmmaker and photographer my medium is the image. But it is a way of creating visual responses, that are more than mere illustrations of a text. They don't need to be perfect pieces. It is sketchbook work

My project is about filmmaking, about the process of filmmaking. So, the journey with all its challenges is part of it. Ingmar Bergman is my closest collaborator. I am in constant dialogue with him about this process and get to know him more and more on route. It does not mean that I aspire to do what he did. Rather on the contrary. By bouncing my thoughts off him, I find my own way of expressing things, not always with his approval.

I feel immensely inspired to have such an admired and accomplished filmmaker at my side to find my practice. This project will be life changing in many ways and it will without a doubt shape me as an artist and filmmaker, and hopefully also reaches into the deepest rooms of other souls.

## Entry No 14: Decay

Saturday, 9 July 2016



Illustration 12 Photograph:  
Decay ([Kroeger](#) 2016b)

Grief is the thing with feathers.

Max [Porter](#) (2015)

The top floor of the Elizabeth Barrett Browning Building in Ledbury has been derelict. We used it for storage during our exhibition of *Voices from the Cillín* during the Ledbury Poetry Festival. On the windowsill of the room, where we had our things, lay a dead wagtail. It was beautiful. It inspired me to try to make a small film sketch about decay. Starting with the bird, then finding the wings of a butterfly, then a wasp, flies, I found many dead things on the top floor. But decay didn't stop there. The windows were broken, the plaster was peeling off and the electrics were sticking out from the wall. There were cobwebs and dust everywhere. But it was all beautiful. So beautiful that it inspired me to take pictures of it, to freeze the current state of decay. Next week it will already look different and in a year's time the bird will only be a skeleton.

## Entry No 16: The Relentlessness of Time

Friday, 15 July 2016



Illustration 13 Photograph:  
Time ([Kroeger](#) 2016c)

All photographs are memento mori. To take a photograph is to participate in another person's (or thing's) mortality, vulnerability, mutability. Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time's relentless melt.

Susan [Sontag](#) (1979)

Tick-tack, tick-tack, tick-tack. The sound of a ticking clock reveals that time never stands still. Every tick brings me closer to the end. There is nothing that can stop it. It scares me when I think about it. Yet what is time? Is it hours, minutes, years? These are just units to measure time.

But what is it we are measuring? Time is measured in relation to motion - how long does it take to move from A to B. Time without motion is relative. Ten minutes can last for an hour or just a few seconds, depending on the situation we find ourselves in. Time is mind-boggling and yet we are utterly dependent of it. We are afraid of it because we don't want it to go and we loathe it because it doesn't go fast enough. Our whole existence is defined through time.

Tick-tack, tick-tack, tick-tack. It tells us about our mortality, about the linearity of our lives. It will not leave us alone.

Tick-tack, tick-tack, tick tack. I am a filmmaker. I take pictures. I capture moments in time that are left behind, when I'm long gone. I can make a single moment immortal. Thinking about that makes every picture valuable. But time goes on, relentless, to eternity.

Tick-tack, tick-tack, tick-tack.....

### *Entry No 22: First Visual Sketch*

Saturday, 30 July 2016

For the first little visual sketch I am going to explore death through a mixture of imagery and selected diary entries from Ingmar Bergman. I am not certain about the sound element. Will there be complete silence, or will I use some form of sound? What is the sound of death? Bells maybe or even just one bell that is often heard in connection with funerals? Or just some kind of eerie sound? That would make death eerie, which it probably is not. No sound could be perceived as a mistake rather than a chosen omission. Silence could work in contrast to sound. But some kind of sound is needed.

## H) About other influences

Finally, here are a small number of entries that show other important influences that had an impact on the making of *Beyond the Edges*. The meeting with Merleau-Ponty was crucial and affected not just the way I approached the practical element of this study, the making of the film, but also my thinking about the relationship between the practical and the theoretical. A visit to the conference *Sonic Acts* in Amsterdam, at which I experienced a great variety of artwork, from experimental film and sound art to installation, as well as inspiring talks, had a profound impact on the direction of this project.

### 44) Eye and Mind

Thursday, 9 February 2017



Illustration 14.  
Painting: *Mont Sainte-Victoire*  
([Cézanne](#) 1904-1906)

What I am trying to convey to you is more mysterious; it is entwined in the very roots of being, in the impalpable source of sensations.

J. Gasquet, Cézanne (in [Merleau-Ponty](#) 1960)

In the process of getting to understand the relationship between autoethnography and practice-based research I came across an essay

by Maurice Merleau-Ponty titled *Eye and Mind*.

It takes a starting point in painting and the painter's way of seeing, a process that I think can equally apply to film or indeed to any visual art, because it describes in a sense the very process of seeing and creating. In essence it describes the simultaneity of a person seeing and being seen. It offers an alternative to the representational view of the world. In fact, it describes reality as ambiguous, as it is always seen from a subjective viewpoint and with the viewer being an object as well as a subject.

This supports the idea that all art is autobiographical, that it is impossible to create anything without including the personal point of view whether that may be in a rather overt or more subtle manner.

It therefore makes sense to claim that conducting research in art, any visual art discipline in fact, must contain a degree of autoethnography.

### *Entry No 48: Trace Evidence*

Monday, 13 March 2017



*Illustration 15*  
Screen grab: *Trace Evidence* (2017)

This research documentary by Susan Schuppli (2016) was interesting and very well made. It was another trilogy, exploring ‘the geological, meteorological, and hydrological appearance of nuclear evidence secreted within the molecular arrangement of matter. It focuses upon three events: the unearthing of ancient nuclear reactors at the uranium mine site in Oklo, Gabon in 1972, the discovery of Chernobyl’s airborne contaminants at the Forsmark power plant in Sweden in April 1986 and the 7,600 kilometre five year journey of Caesium-137 from Fukushima-Daiichi through the waters of the Pacific Ocean to the west coast of Vancouver Island.’

I liked the film. It was interesting and informative. I thought the soundscape was done very cleverly by Philippe Ciompi. He took sounds from devices such as a Geiger counter, which are used by the scientists and seen in the visuals, and sampled them into small melodic sequences to be mixed in with the soundscape. In many ways *Trace Evidence* reminded me of Justin Bennett’s beautiful *Vilgiskoddeoayvinyarvi*. It was also a trilogy and had scientific content. It was very well photographed and engaging. However, there were two vast divergences between the two pieces. One was the narration. Whereas *Trace*

*Evidence* was a traditional documentary with dry and emotionless delivered scientific content and information, *Vilgiskoddeoayvinyarvi* was a personal story, which engaged the viewer on a very different level. Here we learned about a person doing his work and the scientific information was delivered as part of that story. The viewer was involved with the scientist, almost walking next to him. It made a huge difference as to how the viewer engaged with the content.

The other big differentiation between the two pieces was the set up. *Trace Evidence*, the traditional documentary was delivered in a traditional and conventional way in an auditorium with raised seats in one end and a big screen in the other end. The audience knew exactly how to behave in this setup and what was expected of them. *Vilgiskoddeoayvinyarvi*, on the other hand, required a rather different engagement from the audience, through the separation of the screen for the three different parts, the intimacy of the one bench for a maximum of only four spectators and the headphones that were suspended from the ceiling.

It was a very interesting and inspiring experience to see both works within a couple of days. I am intrigued by the setup of *Vilgiskoddeoayvinyarvi* and how it opened my mind even before I started watching it because it forced me to negotiate a viewing situation that I was not familiar with and I will explore how I could apply a more installation style setup for my PhD film.

*Entry No 50: Vilgiskoddeoayvinyarvi - Wolf Lake in the Mountains*



*Illustration 16* Installation photograph: *Vilgiskoddeoayvinyarvi* ([Kers](#) 2017)

This video installation by Justin Bennett (2017) was for me the most inspiring piece I've seen at Sonic Acts. It was a three-part video, set onto three, physically separated screens, a triptych so to speak. It meant for the audience

(there was space and headphones for four at the time) to physically move from one screen to the next. The three parts were synchronised, so there was time to settle in front of the new screen before it began. It is an interesting setup, because it makes you negotiate how you watch a film, as it breaks up the usual habit of film watching. A gentle soundscape of subtle nature sounds mixed in with the occasional crow, connected the three locations and instilled an impression of being on site. Only 4 viewers at the time, quite close to the screen, gave a sense of intimacy and it highlighted the feeling of being addressed personally.

Other than the form, the content was very interesting too. It was a film about a scientist, Victor, who was working at the Kola Superdeep borehole, a project that had started during the cold war. The hole is the deepest ever dug by human beings, with a depth of over twelve kilometres. The site was used to gather geological data, but also functioned as a listening station for seismic movement and enemies' nuclear activity. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the project was slowly wound down, as were other scientific projects, and the site fell into dilapidation. It was finally abandoned in 2008. Victor Koslowski, however, still works there, gathering data about the earth's crust from his listening.

In the film, Victor shows the viewer around the derelict site, talking about its history and mission. Victor is not seen, but it is his voice that brings the viewer close. It is a very personal account; history unfolds through the eyes of an individual. It is the narrative that carries the images. Still images I thought to begin with and then realised that they were actually moving; an odd crow flying through the scene, a cobweb waiving in the breeze, dripping water. Once I discovered that the images were moving, they are even more mesmerising. Because the senses are not occupied with lots of screen action there is room for listening. The sound appears to be recorded binaurally. The narrator's voice is in one ear, giving the impression that he stands right next to you and the next minute it is in the other ear. You get the feeling that the scientist is physically guiding you through the site. At some point Victor is demonstrating how he

listens to the sound of the earth. You can hear the funnels of his listening device being put over your ear and after a while they are taken off again. This intensifies the sense of actually being on site. The voice of the narrator is very important. It is warm and inviting. The voice makes the spectator see the person, although he is never visible.



*Illustration 17* Installation photograph:  
*Vilgiskoddeoayvinyarvi*  
([Graham-George](#) 2017)

It is a piece of fragments. The photographed site is fragmented due to the nature of its dilapidation. You see parts of the site, parts of the landscape, parts of drawings, scientific papers and instruments; close ups of pencils, measuring devices and the like. At one point you see an arm and a hand moving paper.

This is the only time we see something of Victor (or is it someone else we see?). The camera hovers on a bit of blank wall and then slowly pans over old photographs hanging on the wall. These give you fragments again, fragments of a history, fragments of a story. Black frames are inserted between segments, which furthers the fragmentary sense.

It is a beautiful piece, which I quite happily would watch again and again. It gives me great inspiration and ideas for my film. A person and their story come alive without making him visible. The fragments add up and imagination is creating the rest. It is almost like reading a book, where all the images are created in the imagination of the reader. The intimacy of the binaural sound recordings adds to the feeling of a personal story being told to you personally.

## I) Summary

Writing the blog was a very important tool for the creative process as was the need to document it to frame the research and use it as a reflexive tool later on in the process. Indeed, it was so valuable, that it qualifies as a replicable method to be taken up by others, especially when they come to approaching a difficult and indefinable subject or task.

Now that the eclectic influences that have initiated and shaped the film and, indeed, the entire research project, have been introduced in its early stages of the project, the following chapter adds the academic depth and discussion to the most significant aspects.

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## Chapter VI: *Beyond the Edges* - Eclectic Influences

*Film as dream, film as music. No art passes our conscience in the way film does, and goes directly to our feelings, deep down into the dark rooms of our souls.*

[Ingmar Bergman](#) (1994)

*Beyond the Edges* is a multi-disciplinary work which requires an eclectic approach. As installation art, it works with moving images, with sound and music, with art and it also has a performance element to it through the choice of its presentation.

This chapter contextualises the eclectic influences that have been revealed through my blog in the previous chapter, borrowing from theories of phenomenology and perception, music and emotion, music as form, fragments, and poetry. All of these elements in combination hold the key for a cinematic language that gives access to the intangible dimensions of death and dying.

Any one of these elements merits a thorough discussion, which is beyond the remit of this study. However, it is important to at least briefly introduce each of these elements and explain how and why I consider them to be relevant as part of my cinematic language.

### A) Perception

As the intangible dimensions of death and dying are very difficult to put into words or express in any other form, it seems obvious to approach this subject with the help of philosophy, which has been instrumental in offering solutions about how to make sense of the world and our existence within it. One philosopher whose theories seem to be particularly relevant in the context of this research is Merleau-Ponty, exponent of existentialism and phenomenology in post-war France and frequently referred to

when it comes to perception in cinema. [Yacavone](#) (2016, p.159) states that Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology has become central to contemporary film theory as "a shorthand expression for attention to more immediate sensory and expressive features of film".

Contrary to the empiric view that all knowledge is exclusively derived from experience through the senses, [Merleau-Ponty](#) (2005) argues that the body, on which human existence is founded, has an important role to play in our experience of the world. Corporeal knowledge is a vital part of our perception of phenomena in addition to our intellectual knowledge. Not only do we perceive the world, we also perceive ourselves within it, an observation, that gains notable interest in connection with my installation, which I will talk about later on in the chapter. Whilst we are able physically to move from one place to another, we can never see an object as a whole. Part of it will always have to be imagined. As [Loth](#) (2019, p.33-34) puts it: "The world simply reveals itself as ambiguous, both visible and invisible, with embodied subjectivity implanted in both realms." Film theorist Vivian Sobchack's seminal work *The Address of the Eye* (2002) departs from the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty, to establish cinema as an artform in which human experience is subject and object at the same time. She argues that there exists a mutual relationship between the film, and in extension the filmmaker, and the viewer. Whilst the spectator becomes part of the film experience through perceiving it, they also compare it to their own embodied experience and understanding of the world.

Perception generally plays a key role for our individual understanding of the world and always includes a degree of subjectivity. This knowledge is essential for the construction of any film. It is important to consider how we perceive information in the form of images and sound that is presented through a film. We don't go empty, for want of a better word, to watch a film, we come with preconceptions and expectations of the cinematic conventions we have learned ([MacDonald](#) 2009), knowingly or not. According to [Merleau-Ponty](#) (1960), we cannot separate the perception of an object as it is, from how we see it from the bodily context of our being. As such we probably comprehend big existential questions, such as death and

dying through visceral, rather than intellectual understanding, which makes it all the more difficult to pin down and grasp. My starting point in making *Beyond the Edges*, was to look at the language of film and how it is used to convey messages, directly or indirectly.

### 1) Image and mind

Images are, arguably, the main component that constitute a film. They have the most obvious impact, as the sense of sight is regarded as the most dominant ([Murch 1994](#)). I posit, however, that if the succession of images is too fast and if there furthermore is an abundance of action in that succession of images, our ability to ponder and contemplate is greatly affected. In fact, I would go as far as to say that the faster the pace and the heavier the action, the more our capacity to reflect on what we see is diminished. This is supported by the observations of [Koeppnick \(2014\)](#) who claims, that “the intensification of narrative pace is far from situating the viewer as an active or critical observer” (p.154). We are overwhelmed and we consume the images largely without much thought at the time. This does not mean that thinking does not happen at all, or that a film cannot stay with us, for whatever reason, for a long time. A film of any kind will never be perceived the same by two people, which suggests that there is always a degree of imagination involved in watching a movie, whether we reflect upon it or not. But at the time of watching a film, the thinking and imagination will be severely impaired when the pace is too fast. The ever more diminishing average shot length of mainstream cinema causes us to become “utterly distracted spectators” ([Koeppnick 2014](#), p.155). In my mind, two things need to happen in order to allow the space for contemplation, which I wanted to achieve, to make the intangible aspects of death accessible for the spectator: a reduction of the number of images, or rather the pace at which they follow each other and a reduction of the amount of action that is occurring in each sequence of images. Building on that hypothesis, my attention went to the aesthetics of slow cinema.

Slow cinema has been developed as an artform over the last decades by a growing number of filmmakers such as, Béla Tarr, Abbas Kiarostami, Theo Angelopoulos, Tsai Ming-liang, just to name a few, as “a distinctive narrative form devoted to stillness and contemplation” ([Flanagan](#) 2008). On the one hand, it can be seen as an alternative approach to the increasingly fast-paced movies from Hollywood, and on the other hand, as a more general political statement contributing to the debate about reclaiming slowness in life ([Koeppnick](#) 2014). But these options are not what ignited my interest. The keyword for me here was contemplation.

[Grønstad](#) (2016, p.275) argues that “slow cinema spatialises duration and thus makes something invisible visible”. This is very interesting in the context of my film and its attempt to reveal something that is invisible. The invisible, that Grønstad refers to is presence and the passing of time and this presence, he states, “might open up into the domains of both spirituality and ethics” (p.279). I would go even further and argue that the invisible can also include, through the space for contemplation in slowness, access for the individual viewer to their inner world.

## 2) Fragments

The idea that became most important for the conceptualisation of *Beyond the Edges* was the notion of fragments. Fragments could set out prompts and leave the viewer to join the dots and complete the viewed with their own images and context. The idea was that by encouraging the audience to be involved with their own story, it could allow them to engage with the theme on a personal level. In that sense the experience of the succession of fragments might appear as a more complete story. This aligns with [Sobchack's](#) (1992) argument that the viewer's subjective bodily experience of the world, completes the film.

Romantic literature and poetry work heavily with the notion of the fragment. The German poet, literature critic and philosopher Friedrich Schlegel (1772-1829) wrote extensively about fragments, and he was leading in defining romantic poetry. In his

early writings (On the Study of Greek Poetry, 1797) he perceives ancient literature to be characterised by 'completeness' and 'whole beauty', which he sees disintegrating and fragmenting with the fall of the ancient world. Modern literature, however, according to Schlegel, is already a 'fragment' at the time of its origin'. Whereas this meant chaos for the young Schlegel, as he matured, he considered it the right approach to a project. He tremendously admired the work of G.E. Lessing. In an essay (On Lessing, 1797) he wrote:

The most interesting and the most penetrating in Lessing's work is intimation and suggestion; that which is the ripest and the most complete in his works are fragments of fragments (Schlegel 1797, cited in [Otabe 2009](#)).

He concluded that the viewer of a fragment completes what is incomplete through imagination.

This corresponds with my idea about the perception of fragments. While Schlegel is discussing literature, I tried to apply this concept to a film, in which invisible and intangible dimensions were attempted to be made accessible. The question arose as to how it could be possible to create a fragmented experience of things. Our brain has a remarkable capacity to fill in gaps. "Many human activities critically rely on extensive reconstruction of missing details of sensory information" ([Dartmouth College 2016](#)), claims Won Mok Shim, assistant professor of Psychological and Brain Sciences at Dartmouth, because the visual information we receive is often fragmented.

This is fascinating in the context of filmmaking. When we watch a film, we always get a sense of continuity. Indeed, most mainstream narrative cinema, according to [Bordwell and Thompson \(2004\)](#), makes great effort to maintain narrative continuity through various editing techniques, such as shot/reverse-shot, eyeline match or match on action. But even if the filmmaker attempts to intentionally create a fragmented visual story, how can the human brain be stopped to sabotage such endeavour by filling in the gaps? And would it be even desirable in this instance? No. In fact, the core aim of *Beyond the Edges* is to involve the viewer by giving them space to mingle their

own story, questions and contemplations with the seen, thus creating a cinematic environment in which one can get access to engaging with the intangible dimensions of death.

Söderbergh Widding (2017) states that fragments have been investigated and interpreted by archaeologists, philologists and art historians. Film historians have tried to restore entire films from fragments. In literature, it has been used as an aesthetic idea, a poetic intention. Fragments as an aesthetic concept in the film medium, she claims, are more likely to be found in more experimental films ([Söderbergh Widding 2017](#)). It could be argued that montage technique offers a way to join fragments for the viewer to create a whole. Urban growth and industrialisation at the beginning of the twentieth century led to an increase in sensory activity as observed by [Simmel](#) (1995), and the consequently more fragmentary perception of visual information was addressed in film with the montage aesthetic ([Graf 2007](#)), a style developed in the Soviet Union in the 1920s and of which filmmakers Sergej Eisenstein (1898–1948), Vsevolod Pudovkin (1893-1953) or Dziga Vertov (1896-1954) are most prominent exponents ([Bordwell 1972](#)). The portrayal of fragmentary visual perception was of course no new tendency. The Cubists used the skewing of perspective and spatial discontinuity in their work as a reflection of the monumental societal changes, along with the collage artists of the Dada and Surrealist movements of the early twentieth century. The fragment as an aesthetic concept has had an impact on all art forms and genres and at all levels of style ([Olsson 2006](#)).

Fragments increase imagination and curiosity in the viewer, whether in trying to complete a puzzle from a number of fragments or from a single fragment. [Moyer](#) (2007), in his exploration of non-fiction film fragments, argues that “the fragmentary status of some film is what paradoxically restores wholeness to a person or a place of which it is a glimpse.”

That is not to say that imagination is not ignited when we watch an apparent linear and continuous film. Bergman’s films are some of the best examples of that. Bacon (2011) argues that all form of perception requires a degree of filling in, and that we

are quite used to doing that in every-day life, because of the discontinuity of raw perception, even though we are not necessarily aware of it. Our perception is “always embodied, tied to one’s bodily orientation in space and time” ([Bacon](#) 2011, p.33), which ties in with the phenomenological theories of Merleau-Ponty. A further important characteristic of perception is that it is selective, according to Bacon (2011), its extent and precision determined by personal concerns and memories. Transferring this idea to the perception of film, he states:

As in real life perception, memory plays a crucial role by allowing us to identify, interpret, and supplement filmic perception. Furthermore, as memories tend to be emotionally tagged, they guide the meanings and relevance we assign to what we perceive. Perception also has a prospective aspect as it is intertwined with the needs to orientate toward future possibilities (p.35).

This observation is at the heart of what *Beyond the Edges* is trying to achieve; that is: enabling the viewer to access their inner world with regards to death and dying, guided by the perception of what they see and hear.

There is another aesthetic concept that applies the notion of fragments and is frequently used in film, for example to create suspense. [Hanich](#) (2018) calls it ‘Omission, Suggestion, Completion’. It works on the idea of leaving out parts of the action or merely suggesting it, for example by only showing a shadow or a fraction of the action, or only making audible what is happening off-screen. The audience will naturally complete the scene, using their imagination. They make something *absent* present in their minds.

## 2.1) Absence and presence

The notion of fragments, one could say, expresses the idea of absence and presence in form and mirrors the thought of absence and presence in content. Absence and Presence could also be another description of death and life.

At this point it is inevitable to mention Roland Barthes and his reflections on photography in *Camera Lucida*. For [Barthes](#) (2000) a photograph does not represent something from the past, but it is a reminder that the depicted once did exist. It is as such a manifestation of mortality. Death, he explains, is the essence of a photograph because it is a way of preserving what no longer exists. It is a snapshot of time. Writer, philosopher and cultural critic Susan Sontag supports this assessment by linking photography and death. She describes it as “the inventory of mortality” and “[...] photographs state the innocence, the vulnerability of lives heading toward their own destruction, and this link between photography and death haunts all photographs of people” ([Sontag](#) 1979, p.70).

Another concept that Barthes explores, and which seems relevant in the context of absence and presence is ‘studium’ and ‘punctum’. Whereas ‘studium’ on the one hand refers to the cultural, linguistic and political context in which a photograph is perceived, ‘punctum’ on the other hand represents the personal connection of the viewer with the depicted. The punctum, so to speak, is to be found outside of the frame ([Faulkner](#) 2014). Barthes’ theory gives support to the hypothesis that the viewer brings their own cultural background and experience to the viewed and this can be applied to the idea of fragments and the gaps in between them that will be filled by the viewer.

The relevance for *Beyond the Edges* was found in the notion of finding meaning in what is absent, what is not shown, as that could unlock questions, fears, doubts or thoughts for each individual spectator about the intangible aspects of death and dying.

### **3) Still and moving image**

The considerations about photographs and their effect on the viewer had found form in the film sketches I made preceding the final version of *Beyond the Edges*, where I experimented intensively with still and moving images and their different impact. For the final film, however, I chose to use moving images only to achieve a gentle flow.

But these moving images are to a great extent very minimal in their action, to achieve the impact of still images.

Film theorist Metz (1985) differentiates between the spatial and the temporal difference of a still image versus a moving image. In terms of spatial size, the photograph, and he refers to a photograph on paper, is likely to be much smaller than a cinematic image, that is projected to a screen and the cinematic image is further enlarged by the addition of sound and movement. The temporal size, as in duration of the image, is determined by the viewer in case of the still image and by the filmmaker in case of the cinematic one ([Metz](#) 1985). This temporal differentiation, however, becomes redundant when a still image is used in film. Even in a film like the remarkable *La Jetée* by Chris Marker (1962), in which the visual aspect is almost entirely composed of still images, the images are not still, as a photograph would be. The movements that the camera makes while filming the still images, is visible and thus gives the photographs a temporal dimension.

Movement creates a sense of time. Time is perceived in relation to movement. Film unfolds in time as we watch it. A still image acquires that temporal dimension when it becomes part of a movie. The obvious solution for *Beyond the Edges* therefore was to film scenes in which movement is minimal, so they can retain the characteristic of a still image and can evoke a similar response, that is inspiring and encouraging the viewer to add to the story of the image with their own perspective. Corrigan describes the space between still and moving image a “zone of thought [...] creating space and time for thought between the images of a moving world” ([Beckman and Ma](#) 2008, p.5).

The interaction between still and moving image is not a contemporary phenomenon. In 1929 there was an international exhibition of film and photography, staged in Stuttgart, Germany, that highlighted the quality of both mediums, what they had in common and also what separated them. By the end of the 1920s, film had been established as a medium for news and entertainment and photography was a mass medium for the illustrated press. This ambitious show by the title ‘Film and Foto’

brought together thousands of photographs by world leading artists and movements, including Dada, political photomontage, New Vision, camera-less abstract images, photo-text graphics, portrait, scientific and news photography. The film programme featured the works of Chaplin, Eisenstein, Vertov and Dreyer amongst many others. One of the aims of the exhibition was to explain the importance of photography for the development of avant-garde film ([Campany 2008](#), p.10):

Against mainstream cinema, avant-garde film evolved [...] as an anti-narrative poetics. Its preference was for the expressive montage of fragments, resisting the presentation of seamless stories.

#### 4) Abstract Art

Abstract art grew out of the uncertainties and upheaval that had marked the turn of the last century. Common beliefs and knowledge that had been upheld for centuries were challenged by ground-breaking new theories and thoughts. Darwin had developed his theory about the origin of species. Nietzsche had questioned traditional Christian morality and the existence of God. Freud talked about a suppressed human sexual drive, developed psychoanalysis and interpreted dreams. Einstein had written his theory of relativity and Rutherford split the atom. Socialism in Europe was on the rise and the revolutions in Russia and World War I shook all known structures to the core ([Moszynska 1990](#)). Film as a new artform had been born and was rapidly developing into a ubiquitous means of expression. Artists needed to find new ways to express the new spiritual, utopian and metaphysical ideas, so they turned away from the external and towards the internal, with themselves as a focus for producing art. Wassilij [Kandinsky](#) (1977, p.14) states in his text *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* from 1911:

When religion, science and morality are shaken, the two last by the strong hand of Nietzsche, and when the outer supports threaten to fall, man turns his gaze from externals in on to himself.

In his essay *On the Problem of Form*, he distinguishes between inner and outer form and claims that the external form is less significant than the content and that the latter has to come out of 'inner necessity' ([Kandinsky](#) 1912).

The development of abstract art also influenced the beginning of avant-garde film, when filmmakers such as Hans Richter (1888-1976), Oskar Fischinger (1900-1967) or Viking Eggeling (1880-1925) challenged commercial cinema on its lack of addressing spiritual concerns, as music often does, and abstract art is trying to do. Their work (e.g. Richter's *Rythmus 21* (1921), Fischinger's *Wax Experiments* (1921-26) or Eggeling's *Diagonal Symphonie* (1924) attempted to reach spiritual dimensions with the use of shape, motion and rhythm ([MacDonald](#) 2009). I will talk more about avant-garde film in connection with poetry later on in this chapter.

#### 4.1) The use of metaphors in *Beyond the Edges*

Departure from concrete representation, was an important means for expressing the intangible dimensions of death and dying in *Beyond the Edges*, because these aspects of mortality are so indefinable for our imagination. The way to abstract the idea of death from the reality of it in this case, was to use metaphors. [Stone](#) (2014, p.14) suggests: "The metaphor makes no simple comparison; it asserts that something stands in place of, or is, something else". He claims that there are "numerous examples of artists using metaphors to link the physical world to intangible concepts" (p.14). Metaphors and symbols derive from our cultural understanding. [Lakoff and Johnson](#) (2003) argue that our whole conceptual system is largely metaphorical and thus defines how we think, experience and act. Based on these suggestions, using metaphors to unlock and articulate the abstract and intangible dimensions of death and dying seemed relevant.

The imagery in *Beyond the Edges* is dominated by liminal spaces, mainly the edge of land and sea. Liminal spaces, from the Latin 'limen' meaning threshold, are places of

transition, waiting places, borderlands between one realm and the next. They are ambiguous spaces, characterised by not knowing, places of endings and beginnings.

Boats have since Babylonian times been symbols of passage. “Ships transport individuals to the Otherworld or bring them back from death to life” ([Classen](#) 2012, p.15). Water in general, as one of the four elements, according to the dictionary of symbolism ([University of Michigan](#) 2001), represents life, and the ocean is a symbol for boundlessness, eternity and also formlessness, the unfathomable and chaos. In addition, there is the notion of time. These metaphors have been meaningful for me, but in essence the images of the landscapes are neutral and only have the meaning that each spectator assigns to them.

Interspersed with the emptiness of landscape are figurative images to allow the viewer to connect to the images. This was born from an experience I had at an exhibition displaying video art with beautiful landscapes. They were beautiful but left me unperturbed. A sudden appearance of a figure in the distance and footprints left in the sand, however, instantly drew me in and made me interested in the rest and the connection between one and the other.

The figurative images in *Beyond the Edges* act as placeholders, just as the landscape images serve as metaphors. For that reason, the ‘figures’ needed to be unidentifiable. They are therefore either seen in the distance in extra wide shots, from behind or as silhouettes, or as extreme close-ups, where only fragments of the ‘figure’ is visible. This is to enable the spectator to insert whoever they need to be in their place.

## **B) Music and sound**

Apart from the visual components, sound and music have been the most important elements for the creation of *Beyond the Edges*. The intangible dimensions of death,

such as fear of dying, loss, grief or the possibility of an after-life, are indeed very difficult to express and to explain, because they are abstract and beyond words. Music and sound, with their abstract qualities and their ability to speak to the soul, and to reach the listener in unpredictable ways, therefore played an important role in articulating these abstract concepts and emotions. *Beyond the Edges* has therefore been created as a sound-led film, where music and sound give attention to the images and not the other way around, which is the more common order. This has also given the film its subtitle: Sonic Poem with Images. Despite film being a visual medium, sound and music are central to our ability to expand our perception of images, releasing them from the confines of the frame. [Thoma](#) (2015, p. 10) argues that:

[...] sound with its physical, sculptural and spatial impact offers a way out of the constraints of our image addiction or rather a way in to reconfiguring audio-visual alignments – allowing us to reinvent our relationship with images not as consumers but as active participants.

The aim of *Beyond the Edges* is to open, to unlock, to gain access to the intangible dimensions of death and dying. This cannot be easily done through pragmatism and intellect, as the intangible dimensions of death and dying are what they are: intangible. Through allowing emotions as an active participant in experiencing *Beyond the Edges*, we might be able to gain an insight about our internal landscape of mortality and sound and music can serve as a key to gain entry.

Musical experience is characterized by both the active and passive sides of knowing. Music is not only performed; it is heard. In this respect, musical experience parallels the quest-theme generally, in which discovery is not merely the finding of that which is looked for, but the receiving of that to which one is open in situations beyond that which can be intellectually anticipated.” ([Bird](#) 1996, p.2)

## 1) Emotional impact of music

Music is regarded as the perhaps most abstract of all art forms and it carries the role of an emotional signifier. The language of music therefore provides a way to access

emotions, to unlock the intangible and express the unspeakable. Some argue that music might be the origin of language ([Mithen](#) 2006, [Storr](#) 1997).

About the emotional effect of music, [Gabrielsson](#) (2011) has undertaken a very thorough study by collecting strong experiences with music over a period of several decades, from a wide section of different persons from all walks of life and all ages. All participants were given the task to describe their strongest, most intense, most profound experience with music. All these experiences were sorted into different categories and together they give an overwhelming impression of the impact music has on people. Exceptionally moving are the descriptions of people who have lost a close relative. The experience of music in many cases has created a sense of calm, healing, floating, relief and almost happiness. Gabrielsson explains that there are of course many factors that create strong experiences with music: elements of music, the person and the particular circumstances in which the person experiences the music. The combination of these three elements is infinite, which accounts for the endless variety of strong experiences with music. The findings of this study have become an important inspiration for the creation of the soundtrack for *Beyond the Edges*.

There is another relationship between sound and image, which is adopted in film as well as in other art forms such as painting or poetry, that is the inclusion of musical principles in the creation of the work. Painters such as Klee or Kandinsky were re-interpreting the language of painting through the concept of music and kontrapunkt ([Everett](#) 2008). René Clair, as cited by Everett, believed that “the great power of film lay less in the representational quality of its images than in its ability to create its own internal musical rhythms” (p.8). French filmmaker Germaine Dulac considers cinema as the ‘art of vision’, just as music is the ‘art of hearing’ and “composed of movement and life, [...] reaching, just as music does, our thought and feelings. An art made of truth and nuances, radiating the imponderable” ([Dulac](#) 1978, p.41). Cinema, she further claims, just as music, is an art of no limits and she concludes therefore that

[...] the visual idea, the theme which sings in the hearts of the filmmakers has far more to do with musical technique than with any other technique or any other ideal. Music, which creates this sort of beyond of the human feelings, which records the multiplicity of the states of the soul, plays with sounds in movement, just as we play with images in movement. (p. 41)

The analogy between film and music is maintained by many filmmakers such as Angelopoulos, Antonioni, Bergman, Godard, Greenaway, Kieslowski, Resnais, Tarkowski to name but a few ([Everett](#) 2008).

## 2) Bergman and music

Bergman is part of that list as an example of a filmmaker for whom music was not only relevant through its content but also through its form. He repeatedly modelled his films on the structure of pieces of music, as well as including the concept of music in the titles or subtitles of his films e.g. *Autumn Sonata* (1978), *Saraband* (2003), *Persona – Sonata for two* (1966). [Bergman](#) loved music and film for him was music. In his autobiography *The Magic Lantern* (1988, p.73) he echoes Dulac's reflections on film, music and emotions:

Film as dream, film as music. No form of art goes beyond ordinary consciousness as film does, straight to our emotions, deep into the twilight room of the soul.

The starting point of my interest in Bergman, that is his love and use of music, continued to play a vital role for the creation of *Beyond the Edges*. It had long before caught my imagination as it became apparent that music was something that was very important to him ([Luko](#) 2016). [Grøngaard](#) (2007) describes music as a universe of its own, a suggestive world, which influences our emotions in a way that lets us connect to other realities than our own. For Bergman that meant the ability to connect with the 'beyond' ([Sommar med Ingmar Bergman](#), 2004).

He also considered music as a much more reliable form of communication than words, as it allowed him to express what he thought was impossible to express through speech ([Renaud](#) 2008). He regarded a musical score to be much clearer and concrete, whereas words seemed treacherous to him because of their ambiguity ([Ingmar Bergman och musiken](#) 2001).

If there is a thoroughly consistent theme in Bergman's comments regarding music - a *cantus firmus*, we might like to say - it is his continuous reference to music as a means of communication, as a consolation, and as a source of meaning in his ongoing self-examination as artist and spiritual being. ([Bird](#) 1996, p.3)

[Walker](#) (2000) suggests that whereas filmmakers normally use music to support and supplement a narrative, in Bergman's films music becomes a wordless narrative itself, inseparable from its context.

There are many examples in the films of Bergman, where words are replaced with music. In a central scene in *Cries and Whispers* (1973) for example, two sisters, whose relationship is defined by an inability to cope with physical or mental closeness, find a moment of intimacy. In a "beautifully choreographed icon of balletic touching" ([Rice](#) 1975), Bergman chooses to mute the words they speak to each other and lets Bach's Sarabande from the 5<sup>th</sup> Cello Suite accompany the scene instead, which "communicates directly to the unconscious with supra-verbal immediacy" ([Rice](#) 1975, p.154). Once the music comes to an end, the sisters cannot uphold their intimacy and they resume their shallow and unfriendly relationship ([Kroeger](#) 2013).

The same Sarabande is used as a form of leitmotif in Bergman's last film *Saraband* (2003). *Saraband* is constructed as a series of ten duets or dances with a prologue and an epilogue, a format that I have echoed in *Beyond the Edges*. [Jenkins](#) (2006) describes these duets as

"... searching dialogues between characters that greatly need to communicate with each other but only manage to engage in a hopelessly desperate dance" (p.2)

The Sarabande in this film not only connects the separate scenes, it also represents the spiritual presence of the character of Anna, who has recently died and, whom we therefore never see, but whose presence is strongly felt by the other characters in the film and who instils to them through the music a “sense of belonging, grace, perhaps a redemption of some sort” ([Koskinen](#) 2002, p.21).

Bergman portrays all manner of dark sides of the human psyche in his films, often fuelled by an innate fear of death, and his characters often lack the ability to communicate with each other or show true emotions. “His belief in the ability for reconciliation through love and forgiveness, however, is expressed by his use of music” ([Kroeger](#) 2013).

It was not only the precision of expression that attracted Bergman to music, but also its rhythm. Recognising that everything in life was based on rhythm – our hearts, breathing, day and night, ebb and flow, was a revelation to him ([Bird](#) 1996). But the most important aspect of music, which he did mention frequently, was that he viewed music and film as unintellectual suggestions ([AFI Q&A](#)) and to be artforms that are able to “bypass the intellect and go straight to the emotions”. He said in another interview:

Personally, I think we have got music as a gift – I am not a believer – but I think music is a gift to help us understand the realities of the world beyond our own ([Sommar med Ingmar Bergman](#) 2004).

According to [Bird](#) (1996), Bergman regarded music as the most spiritually meaningful art of all. When the intellect fails to understand the intangible aspects of death, perhaps answers can be found in more spiritual dimensions, whatever these constitute for each individual.

Bergman’s understanding of music and the importance it has for his films in form, content and spiritual dimension greatly influenced and shaped the soundtrack of my film.

## C) Structure and form

*Beyond the Edges* does not seek to provide answers. Rather it intends to open minds to asking questions. The use of a multitude of layers to create ambiguity and an intricate tapestry of meaning was something I always have worked with, whether it was in film, animation or photography and it has also become the fabric of *Beyond the Edges*. With regards to the form, which I have chosen for the film, I have been inspired by the Bergmanian way to give his films a musical structure and the influence of poetry in avant-garde and experimental film ([MacDonald](#) 2006).

### 1) Poetry

Poetry in the context of film, from the avantgarde-films in the 1920s to contemporary experimental films, is a vast subject that justifies a study of its own. For the purpose of explaining the thinking behind *Beyond the Edges*, a limited overview must suffice.

Poetry as a literary form has perhaps the most ambiguous potential, as it has the ability to compact an abundance of meaning into a limited number of lines. This ability to say a lot in a concise and short form, to express meaning in between the lines, is the reason why writing poetry as a form was appealing to use for the dialogue between the thoughts of Ingmar Bergman and my own. Whilst the words articulate something concrete, the questions deriving from them can produce infinite amounts of meanings, depending on each individual's relationship and negotiation with death.

It is difficult to define poetry as it has developed in such variety and away from the original verse form. [Nemerov](#) (2020, p.1) describes it independently from its form, but more as:

... literature that evokes a concentrated imaginative awareness of experience or a specific emotional response through language chosen and arranged for its meaning, sound, and rhythm.

It is, on the one hand, the promise of imaginative awareness and the emotional response from a spectator that made poetry such a suitable form both for my personal narrative and the words of Ingmar Bergman. On the other hand, it is the rhythmical construct of poetry that helped me integrate the text as a musical element into the soundscape of *Beyond the Edges*.

There is a close connection between poetry and sound that [Gross and McDowell](#) (1996, p.8) describe as “a poem is a symbol in which idea, experience and attitude are transmuted into feelings; these feelings move in significant arrangements: rhythmically”, and [Street](#) (2012, p.xii) as:

a medium inhabiting a place in which the imagination of the listener, working in partnership with the maker of the sounds, creates something which [...] can be at times abstract, ambiguous, shadowy and, yes, mysterious.

It was in the 1920s that a body of films developed that were critical to the by then already established narrative form. Avant-garde and experimental film, according to [MacDonald](#) (2006, p.37) took inspiration mainly from two sources: “the fine arts, particularly music, painting and collage; and the literary arts, particularly poetry”. It distinguished itself as pure cinema and independent of the demands of production companies and motives of profit ([Dulac](#) 1978). It moved away from the dramatic narrative to devise new forms of expression.

Within pure cinematic means, beyond literature and theatre, it sought emotion and feeling in movement, volume and forms, playing with transparencies, opacities and rhythms ([Dulac](#) 1978, p.46).

[Ieropoulos](#) (2019) argues that, whilst the French impressionists, such as Germaine Dulac (1882-1942), Henri Chomette (1896-1941) and Louis Delluc (1890-1924) did not really distinguish between poetic and musical language and considered rhythm to be the foundation for the alternative expression, they were the first in their writings to differentiate between prose and poetry cinema. Man Ray (1890-1976) combined a number of talents to his contributions in art, photography and film. Indeed, according to [Kuenzli](#) (2007), he had a pivotal role in the avant-garde cinema movement, from

early Dada to Surrealism. He considered cinema as intrinsically poetic and was the first to use the word poem in connection with film as he called his work *Emak Bakia* (1926) a cinepoem ([Ieropolous](#) 2019). One of the most prominent artists to engage with the film poem was German experimental filmmaker Hans Richter (1888-1976). He considered the lyrical form of poetry to provide greater freedom of expression and a way to make the invisible visible ([Richter](#) 1971).

The cine-club movement had spread from Europe to the United States and Canada and produced societies such as Frank Stauffacher's 'Art in Cinema' in San Francisco and Amos Vogel's 'Cinema 16' in New York. Poetry and the visual arts became increasingly important for filmmakers ([MacDonald](#) 2006). In 1953, Cinema 16 held a historical symposium in which filmmakers, writers and poets discussed the relationship between poetry and avant-garde cinema. They exchanged views on types of poetic expression and poetry as visual medium. One of the participants was American Avant-garde filmmaker Maya Deren (1917-1961), who wrote extensively about the relationship between poetry and film ([Ieropolous](#) 2019). She spoke about the difference between poetry and prose:

The distinction of poetry is its construction [...] And the poetic construct arises from the fact, [...], that it is a vertical investigation of a situation, in that it [...] probes the ramifications of the moment and is concerned with its qualities and its depth, so that you have poetry concerned in a sense not with what is occurring, but with what it feels like or what it means. A poem to my mind creates visible or auditory forms for something that is invisible, which is the feeling or the emotion or the metaphysical content of the moment ([Symposium Poetry and the Film](#) 1953).

The notion of 'feelings', 'the invisible', 'metaphysical content' that various artists and filmmakers make out to be inherent in the form of poetry, were exactly what I was looking for when defining a cinematic language to unlock the intangible dimensions of death. Added to that is the concept of construction, which is also emphasised by [Shklovsky](#) (1982) who suggests that what distinguishes a poem from prose is not alone a matter of rhythm, but its geometrical structure.

## 2) Fugue and kontrapunkt

A matter of construction and geometrical structure, one could say, can also be found in musical compositions. Having a structure is a good starting point, whether it is in writing, architecture, composition or, indeed, filmmaking. Bergman, as mentioned previously, often gave his films a musical structure and I chose to do the same for *Beyond the Edges*, as it provides an existing framework and helps to eliminate the 'blank page'. Music of Johann Sebastian Bach features most prominently in the films of Ingmar Bergman ([Luko](#) 2016) and I share Bergman's love for Bach's music. Bach is considered the prime exponent of the art of the fugue ([DeVoto](#) 2007) and the fugue is the musical style on which I have loosely based my film. [Bird](#) (1996, p.5) defines the musical fugue as

... a type of composition for a set number of parts, with two or more 'voices' (instrumental or sung) juxtaposed around a central theme. This central theme - the 'subject', or ground voice (cantus firmus) provides the reference-point, against which other voices serve as interpretation, repetition, parallel statement, contrast, inversion or other form of variation, the whole leading to a harmonic resolution. The hearing experience with regard to fugal compositions is a dynamic listening act, requiring the perception of the process in which fragments are brought together to form the whole.

The central subject in *Beyond the Edges*, the 'ground voice' to speak with Bird (1996), is death, introduced as the theme in the prologue or, to speak in terms of a fugue, the exposition. The other voices, represented by the thoughts on death of Ingmar Bergman and myself in ten contrasting parts, resemble the middle part, the episodes, that 'interpret', 'contrast', 'repeat' or 'vary' the subject in other forms, to lead to the coda, the 'resolution' ([Bird](#) 1996). A similar structure of a prologue and an epilogue enclosing ten parts, in this case dialogues, can be found in Bergman's final work *Saraband* (2003).

The musical style of the fugue and counterpoint, as established by J. S. Bach, had inspired a number of artists and filmmakers in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, to use it as an analogy for a form and structure in visual art that could express time and motion and

introduce temporality and dynamic into their work. Paintings appeared with names such as *Amorpha – Fugue in Two Colours* ([Kupka](#) 1912), *Fuge in Rot* ([Klee](#) 1921), *Fuge in Rot und Grün* ([Richter](#) 1923). The collaboration of Swedish artist Viking Eggeling (1880-1925) and German Hans Richter applied that concept intensively to their respective work in painting and in experiments with moving image. As Richter recalls:

For both of us, music became the model. In musical counterpoint, we found a principle which fitted our philosophy: every action produces a corresponding reaction. Thus, in the contrapuntal fugue, we found the appropriate system, a dynamic and polar arrangement of opposing energies, and in this model, we saw an image of life itself: one thing growing, another declining, in a creative marriage of contrast and analogy. (Richter, cited in [Lawder](#) 1975, p.43)

Music and art have long been interwoven and mutually inspired with their respective forms of expression. *Beyond the Edges* takes elements from music and art and combines them into one whole, using the abstract and dynamic qualities that have been described as touching the spirit, to give the viewer access to their internal communication about death and dying.

## D) Installation

### 1) Installation in general

The final considerations with regards to *Beyond the Edges*, were concerning how to present a film that tries to unlock the intangible dimensions of death and dying. The thought of exhibiting it in form of a multi-screen installation was instrumental from the early stages of production.

The experience gained from previous work I have done on sensitive topics, has shown that it is important to give the viewer space to negotiate a topic that might, or might not, provoke an emotional response. [Koch](#) (1994) suggests that the behaviour of a

spectator alters depending on whether they are viewing alone, or in company, or just in the presence of others. If not alone, we become self-conscious and experience not only what is exhibited but also ourselves experiencing it through the eyes of another. This corresponds to [Merleau-Ponty](#)'s (1968, p.143) assessment:

As soon as we see other seers [...] henceforth, through other eyes we are for ourselves fully visible. [...] For the first time, the seeing that I am is for me really visible; for the first time I appear to myself completely turned inside out under my own eyes.

I have in the past created film installations, which were performed either in a linear fashion, with the audience seated in rows and the film playing from beginning to end, or as an open installation with the film playing on a loop. The audience in the latter could enter and leave at any point. Spectators to the seated arrangement expressed a wish to come again and see it with more time to reflect and fewer other people present. It helped the spectators to be able to move around in the space and not be confined to one seat. Most spectators to the looped performance would stay considerably beyond the duration of the film.

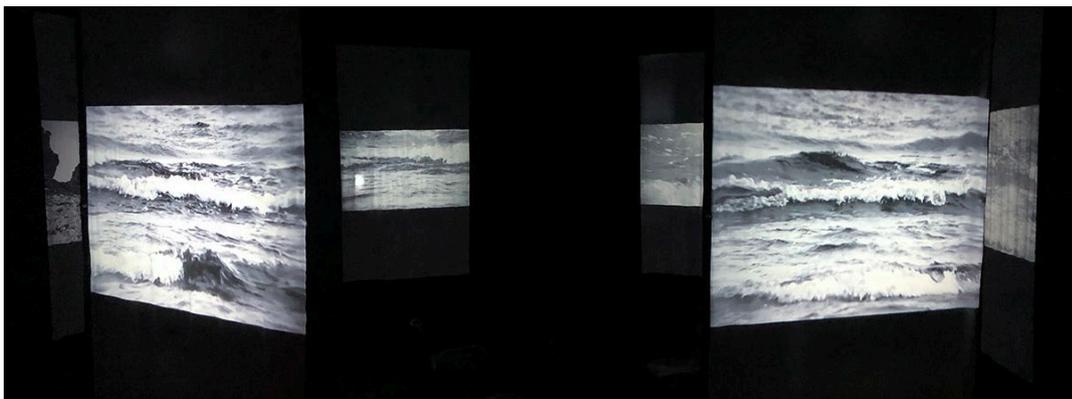
These observations are consistent with the suggestions by [Bishop](#) (2005), who describes installation art as art in which the space and the elements within are regarded as one entity and into which a spectator enters. She further assesses that, as opposed to traditional media, "it addresses the viewer directly as presence in the space [...], whose senses of touch, smell and sound are as heightened as their sense of vision" (p.6) This, she concludes, is the key characteristic of installation art. Through entering a space, moving around and becoming part of the installation, the viewer is 'activated' and becomes integral to the completion of the work. [Lapum](#) (2018, p. 378) describes an experience of installation art as:

... sometimes the experience trickles into the quietest chambers or edges into the corners of our soul, with its residuals ebbing and flowing into our lives at unforeseen times.

This is the sort of experience I wanted to achieve with *Beyond the Edges*, a piece of art that can be perceived with sensory immediacy to break through the barriers that might stop us from contemplating the unknown quantity of death and dying.

The relevance of the entering and walking around in the installation of *Beyond the Edges* lies in the viewers freedom to enter and leave at any point and thereby defining its length and duration. The ability to come and go allows the audience to determine how much or how little of a sensitive subject they are willing to engage with. That freedom potentially creates a greater preparedness to remain open and engage for longer.

## 2. The Setup of *Beyond the Edges*



*Illustration 18* Installation photograph: *Beyond the Edges* ([Kroeger](#) 2019)

*Beyond the Edges* is presented as a multi-screen installation in which six screens, consisting of pieces of fabric, are arranged in a circle. The twelve parts of the film are displayed consecutively on alternating screens, whilst the remaining five screens display various moving seascape images. The sound surrounds the spectators, which gives it a three-dimensional quality and makes it an immersive experience. A few chairs are available for the audience to use, if required.

*Beyond the Edges* has been installed in an unfinished version to test the installation setup as intended. It has been seen by a small audience over the duration of two days. The response gave an early indication of how the installation and content is perceived<sup>5</sup>. The majority of the spectators spent considerably longer time in the installation than for the duration of one loop.

The reactions I have received<sup>6</sup>, gave me some confidence in my hypothesis, although any form of audience survey has not been part of my methodological strategy and as such is not within the remit of this research. But the comments demonstrate that the cinematic language used in *Beyond the Edges* can give the spectators access to the intangible dimensions of death and dying and space to contemplate.

## E) Summary

Many different concepts and theories, from many different disciplines of art have been used to create a cinematic language for *Beyond the Edges* that can give the audience access to the intangible dimensions of death and dying. With a departure in the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty and his theory about the inclusion of the body in time and space, to influence how we perceive, I have used the concept of fragments to create a heightened awareness of what we see and hear. The soundtrack is the leading element that creates emotional signifiers, drawing our attention to the images, which with the metaphoric quality give prompts to the viewer and the opportunity to contemplate. The presentation as an installation, which makes the audience an integral part of the work, intensifies that experience. All the eclectic influences are intrinsic elements that make *Beyond the Edges*.

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<sup>5</sup> Other planned installation dates had to be postponed due to Covid19 and possible reactions and comments could therefore not be considered for this exegesis

<sup>6</sup> Full audience reactions are included as Appendix 11

## Chapter VII: Conclusion

*We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.*

[T.S. Eliot](#)

### A) Resume

#### 1) Outset

At the beginning of this practice-based study stood a filmmaker with a cancer diagnosis in search of a film that could help open up to and release fears about dying. These fears were indefinable and intangible. It soon became apparent that films that could answer that need were indeed rare. It led me to reflect upon what a film with the desired qualities would actually look like and, equally, what was lacking in the films that I saw? To be able to answer that, I had to ask myself what exactly I was trying to deal with. I realised that the aspects of death that were the problem, were not necessarily the physical and material ones, but the intangible sides of death and dying. It is inherent in anything that is intangible that, although it exists, it is difficult to touch, difficult to define or understand, vague or abstract, which confronted me with the next problem: How can something that is indefinable and intangible be made visible? What does fear look like? Can it be made visible at all or does it need other ways to make it accessible? This ultimately led to the overarching research question:

- How can cinematic language be used to make the intangible aspects of death and dying accessible?

As a filmmaker and artist, it was obvious for me to depart in my own creative practice in my aim to find an answer. An additional and closely linked aim was accessibility. Not

only was it imperative to make intangible dimensions of death accessible, but also the whole project in itself with all of its aspects, because a language of any sort is futile, if it cannot be understood.

I pursued two closely connected objectives:

- Making a film that would be a cinematic expression of the intangible aspects of death and dying in order to make them accessible for the spectator.
- Devising a creative process that would provide a method and a structure to approaching such intangible subject.

## 2) Methodology

Practice-based research was the core methodology to this study. That is to say that an answer to the question asked was found through the making of *Beyond the Edges*. The film does not give an answer as to how to deal with the intangible aspects of death, but how to use cinematic language to enable the viewer to access them. The answer is inherent in the film and its form.

The intangible nature of the problem posed a particular obstacle: Where to even begin? As [Knudsen](#) (2018) suggests, our incentive and motivation to create comes from within. We can only relate to the world and the challenges it brings, from the perspective of our own experience and cultural inheritance. Notably within art and in this case art-based research this becomes highly relevant. For that reason, I based my research on autoethnography, to be able to use my own personal voice and experience as a driving force and to translate my own story into something that is universally accessible, both in outcome and process.

A subject such as death, and especially fear of it, is bound up with the strongest emotions, however they may find expression. Therefore, autoethnography not only became the obvious, but also the most appropriate framework from which to depart.

[Ellis and Bochner](#) (2000, p.748) to the question why personal narrative matters, suggest:

The stories we write put us in conversation with ourselves as well as with our readers. In conversation with ourselves, we expose our vulnerabilities, conflicts, choices and value. We take measure of our uncertainties, our mixed emotions and the multiple layers of our experience. Our accounts seek to express the complexities and difficulties of coping and feeling resolved, showing how we changed over time as we struggled to make sense of our experience. [...] In conversation with our readers, we use storytelling as a method for inviting them to put themselves in our place.

Autoethnography, in combination with practice-based research, gave me the ideal platform from which to approach finding an answer to my question.

I deployed three main methods to the process of making the film. To give myself a starting point I engaged intensively with the work of Ingmar Bergman. Not only with his films and their visual aesthetics, but equally as much with his use of music and his ability to write his own screen plays. In addition, I studied his workbooks and diaries and other of his writings (e.g. *Magic Lantern* 1988, *Images, my Life in Film* 1994) that gave me profound insights into his thoughts about death and dying and not least his enormous fear of it. I even spent prolonged time at the artist's residence to further dive into and understand his universe. With another artist's work as a point of departure, I wrote a prospective blog exploring and interrogating various aspects that would eventually form the core elements of my film: engagement with Ingmar Bergman, the notion of fragments and the significance and role of sound and music. The blog entries were the initiation to making several series of short film sketches in which I explored the same aspects in practice. These sketches then influenced the language and aesthetics of the final film. Thus, the methods of investigation became inextricably linked.

### 3) Literature review

The literature review, which in a sense also has been a method of inquiry, briefly summarised what is written on death in film. Despite the fact that death and mortality are part of most film narratives, even if not always explicitly, surprisingly little scholarly literature exists that specifically explores death in film and the question of its representation and impact. Much of what has been written interdisciplinary about death in film, focusses on the depiction of violence and horror, according to [Sullivan and Greenberg](#) (2013). Their anthology collects a number of contributions that examine the topic of death in film and human psychological responses to it. [Aaron](#) (2014) centres on more innocuous and poignant representations of death in mainstream film, which she describes as potent distancing devices that help us hiding from the reality of our mortality, quoting Rank (cited in [Becker](#) 1973, p.99): “through the death of the other, one buys oneself free from the penalty of dying, of being killed”. Scholarly articles on how intangible aspects of death and dying are manifesting in film, whether it be mainstream or experimental/ avant-garde film and how these can be made accessible for the audience are, as far as my investigation goes, yet to be written.

As my work mainly contributes to the body of film and sound it seemed appropriate to contextualise it with other films that try to explore the intangible dimensions of death in some form. I reviewed and analysed a selection of films by Ingmar Bergman (*The Seventh Seal* 1958, *Cries and Whispers* 1972 and *Saraband* 2003) and films that would be categorised as personal narrative and experimental/ avant-garde film. Bergman shared his anguish about death with his audience through his narratives. He “brought Death to life”, as [Cowie](#) (2013, p.153) insists, by giving death a physical or symbolic presence in his films.

The personal narrative films that I have looked at, documenting journeys towards the end, gave the makers an outlet to come to terms with their own approaching death (*Bye* 1991) or the death of a loved one (*The Dad Project* 2009, *Noch hier, Schon da* 2014). *Island* (2017) documents the end of life for a number of patients in a hospice.

Engaging as a viewer with others' journey towards the end, encourages us, on the one hand, to consider our own mortality, but on the other hand also takes our attention away from our own concerns and replaces them with the concern for others.

Finally, I watched two films that would be considered experimental/ avant-garde films. The experimental character of both films allows for a more fragmented narrative. Bill Viola's film (*The Passing* 1991) about beginnings and endings is a cavalcade of images that allows the viewer's mind to wander. The absence of text creates the space needed for contemplation. Derek Jarman's film (*Blue* 1993) omits the most obvious element that constitutes a film, that is the image. More precisely, he lingers for the entirety of the duration of the film on a blue screen. The absence of image concentrates the mind on the listening and allows imagination to create own images to accompany what is heard.

These experimental examples with their fragmented form, providing room for contemplation, were a confirmation of my hypothesis and held a key for my work to go forward and inspired further experimentation as to how the intangible dimensions of death and dying could be made accessible for the viewer.

## **B) Outcome**

The outcome of my exploration consists of two parts, corresponding to the aforementioned objectives, the film itself and a documented creative process.

### **1) The film**

The film consists of twelve short films that can be seen as a continuum and that form a cycle when played on loop, which it does in the context of the installation, which is its main form of presentation. The main element that in this case defines a cinematic

language capable of providing access to the intangible aspects of death and dying, is the notion of fragments. Fragments are deployed in a variety of forms. The fragmented narrative I created with the twelve poems, based on my own and Ingmar Bergman's thoughts, introduces spaces, which the viewer can fill with their own thoughts, memories and experiences. This enables a different kind of experience for the viewer.

The visual elements consist of recognisable cultural signifiers and metaphors that are chosen to provide a space of meditation and comfort, which seems necessary and important to make the viewer feel safe to contemplate such difficult emotional subject as death and dying. The leading element to the film, however, is the soundtrack, composed from music, sound effects and poetry. It is thus a sound-led film, which the subtitle 'Sonic Poem with Images' suggests. Most commonly, it is the images that drive the narrative - or non-narrative - of a film, with music as an accompaniment to the images. In a sound-led film such as *Beyond the Edges* it is the sound that leads and gives the prompts. The images here are not a mere illustration, which would be difficult in the case of such intangible subject. The images are metaphors that might or might not be understood, based on the emotional signifiers the soundtrack is providing, both in words and in sounds.

The installation, which adds a more bodily experience of the film, allows the audience to dictate the length of the piece or at least how long they want to engage with its contents. As [Bishop](#) (2005) asserts, the viewer of an installation is regarded as a presence in the space and through this setup I allow the spectator to be a participatory contributor to the creation of the narrative, thereby hoping to inspire them to contemplate questions to their own finitude.

## 2) The process

Equally as important as how a film could look that gives access to the intangible dimensions of death and dying, was how to approach the making of such a film. How

to begin? The process I deployed, had three important elements to it. Firstly, the engagement with another artist (Ingmar Bergman 1918-2007), who became an inspiration as much as a sounding board and an anchor point from where to catapult my creative journey. It eliminated the blank page and gave me some substance from where I could develop my own ideas, always in imaginative dialogue with the artist. These ideas were further developed through the writing of a prospective blog, which allowed an eclectic approach and resulted in the inclusion of a wide range of sources as food for thought. In this blog, I less reflected on what I had done, but rather proposed for myself thoughts and ideas that would help to develop the film. These thoughts were channelled into the creation of several series of film sketches which explored the elements that later constituted *Beyond the Edges*.

### C) Significance and contribution

With *Beyond the Edges* I have suggested a cinematic form that makes the intangible dimensions of death and dying accessible. It is one possible solution that answers the research question. My key findings, with regards to form in the context of making something that is intangible accessible, in this case aspects of death and dying, is the use of fragments in a sound-led film.

The use of fragments in itself is of course not new, especially not in the context of experimental film, whose main characteristic is often some form of fragmentary narrative. But using the notion of fragments as a method in film to make the intangible dimensions of death and dying accessible is an original contribution. Fragments create prompts for the viewer's own imagination to fill the gaps. The ambiguity of the absence between the gaps is what creates that room for thinking for the audience. In *Beyond the Edges*, I have deliberately presented a fragmented narrative of my own experience in dialogue with the thoughts of Ingmar Bergman, to inspire the viewer to access their own thoughts and experiences.

To enable that thinking and to guide the audience to access and contemplate the intangible aspects of death, I have made sound the leading element in the film. I have used emotional signification in the soundtrack, combined with actual signification in the voice-overs, to evoke an emotional response to the images, which in themselves may or may not signify death, thereby helping the audience to access their feelings about death and dying. I have generated aural triggers and reinforced them with visual triggers, which is different from the usual order of creation.

Whilst the separate elements I have applied in the film are not new in themselves, combining them all to make the intangible dimensions of death and dying accessible, has not been done before. It creates a unique relationship between filmmaker and audience, that takes people to a space where they can engage beyond the material aspects of dying. The presentation as an installation further strengthens that experience through the bodily engagement and the deployment of more senses by moving in a space and being immersed in image and sound.

A second set of findings is regarding the process of making *Beyond the Edges*. The process I have employed to approach this difficult and, at best, vague subject of the intangible aspects of death and dying, provides new insights into methods of creative interrogation. Through the intense engagement with another artist as a starting point and framing mechanism, with a creative blog as a method of theoretical exploration, followed by practical experiments resulting from the theoretical enquiry, I have devised a creative structure that could serve as a “manual for filmmakers”, who could take my methods and apply them to their own theme.

With *Beyond the Edges* I hope on the one hand to contribute to a wider debate both amongst filmmakers as well as theoreticians about how to use cinematic language to create access to intangible subjects. On the other hand, I hope that my contribution will answer a call to reclaim death as part of life in our society and increase dialogue and public debate about the status of awareness of death and dying in the public realm.

## D) Limitations

Situating *Beyond the Edges* in the context of experimental/ avant-garde film suggests that it is a contribution to a niche audience rather than a mainstream one. This can be interpreted as a contradiction to the aim to make the work accessible. But mainstream cinema, as [Aaron](#) (2014) reminds us, is first and foremost an entertainment industry and as such, I suggest, probably not the best or most appropriate forum where to engage with the intangible aspects of death.

*Beyond the Edges* constitutes only one possible answer to the research question. Whilst both form and process lend themselves to be adapted to other intangible themes and subjects, and it can be assumed that it will work, the specificity of this project limits the ability to draw generalised conclusions, on how to use cinematic language to make the intangible aspects of death and dying accessible.

It would have been helpful to give further weight to the assessment that *Beyond the Edges* indeed constitutes an answer to the research question, by including a more substantial body of comments<sup>7</sup>, although audience surveys never had been intended to be within the remit of this study.

## E) Implications for theory and practice

My findings on how cinematic language can be used to make the intangible aspects of death and dying accessible has a number of implications for theory and practice. *Beyond the Edges* is one solution to the problem. But there could be many others. By first identifying a gap and then making the first suggestion, I hope it will inspire other filmmakers to try to find different ways to achieve the same goal.

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<sup>7</sup> The lack of such data can be explained with the postponement of scheduled installations due to Covid 19, where many more viewers would have had the opportunity to experience *Beyond the Edges* and leave their comments.

The form that I have used to make the intangible aspects of death and dying accessible, could equally be applied to other intangible subjects, such as faith, religion or spirituality to name but a few. Whereas literature has easier access to internal, abstract, cognitive processes, how can these be made visible or accessible with image and sound, with the language of cinema?

Written scholarly literature on death in film is not substantial and on the intangible aspects of death in film virtually not existing. This project could inspire further theoretical research and writing.

As to the new insights into methods of creative interrogation within film, the process I have discovered could be taken forward by other practitioners and applied to their own theme.

The implications for my own practice as a filmmaker and a researcher, is the recognition of T. S. Eliot's observation that "the end of all our exploring, will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time". My interest in the intangible and less accessible workings of our minds on all sorts of subjects has only grown through this project. Having a workable, structured and creative approach to enquiry into intangible dimensions, I am inspired to take my own methods in both process and form further onto new projects involving indefinable and unfathomable thoughts. I would like to further explore the idea of fragments in a sound-led film to see, how through ambiguity it can be possible to engage an audience actively through the medium of film, to open minds and to spark imagination. To say it with Japanese philosopher Daisaku [Ikeda](#) (2001, p.37):

The life and essence of art [...] lies in expressing through a wellspring of emotion the universal realm of the human spirit. It is a melding of the individual and the universal. That is why great art reaches out beyond ethnic and national barriers to move people all over the world.

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(Note: The links to the in-text references will point to the first mention of any reference in the text)

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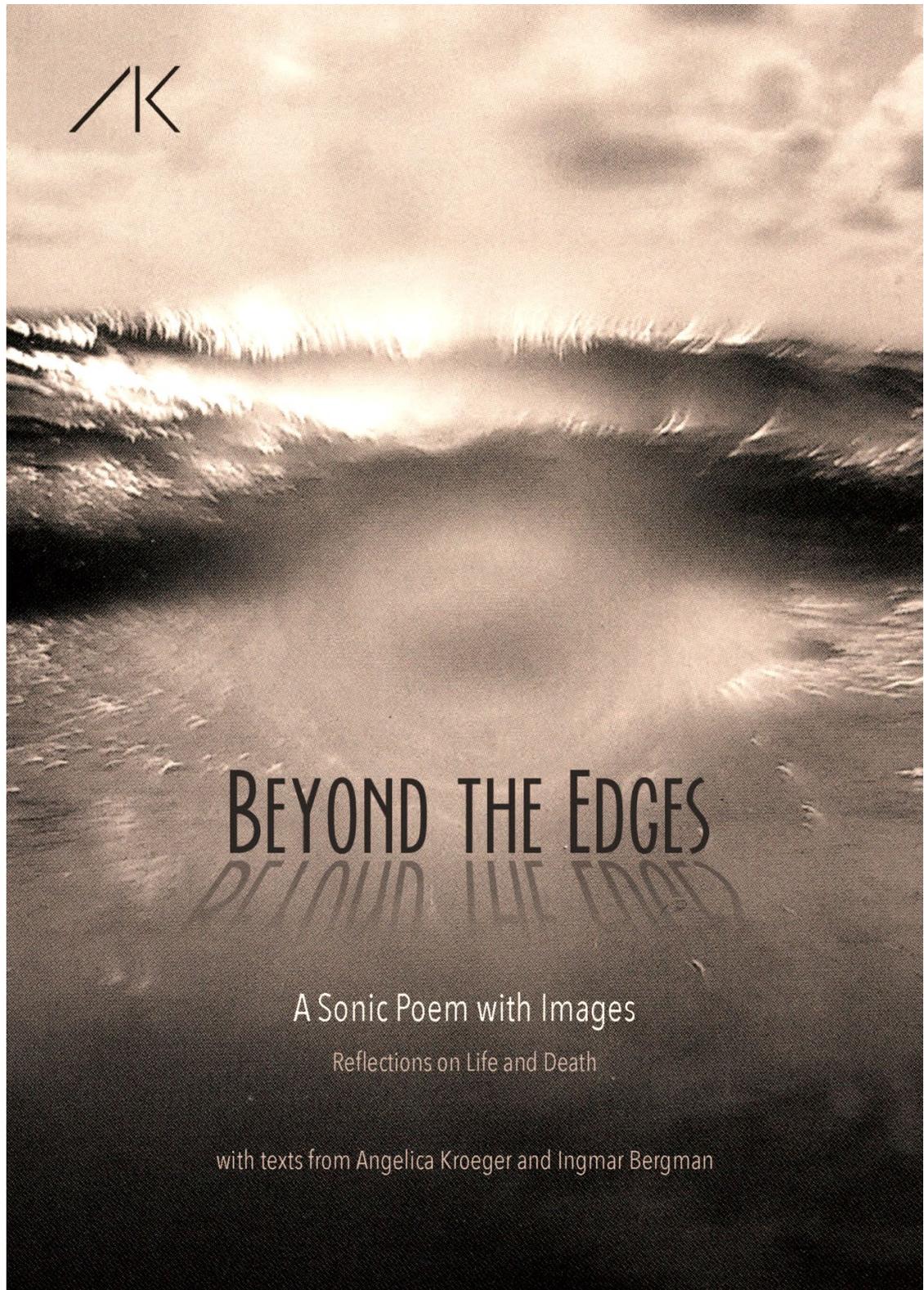
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App 1: Installation Programme, including text of all twelve poems and film credits



# BEYOND THE EDGES

A Sonic Poem with Images

Created, written, filmed and composed by : Angelica Kroeger  
with musical stems from : Stephen Deutsch  
Voices: Elisabeth Befrits  
Halfdan Kamper  
Angelica Kroeger  
Voice representing Ingmar Bergman: Ludvig Josephsson  
Soprano: Bettina Kamper  
Violin: Anne Wood  
Cello (Bach): Katy Bell  
Piano (Schubert): Fritz-Jürgen Kroeger

*Running time of one complete loop is 51 minutes*

Some of the lines in the poems are inspired or taken from Ingmar Bergman's Notebooks 1957-1974 and 1974-2001, The Magic Lantern, Bergman Archives and Tre Dagböcker

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**Beyond the Edges** is an installation, reflecting on Life and Death through my own experience of being close to death, and that of Swedish filmmaker Ingmar Bergman.

It constitutes the practical and main part of my PhD, which explores, how the intangible dimensions of death can be made accessible through the language of film, sound and music. It is inspired by the work and writings of Ingmar Bergman.

When I was diagnosed with cancer my world came apart from one minute to the next. It was turned upside-down and inside out. I was faced, in a blink of an eye, with death. In an instant I became aware of my mortality. My first reaction was numbness, because I didn't know what I was supposed to think and feel. It was difficult to hear my own thoughts in amongst all the good advice I was given from all sides. Pondering about it was terrifying. The prospects were too vast, too difficult to grasp. But slowly I began to yearn for an understanding of what it might mean to die. During the time of chemotherapy, where I had to experience my own physical decline, the prospect of dying seemed very real. At this point I was at a loss as to where to turn. All my knowledge and intellect had so far failed to equip me mentally to deal with the idea of finitude. My illness, however, did ignite the burning wish to create artwork that can give people access to contemplating death and what it means to die.

Ingmar Bergman's lifelong fear of death and the way he approached the subject in his work has always been an important inspiration. Not least the importance of music for him in the context of death has been a significant part of my studies. This, mixed with my fascination of him as an artist and my own personal experience of facing death, are the basis of my work. The landscape of Ingmar Bergman, which echoes my own, is the visual centre of my work, his thoughts, in a fictive dialogue with my own thoughts, the thread that is woven throughout.

The installation exhibits a series of short-films, seen as a continuum, that explore fear of death, meaning of life, aging and loss. It is a sonic poem with images as a homage to life. This immersive experience is as much about listening than about seeing. By engaging all the senses, I hope I can inspire you to ask your own questions to the finitude of life.

*Angelica Kroeger, March 2020*

# THE 12 POEMS



## Film 1 - January - Prologue

Child: You are old.

Grandmother: Yes, I am old.

Child: Are you going to die?

Grandmother: Yes, I am going to die, but not just yet.

Child: Where are you going when you die?

Grandmother: Where were you before you were born?

Child: I was in a different place then.

Grandmother: That is where I will be going when I die.





**Film 2 - February - IB (Ingmar Bergman)**

I do believe in God

As a little boy  
I once cried, because I was moved  
by the melancholy of some beautiful music.

It conjured up the saddest images:  
My mother dying.  
Me lost in the woods.  
And my teddy badly punished.

Death is my friend and companion.

I can't escape death.  
No one can!  
But acknowledgement of death  
Sharpens the consciousness of life.

Sometimes I feel this is the realm of death.  
Death and killing are such obvious components of our existence.  
Death has also attacked our finer instincts and insights.  
Humanity. Sympathy. Understanding. Tenderness. Closeness. Warmth. Loyalty.

There is a panic around us.  
Some have discovered it  
but it is going on all the time  
and it has gone a long way.

### Film 3 - March - AIK (Angelica Kroeger)

On June the twelfth I was diagnosed with cancer.  
Surely not!  
Not me.  
Who has got cancer?  
It has nothing to do with me.

When you are diagnosed with cancer, you are meant to cry.  
So I cried.  
Because, it is what you do.  
What is next?  
I will go on holiday.

No, you have to come to the hospital. It is urgent.  
First name.  
Surname.  
Date of birth.  
Date of death.

Wait.  
Hang on a minute.  
What is this?  
No, I don't want this to be filled in.  
Not just yet.

Oh my God.  
I have cancer.  
What does that mean?  
Am I going to die?  
What does that mean?

#### Film 4 - April - IB

I don't believe in God.

There is a cry of anger  
and loneliness  
and tedium  
and need for contact  
and longing  
and anxiety  
in the throat.

There is a big wordless scream  
That wants out.

But it wasn't there a few hours ago.  
And it might not be there tomorrow.

You were born without purpose.  
You live without meaning.  
Living is its own meaning.  
When you die, you are extinguished.  
From being, you will be transformed into non-being.

A God does not necessarily dwell  
amongst our increasingly capricious atoms.

This insight has brought with it  
a certain security  
that has resolutely eliminated  
anguish and tumult.

Though on the other hand  
I have never denied my second -  
or first - life,  
that of the spirit.

## Film 5 - May - AIK

From one minute to the next, I have become mortal.  
From one minute to the next, all colours are electrified.  
From one minute to the next, all sounds are amplified.  
From one minute to the next, life has become utterly meaningful.  
I don't want to die.

Where will I go when I die?  
Do I live life to the full?  
Do I have any regrets?  
Is there anything I want to change?  
Will I leave anything behind?

I want to run.  
I want to cope.  
I want to be strong.  
I want my family to cope.  
I want to be strong.  
I have to -  
For them.

A sudden understanding of finitude.  
A sense of urgency.  
A wish to stay in the moment.

To hold on.



## Film 6 - June - IB

I do believe in God.

There's no meaning in understanding  
the total confusion that is ravaging  
deep in my innermost centre.

There's no meaning either  
in trying to repress  
this childish unruly sorrow.  
It comes in waves and is unbearable.

At the same time,  
I must hold myself together  
for Ingrid's sake.

Ingrid is still there.  
She is still here.  
If I only could rid myself  
of this childish despair,  
which is screaming me, me, me.

For once, it is not about me,  
about what I feel or want.  
It is just about Ingrid.

I have to restrain myself.  
Fight the panic.  
There is no return.  
If only this had got me instead.

It hurts so much  
And it hurts all the time.  
I am crying without shedding a tear.

But I must be strong.  
For Ingrid's sake.

## Film 7 - July - AIK

Time is relentless, it will never stop.  
The clock is ticking towards our life's conclusion.

My father used to play the piano.  
His practice was my lullaby.  
He is still playing  
But his fingers don't move as fast as they used to.

Everything is slowing down.  
Only time does not slow down.  
I fear that day when he will no longer play  
And his music will only be a memory.

My mother is tiny  
and strong, and adventurous and curious.  
She has built a wall around herself  
to not get hurt.

I want to protect her, cradle her.  
The child in my mum  
The joyous child and the vulnerable one.  
Give her back her stolen childhood.

One day, also she will be gone.  
And I cannot bear that thought.

Probably my greatest fear  
And my greatest sorrow  
is losing my parents.

I do want time to stop,  
I don't want time to stop  
I don't want the clock of life to cease ticking.

Time is relentless, it won't stop...  
... until it will ...

## Film 8 - August - IB

I don't believe in God.

My evening prayer consists of  
a long list of names.  
Many of them already dead.

There is my friend -  
I let him down.  
He never let me down.  
I forsook him when he was ill.  
Perhaps I was too frightened  
To see him slowly die.

And there is my brother.  
I was terrified of his paralysis.

And my grandparents,  
whom I never met.  
But they exist within me.  
And maybe we will meet again  
And then we can talk.

So I stand at a border, a boundary  
Turning towards something  
That becomes increasingly real.

I can suddenly experience myself as being dead.  
I am dead.

I am trying the thought -  
even if it is just a thought -  
it seems possible -  
I can't explain -  
I don't have the right words.

Carefully I move in this familiar unknown.  
This is how it feels to be dead.

## Film 9 - September - AIK

I need to be alone.  
to hear my own thoughts.  
My own fear  
for the unknown.  
Coming to terms with the prospect of dying

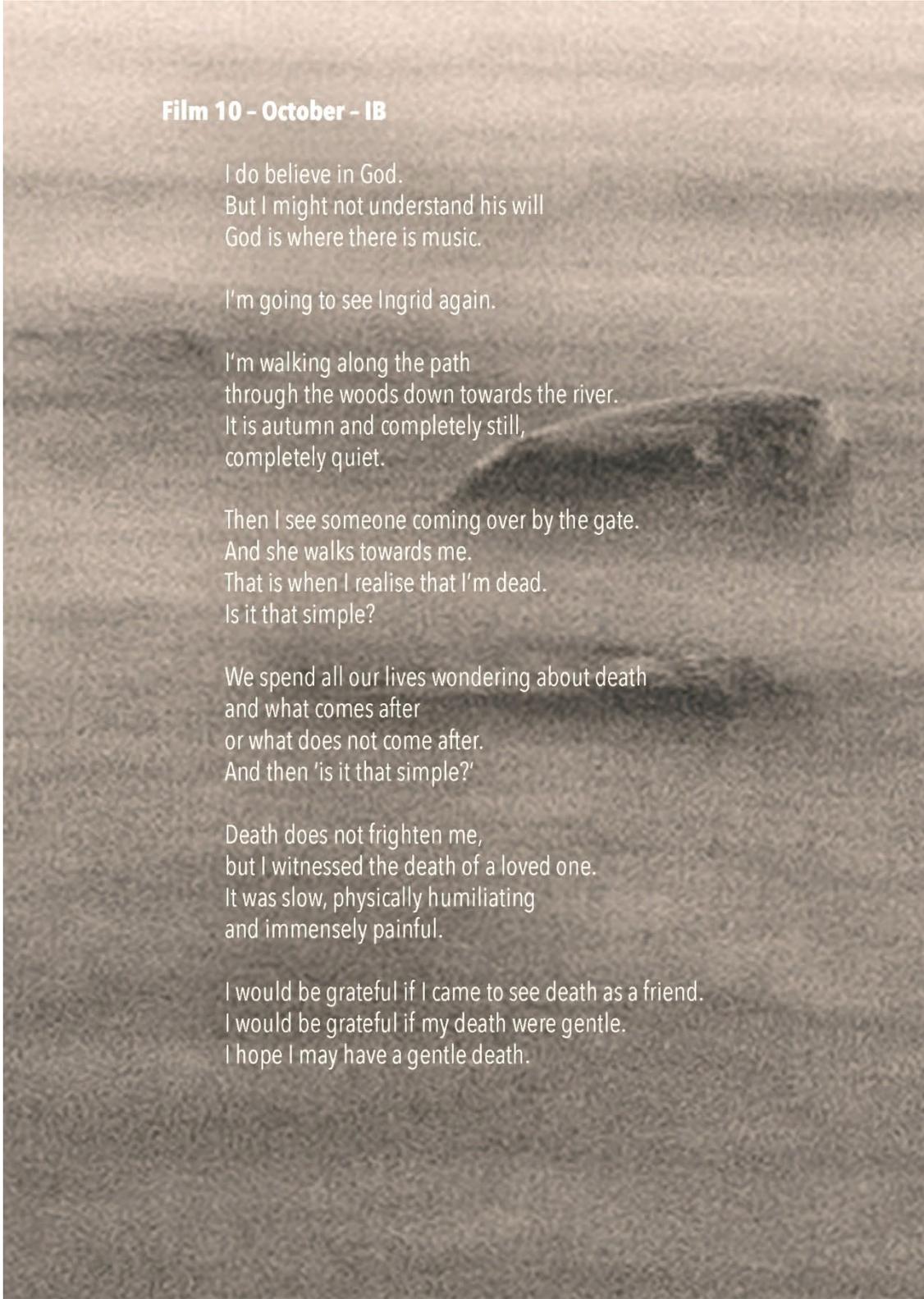
I must die on my own.  
No one can do that for me.  
I can be surrounded by my dear ones.  
But that last step,  
no longer holding on,  
the letting go,  
I must do alone.

I know I can do it.

Facing death is my opportunity to face life.  
Thinking about death is thinking about life.  
Fear of death is fear of losing life.  
Life is precious in the face of death.

I want life to be precious in the face of life.





**Film 10 - October - IB**

I do believe in God.  
But I might not understand his will  
God is where there is music.

I'm going to see Ingrid again.

I'm walking along the path  
through the woods down towards the river.  
It is autumn and completely still,  
completely quiet.

Then I see someone coming over by the gate.  
And she walks towards me.  
That is when I realise that I'm dead.  
Is it that simple?

We spend all our lives wondering about death  
and what comes after  
or what does not come after.  
And then 'is it that simple?'

Death does not frighten me,  
but I witnessed the death of a loved one.  
It was slow, physically humiliating  
and immensely painful.

I would be grateful if I came to see death as a friend.  
I would be grateful if my death were gentle.  
I hope I may have a gentle death.

**Film 11 - November - AIK**

With the thought of dying,  
I imagine life.

I conceive the sea  
As the pool of all life  
And the wave as an individual lifetime,  
that comes and lives  
And returns to the pool of life.

Before you were born  
You were a star  
My mother always said.  
And when I die,  
I will be a star again.

In the face of death  
The worlds expands  
beyond our understanding.

Advancing to a different realm.  
The realm of God – perhaps,  
whatever we consider that to be.

There is comfort in trust.  
Trusting that all will be well.  
Comfort in not understanding  
And just meeting  
The inevitable.

## Film 12 - Epilogue

All begins afresh  
The waves are coming and going.  
The moon is waxing and waning.  
The sun is rising again.

A new dawn,  
a new life.  
Nothing is ever lost.  
Everything is transient.  
Nothing stays the way it is.  
Everything is change.  
Everything is in constant flux.

A new understanding of being part  
of the workings of the universe.  
Being part of the coming and going,  
whatever shape this may take.  
Feeling at peace  
With the nature of life and death.

It is not about endings,  
It is about beginnings.  
We can always begin something.  
Even in the hour of our death.





THE BERGMAN ESTATE  
ON FÅRÖ



## App 2: Audience responses to the test installation

- I really thought that was beautiful
- I really thought the sound of the waves is relaxing but there is so much more that everyone can take something I can relate to my family have lost a lot and myself more because I've lost three brother really young. I don't know why, my biggest fear is for myself is the thought of death has always been with me. Don't know if this is because my father died young and at this time I was not allowed to go to my father's funeral I would have been 12 years old my father was 40 years. This video was very good for myself.
- What a profound experience! Love the ticking of the clock. Made me think how I need to get things in life done. Well done, so powerful.
- Mesmerising, I was totally absorbed. Life in the face of life – how do we live like this? So many truths, so many questions. Greyness, aloneness, time ticking away. Our lives, with the inevitability of death. No bargaining, no escape, how do we face it, or not? Loved the focus of one screen by the others, the images, the spoken word. Everything emerging from the waves and returning to the waves. Life goes on, we are born, we live, we die – the ongoing cycle. The dad, playing the piano, took me back to my dad who died earlier this year, of the things we did together. I too had 2 parents till very recently, but life goes on..... and I miss him. Thank you for this wonderful experience.
- I liked that there was so much time to think
- It is a deeply moving, beautifully crafted sonic poem that takes us on a gentle journey to explore life's most profound question. It is a deeply personal journey which takes huge courage to share and I feel it offers resolution to

both you and those who go on the journey with you and Ingmar, but each can find their own resolution. Beautiful, beautiful images and cinematography hold you spellbound from start to finish as does the emotive and affecting soundscape, voices, music and songs. The opening conversation between the child and his grandmother opens in such a moving way that you know you just want to go forward the next steps. The story with the parents is so tender and full of love and the images capture this love. It brings so many creative and deeply emotional aspects into a deeply affecting experience that offers the ability to explore and understand for ourselves this profound question of our own and others mortality. It creates a space in which we can meet death as our companion and through that embrace the preciousness of every unique, precious tiny moment of life. It gives us constant renewal of the intrinsic value of life.

- An incredible output the complexity of textures and layers of visual, audio and themes.
- It is very real, raw, but also comforting. I felt very empowered watching your film. Less scared of death and how it may feel to face it alone. As you rightly point out is something we do alone. I think that your film empowers and achieves a sense of social justice. It is transformative as it facilitates empowerment.
- It was so profound. Glad there was so much space to think

App 3: Full research blog is to be found at  
<https://mynotesfromthenorth.blogspot.com>

App 4:



*Voices from the Cillín*, teaser

See: <https://eprints.bournemouth.ac.uk/36596/>

App 5:



*Lullaby for Adults*, teaser

See: <https://eprints.bournemouth.ac.uk/36596/>

App 6:



*Song of Love*

See: <https://eprints.bournemouth.ac.uk/36596/>

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