

# **THE SISTERS B. – COLLABORATIVE FILM PRACTICE USING EMBODIED MONTAGE STRATEGIES**

ANNIKA BOHOLM

THE THEATRE ACADEMY AT LULEÅ UNIVERSITY  
OF TECHNOLOGY (SWEDEN)

KERSTI GRUNDITZ BRENNAN

LUCA SCHOOL OF ARTS / KU LEUVEN (BELGIUM)

**Annika Boholm & Kersti Grunditz Brennan** have collaboratively initiated, conducted, screened, published and presented artistic research in LA, Berlin, Stockholm, Lisbon, Manchester, Graz, Tallin, Catania and digitally since 2017. [www.blod.one](http://www.blod.one)

**Kersti Grunditz Brennan**, film editor, documentary filmmaker, professor of audiovisual art at LUCA School of Arts. PhD in film and media from Stockholm University of the Arts. MFA in choreography from Mills College, CA on a Fulbright scholarship. <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2422-5119> / [kersti.grunditzbrennan@luca-arts.se](mailto:kersti.grunditzbrennan@luca-arts.se)

**Annika Boholm**, author/scriptwriter, instigator of stage co-creation, researcher, assistant professor in performing arts at Luleå University of Technology. Former dancer/director/choreographer with MA in New Performative Practices from Stockholm University of the Arts. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4373-9070> / [annika@boholm.info](mailto:annika@boholm.info)

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### **Corresponding author**

Annika Boholm: [annika@boholm.info](mailto:annika@boholm.info)

Kersti Grunditz Brennan.: [kersti.grunditzbrennan@luca-arts.se](mailto:kersti.grunditzbrennan@luca-arts.se)

LUCA School of Arts, Palazienstraat 70, 1030 Brussels, Belgium

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## Abstract

This article is an invitation into an artistic research project on team-based filmmaking. Its format takes a montage approach congenial with the research ambitions: writings on a film process are interspersed by texts on research methods, script scenes, historical images and facts, while loosely traced by comic strips in the intended film's chronology.

The Sisters B. project responds to a lack of research on and through collaborative film practice. We situate the project in our time's flood of media-based storytelling and ecological crises. This project's multifaceted and exploratory approaches are informed by the complexity and entanglement of consequences – to environment, people and otherwise, directly and ideologically – of both cinematic production and its narratives. Our methodological framework draws from several academic fields and artistic disciplines, manifested through the article's exposition of a filming week on the Bergman Estate.

The Sisters B. explores loss and conditions for creativity through an embodied conversation with the composers Lili (1893-1918) and Nadia (1887-1979) Boulanger. The article proposes a range of embodied montage strategies; intertwining narrative levels, connecting times, activating audience imagination, embracing friction, responding to circumstances, producing by re-using; porously overlapping fact and fiction, theory and practice by relating biography, ecology and rhythmic gestures to script, performance and film editing.

**Keywords:** Artistic research methods, Boulanger, Collaboration, Film editing, Performance, Scriptwriting, Team-based filmmaking

## Intro

*The Sisters B.* artistic research project is an embodied conversation with the past. It's an attempt at sharing experiences across time through a process of probing biographical moments that in retrospect may seem inconsequential to the shaping of a life trajectory or historical account. Moments where embodied experiences are pertinent, holding potential for connection, dialogue, and empathy beyond the cognitive.

*The Sisters B.* is research through filmmaking, research on filmmaking, filmmaking as research – there is a film being made and there are research methods being created and filmmaking methods explored. The filmmaking and the research, as well as this article, are undertaken from an embodied montage perspective; juxtaposing and connecting past, present, and future in an oscillation between linkage and collision, porously overlapping fact and fiction, theory and practice by relating biography, ecology and rhythmic gestures to script, performance and film editing.

Our research focuses on the entangled complexity of cinematic practice. We are interested in how modes of production, aesthetics, spectatorship, and narrative content intersect and affect each other. We also explore methods to raise awareness of the consequences – to environment, people and otherwise, directly and ideologically – of both cinematic production and its narratives.

Contrary to prevalent notions of the singular film auteur, filmmaking is by nature interdisciplinary (Pearlman & Sutton, 2022); a co-operation of different specialized practices (scriptwriting, directing, performance, cinematography, editing, sound design, et. al). By emphasizing interactive aspects of cinematic practice, this article advocates for benefits of foregrounding collaborative approaches to both filmmaking and artistic research.

This artistic research is conducted in the intersection of collaborative structures, style, and storybuilding, by combining two seemingly contradictory perspectives:

The *embodied* perspective is one of connection, acting on and through both environment and bodies, including but not limited to human bodies. As cinematic expression, it can be considered continuous, adhering to biological processes and laws of physics, allowing engagement in story and characters on emotional and kinesthetic levels (Gallese & Guerra, 2012) – taken to extremes in action film and fear- and tear-inducing drama.

The *montage* perspective is one of critical distance achieved through collision, fragmentation, and juxtaposition of contrasting elements. As cinematic expression, it invites complexity and shocks audience into active co-creation (Eisenstein, 1949) – often used in experimental assemblage film and video art. In teamwork it promotes diversity of experiences in the flock.

For our collaborative structure, we form *embodied montage* strategies to invite multiplicity of voices, and develop methods to navigate friction, ambivalence, complexities, and contradictory viewpoints from a position of care for consequences to individuals and ecologies involved in the collaboration.

We situate the project across several academic fields and artistic disciplines, reflected in a methodological framework of theory and practice. To contextualize, inform and articulate the entangled complexity of cinematic practice, we turn to three theoretical themes drawn from feminist, decolonial, and post-humanist scholarship: Transformation, Performativity, and Companion speciesism. For hands-on exploration of cinematic intra-action, we have devised five distinct creative practices: Dialoguing, Dislocating, Exploratory retelling, Perform-acting, and Tinkering.

The idea of *embodied montage* strategies responds to a knowledge gap identified through our 30+ years of exploring choreography and filmmaking. In our DIY film and research project BLOD we used embodied practices to explore relation-building through a methodology of creating gaps and friction – between audience, story, time, matter, and co-creators.

*The Sisters B.* project continues the research trajectory described in *The BLOD Method: case study of an artistic research project in film* (Boholm & Grunditz Brennan, 2022). The BLOD method is articulated as a ten-point Manifesto, written to accommodate a multitude of contents, forms, and modes of collaboration, while demanding cross-disciplinarity, honesty and risk-taking. Aiming to create multivocal cinematic experiences on themes of female bleeding, bodily transformations, and vulnerabilities, *BLOD* explored a kaleidoscopic dramaturgy using juxtaposition and kinesthetic engagement as compositional tools, pointing towards a potential of combining embodied and montage.



**Fig. 1** Nadia & Lili Boulanger, Paris 1900

Site for *The Sisters B.* research is the making of a film dealing with loss and conditions for creativity through a fabulation of the composers Lili (1893-1918) and Nadia (1887-1979) Boulanger.

Together with a group of musicians and dancers, we filmed at the Bergman Estate on the Swedish island Fårö. Working

within our methodological framework, creating footage towards an experimental fiction film that explores contemporary life choices through two composers forgotten by music history. A plot in fragments, moving between stories of the bold sisters and film set events.

*SYNOPSIS: In seven days, seven women and their grown children make a piece of art about the ultra-musical sisters Lilia and Nadia Boulanger. Roles and actors meld. The days pass as in a Chekhovian drama: scene after scene is rehearsed and filmed, between takes the ensemble grapples with everyday chores, financial and ecological crises, existential quandaries. On an island in the Baltic Lili's music is recorded. When Lili dies, Nadia sinks all her compositions to the bottom of the sea. Now and then, life and death, hope and sorrow reflected in each other.*

The article is structured in nine sections: intro, seven reflections from perspectives of different cinematic practices, and outro. The reflections stem from each of the seven days of filming: thematic background to scenes shot as well as queries and challenges around artistic choices and daily conditions. Each reflection also expands a theoretical theme or creative practice from our methodological framework. As a counterpoint, a potential film is presented as movie stills with dialogue in the scene order of the manuscript's seven days. This co-authored article is written in first person plural, but the use of 'we' can also refer to the larger group of film collaborators. We, the authors, are referred to by name and in third person when representing singular practices and opinions.

The current state of the world is dire. Not to be crushed by the impossibility of dreaming again, we move through an undergrowth of playfulness and humor. The style and format of this article reflect our embodied montage perspective. It's an invite to engage with our grappings with time – simultaneously finite and cyclical.



Fig. 2 The Sisters B.; stills from footage, excerpts from script, 2023.

## Monday

*First day of filming. Annika has been on Fårö for a couple of days to scout locations around the island and think through who will stay in which Bergman Estate house. On her way from Visby, she picked up the sponsored local sausages and bread for our meals, and a double bass borrowed from a music school. Kersti, Kerstin and Sunniva arrived last night, and today's scheduled scenes feature the Boulanger sisters and various danced events.*

Both the research and the film started from a spark of curiosity and some years of idea development guided by questioning rather than methods. Echoing Alison Knowles (Fluxus): Do we have to have a clear idea of what we want before we start? or can we invite other possible approaches without losing... what? Can risk losing even be the right thing to do? Striving to stay open, what does that ask of the idea development strategies we choose? How can we avoid hierarchies that come with criteria for categorization, selection, valuation? What kind of practices can still generate cinematic specificities and poetic particularities? What scholarships can fuel attentiveness to what's actually happening while staying open to what's going on.

Transformation, as part of our methodological framework, is a core process of both loss and creativity. The philosopher Rosi Braidotti provides theoretical fodder through her proposed 'distancing' as ways of detoxifying ourselves in order to envision a different world. "What is necessary is a radical

transformation, following the bases of feminism, anti-racism, and anti-fascism. An in-depth transformation around the types of subjects that we are. And that can only happen collectively, by redefining the type of world that ours is becoming" (2019).

Lili and Nadia Boulanger grew up in Paris, spending their summers in the village Gargenville. We envisioned our motley film crew taking the train to France, but every declined application for financing forced us to let go of that biographically correct ambition. The radical approach to creative problem solving we developed through the BLOD project left us open to rethink authenticity and apply for a group residency at the Bergman Estate.

So, the film takes place on Fårö. The demons haunt. Anything can happen. All is not probable but possible. Then is now and now is then; Bergman's Dämba is transformed into a summer house on the French countryside.

At the contemporary narrative level, the film crew turns itself inside out to make an innovative film on a shoe-string budget. At the historical storytelling level, Lili dies at the age of 24 in the shadow of the First World War, and Nadia gives up her composer ambitions. Instead she will teach and foster others – giants such as Philip Glass, Quincy Jones, Astor Piazzola.



Fig. 3 The Sisters B.; stills from footage, excerpts from script, 2023

Scene 23; first scene filmed, Kerstin plays Nadia, Sunniva plays Lili:

23. INT. SALON. MORNING

NADIA (28), LILI (22) sit quietly and compose. LILI's working on *Vielle prière bouddhique*. NADIA has only written a few phrases. NADIA puts down her pen, rests her chin in her hand, looks far ahead. LILI writes. NADIA closes her notebook.

After three slates of scene 23, scene 26 is set in the adjacent garden:

26. EXT. PORCH. AFTERNOON

LILI (23) propped up in a sun lounger. Even though the weather's mild, she's wrapped in a duvet and a blanket.

The filmmaking process for *The Sisters B.* is collaborative; mis-en-scène, cinematography, production design, acting and music develop in parallel and non-hierarchically. Through the historical figures Lili and Nadia Boulanger, we link past conditions, present experiences and a yet unformed future.

The idea development is based on research on Lili and Nadia's life, artistry and era. We start from what chafes in our own artistry and use speculation – in scripted situations and dialogue – to approach the Boulanger sisters, their time, choices and fates.

Are we Nadia? Are we Lili? What transformation of fates and choices can we perform across a hundred years? We are aware of the parasitic aspects of using records of their lives

as fodder for our creation. How to relate to lived experiences of others, especially those who cannot speak for themselves since they are dead? Complexities we respond to by experimenting with form and content. We lessen our claim of historical truth by destabilizing any fixed image of the past. We fabulate: the narrative gets broken up by pure fantasies, fragmentary and associative storytelling. Moments with the sisters are interwoven with the collaborators' own stories and hopes. Play is mixed with seriousness, surreal twists and turns with everyday moments, held together by musical and choreographic elements.

In scene 23 of 35, the historical and contemporary narrative levels intersect in the mis-en-scène. Cinematic claims of historical authenticity get challenged as Nadia and Lili sit in period costumes while a crewmember pass the camera, heading for the shower wrapped in a towel.

Scene 5 is Annika, the director, doing wacky dance moves dressed in an animal costume playing follow-the-leader with Kerstin and Sunniva. Scene 5 and 32 are part of an ambition to allow space for music and editing to claim its own narrative voice:

32. EXT. HOUSE. DAY

KERSTIN dances in a doorway; she dances far away; disappears, comes back – an arm, a leg; she's hidden behind the doorpost, half body sticking out, etc.



Fig. 4 The Sisters B.; stills from footage, excerpts from script, 2023

*The Sisters B.* experiments with the BLOD method applied to a project with more people and less time, prompting strategies for navigating friction and care in both collaboration and narrative. Embodied montage strategies for idea development are as much about story and form as about creating structures for a process that supports creative agency in all cinematic practices through the entire production and allows an aesthetic to emerge from conditions at hand.

Lili Boulanger died in Gargenville in 1918 of Crohn’s disease, having been ill most of her life. She was hailed as a child prodigy and became the first woman to win the Prix de Rome Composition Prize. Despite Nadia’s annual memorial concert in her honor, Lili was forgotten and did not become part of the 20th century’s music history until recently.

We make no attempt to recreate an accurate past but let references to actual (historical and biographical) events into conversations between the sisters in fictional situations. Scene 19 is a slow day on the beach where the sisters talk about the Rome composition competition, the war, Lili’s health, and Nadia’s worries.

Throughout the idea development we kept talking about *The Sisters B.* as a cinematic story not only of the trials of life and creation, but of the human tragedy of being locked in her bittersweet fate. Through its film-related artistic research

queries, this project takes on aesthetic challenges in this age of climate crisis. We argue that sustainable filmmaking requires new strategies and a belief in the audience’s imagination: Fårö can act as France, the Baltic Sea can perform the Atlantic.



Fig. 5 Nadia & Lili Boulanger, Trouville 1902



Fig. 6 The Sisters B.; stills from footage, excerpts from script, 2023

## Tuesday

Second day of filming. Annika is directing, including overhead responsibility of scenography and costumes. Cecilia arrived last night, she's in charge of the music and plays the sisters' mother:

### 4. INT. BOULANGER'S SALON. MORNING

Mama RAÏSSA plays Pjotr Tchaikovsky's *Bitterly and Sweetly*. On the music sheet: *A ma chère amie Raïssa de Pjotr* RAÏSSA barely reaches the keys - her belly is that big! NADIA (6) on the floor playing air piano.

Scene 4 is filmed in the living room of our production head quarter. The house, Dämba, is home to concert pianist Käbi Laretei's grand piano Estonia. For our production design, we moved things around; rearranging furniture, removing or highlighting stuff, searching for a condensed and elevated quality while respecting the site's significance.

Our methodological framework practice Tinkering is to be understood as an expanded notion of care taking, sustainability, and transformation: relating to a wounded planet, re-imagining relations between subject and object, between human and more-than-human. Tinkering is performative recycling true to our ambition of working with what's already there, what to get hold of when reaching out, digging deeper where we already stand.

The sisters are born into a music family: papa Ernest, an older composer and professor at the conservatory, mama Raïssa, a much younger talented singer and self-proclaimed Russian princess.



Fig. 7 Lili & Nadia Boulanger, Hanneucourt 1910s



Fig. 8 The Sisters B.; stills from footage, excerpts from script, 2023

The parents had lost their firstborn, Nadia and Lili's younger sister dies as a baby, and Ernest dies when the sisters are still small. Both sisters get a formal music education and through their mother's legendary salons they become part of Paris' music community.

7. INT. BOULANGER'S SALON. DAY

NADIA (9) and LILI (3) play four-handed. Little, Lili! - her tiny legs dangle under the piano stool. RAÏSSA's reflection on the grand piano lid - watching her own profile - pleased to have her waist back.

Scene 7 is an everyday situation embodying the undercurrent of the sisters' upbringing, scenes 10, 15 and 30 take place in a churchyard. The scenes are snapshots of subject matter inherent in the inevitable passing of time – metabolism, growing, entropy, mortality, decay – embodied processes invoking vulnerability and integrity of life to engage with story and characters and to enliven diversity of experiences in the collaborative practice.

Montage is at its core a practice of rearranging: using, reusing, and remaking as performative transformation. Tinkering is congenial with montage – it's about the doing, the trying, the watching and the redoing. Tinkering re-imagines aesthetics; allowing an aesthetic to emerge rather than be strived for, as things look different when environmental (embodied) consequences are crucial to the creative considerations.

Our agreement with Fårö church is to keep our filming schedule open to accommodate their funeral planning. Once we learn when they tend to recent local deaths, we choose our moment, pick a headstone, assign it the Boulanger family grave and film the back of it. Kersti hands over control of the camera to play Ernest for scene 10 where the family visits the oldest and youngest daughters' grave. By scene 15, Ernest is dead. Raïssa and the girls bring flowers:

15. EXT. CHURCHYARD. AFTERNOON

Mama RAÏSSA (42), NADIA (13) and LILI (7) bring flowers to papa Ernest's - and the sisters' - grave. The girls hop along. LILI hollers from their favorite grave: Marie Duplessis' = Camille.

LILI  
If we were four we could  
have played eight-handed!

RAÏSSA nods, tries a yes, but cannot speak.

Noone had thought to bring the prop bouquet, but the churchyard janitor was changing flowers on graves and let us pick from what she had discarded. We are filming on a windy day. There's a steady stream of cars passing on the main road. Between scenes we change costumes in the open. By the time we finish scene 30 – Nadia alone by Lili's grave – Kerstin is in her fourth costume for the day.



Fig. 9 The Sisters B.; stills from footage, excerpts from script, 2023

Annika took stock of her own wardrobe from an idea of costumes in grey, augmented by a few borrowed period items; and asked the ensemble to bring clothes they felt comfortable in, from light grey to black. She used her bedroom at Dämba – where they shot *Scenes from a Marriage* – as costume storage. The costume choices adhered to the Tinkering idea of reuse and repetition: as time passed, Nadia inherited mamma Raïssa’s clothes, Lili inherited her sister Nadia’s. Each morning Annika met with those filming, and from an outline, they composed the costumes together; adjusting the look to work for the day’s scenes.

There are different theories on why Nadia stopped composing. Did she lose confidence when she placed second in the Rome competition. Or did she miss the encouragement of her longtime collaborator Raul Pugno who died in 1914. Did she want her Lili’s genius to shine unobscured. Or did her music not pass her own harsh critique. The final scene of the script is a fabricated conflation of all these potential reasons:

35. EXT. BEACH. DUSK

NADIA kneeling on the rocks, sorting sheet music in two piles. Her own compositions to the right, Lili's to the left. Sits for a while and looks out to sea. As if she's awaiting a decision. Lifts the right pile and crawls to the water's edge. One at a time, she places her sheets in the water. A seagull glides by. Shrieks -

LILI under an umbrella looking at NADIA as the papers float away. It doesn't rain.

Embodied montage strategies mean embracing all kinds of conditions. We film in October and the Baltic Sea is bone chillingly cold. The seagulls are absent. Kersti tries to capture some other birds on camera, but her focus is fading. Back at the house, the whole crew warms up with soup. Later that night, Kersti starts throwing up from a stomach bug – over the course of the week all of us but one fell like dominoes.

Hence, also health becomes a montage strategy; Kersti and Annika have morning meetings taking stock of who is well each day and which scenes we can film. Lili had Crohn’s disease, all of us recovered, she did not.



Fig. 10 Lili Boulanger, Paris ca 1916



Fig. 11 The Sisters B.; stills from footage, excerpts from script, 2023

## Wednesday

*The third day is a short one. We start late as Annika and Kersti are shaky from a night of sick. Scene 11 is Cecilia, Kersti and Annika having an animated conversation about creative choices while walking. We film on the gravel road near our accommodation, with a swamp in the background. After clearing away some road signs, Kersti, who does the cinematography, sets up the shot in dialogue with Annika, but leave the camera operation to Kerstin and Sunniva who are not featured in the scene.*

Walking and talking about different relationships to female role models, teaching and creating, entry points into the project and our connections to the sisters: When Kersti was a young piano student, the impressionists were her fix. She still asks herself why she never played any of Lili Boulanger's fantastic piano music. Annika names impermanence, doubt and sisterhood as irises in her bouquet of themes. Relating to Nadia, Annika remembers something from when she expressed gratitude to excellent peer readers at her writer's education – her father asked, probably without understanding the impact of his words: 'so, do you have anything to tell?' Sorting through the vast music library of her conductor father after his death, Cecilia found only one piece by a woman: Lili Boulanger's *Vieille prière bouddhique*. She talks about her own music education, all the years immersed in music and never

thinking about how nothing she studied was written by a female composer.

Our creative practice Dialoguing has evolved from the BLOD manifesto's point #3, No Compromises! A stance to afford agency to each collaborator and to embrace the creative energy of friction.

Dialoguing as a distinct practice within our methodological framework is reflexive and performative, involving all the project's collaborators through all stages of the research.

Dialoguing invites critical examination of preconceived relationality and individual autonomy during the whole filmmaking process. This includes creating sustainable working conditions, as well as space and guidelines for preserving artistic integrity within the scope of the research aims; acknowledging collaborator influence on the process and substantial creative imprints on the project.

The practice of Dialoguing rests on the premise that encouragement of dissent and disagreement is a fundamental component of robust decision making. By reflecting together, questions of intra-relational ethics and strategies for dealing with collaborative challenges are handled collectively; with parameters for conduct centered on care while being aware



Fig. 12 The Sisters B.; stills from footage, excerpts from script, 2023

of the risk of implementing a tyranny of harmony where friction and tension is banned from the process.

The practice of Dialoguing includes providing strategies, to be agreed on beforehand by the collaborators, for cooperatively resolving conflicts with respect and creativity.

11. EXT/INT. BEACH/KITCHEN. AFTERNOON

Things are going on in several places. In addition to conference on the road and chess game on the beach, EMMA, JOHAN & RUTH prepare supper - it's lively - and SVEN's setting up for sound recording. KERSTIN's in a pine tree, spying with binoculars.

The whole team hasn't arrived yet, so we film Kerstin in the pine tree. We stay at the same beach and film scene 2: Lili under umbrella. A leftover from yesterday's botched attempt at the scene when the intended footage of Lili on an opposite shore was impossible to create with the lenses at hand, in the fading light and available topography. Kersti had failed to predict and communicate the cinematographic difficulties with the darkness and distance and Annika had insisted on pursuing this symbolically important shot across the water.

2. EXT. BEACH. EARLY EVENING

In the distance, at the edge of the forest by the water, LILI stands with an umbrella. It's raining. She has light-colored clothes.

LILI seems at ease - blinking a few times, soft corners of her mouth.

But, there's something about the way she stands there, looking like she knows something about her fate.

We have another go at it. But before we start, the two of us assess other scenes scheduled this day, efforts of changing locations and acknowledge yesterday's discord by taking responsibility for our own emotional responses to the conflict. We find new connections to the scene and each other, then rethink the wider shots' image composition with the water diagonally behind Lili.



Fig. 13 Satellite view of filming location, 2025

The cinematography starts from embodied montage considerations. The visual language seeks connections between scenes via movement, places, objects, colors, light while the footage for the scenes is open to cross-cutting, swapping and reassembling. Images are composed from editing thinking; carefully positioning the camera as if it were a person - in scale, proximity, focal length - to facilitate editing that invokes kinesthetic responses despite using a static camera and not a steady-cam (Heimann et al., 2017).



Fig. 14 The Sisters B.; stills from footage, excerpts from script, 2023

Out of environmental care, also true to Tinkering, and as a safeguard against overextending our working days, we use only natural and pre-existing light sources. Dusk in October starts around 4.30 pm. With two evening scenes left to film, still some daylight and in a good creative flow, we practice Dialoguing to develop lighting choices that bring deeper connection to the scenes; we understand Lili's death through the blue light of dusk and its contouring of dark forest, and we feel Sunniva's merging with her role through the amber blend of bed lamp light and sea shells.

28A. INT. BEDROOM. EVENING

LILI (24) lies still on her bed with eyes closed. On the floor, NADIA (30) is on her knees - her hands clasped, head resting against the bed. RAÏSSA (61) by the window with her back to the room.

22A. INT. BEDROOM. EVENING

SUNNIVA lies on a bed with shells over ears.

After Lili Boulanger won the Rome prize at age 20, she experienced four feverish years as a lauded composer before she died and was lost to music history for a long time. Even though her music is now 'rediscovered', the originality, breadth and quality of her oeuvre get overshadowed by her early death. We don't want to add to the pile of dead young women that make up literary and film history. So we Dialogue, searching for ways to create images of Lili's death that debunk "The death of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world [...]". (Poe, 1846)

Our *embodied montage* strategies include a strive for interruption of images, expanding the BLOD project's kaleidoscopic dramaturgy further towards unpredictability, multiplicity, blurring of roles and identities.

In line with the montage ambition of making the story construction visible through a layer of meta-story, the roles of Sunniva and Lili overlap and dialogue. Similarly, Lili's music is filmed and recorded to be both film score and integral parts of the story, foregrounding Lili's music, musicianship and composing. Footage of instruments and close-ups of playing hands carries embodied connections with character beyond emotion and time.

The practice of Dialoguing is evaluation of process in progress, conceptually generative and a means to contribute to a culture of respect for knowledge, academia, theory, artistic research. Dialoguing includes reflecting together; within the working group as well as through intra-active dissemination formats. Dialoguing pushes implicit aspects of the collaborative process to the surface. It's a tool to explicitly articulate our filmmaking methods as models for collaborative structures in general, and for multi-layered interactions in interdisciplinary endeavors. Elevating ongoing research conversation to a distinct practice emphasizes the importance of acknowledging collaborator contributions.

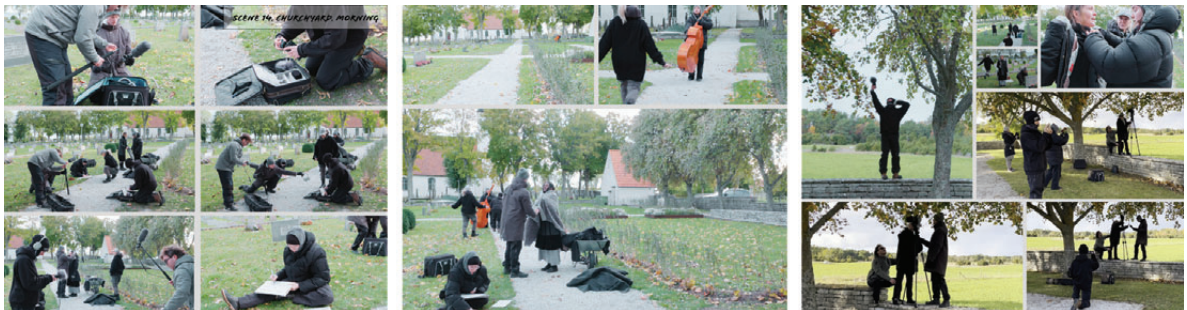


Fig. 15 The Sisters B.; stills from footage, excerpts from script, 2023

## Thursday

*The falling domino of day four is Cecilia. Kerstin is also feeling queasy. Arvid, Emma, Johan and Sven\* crossed the strait with the ferry at 1 am, making for an afternoon appearance. Sunniva accompanies Annika and Kersti to the sandy dunes of Ullahau for scene 22 and 20, health conditions shifting time of day from evening to morning.*

### 22. EXT. SAND DUNE. EVENING

KERSTI and ANNIKA babble: It's war. What enables violence? We don't get it. Who are we? What do we do? What is art good for?

### 20. EXT. SAND DUNE. DUSK

The lovely autumn sky over the dunes.

We are back for lunch. Our friend Bert, actor, baker, carpenter, chef, has volunteered to cook for us and the team's healthy ones enjoy pumpkin soup and bread out of the oven. He



Fig. 16 Ingredients for film crew lunch, 2023

cooks at Ängen, where the kids\* stay and where we filmed Lili's death bed the night before.

Dislocating story events from their natural spatial habitat is a transformative gesture, generating new meaning by disruptions to familiar spaces, drawing on philosopher Michel Foucault's concept 'heterotopia' (1986). Dislocating is also a mindset for creatively exploring experiences of losing and gaining familiarity with one's body – eschewing naturalism, causality, narrative logic.

The practice of Dislocating is used as an *embodied montage* strategy with regard to content, processes and aesthetics; re-imagining location scouting to invite an awareness of companionship with natureculture (Haraway, 2003). We choose (dislocated) sites to performatively engage with its inhabitants, nuances, weather, etc. – for instance filming at the churchyard amid whoever happens to pass by. These encounters with people and places serve as immediate expositions of the research processes (continuing a fruitful experience from the BLOD project) and the practice of Dislocating thereby also invites reflection and critical dialogue.

We set out to the rocky beach of Tuesday:

### 11A. EXT. BEACH. AFTERNOON

SUNNIVA and ARVID play chess. ARVID in black hoodie – cool and collected. SUNNIVA focused, red of cheek, wind in hair.



Fig. 17 The Sisters B.; stills from footage, excerpts from script, 2023

It starts to rain. The waves are crashing and roaring. The location is a formidable opponent. As is the lack of chess board. Kersti was convinced that she'd seen one in Ingmar's home at Hammars. (Fig. 18) It turned out to be a checkered coaster. The team picks white and black stones before we start filming, and the chess game can begin. The beach makes its way into the footage, eventually no frequency of wiping can keep water away from the lens.

We head back to Dämba for the missing interior of scene 11: Sven setting up for sound recording, followed by scenes around the house:

5A. EXT. GARDEN. MORNING

The rest of the FILM TEAM play croquet.

Lili died in March 1918, eight months before World War I ended. She died in the family's summer house. The very house that hosted the Boulanger famous musical salons; to which Igor Stravinsky later fled from the Nazis, for protection by his friend and colleague Nadia.

A key aspect of the project was setting up a creative situation delimited in time and space. A place where culture and nature intersect. Where filming, cooking, sleeping flow together. Our Bergman Estate residency provided such an environment; matching the sisters' life work situation and the project's experimental aesthetic.

Annika wrote the final script for this particular location, scenes set across the island, the site considered one of the roles.

27. EXT. GARDEN. EARLY EVENING

ANNIKA has found wild leek that she greedily snatches. SVEN films with his mobile phone.

ANNIKA:  
(announces her driving forces -)  
I want to show life as I imagine it.

Short silence - SVEN keeps filming.  
That would be something Virginia

(to SVEN:)  
Wolff (pause) could have said...  
perhaps she did...?



Fig. 18 Filming locations Hammars, 2023



Fig. 19 The Sisters B.; stills from footage, excerpts from script, 2023

We filmed scene 27 just outside the Dämba living room. While we were filming, Emma was in there practicing for scene 22B, and her flute was heard through the window. In the script, scene 26 mentions *Vielle prière bouddhique* heard faintly in a distance. It was as if the script came to life! Sadly, we had to ask Emma to be quiet, as editable footage requires dialogue to be recorded without discernable melodies in the background.

But when later filming Emma in the living room, Kersti got editing ideas for temporal dislocations (of sound, character reactions, parallel actions), enlivened by our use of the same and adjacent locations across scenes from different story levels, time periods and chronologies.

22B. INT. LIVING ROOM. EVENING

SVEN records EMMA playing the flute part of *Vielle prière bouddhique*.

**Vielle prière bouddhique**  
Old buddhist prayer  
*Prère quiddicane pour tout l'Univers*  
pour Ténor, Chœur et Orchestre

Traduction de M<sup>lle</sup> S. BARPELÉO  
Transcription anglaise de J. N. SCHLEFIELD

LILI BOULANGER  
17 Août 1920-01 Mars 1916

Larghetto *al. 66 à 52 appogiato*

En Solo de Ténor pour les Chœurs et l'Orchestre. The score's title may be sung by 8 voices.  
Page double d'opéra-orchestre  
Copyright by BOULENGER & C<sup>o</sup> 1921-1925

Paris, 4, Place de la Madeleine

Fig. 20 Pages from original score, 1925



Fig. 21 The Sisters B.; stills from footage, excerpts from script, 2023

## Friday

*Our fifth day. The night before, Kersti took the car ferry to pick up Ruth\* from the bus. Katarina will arrive after breakfast tomorrow to complete the team roster. Today's falling domino is Sunniva, and Cecilia has a minor relapse. We have a packed schedule with scenes 26, 9, 11B, 3, 33, 34 centered around Dämba and the action-packed scene 14 to be filmed at the churchyard. It's one windy day.*

While she was doing archival research and immersing herself in the Boulanger sisters, Annika slowly started an ongoing process of choosing and ordering aspects of the sisters' lives for the writing of story and script dramaturgy. Searching for everyday actions, situations and dialogue which hold potential for connection beyond the cognitive – operating on an emotional and physical level.

26. INT. SALON. AFTERNOON

NADIA (29) teaches Paul V (23).

They sit next to each other on the piano stool. NADIA shows, leans back, closes her eyes, listens to Paul - *assez bon*.

PAUL  
(to the camera)  
She hears and sees everything

Arvid plays Paul and Annika shaped the scripting of this scene from her eleven years of living close to Arvid's piano lessons and the relationship between him and his teacher. The script situation is invented, but it's plausible.

Nadia started teaching young and she became one of the most influential composition teachers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Composer and critic Virgil Thomson, famously dubbed her "a one-woman graduate school so powerful and so permeating that legend credits every American town with two things – a five-and-dime and a Boulanger pupil." (1962)



Fig. 22 Nadia Boulanger with student, USA 1958

In scene 9 Johan interviews his mother Kersti about why they are making the movie. It's written from a related place of listening: Annika 'hears' Johan's way of talking from both knowing him and responding to qualities in his voice.



Fig. 23 The Sisters B.; stills from footage, excerpts from script, 2023

Two scenes later, Johan, Emma and Ruth make pancakes, scene 9 still reverberating through their whisking and flipping. *Embodied montage* strategies for scriptwriting bring the doing to the forefront.

3. INT. KITCHEN. EVENING

THE FILM CREW cooks. Making the Ukrainian soup borscht. All helps out. KERSTI chops onions with swim goggles. RUTH's a whirlwind of energy, handing ingredients to ARVID frying them. JOHAN's mixing fried pork & pickled cucumber. EMMA ladles the sour cream, sets out honey, cuts parsley. SVEN sets the table, documents with his mobile.

RUTH  
(with a sweeping gesture)  
Big Brother 2.0.

EMMA / SVEN  
Finally! / Cringe alert...

Scene 3 continues with a long dialogue filled with references and reactions Annika has stolen from past interactions with 'the grown children'. Though without dialogue, scene 14 is written from a similar embodied and relational experience of a film shoot's pre-actions:

14. EXT. CHURCHYARD. MORNING

THE FILMTEAM prepares for scene 15. Running cables. Recording steps in gravel and birds chirping. Rehearsing the scenes. SUNNIVA gets her lavalier. CECILIA comes bumbling with the double bass (ANNIKA mimes: *not now*). JOHAN is holding KERSTI's leg - she's standing on a bucket pressed against a monument gravestone, barely reaching the camera (ARVID asks if he should take over, but *no thanks*, this is her domain).

The manuscript is based on documentary strategies in a porous overlap of fiction and reality. In the script process, our methodological framework practice Exploratory retelling, draws from performative writing; addressing the unconscious, imagination, dreams, the unsaid; acknowledging that writing occurs from and through a body. It narrates personal lived experiences on a sliding scale of fabulation, characterized by unpredictable dialogue and kinesthetic triggers, challenging causality through *montage* techniques. As an *embodied* practice, the scriptwriting connects with rhythmic and poetic concepts of choreography.



Fig. 24 Costume details, 2023

*The Sisters B.* script aims to evoke kinesthetic reading, invite scenic displacements and temporal shifts, leave space for improvisation, capriciousness, and form experiments. It's not a blueprint to be implemented, but a transformational activity that allows an aesthetic to emerge.



Fig. 25 The Sisters B.; stills from footage, excerpts from script, 2023

The third to last scene in the script epitomizes *embodied montage* strategies – starting from historical fact to envision a situation of tactile and material actions, dislocation, anachronism.

33. INT. SALON. DAY

NADIA by the grand piano. THE FILM CREW on the floor, kneading clay figures. As they finish, they place the figures on the piano:

JOHAN  
Burt Bacharach

EMMA  
Quincy Jones

SVEN  
Philip Glass

RUTH  
George Gershwin

NADIA shifts her concentration and looks at Gershwin. Barely noticeably shakes her head – but not as if she's dissing him.

NADIA  
(to the clay figure)  
George, I have nothing to teach you.

Ruth takes Gershwin back, bunches him up, kneads the lump of clay, and starts anew.

ARVID  
Astor Piazzolla

Nadia stopped composing when Lili died. Instead, she devoted her life to the music of others – as a pioneering conductor and as a seminal composition teacher, the one who nurtured the artistic voices of mainly men, who is said to have shaped American contemporary music. Considering her to be “arguably [...] the most important woman in the history of classical music,” *BBC Music magazine* concludes: “It is

frankly unimaginable that a man with a similar degree of influence over 20th-century music would have been so ignored.” (Burton-Hill, 2017).

Caroline Potter argues “Lili was ‘allowed’ to have a public career as her chronic ill health meant that as she was unlikely to live long, she wouldn’t be a professional threat to her male peers” (2006).

In 1938, Nadia was asked how it felt to be the first female conductor of the Boston Symphony: “I’ve been a woman for a little over 50 years and have gotten over my initial astonishment. As for conducting an orchestra, that’s a job where I don’t think sex plays much part.”

34. EXT. PORCH. AFTERNOON

EMMA sits by herself drinking coffee. This is serious. She looks at a clay figure on the bench, it's not exactly realistic but it clearly has breasts. RUTH joins, coffee in one hand and a clay figure in the other.

RUTH  
Stravinsky.

EMMA  
Like, I made, uh, I have... made, eh...

RUTH sits down.

RUTH  
She wasn't very good at supporting women, huh?

They sit in silence.

EMMA  
I heard they got caught in a music closet... Nadia and Stravinsky –

EMMA throws her clay figure at RUTH. The figures make out.



Fig. 26 The Sisters B.; stills from footage, excerpts from script, 2023

## Saturday

*Everybody has arrived. It's the sixth day. Newcomer Katarina's calm energy and long experience of professional musicianship give the stomach bug ridden group a boost. Our menu is mainly vegetarian and today Bert serves the lunch soup at Dämba. For our Ängen dinner feast of oven baked salmon, we invite fellow residenter Ukrainian filmmaker Thea Marti who joins us for a film screening of *The Seventh Seal* in Ingmar's converted pigsty movie theater. Kersti goes bananas over the editing room on its upper floor. But the day starts at everybody's houses:*

### 29. EXT. SEASIDE. DAWN

A new day dawns.

The FILM TEAM just woken emerges from their abodes. From Skrivstugan by the shore, from Ängen and Drängstugan through the forest, from the Guest House across the fields, by bike from Dämba, the Wing and the Mill.

### 31. EXT. BEACH. MORNING

THE FILM TEAM gathers strength before the final push. Someone stacks pebbles; someone is looking at clouds; someone skips stones; someone solves sudoku; someone reads; someone is sunbathing; EMMA and RUTH practice the dialogue of scene 34.

Annika explored new applications of the BLOD ambition to write text that generates impulses rather than instructions when interpreted by its user through speech, sceneries, dance.

The script is meant to invite the user's bodily experiences and ignite intellectual and kinesthetic sparks; linguistically working to activate physical sensations, mobilize memories and stored knowledge. In other words, get the actors' imagination and creativity going, so that they become an active part of the work.

The script's collaborative gesture encourages multidirectional relational exploration between script, role and actor. Combined with a form of dramatic text that, through a surrealistically permissive attitude, challenges film and television drama's often expected demands for external authenticity and credibility, this approach reframes cinematic character. It's drama as play, where the game rules' inner logic is created from chains of events beyond psychologically logical cause and effect, a playing that is about recreating experiences of life.

In our methodological framework, Perform-acting is a practice of not becoming the roles but performing their actions; housing them in performer bodies and giving voice to scripted lines. In *The Sisters B.*, the dramatic text is not subordinate to the characters, the characters just happen to play the game.



Fig. 27 The Sisters B.; stills from footage, excerpts from script, 2023

17. EXT. FIELD. MORNING

LILI (12) and NADIA (18) fly kites. It's the kind of happy, wonderful day they'll remember for the rest of their lives. RAÏSSA stays by the house to sneak a cigarette.

[...]

NADIA hands over the kite to LILI, hurries to RAÏSSA. EAGER YOUNG MAN (around 20) is waiting on the patio, sheet music in hand.

Lili and Nadia's lives are portrayed with neither realism nor historical accuracy. The dancers Sunniva and Kerstin play the sisters from small children to adults (without 'playing' children). Through situation, movement language and select costume details, the era and the sisters' ages are indicated.

By focusing on physical actions and characters' physical situations, the practice of Perform-acting imbues the generated footage with potentials to explore editing and cinematic story-making where viewers' character engagement is not dependent on recognition but operates through kinesthetic interaction. When applying our *montage* measures of critical distancing through spatial and temporal fragmentation, Perform-acting's insistence on physicality supports an *embodied* connection to vulnerability of life.

28. INT. HOUSE. EVENING

SUNNIVA dances through the house. As when *Sleeping Beauty* pricks herself on the spinning needle, everything stops: ARVID in the middle of setting the table, EMMA chopping leek, JOHAN cutting bread, RUTH at the stove, SVEN handing his phone to EMMA.

The Sisters B. project is an embodied conversation across time through music. Lili wrote *Vieille prière bouddhique* for tenor solo, choir and organ between 1914 and 1917. Music critic Sofia Nyblom (2016) writes that it's inevitable that facing death leaves its mark and forces a precocious seriousness in Lili's music. The philosophical depth in *Vieille prière bouddhique*, is highlighted by natural tone scales, clearly inspired by Gregorian chant. A feverish intensity contributes to Lili Boulanger's strongly personal voice.

Performing the piece now is a way of glimpsing her musical intentions. Based on the instruments played by the team, Cecilia made a re-composition of *Vieille prière bouddhique*. The term started to be used more widely when Max Richter re-composed Vivaldi's *Four seasons* in 2012. The practice does not differ from arranging, but the inclusion of 'composing' emphasizes authorial impact as well as artistic responsibility for the arrangement.



Fig. 28 The Sisters B.; stills from footage, excerpts from script, 2023

In the ethical considerations around re-composing Lili's work, we weigh the integrity of the composition against its performability within the project. We use re-composition as an *embodied montage* strategy; composition fragments – a harmony, a rhythmic pattern, a piece of melody – are re-assembled as *montage* and *embodied* in the footage and the performers through their playing of the music. The practice of re-composition takes the 1917 music to a different time with different conditions through both Perform-acting and Exploratory retelling.

1. INT. LIVING ROOM. EARLY EVENING

SUNNIVA and KERSTIN (who play Lili & Nadia) are warming up; EMMA assembles her flute; SVEN drums lazily on cajun; JOHAN and ARVID chat and tune guitars; KATTIS unpacks her contrabass; ANNIKA (director) walks the stagings; CECILIA (composer + plays Raïssa) sits at the grand piano; RUTH sorts out Raïssa's fake baby bump, fixes the wig, arranges her dress over the piano stool; KERSTI (producer + cinematographer) tries out camera placement and shot sizes. In short, how it is before it gets quiet and the camera takes: people know what to do, have fun, yet an uncanny jitteriness.

Suddenly, KERSTIN/NADIA stills down, looks out the window to the garden and beyond.

We stay in the living room to film scene 8, scripted as a first rehearsal of *Vieille prière bouddhique*: Cecilia Perform-acts the role of Cecilia-the-conductor, embodying Nadia while being herself, telling the ensemble the story of her father. They rehearse for sound recording and Cecilia-the-conductor gets irritated by their vanity for the camera. Before filming scene 21, written as more rehearsal, we realize we don't have the actual performing of Cecilia's re-composition in the script.

With the extensive footage of preparations we already have from scene 1 and 8, we dedicate the rest of the day to filming the ensemble playing.



Fig. 29 Page from score of re-composition, 2023



Fig. 30 The Sisters B.; stills from footage, excerpts from script, 2023

## Sunday

The island is isolated by a rainstorm. We decide to save the one remaining outdoor scene for the spring to stay indoors at Dämba. A slew of crew got sick during the night. The team has been in constant flux as members have perked up or faltered. We start filming close-ups from scene 21 with one person at a time playing their instruments, while Kerstin and Annika withdraw to work through some of Annika's directing ideas for scene 18 and 12.

### 18. INT/EXT. HOUSE. DAY

CECILIA conducts THE FILM TEAM, who rhythmically counts to 24 (Lili's death); SVEN plays Cajun; SUNNIVA improvises.

In pairs, making arm movements on counts: 1; 1,2; 1,2,3; 1,2,3,4; 1,2,3,4,5,6; 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12; A bird wing chorus!

With the weather conditions, the exterior envisioned for the wing choir, is converted to an interior. We pick the dining room for wings and place the rhythmical counting in the living room. This generates an unexpected potential: with both parts of the scene grouped and filmed frontally, they could be edited as if facing each other across a room; *embodied montage* as temporal dislocation within a spatial continuity (one body in two places at once).

The staging for scene 12 is meticulously choreographed; movements, timings, spatial transitions around the dining room table. Before filming Annika and Kerstin teach the choreography to the rest of the team.

### 12. INT/EXT. DINING ROOM/PORCH. EARLY EVENING

As the FILM CREW arrives at the set table, CECILIA has a flash of genius. Right before they sit, she sings the first phrase of *Vielle prière bouddhique* – beautiful as heaven's angels. Everyone stops. Great, they took the bait. CECILIA sings again, making a go-along-gesture. They mimic: singing, picking up forks to stroke in sync with the music. They get more and more advanced; sing and make rhythms with cutlery, glasses, plates. Add movements, changing places, etc. until it all subsides, and they sit down. CECILIA takes the chance and gives a short speech on the theme: *Nadia, Lili and We: contribute with feminine esprit.*

It's speech time. Cecilia had prepared a semi-improvisation on the given theme. For the after-dinner scene (13), Kersti hasn't learned the scripted speech of Kersti-the-role. Annika reshapes the mis-en-scene so that the Kersti character brings a written speech.



Fig. 31 The Sisters B.; stills from footage, excerpts from script, 2023

Reading from a paper changes the character from someone who can pull eloquent phrases out of the moment into someone who has laid awake to find the words. This interaction between actor, director, conditions and physical action cooperate when creating a performative image to counter the prevalence of skilled impromptu orators in cinema.

The thematic theory Performativity is central in our methodological framework and permeates the whole creative process. We use it as a compass to navigate the entangled complexity of cinematic practice and to contextualize and articulate ethical concerns. The whole team jointly searching for the song of scene 16, became an instance of collaboration where Performativity concerns guided our Dialoguing practice.

16. INT. HOUSE. EVENING

Afterwork. CECILIA plays piano, EMMA & RUTH sing, SVEN keeps the beat, the rest dances.

We needed a song old enough to be past copyright; upbeat and familiar to most of us. The first idea was *When the saints* which fit the bill but prompted wild discussions on the pros and cons of using a traditional gospel spiritual. Even though the song is firmly part of a secular jazz repertoire, cultural appropriation was a crucial concern to address. How do we take responsibility for the images we throw into the world? To maintain a perspective on one's own gaze is an ongoing

endeavor. Talking about the performative potential of the song choice – the ethics and values that get embedded in footage that acts in the media landscape – we had to refine our criteria. Katarina came up with the Swedish version of a musical revue tune – *Better and better day by day* – congenial with both the scene and our film week – a song we all knew enough to play with gusto.

The way Judith Butler connects performativity and gender speaks to the narrative content of *The Sisters B.* Additionally, Butler's concept of performativity as rejection of essentialisms and stable identities and meanings, and eschewing of authenticity, authority, universality, and objectivity (1990), informs our *embodied montage* strategies for collaborative practice, aesthetics and artistic fabulation. We also draw from Karen Barad's idea of performativity as iterative intra-action:

All bodies, including but not limited to human bodies, come to matter through the world's iterative intra-activity, its performativity. (2003)

Scene 25 is staged by setting a playground in the house and then all of us play the game. Kersti moves the camera between each round, then joins in as a hen. Everybody wears face-covering animal heads, the reason for playing is never mentioned – the game happens as if in a dream, a party



Fig. 32 The Sisters B.; stills from footage, excerpts from script, 2023

event, an absurd venting moment for a bored crew. The scene provides footage that can be edited as interjections of consciousness' shadowy corners, fantastical detours or echoes of the unsaid.

25. INT. HOUSE. DAY

THE FILM CREW'S dressed as animals. [But no cute critters. The costumes have a gothic expression.] They play *the floor is lava*.

Rather than focusing on psychological or causal explanations, the script is written to warp the notion of a protagonist through listening, acknowledging, and decentering. This shapes our performative considerations for mis-en-scene, through both Dialoguing and Perform-acting.

24. INT. HOUSE. MORNING

Ashes over set table, the shadow of a rabbit blowing them.

An essential concern of *embodied montage* strategies, is treating life as interdependent and relational, inspired by Donna Haraway's concept Companion species (2003). In our methodological framework, the theoretical theme Companion speciesism performatively claims equal weight to all beings, pointing out that 'human' is neither neutral nor inclusive. Haraway's concept is further developed in Anna Tsing's

writing on mushrooms as companions and foraging as a model for sustainability, teaching interdependence while providing sustenance (2012). Tsing's ideas resonate with how we view ecological concerns in our cinematic practice as well as inspire models for dramaturgies.

*This October week offered woods full of Craterellus tubaeformis. Left the hamlet at dawn, crossed a road, started picking. Walked further, squatted and picked. Saw another cluster, went there. Turned around, saw the spot just left from a new angle, saw mushrooms missed. Needles in boots, fingers smelling of funnel chanterelle and moss.*



Fig. 33 Nadia Boulanger with students, Paris late 1960s



Fig. 34 The Sisters B.; stills from footage, excerpts from script, 2023

## Outro

When the week is over, we have a cluster of footage; fragments, moments, cinematic matter imbued with the specificities of different cinematic practices (music, producing, set and costume design, scriptwriting, performance, cinematography, directing, sound recording) and artistic imprints of each collaborator:

Annika Boholm wrote the script, directed and played ANNIKA Cecilia Öhrwall recomposed the music, played CECILIA and RAÏSSA Sven Friberg recorded sound, played SVEN, YOUNG EAGER MAN and percussion Emma Eskeby was general crew, played EMMA and the flute Ruth Pahlbäck did hair, played RUTH, the clarinet and sang Sunniva Vikør Egenes played SUNNIVA and LILI and sang Kerstin Abrahamsson played KERSTIN and NADIA and sang Arvid Friberg was general crew, played ARVID, PAUL and the piano Johan Pahlbäck was general crew, played JOHAN and the trumpet Katarina Lindgren played KATARINA and the double bass Kersti Grunditz Brennan produced, did cinematography and played KERSTI and ERNEST.

We'll never know what would've come out of this week with a different set of collaborators. Our entangled relationships – children, colleagues, friends, mothers, partners – affect each situation and both we and our relationships are shaped by the creative interactions, frictions, newfound commonalities.

The research will continue from the perspective of editing – editing-thinking as an *embodied montage* strategy reaching beyond the edit room. Each iteration of project presentation, with its particular focus and selection of topics and footage, will generate feed-back and reflections that loop back into the project, informing the next stage of dissemination and the ongoing editing process.

A film is in the making – format and duration unknown – grounded in embodied experience of the collaborative filming week. Kersti edits; a Tinkering practice of montage based on articulated oscillation between three perspectives: the character's, the filmmaker's and the viewer's. This embodied shifting of cinematic positions, draws from Kersti's original editing taxonomy in relation to shaping character through editing (Brennan & Pearlman, 2023).



Fig. 35 The film cast and crew, 2023

*Embodied montage* strategies for film editing are what is sounds like: using montage techniques like thematic collisions, distancing devices, and gaps for audience to bridge, while simultaneously activating embodied engagement through emphasis on kinesthetic triggers and use of ‘Hollywood’ continuity editing.

The script, though a cohesive narrative, is written and filmed as porous and potentially independent moments open to re-ordering and skewing. The editing involves a Dialoguing practice with Annika, reflecting together on edited sequences. The film editing is a practice of Exploratory retelling of the footage and the footage’s origin story – its interdependent and relational intentions and conditions.

The influential composition teacher Nadia Boulanger stopped composing. The lauded composer Lili Boulanger vanished from music history. Are we Lili? Are we Nadia? How are their fates and choices relevant a hundred years later? In 2025, questions still revolve around who gets inscribed in history and why, how much uncharted terrain one can transverse, how to hold fast in the face of minimal encouragement.

Despite the lack of funding, but cheered on by an overwhelmingly positive response to a conference presentation at INEFF (Boholm & Grunditz Brennan, 2023) we decided to do it anyways. We had access to equipment, we had the residency, we could offer room, board, travel and future royalties. So, in the fall of 2023 we filmed the entire script except scene 6:

During the week of filming, all but one of the team had at least a day of nausea and vomiting. The vulnerability of our bodies interjecting itself tangibly with the film creation. Working

6. EXT. BEACH. DAY

THE FILM CREW changes into swimwear. Goofing and running into the water cheesy movie style. All except KERSTIN/NADIA, climbing a windswept pine tree overlooking the beach.

around and through health considerations with care and creativity, added layers to our embodied conversation with Lili who died from a stomach related illness as well as with Nadia who cared for and lost her. We knew we would recover but our predicament reminded us of the precarity of our privileged time.

Lili died 1918, the world was at war – the war to end all wars.

100and some years after Lili’s death, the challenges she would have faced are both radically different and eerily the same. There are now treatments for her illness, the human mind is technologically expanded, life extensions and gender transitions are medically possible, but a future for life on earth is ecologically and politically conditional.

We situate this research project in our time’s flood of media-based storytelling, the film industry’s recently awakened awareness of sustainability issues and movements lobbying for broader diversity among performers and film creators. The prevalence of ideological polarization and ecological crises, combined with the complexity and entanglement of embodied consequences, inform this project’s multifaceted and exploratory approaches. We started from a *BLOD* line: “The way humans act in the world, other ways of acting are urgent.” *The Sisters B.* project is infused with searches for what that means translated to making film, what even ‘making’ means on a planet on the brink of collapse.

In the legendary words of Nadia Boulanger:

To study music, we must learn the rules.

To create music, we must break them.

*As the end of filming approaches, we slowly but surely understand what it was all about. But then it’s all in the can, seven days are over, never to come back –*

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