the eyes of death
Acknowledgments:

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2005 - 17 August – 23 October, Collaborated with two films (Staring Back and Paranoia) in The Exhausted Body Exhibition, curated by Nina Dimitriadi 11, Kaoshiung Modern Art Museum, Taiwan, .
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Abstract:

This doctoral study, composed of four films and an exegesis, configures a new conceptualisation of death in and through film, assembling an intricate theorisation of ‘the mediated I’ and ‘the unmediated I’ of the witness. This thesis focuses on the consciousness of the witness, through locating a position and expression in reflective, reflexive, experiential, critical and artistic practice. My research questions the witness’s attempt to ‘manage’ the experience and tracks the self reflective process of thought s/he undertakes in the face of death, dying, coma and suffering. In probing the subjective experiences of the witness, the knowledge of disaster and the absent Other gives way to a moment of distinction between the spectator and the witness. The actual movement being proposed between the two is through the ways in which they both are activated through the reality of death. Critical and creative practice encourages a recognition of - and identification with - the possible meditations and negotiations of the witness. It aims to infuse a configuration of the witness by way of reflection in consciousness and artistic formulation.

This thesis proposes a conceptual diagnosis as the original contribution to knowledge. I identify apathy as an anti-choice and unrecognised necessity of consciousness in the face of death, dying, coma and suffering. The research offers a new insight into the existential encounter of the witness. The aim of the practice component is to re-present and re-vision everyday encounters on television and in media alongside metaphors, possible meditations and negotiations to the subjective experience in and through filmic gaze. The visual propositions complement the written text by means of displaying the fear and anguish of the witness, and the attitude towards the Other, disaster and the irrecoverable death. The aim in turning this subject matter into an academic study has been to align two different perceptions: visual and theoretical practice. These two conceptual terms have offered distinct ways of handling the unsettling encounter from not only a witness’s point of view but also from the perspective of a researcher and the film-maker.

Together, the visual and theoretical strategy reveal the workings of consciousness and creative meditation of the witness to identify the struggles against internal and external terror in being a witness. The research is interdisciplinary, deploying philosophy, literary and artistic theory. Yet it is not a contribution to the specialised discipline of philosophy, sociology or psychoanalysis of death, dying and suffering, but offers a critical and creative matrix combining inventive and reflexive approaches. This practice-based doctoral study
challenges the artist and practitioner to create and then raise awareness through a dynamic, reflexive and interpretative discourse. It fuses genres, including autobiography, literary studies and visual arts.

The relationship between the exegesis and films provide an innovative pathway through creative meditation and negotiation of the witness by integrating filmic presentations as an integral loop in the research. Every chapter frames a dialogue between already existing theories of death, dying and grief and filmic texts to transform experience into visuality through constructing a descriptive insight and artistic expression.
Perceiving Subject: This term is borrowed from Zygmunt Bauman. It refers to the ‘acting subject’ whose perception struggles to identify with the subjective experience. The research shifts attention from what is visible to the perceiving subject in order to lay bare the structure of the experience in the witness’s framework within which consciousness is positioned. Bauman states that ‘faced with such impossibility, the perceiving subject may only delude itself with a play of metaphors, which conceals rather than reveals what is to be perceived, and in the end belies the state of non-perception which death would be. Failing that, the knowing subject must admit its impotence and throw in the towel.’ My research, while bringing a Sartrean existential approach, adopts this term to capture the witness in the process of self-conscious reflection. In Sartrean philosophy, the term also has connotations of the Berkleian formula ‘esse est percipi - to be is to be perceived’ which has connections to Husserl when subjective yields the irreducibility of being to appearance or to consciousness of the appearance.

Perceived Object: The term refers to the encounter of the witness in the face of death, coma, dying and suffering. My research, after establishing an analysis of the witness turning into herself as the perceiving subject to reflect in consciousness, modifies the challenges and difficulties of the encounter and attempts to identify with the Other and disaster as the perceived object. Perceived object requires attention in order to construct a relation to itself and to its reality for the witness.

‘The Reflective I’: The attempt on the part of a conscious self to contemplate, reconcile and comment on the encounter by way of reflection. The research follows the reasoning of the witness in consciousness and captures ‘the reflective I’ in the process of determining a decision and a response to the experience. ‘The reflective I’ is mediated by the research of a language that formulates an intellectual order to understand possible meditations and negotiations in the consciousness of the witness.

1 These terms are deployed and defined within the text of exegesis. However for the convenience of examiners and readers, the list of terms provides a quick guide to the crucial terms, their theoretical and historical origin, and their trajectory through the thesis.
3 ibid.
4 see C. Macann 1993, Four Phenomenological Philosophers, London: Routledge, pages 112-4
**Sovereign Moment:** A term borrowed from Georges Bataille, it refers to ‘an instance unknowing’\(^5\) which reveals itself in the face of terror and fear. The project applies Bataille’s term to the impact of fears in order to be able to explain the inability to act and the lack of self-referential knowledge to what is encountered. Bataille’s configuration of sovereign moment reveals what cannot be reflected in consciousness and what haunts the witness. The arrival of the unexpected determines the practice of fear: the feeling of impotence which arouses and targets all the anxieties of the incomprehensible. His notion emphasises the relationship between death and thought as undergoing a sovereign moment at the moment of the encounter, locating the transgressive through loss of self and announcing the limits of experience. The research re-defined the notion of fear as the mystery of the unknown which appeals to Bataillian unknowing. The research suggests that the sovereign moment – the fear gives rise to anguish in order to be able to reflect in consciousness.

**Anguish:** The doctoral study draws attention to the anguish when probing the witness’s predicament in the face of death and dying. Anguish has been the subject matter of existential philosophy from Soren Kierkegaard, Martin Heidegger to Jean Paul Sartre. The study employs Sartre’s configuration of anguish. Sartrean anguish is ‘the mode of being of freedom,’\(^6\) where a constant obligation to remake the Self creates an apprehension of one’s choices in the face of itself. Sartre sees anguish as the mode of being of freedom because in the face of not-being, he claims that one feels the burden of the immense responsibility and as a result experiences anguish, and this anguish is the realisation of the kind of freedom that makes one aware of the possibility of making choices. Within the doctoral study, it is re-described as the misery of the unknown in consciousness, compelling the witness to reflect upon and act on its misery. The research offers an attempt to explain the witness’s mind-set through anguish. It is the absence of justification but it is also what demands recognition and a response in order to determine a choice and responsibility towards what torments the witness. Sartre argues that, ‘being is brought on to reflective plane and envisaging one’s distant or immediate possibilities suffice to apprehend oneself in pure anguish. In each instance, anguish is born as a structure of the reflective consciousness in so far as the latter considers consciousness as an object of reflection; but it still remains possible for me to maintain various types of conduct with respect to my own anguish – in particular, patterns of

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flight. The research aims to establish (the witness’s) types of conduct in anguish and seeks to articulate the modes of choices and responses of the witness in reflection.

**Counter-anguish:** According to Sartre ‘it is the counter-anguish which generally puts an end to anguish by transmuting it into indecision. Indecision in its turn, calls for decision.’ My research follows the process of thought of the witness in anguish; from indecision to decision attempting to create the counter-anguish in order to accomplish an (awareness of a possibility of) escape from it.

**Apathy:** Commencing with Sartre’s existential approach, my research suggests that a witness generates the counter-anguish as a mode of apathy which becomes an anti-choice within consciousness, seeking to formulate a response and responsibility to anguish. Apathy is not a failure of effort or lack of apprehension as in its conventional usage. Rather, it is the unrecognised and unspoken necessity of consciousness that the witness strives for in order to turn the unbearable into bearable. It implies a Freudian detachment from the lost object. The state described as apathy is understood by way of self-reflection, by way of analysing the witness’s anguish in consciousness. The research probes its definable and rational causes, and demonstrates it as the transcended anguish. Apathy, within the doctoral study, is performed from a position of wished-for-freedom that will attempt to overshadow the anguish where consciousness intervenes to transcend.

**The Gap:** The term is inspired by Maurice Blanchot’s notion of ‘interval’ that reveals itself ‘between no longer and not yet.’ The impossibility of attachment to the Other and to disaster breeds a particular approach towards its knowledge and constructs a space between engagement and escape for the witness. The study suggests that the witness captures and creates this space between herself/himself and the Other; between herself/himself and the world in order to be able to construct a relation to the reality and the actuality of the events. The gap is shaped and formed upon the impossible experience in which the witness is not participating, but perceiving. The gap is an affirmation of the distance and interruption in time that preserves the questions by keeping them open and by allowing the interminable and incessant exposure of thought that Blanchot assigns to the language of the impossible experience.

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7 ibid. 64  
8 ibid. 56  
**One’s Own Other:** The demand of a relation to the Other and disaster, and the constraints of the impossible experience both confirm the separation (from the world) within the gap while attempting to define and put the Other in its place not only in social life but in individual life. My research suggests that the witness, in order to conceptually handle the experience and give meaning to disaster and the Other (whose absence requires meaning), creates one’s own Other. It is invented out of necessity and out of experience as a mode of approach to the possibility of concern and connection constructed by the witness in relation to the Other and to the world. The thought invites a suspension in time that opens up to its discontinuity and tries to complete itself in order to designate the unknown and the impossible experience. One’s own Other gives rise to the necessary structure and connection to the Other by way of providing the distance to address our relationship with death, dying and suffering as well as the traumatic experience.

**Meditation with exposure:** The witness is exposed to what s/he encounters. The appearance of the Other (who is struck by disaster) leaves the witness vulnerable in relation to the event and the world. The witness, in order to be able to reflect and give meaning to what is encountered, engages in meditation with exposure as s/he conceptualises and contextualises the experience. The term refers to the profound process of disclosing and unmasking the unknown and unfamiliar occurrence of the witness.

**Persecutor:** Maurice Blanchot perceives the Other as the Persecutor\(^{10}\) whose appearance and crimes overwhelm and who is actively and passively marking the witness by death and disaster. In the process of constructing a relation to the Other, this doctoral research utilises a Blanchotian approach to the Other, describing the unbearable and violent appearance of the Other in relation to the witness as becoming the Persecutor.

**Patience of passivity:** Blanchot talks of a state of abeyance\(^{11}\) on the part of the witness/the victim in the encounter of death, disaster and the Other that is not voluntary but rather it is a task\(^{12}\) that presupposes the distance, implicating the passivity of suffering. The patience of passivity bears ‘loss of self; loss of all sovereignty but also of all subordination; utter uprootedness, exile, the impossibility of presence, [and] dispersion (separation).’\(^{13}\) My research refers to and deploys this state to evaluate and elaborate the witness’s effort and affliction in the face of the Other and disaster.

\(^{10}\) ibid. p. 19  
\(^{13}\) ibid. p. 18
**The logic of disappearance:** The term refers to the limitations of the visual representation of death, and the disturbance (and the fascination) evoked by the spectacle in contemporary society. Blurring boundaries between true and false; between representation and reality generate the logic of disappearance by way of manipulation and control. The spectator is drawn into the logic (of the spectacle) that obliterates itself within the representation. This doctoral research, in the analysis of the spectator’s attitude in Western culture, probes the modes of reading and understanding the images of death and the logic behind the representation.

**Separateness:** A term borrowed from Guy Debord\(^{14}\) where he describes the spectacle as producing its devoid of meaning; making it impossible to isolate the means of real and therefore giving rise to a separation between the spectacle and the spectator. The separateness is mediated by the image, by the representation and by its ephemeral seduction of symbolic reproduction. The research refers his term in the process of examining the representation as the spectacle.

**Callous treatment:** This is a term that Zygmunt Bauman\(^{15}\) describes in his configuration of the new and contemporary attitude as the result of fluid modernity. The callous treatment becomes part of the survival mechanism in the face of brutality and cruelty, generating disengagement, ambiguity and superficial escape. His description stands to deduce and re-describe the individual’s position, conditional interest and existential insecurity which are analogous to the spectator’s attitude in the face of representation.

**The unmediated - visual I:** The doctoral study brings together two different perceptions: visual and theoretical practice. These two conceptual terms offer distinctive ways of handling and ‘managing’ the unsettling encounter from a witness point of view inasmuch as from a/the researcher and a/the film-maker’s viewpoint. ‘The unmediated – visual I’ refers to the subjective experience of the witness as a film-maker, reflecting the trauma’s unmediated status\(^{16}\). The witness encounter with the real(ity) is conveyed within the creative practice – the filmic propositions. ‘The unmediated – visual I’ of the witness does not employ language. Rather it reflects and projects the manner in which each film (*Apathy, Disaster, The Other* and *O’Death*) defines a way of seeing and perceiving the real(ity), as well as interpreting and manifesting the concepts and theories underpinning this project. Such an attempt involves repetition, metaphors, trembling, a faint, denial, an escape and confirmation of trauma’s irresolvable nature to follow the thought and the event at a distance. The unmediated

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and *O’Death*) defines a way of seeing and perceiving the real(ity), as well as interpreting and manifesting the concepts and theories underpinning this project. Such an attempt involves repetition, metaphors, trembling, a faint, denial, an escape and confirmation of trauma’s irresolvable nature to follow the thought and the event at a distance. The unmediated experience is not reducible to other experiences. It remains an experience of immeasurable force for the witness. ‘The unmediated – visual I’ tends to anchor the traumatic encounter of the witness; enduring fear, anguish, denial, the Other’s unrecognisable image in coma and death. The filmic propositions manifest the external struggles of the witness where the necessity to create (and transform the personal trauma) and the impossibility of a consolation attempt to overcome their mutual antagonism in an artistic expression. ‘The unmediated-visual I,’ in that sense, reveals and unmasks the live interaction of the witness in relation to the reality of the event without offering a consolation which appeals to silence(’s unheard screams).

**The mediated - theoretical I:** What communicates within ‘the mediated – theoretical I’ is the contextual analysis and conceptual appropriation of the witness as a researcher. It forms and shapes the exegesis and the trajectory of the thesis where theory proceeds to conquer, to defeat what torments and to structure the responsibility and response within consciousness. ‘The mediated - theoretical I’ creates its own logic and rational understanding, bargaining for a resolution and solution while generating a conclusive analysis to the witness’s predicament. It can be understood as conveying the internal conflicts that seeks to determine a decision. It offers a view of human consciousness, undertaking a reflective approach in order to capture and present the possible negotiations and meditations of the witness within language. While ‘the unmediated - visual I’ generates the tension of thought (artistically) as it comes to struggle with its conditions, it formulates (and operates within) ‘the mediated - theoretical I’ whose implications are inescapable. The relationship between these two can be said to resemble the relationship between language and silence. Language comes afterwards in order to reflect, to repair, to formulate, to construct and to consider a possibility of consolation, but silence in that sense will always try to invent its own secret manifestation in order to initially listen to itself.
This project began four years ago, inspired by Rick Poynor’s chapter on the images of death in his book *Obey The Giant,*¹ where he discussed the impact of the images leaving ‘a stain in the mind that no solvent could erase.’² He recalled his own experiences as a young boy trying to understand the reality and the violence of death and dying. He was probing, in the face of death, whether it was ‘possible to cast aside’ our ‘routine ironic detachment or salacious attraction and see the victims as human beings’³ because the images - gradually - were desensitising us. That hypothesis triggered a doctoral study which investigates the extent to which the images of death alter an individual's conception of reality in Western culture in terms of the degree of social stigma attached to death. The value, meaning and use of the images of death are examined within sociological and critical discourses as a way of identifying how the viewer perceives and consumes these images in everyday life, and how the understanding of the image cognition is transmitted into creating a desensitised impression within the perceived role of subject matter. The intense stain I have felt - dramatically displayed within the representation - has summoned questions probing our desensitising impression towards death as well as to the subjective experiences of witnesses. Only months later, I was to become a witness and encounter my aunt in a coma. This encounter radically changed the direction of this doctoral study.

The personal trauma, the actuality of the event and the image of coma have prompted a need to formulate the impossible experience of the witness and frame this experience in a doctoral study to be able to create the necessary critical reflection. The questions on the witness’s approach to such encounters could not be dismissed: how does the witness ‘handle’ or ‘manage’ the experience? What kind of self-reflective process of thought does the witness go

² ibid. p. 98
³ ibid. p.105
through in the face of death, dying, coma and suffering? How are the challenges of the subjective experiences of the witness modified in and through objective causes in consciousness? How is the knowledge of disaster and the absent Other communicated? How does the witness differ from the spectator and the ways in which they both attempt to come to terms with the reality of death? A careful and detailed analysis of the subject, similar to an autopsy, brings a new insight to the difficulties of the witness. To enact this process and project an intricate weave between film and word create a texture of doctoral scholarship that offers a complex interrogation of the filmic and theoretical space between seeing and dying.

The risk (for the witness) has been the claim of what torments. To quote Sandra Gilbert in her foreword to Death’s Door, ‘I think I felt driven to claim my grief and – almost defiantly – to name its particulars because I found myself confronting the shock of bereavement at a historical moment when death was in some sense unspeakable and grief – or anyway the expression of grief – was at best an embarrassment, at worst a social solecism or scandal.’

The imperative in Gilbert’s assertion is applicable for a doctoral study. In an academic context, to investigate the subjective experiences of the witness and be rigorous as well as critical while seeking to contemplate and generate a response could be interpreted as unnecessary and irrelevant. Certainly, a doctoral study cannot offer justification but rather a recognition of critical and creative analysis, encouraging recognition of and identification with the possible meditations and negotiations of the witness in the face of such encounters. The researcher as the witness – and the plural voices and positions summoned through such a study – is turned into a case study. Had I been representative in some respect for the other witnesses, I could reach to an understanding of the internal and external struggles of the mourner. Yet I have refrained to occupy the words grief and mourning, choosing instead to bring attention to the anguish that has claimed both its sovereignty and annihilation. To concentrate on the consciousness of the witness in order to lay bare the structures of the

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experience, to take responsibility and generate a response to the impossible, have opened up an existential and philosophical approach inasmuch as the creative and artistic one.

I have examined, articulated and formulated the witness’s anguish in the encounter of death, coma and dying, and fixed it to filmic and theoretical form under the shadow of a doctoral story. Yet I cannot pretend there is a consolation within this effort of the witness as a researcher or a film-maker. What becomes evident, in spite of the efforts of any theorist, writer and artist, (as Jonathan Dollimore writes in his closing sentence on Death’s Incessant Motion) ‘is that the trauma of mutability is not cancelled,’ negated or obliterated ‘in the identification with change; rather it mutates into something else, and historically that something else has included fantasies of violent purification: annihilation not of the self but of the other.’

However intensely the witness attempts to ‘manage’ the traumatic encounter, the experience can only be understood in its language and silence. Researchers may then come close to handling and meditating on the experience without reaching a solution either to our loss, to the witness’s suffering, or to the Other’s pain. Nevertheless what torments us claims identification, demands understanding and empathy. Being a witness is seeing and perceiving something; something that opens a wound, leaves its traces in the mind forever; never reduced to the principle of ‘manageable’ or bearable without difficulty. Witnessing is passive as well as suffering. The passivity becomes only active by engaging in death’s language and silence.

Modulating the misery and the suffering provokes an exegesis of failure. Yet this failure preserves in itself the challenges, questions, speculations, possible negotiations and meditations, not as a means of overcoming or justifying but rather to be able to think with pain as Maurice Blanchot would suggest. Death silently opens up like a fissure. Within that fissure it flutters with broken wings in the mind of the witness/victim/survivor and the spectator, the discontinuous imperatives start to gamble to find a way to tolerate the impossibility. If nothing compels one to understand consciousness of this fissure, how is it

possible to comprehend the discontinuity and human reality? This doctoral study is an attempt to ‘speak of’ death’s language and silence. Under each formula lies the reason’s mockery and the battle of consciousness. There is no adequate formulation or solution that will annul the suffering of being in the face of death and dying. As a researcher and filmmaker - inasmuch as a witness – I have brought an insight, an idea, and a critical and creative approach within this doctoral study.

6 If I - as the postgraduate - am to prescribe for the reader and the viewer the suggested order for engagement in the pages, then for the first three chapters and films, read the chapter before viewing the film that accompanies it. For the last chapter, the film is to be viewed before reading the chapter. This order offers a pathway through the configuration of the witness, resonating through the stages of the encounter.
Is it like
A charcoal sketch-
A hazy shadow?¹

Toyokuni

Death and dying, while not failing to deny the sovereignty and expiration of corporeality, initiates questions of epistemology, ontology and teleology. The desire to probe the gap between the commonsensical binaries of life and death, experience and silence, has framed the subject, terrain, trajectory and argument constructed within this doctoral thesis. The limitations of knowledge, interpretation and consciousness have been the questions shaping the structure of four films and this exegesis, which construct a scholarly loop between film and word to create a matrix of understanding about anguish, loss and silence. This doctoral study is a critical and creative inquiry into the subjective experiences of the witness. The goal is to probe the challenges of the internal and external struggles from an existential perspective bringing forward a comparative analysis between the witness and the spectator. The imperative is to introduce both theoretical and visual means to reflect, construct and formulate a new insight to the existential encounter of the witness (as a researcher and a film-maker).

My focus is propelled by the necessity to articulate the difficulties and complexities that are confronted in the face of fear, anguish, disaster and the absent Other. The original contribution to knowledge is building a filmic and scholarly framework around the concept of a/the witness, while acknowledging apathy as existential destiny as well as the social destiny of the spectator. It also brings an innovative focus on creative meditations and negotiations of the witness by operating the filmic presentations as an integral loop in the research.

The order of the chapters, and the alignment with the films accompanying them, introduces an intellectual pathway through the witness’s thought process and practice. First the witness

confronts the unrecognisable body that triggers fear and anguish, and turns into herself in order to self-reflect as a perceiving subject where apathy occurs as the unrecognised necessity of consciousness; the second stage would attempt to understand the Other as the perceived object, and come to terms with the disaster that took place; the third stage reveals the differences between witnessing and becoming a spectator in order to tolerate the impossibility of the encounter, and brings an analysis of the spectator’s mind-set in the face of representation of death, dying and suffering; the fourth stage conveys the loop from apathy to death when the absolute irrecoverable declares the disappearance of the identity of the witnessed.

Throughout the thesis, each chapter appears to dominate the document in turn; prescribing a response and responsibility of its own. Yet as a whole they build the argument and original contribution to knowledge: a new configuration of the filmic witness, through apathy. The structure is divided into four chapters and four films: On Apathy and the Witness, On Disaster and the Other, On Representation and the Spectator and The Eyes of Death. Chapter One - On Apathy and the Witness - introduces a self-reflective process of thought in consciousness by shifting the attention from the encounter to the perceiving subject, the witness. It aims to identify with the self-evaluation of the witness in the encounter of coma. The objective of this chapter is to scrutinize how the witness attempts to placate fear and anguish, the self-reflective process of thought manifested in consciousness, and if there is to be counter-anguish how it is projected. The chapter deploys and critiques the theories of Georges Bataille and Jean Paul Sartre in order to lay bare the structure of the self-reflective consciousness of the witness that experiences fear, anguish and attempts to formulate the counter-anguish. Bataille’s and Sartre’s critical strategies address the reasoning of the witness

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in the face of fear and anguish. The first film Apathy functions as demonstrations and apprehensions of the gestures which are speculated within the text. It depicts the eyes of fear, and anguish experiencing an unsettling encounter, and conveys Bataille’s ‘instant unknowing’ and Sartre’s anguish as well as exploring the metaphors within the created mise-en-scene.

Chapter Two - On Disaster and the Other - shifts attention from the perceiving subject to the perceived object – the Other. It aims to identify with the witness’s trouble to relate to the Other and to the disaster – the actuality of the events. The objective of this chapter is to examine how the witness constructs a relation to the perceived object – the Other – and how the knowledge of disaster manifests itself in the mind of the witness. The chapter probes the process and consequences of what occurs when the witness attempts to give meaning to what is perceived. In the process of speculating the witness’s challenge to form a relation to the Other and the disaster, Maurice Blanchot⁴ guides and tracks the chapter’s emphasis on the witness’s effort. It is necessary to underline the influence and the impact of Blanchot’s distinctive way of thinking and language within the research. The doctoral study – not only this chapter – takes into consideration his thoughts, views and reflections on death, dying, disaster and the Other in all stages of the research; at times as an invisible powerful advocate and ally, other times as guiding and structuring the impossible experiences of the witness. The intuition is nourished by Maurice Blanchot to the extent that the identification with pain and anguish becomes possible under his wings. The filmic proposition Disaster exposes the passivity of the witness which appeals to Blanchotian approach (that is presented within the theoretical framework) and utilises his ideas of disaster to locate the witness’s position and expression in an artistic practice.

Chapter Three - *On Representation and the Spectator* - brings a cultural and social analysis of the spectator in the face of representation. It aims to identify with the spectator’s attitude in order to be able to compare the attitude to the witness’s. The objective of this chapter is to understand modes of reading images of death, how the spectator ‘manages’ to handle death’s display when the spectacle turns cruelty into habit, shock into the familiar and death into something justifiable. The chapter examines whether there is a claim for identification for the spectator with the traumas of the witnesses and the victims whose anguish and suffering are represented within the spectacle. It is to analyse what distinguishes the spectator from the witness and to investigate how suffering, violence and cruelty within the representation are perceived from a spectator’s point of view. Are the images of death bound to invoke empathy, understanding and compassion towards its actuality? In order to be able to answer this question, the chapter deploys the critical assessment of Susan Sontag\(^5\) while borrowing the theories of Jean Baudrillard\(^6\), Guy Debord\(^7\) on the spectacle. To describe the spectator’s attitude, the chapter engages with the theories of Zygmunt Bauman\(^8\), Sandra Gilbert\(^9\) and Adam Phillips.\(^10\) The third film - *The Other* - challenges the viewer emotionally by disclosing the disturbing appearance of coma where the witness will empathise while the imperceptive eye of the spectator would be challenged to the extent that might bring the questions of reflection and thought towards its reality.

Chapter Four - *The Eyes of Death* - provides a deeper understanding of the relationship between the exegesis and filmic practice in this doctoral project. It aims to probe the distinguishing elements between the theoretical and the filmic compositions of the witness as a film-maker and the researcher, how these two operate within the research. It forges a connection between the reader and the author as well as between the film-maker and the

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viewer by attempting to demonstrate the strategy behind the order of the films and the
chapters. The film O'Death announces the arrival of a death in which the witness is not
participating but perceiving. The witness is triggered by the impossibility of language and
silence while seeking a way to come to grips with its reality by means of artistic expression.
As the final, crucial reflection of the researcher as a practitioner, the study calls for change
and completion while attempting to find consolation within this last film.

The rationale behind the choices of theories and concepts underpinning this project aims to
introduce both reflective and reflexive responses of the witness in consciousness and in
visuality. It does not focus on the philosophical debates on death, or psychoanalytical critique to the conflict between life and death, mourning and grief. Rather it draws the
attention to anguish in consciousness in order to understand what kind of self-reflective
process of thought is manifested in the mind of the witness. It is important to understand how
the witness attempts to placate the anguish within consciousness when trying to analyse the
attitude towards death, dying and suffering. The witness in that sense confronts the necessary
reflection as a means of anguish. The reflection is the apprehension of the self within the
experienced fear and threat of death into reality. Yet to try to understand the spectator’s
attitude also offers clues towards the attitude to death in the modern society. The distinction
between being a witness and a spectator can help us to identify the ways in which the reality of death and dying are dealt with. The visual representation of reality especially when it

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comes to view and comprehend the images of death, dying and suffering, creates a disturbing 
pause and a distance towards its reality while creating a desensitised impression upon its 
spectator. In order to explore this distinction between occupying the role and function of a 
spectator and witness, the research investigates not only the extent to which the visual 
representation of death constructs an individual’s perception of death, but also the ways in 
which the reality of death is ‘managed’ in the mind of the witness and the spectator.

Undertaking the witness’s and the spectator’s attitude towards death, dying and suffering, 
monitoring and evaluating their situation within consciousness by submitting to the inevitable 
anguish, then estimating this state in respect to the relation to the representation of Death, and 
consequently drawing attention to the distinction between the witness and the spectator can 
propound a different approach and a distinctive study to The Eyes of Death. Calling for a 
unique inquiry of the witness’s experience in the face of an existential encounter, this thesis 
endeavours to meet not only the rational and logical analysis of the researcher as a witness but 
also the critical eye of the film-maker by creatively assessing the filmic propositions which 
bypass the intellect and introduce the visuality in anguish in order to encompass ‘the mediated 
I’ and ‘the unmediated I’ identifying with the external and the internal struggles.

The research considers the witness’s predicament that occurs in the encounter of unfamiliar 
and unsettling condition of the Other and/in the disaster as a conscious experience, concerning 
the structure and the foundation of the experience associated with such encounters. It adopts a 
position that accepts the need and necessity to self-reflect in consciousness as the perceiving 
subject and to construct a relation with the perceived object. Complementing a new insight to 
the multiple negotiations of ‘the I’ and how it operates with the direct application of an 
existential and a creative approach, this thesis implicates interpretative strategies and multi-
disciplinary critique to the ways in which the witness comes close to ‘manage’ the impossible 
experience. What distinguishes this doctoral thesis from prior scholarship is the fact that it 
brings two distinctive perceptions to the witness’s reasoning: visual and theoretical. These
two concepts in turn give rise to different reflexive and reflective modes of understanding the
witness as the researcher and the film-maker.

**Research in and through practice:**

The complexities of writing a practice-based doctorate present scholarly challenges, bringing
through questions on the limitations of disciplines and paradigms, and on the researcher’s role
as a practitioner. The project follows the existing paradigms in relation to ontology,
epistemology and methodology adapted from E. G. Guba\(^{13}\). Carole Gray and Julian Malins
give in their book *Visualising Research* a detailed analysis on Guba’s paradigm.

According to Guba, the choice of methodology should be a consequence of ontology
and epistemology – that is, methodology is evolved in awareness of that researcher
considers ‘knowable’ (what can be researched, what is an appropriate research
question), and in an awareness of the nature of knowledge and their relationship
between the researcher and the ‘knowable’. For instance, the positivist paradigm of
inquiry is characterised by a ‘realist’ ontology (reality exists ‘out there’), and an
objectivist epistemology (the researcher is detached); methodology is therefore
experimental and manipulative, in contrast, the constructivist paradigm is
characterised by a ‘relativist’ ontology (multiple realities exist as personal and social
constructions) and the epistemology is subjectivist (the researcher is involved); as a
consequence, methodologies are hermeneutic (interpretative) and dialectic
discursive).\(^{14}\)

This doctoral thesis presents a ‘constructivist paradigm,’ characterised by the ‘relativist
ontology,’ of the witness as both a researcher and a practitioner whose realities exist as
‘personal and social constructions’. The researcher is ‘involved’ – implicated and active - in
bringing socially and experientially, critically and creatively assembled structures to the
witness’s predicaments in the encounter of coma, death and dying. The methodology concerns
a hermeneutic\(^{15}\) dialogue between the witness and the encounter inasmuch as between the
researcher and the reader, the film-maker and the viewer. This dialogue establishes the

Design*, Hants: Ashgate Publishing Limited, p. 19
\(^{15}\) ibid. p.198 In their glossary Gray and Malins give the definition of hermeneutic from OED, 2002 as
‘the art of science of interpretation’ as well as giving K. Friedman’s (2002, *Hermeneutics and
Hermeneutical Research Methods*) description which is a research method that acknowledges multiple
interpretations and meanings giving ‘each speaker his or her own voice.’ G. Sullivan also writes that
‘nowadays, hermeneutics is situated at the very heart of individual meaning making.’ G. Sullivan
multiple meditations and negotiations of the witness as a researcher and a film-maker in order to reach to an understanding of the difficulties and challenges that are confronted in the face of an impossible experience in consciousness and in visuality. The creative practice aims to visualise the evaluation of the research by ‘developing innovative and creative’ filmic propositions and ‘imaginatively making visible/tangible the research findings.’ The relationship between theory and practice offers a process of identifying struggles of the witness, undertaking an existential mission to investigate the stages in witnessing. Each step entails examining both ‘the visual I’ and ‘the theoretical I’ of the witness under critical and interpretative approaches. The practitioner’s role is to present a view to understand the contextual implications that underline the research and offer a critical reflection. To grasp the role of the researcher as/and practitioner for this doctoral thesis tethers the processes of memory, perception and reasoning of the witness to the processes of emotional and volatile consciousness in visuality that are mediated by external factors which emphasize the circumstances of the witness both as a practitioner and a researcher.

In the doctorate literature, there are numerous studies and approaches to the practice-based doctoral studies in terms of the challenges of writing, the role of the practitioner and conceptualising the practice within the research. It is often stated that what distinguishes practice-based doctoral study from ‘conventional’ Ph.D. programmes is ‘the high value placed on generating practice-based knowledge to address “real-world” problems, whereas

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16 ibid. p.16 Gray and Malins describe the role of the practice in developing an approach to research.
traditional Ph.D. programmes intend to give rise to “professional researchers.” In practice-based doctoral study, the research process challenges the artist and the practitioner to create and then to raise awareness on the critical and analytical examination with a dynamic, reflexive and interpretative discourse. This cycle produces professional practitioners where the artist adopts a dual role of practitioner and theorist as Graeme Sullivan describes. When evaluating how the practice is understood as part of the research, he also provides the reader with possible modes of reading. It is useful and convenient to highlight Sullivan’s approach in order to instruct the reader and the viewer of this doctoral thesis in regard to the multiple possibilities of interpreting the relationship between theory and practice. Sullivan, in his Art Practice as Research, suggests four types of reading and understanding the practice in a theoretical framework which conceptualises the visual art as part of the research. According to him visual arts knowledge can be understood as ‘transformative, constructivist, conceptual and contextual’. He states:

Visual arts knowledge is transformative. This means that knowledge creation in visual arts is recursive and constantly undergoes change as new experiences “talk back” through process and progress of making art. Second, visual arts knowledge is constructivist. This means that knowledge is produced as a consequence of integrating theory and practice and this praxis results in descriptive awareness, explanatory insight, and powerful understanding. Third, visual arts knowledge is conceptual. This means that knowledge is grounded in the practice of making that uses knowledge that is available through personal cognitive systems and culturally accessible domains. Fourth, visual arts knowledge is contextual. This means that knowledge that is produced by artists enters into communities of users whose interests apply new understandings from different personal, educational, social and cultural perspectives. These features of visual arts knowledge are by no means definitive, and each aspect owes a legacy to paradigms of theory and practice that, under certain circumstances, may be used as explanatory systems, interpretative frameworks, or imaginative forms.

Within this doctoral study, the creative practice introduces four short-experimental films (Apathy, Disaster, The Other and O’Death) which manifest a cycle; changing and enduring recursive and reflexive procedure in the face of an encounter, mirroring and resonating the ‘transformative’ aspect of the practice. The order of the films, in that sense, needs to be

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20 ibid. p. 100
21 ibid.
understood as stages in undergoing a change which started with the confrontation of an unrecognisable body in coma whose witness is familial, and completing itself with the finality of death. It connects with John Dewey’s statement that change *defines* the physical; ‘to deal with change’, he writes ‘is belief or opinion; empirical and particular; it is contingent, a matter of probability, not of certainty.’ He contends that the theoretical is always rational and stands apart from practical action. The individual would not reach to a perfect certainty in doing and making but rather would be implicated in uncertainty, frustration and failure.

Human knowing could be ‘approached through the medium of apprehensions and demonstrations of thought, or by some other organ of mind, which does nothing to the real, except just to know it.’ It is possible to emphasize, based upon his assertion, what communicates within the visual art is how ‘change’ is transformed into a practical refuge in the efforts of an artist or practitioner. The artist - the practitioner - if to exemplify, could bring diverse types of original contribution to knowledge by using different types of methodology. For instance, types of contribution to knowledge would be ‘re-interpretation by making new sense of ancient material’ or ‘by making new sense of how people interact with artworks,’ or ‘how artists use chance’ while ‘making new connections between diverse ideas as creative stimulus’, or ‘capturing new and/or additional evidence on the decision-making process in developing an artwork’ or ‘curating thematic exhibitions as a way of experiencing and exploring a range of new practices.’ Given the necessity of the practitioner to construct a visual research under a doctoral study entails creative and critical deployment of the theories that underline the research by questioning, comparing, interpreting, reasoning, sensing and intuiting. From this basis, the knowledge (or to know it) prompts also the ‘constructivist’ understanding and aspect of the creative practice which demonstrates an awareness and recognition of (apprehensions of) thought. As to the ‘conceptual and contextual’

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23 *ibid.* p.21
understanding of the visual arts, under the cover of doctoral study, it builds up the intellectual, rational, logical and diagnostic inquiry by turning the art and imagination into ‘interpretative framework, explanatory systems, or imaginative forms’ to extend and strengthen its own essential qualities and expression. It suggests the forms, ideas and situations resonate ‘the artistic I’ of the practitioner and ‘the analytical and the critical I’ of the researcher in order to demonstrate to the viewer and the reader the artistic and analytical experiences (of the witness).

The examiner, reader and the viewer of this doctoral thesis are bound to form their own analysis, judgement and approach. The process of reading captures the possibility of negotiations and meditations upon the anguish manifested within the practice and theory. The applicability of the modes of reading and understanding the practice - filmic propositions - as transformative, constructivist, conceptual and contextual brings forward the importance of the responsibility and response that visual arts and artists, culture and the individual have always owed to each other. For the films, the intended audience is both the witness and the spectator; they are implicated in the representations of death, dying and coma in order to construct an empathy and identification with the encounters of the film-maker as a witness. The films do not offer persuasion or a consolation to the reality of death, but present the processes of experience from the perspective of ‘the visual I’ encountering and reflecting an artistic uncertainty and anguish. The knowledge of the filmic propositions is constructed upon the

26 J. Dewey (1980) *Art as Experience*, New York: Perigee Books. Dewey in his exploration of art as experience sees the work of art as the development of an experience. Demonstrating Shakespeare’s and Keats’ philosophy of art as accepting ‘life and experience in all its uncertainty, mystery, doubt, and half-knowledge and turns that experience upon itself to deepen and intensify its own qualities – to imagination and art.’ p. 34 Through the ‘expressive object’ personal act and objective outcome are connected to each other. The artist and the viewer encounter each other, their physical and mental settings.

witness’s ontological subjective state and experiences. They can all be viewed as strong emotional and intellectual reactions to the ways in which death, dying, coma and suffering are perceived from a witness’s point of view. The films are short-experimental films and key themes are not only what the film-maker sees in media, press and films but also the metaphors and the deployment of theories that are presented within the research. The images are the products of certain influences and conditions, circumstances and situational factors of the witness. The video works explore multiple roles of the eye: all manifest a way of seeing the events, people and artefacts around us in relation to anguish, disaster and the Other. The images convey metaphors and analogies that are associated with being a witness in the face of death, dying, coma and suffering. They do not offer a narrative or a story but they are all constructed in a certain order and structure that the editing pace sometimes distracts the viewer and other times emphasises a distinctive manner where patterns of repetition or trembling intentionally might create frustration, disturbance and an unsettling reaction. They disclose a hermeneutic and artistic approach to the ways in which the witness manages to come to terms with the external struggles and the objective causes of subjective experiences. Every chapter is accompanied by - and dialogues with - a filmic proposition that moves forward the theories that are deployed within the chapter by transforming the experience into visuality, by contextualising and conceptualising the external factors, and by constructing a descriptive insight and an artistic expression.

The descriptive and artistic expression within the films operates ‘the unmediated I’ of the film-maker while the theoretical framework enacts ‘the mediated I’ of the researcher by framing the internal struggles of the witness in the face of anguish. In that sense, this doctoral thesis encompasses both ‘the unmediated I’ and ‘the mediated I,’ highlighting the analytical and creative approach of the researcher as a practitioner or vice versa. The dialogue between

28 The film-maker is influenced by an intense and dark style that is analogous to directors like David Lynch, Ingmar Bergman, Andrei Tarkovsky, David Cronenberg, Krzysztof Kieslowski and artists like Gottfried Helnwein, Orlan, musicians like Diamanda Galas, Ketil Bjornstad, Anton Webern, poets like Paul Celan, Rene Char and writers like Maurice Blanchot, Franz Kafka, Emile Cioran.
the exegesis and the films within this doctoral thesis is constructed through creating the necessary space between the researcher and the researched as well as between the researcher-practitioner and the reader-viewer in order to generate critical and rational as well as creative and artistic scrutiny to the witness’s predicament. The form of exegesis offers an unusual and diverse combination of data. It tracks the narrative and the art form that convey a re-description of the intolerable and the unbearable – of fear, anguish, suffering, loss and grief.

The traumatic experiences, analogous to the witness and the victim, that compel the writer, theorist and the artist, film-maker and musician to articulate the encounter are portrayed within the exegesis, investigating the forms of negotiations and the meditations on suffering. Valuable research may deploy unobtrusive methods which does not involve interviews or surveys with the direct researched subject – the witness - but rather makes use of unusual data such as blogs, films, music, art as well as documented events and experiences in media, television and cyberspace. An unobtrusive method implies methodological innovation that brings forward an imaginative and creative direction of the mind. Raymond Lee argues that ‘unobtrusive methods are valuable in themselves because they encourage playful and creative approaches to data, undermining in the process the tendency to rely on particular research methods because they are familiar or routine other than appropriate to the

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30 The research follows the anonymous author of http://inthehallofmirrors.typepad.co.uk/ on death, HIV, witnessing; Lars Iyer’s writings on death, and Blanchot on http://spurious.typepad.com/spurious/; Matthew Swiezynski, Arthur de Eriomem and Herr Schinkel’s archival treasures from films, art and music on http://theartofmemory.blogspot.com/

31 Particularly Ingmar Bergman’s (http://www.ingmarbergman.se/) and Andrei Tarkovsky’s (http://www.acs.ucalgary.ca/~tstronds/nostalghia.com/) films


33 http://www.helnwein.com/, http://orlan.net/ (more to come and with the right dates and all)

problem in hand.\textsuperscript{35} Unobtrusive methods allow the researcher to recognise and distinguish the elicitation of the subject matter outside the traditional methodology by bringing forward and collecting atypical data from an inventive and innovative perspective. The doctoral study does not isolate the subject (the witness) and does not involve one-to-one active investigation and survey with other witnesses. Rather, it aims to adopt a position that examines its author (the witness) as a case study while drawing on her own subjective experiences, and internal and external knowledge inasmuch as taking from the articulated experiences of other witnesses whose voice of concern has art and meditation in its origin. The selection of data draws attention to the sensibilities of the author in terms of influences, problems, weaknesses and strengths of being a witness, considering rare but powerful instances from the creative and critical experiences and expressions. The use of diverse media (from films to literary accounts) allows a unique scrutiny for the imaginative inflections on methodology. The research takes art (from poetry to visual arts) as an experience by projecting and creating a tissue of connectivity between the exegesis and the films. As John Dewey argues, ‘in art as an experience, actuality and possibility or ideality, the new and old, objective material and personal response, the individual and the universal, surface and depth, sense and meaning, are integrated in an experience in which they are all transfigured from the significance that belongs to them when isolated in reflection.’\textsuperscript{36} This kind of isolation in/of reflection appeals and operates effectively in the unobtrusive method that can become part of practice-based doctoral study. It provides an alternative which integrates an experience of the researcher as a practitioner (as well as a witness) resembling a bower bird, collecting and pulling together traces of evidence that are analogous to the subject in hand.

\textbf{Theoretical and methodological palette:}

The methodology activates a multi-disciplinary approach, bringing atypical but close-knit set of theories and speculations, combining diverse routes, establishing the reflective and

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\caption{Diagram illustrating the methodology approach.}
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Theory & Methodology \hline
- Art & - Unobtrusive \hline
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\caption{Comparison of theoretical and methodological elements.}
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\textsuperscript{35} ibid. p.24
\textsuperscript{36} J. Dewey (1980) \textit{Art as Experience}, New York: Perigee Books, p. 297
constructivist paradigm. The text in every chapter starts with an autobiographical voice that orients a reader on the reflexivity of the witness. Reflexivity, writes Sullivan, ‘is associated with self-critique and personal quest, playing on the subjective, the experiential, and the idea of empathy.’37 It is necessary to acknowledge the fact that in order to speculate and construct the knowledge and the essential insight to the witness’s mind-set there is a need to state the ontological subjective state of ‘the I’ in the face of a troubling encounter. The mechanism through which to achieve this is only through an autobiographical voice that describes and self-critiques the encounter to the extent of personal quest in order to assemble the challenges and the difficulties. Otherwise the experience of the witness cannot be known from an ontologically objective state. Dewey confirms that, ‘since what we know about the world is a product of transaction of our subjective life and a postulated objective world, these worlds cannot be separated.’38 Therefore, if the purpose of the research is to understand and recognize the witness’s state of mind, then it is vital to allow the autobiographical voice to form a critical, reflexive and experiential approach in order to generate empathy for the reader. This form of critical constructivism would affect the researcher and the researched, reveal the reflective of individual purpose and encourage reflexive cultural response as Sullivan states.39 The epistemology is subjectivist, as it functions by demonstrating the witness’s perception of fear and anguish in consciousness and in visuality. It not only offers a form of human understanding and empathy but it also frames the structure of the limits of experience.

The key theorists that guide this doctoral study - not only theoretically but also visually - are Georges Bataille, Jean Paul Sartre, Maurice Blanchot, Susan Sontag, Zygmunt Bauman, Sandra Gilbert and Adam Phillips. The methodology comprises different genres from the autobiographical narrative of C.J. Lewis, Simone de Beauvoir and Joan Didion, literary

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The research engages with a self-reflective thought process which is pursued through a critique of Georges Bataille and Jean Paul Sartre’s speculations and observations on the means to come to terms with the fears and anguish in order to elaborate and evaluate the witness’s mind set. Bataille, twentieth century French essayist, novelist and theorist has been a significant and an important voice in regard to the relationship between eroticism and death,
pain and anguish at times turning his gaze to torture victims,\textsuperscript{48} other times conveying the destructive forces and dark values.\textsuperscript{49} He was involved with surrealism in 1920s, inspired by Nietzsche, Hegel, Marquis de Sade, Gilles De Rais, and was friends with Rene Magritte, Pierre Klossowski and Maurice Blanchot with whom he shared a similar interest in the articulation of the ‘darkness of the unspeakable.’\textsuperscript{50} A radical thinker for his time, he was interested in cruel spectacles of sacrifice, blood, violence, death, dying and suffering. His writings included poetry\textsuperscript{51}, philosophy, economics, pornography and surrealist short stories.\textsuperscript{52} Bataille saw consciousness as coming under attack, and ‘at its origin fragile’\textsuperscript{53} when being-in-crisis experiences put the individual to the test and question the transition from continuity to discontinuity or from discontinuity to continuity.\textsuperscript{54} In his foreword to \textit{Erotism} he disclosed: ‘I do not think that man has much chance of throwing light on the things that terrify him before he has dominated them.’\textsuperscript{55} That was what he attempted to do in his writings; dominating and uncovering the limits of the dark experiences.

Bataille was astonished by the haunting images of - and fear of - death and dying to the extent that the necessity of evil and to recognise it in us were all imperative in order to reconcile pain and anguish. Pain and anguish dominated his thoughts as the mediator;\textsuperscript{56} revealing existence ‘only as mortally wounded.’\textsuperscript{57} His ideas on sovereignty discussed in his lectures given at the College Philosophique in 1951-53\textsuperscript{58} proposed the notion of unknowing in the encounter of fear, terror and violence. Chapter One uses his configuration of \textit{sovereign moment} by applying it to the perception of fear. Such a realisation – fear as sovereign moment – helps us

\begin{footnotes}
\item[48] G. Bataille (1989) \textit{The Tears of Eros}, San Francisco, California: City Light Books
\item[55] ibid. p. 7
\item[56] G. Bataille (1989) \textit{The tears of Eros}, San Francisco, California: City Light Books, p.4 from J.M. Lo Duca’s introduction
\item[58] parts of the lectures are published in J. Morra, M. Robson, and M. Smith (eds) (2000) \textit{The Limits of Death}, Manchester: Manchester University Press
\end{footnotes}
to identify the suspension of thought and the absence of meaning. Bataille demonstrates the crucial impact of fear and terror by locating the transgressive through loss of self and knowledge which always evades us but at the same time haunts and troubles us. His notion of sovereignty presented also the economic and political connotations on a social level, yet such conceptualizations remain outside of intent of this thesis. The study, while analysing the very first stage of the encounter for the witness as undergoing a shock and terror by the sight of the unfamiliar and unexpected, brings light to the ‘instance unknowing’ as the sovereign moment by engaging with Bataille’s notion. It is important to explain the inability to act in the face of fear and why the individual is troubled to reflect and to separate the object of fear from consciousness. Research in the first chapter expands the discussion of the ‘sovereign moment’ by reconciling the impact of fear as unreflective in consciousness, and giving way to anguish as the aftermath of fear when there is no self-referential knowledge of the witness in the interruption of thought. It develops a critical inquiry with the help of Bataille to the effect of fear; not the social and cultural but the personal fears that the witness confronts which opens up to an existential and philosophical experience.

After establishing fear as the sovereign moment which does not allow self-reflection in consciousness, the research tracks its aftermath as generating anguish that declares itself by taking refuge in reflection. This is where Sartre’s notion of anguish helps us to follow the reasoning, responsibility and choices of the witness in an attempt to create counter-anguish in order to turn the unbearable into bearable. The project uses Sartre’s investigation to anguish which suggests demonstrations and negotiations in self-reflective consciousness. Sartre, the ‘father’ of existentialism, is one of the most famous French philosophers of the twentieth century, influenced by Martin Heidegger and Soren Kierkegard who all inspired him on the

\[\text{59} \text{ see G. Bataille (1988) Accursed Share, New York: Zone Books and} \]

http://www3.iath.virginia.edu/pmc/text-only/issue.992/review-2.992

views of anguish, fear and nothingness. His philosophical treatises from *Existentialism and Humanism*, 61 *Being and Nothingness*, 62 to *Sketch for a Theory of Emotions*, 63 his novels 64 and plays 65 all exercised the realisation of choices and responsibility in the face of anguish, nothingness, freedom, being and not-being. For him, consciousness is responsible for its being 66 and its nature is to enclose its own contradiction within itself 67 in order to construct/repair/formulate its own solution to what it lacks. His idea of freedom declares the anguish which dictates choice and responsibility. Stephen Priest, in his introduction to his notion of freedom, states that ‘Sartrean freedom cannot be understood without understanding the situation.’ 68 A person cannot be separated from the totality of their context, and is the framework through which identity is formed. Jonathan Dollimore confirms that his importance is his uncompromising emphasis on human freedom and responsibility. 69 Sartre’s notion of freedom introduces the anguish in consciousness in between choice and responsibility. In *Being and Nothingness*, he describes anguish as ‘the mode of being of freedom.’ 70 Sartre’s anguish is significant for us to critically assess the witness’s situational and circumstantial state in the process of reflection. Sartre, in that sense, examines and depicts the condition of being determining a decision in anguish, demonstrating *anguish in the face of the past* and *in the face of the future* 71 which the project applies to the witness’s mind-set, resulting in attempts to formulate the counter-anguish with the help of his trajectory.

Primarily interested in his notion of anguish, the chapter speculates, based on his manifestations, on the manifestations of the witness in the hope of dispelling anguish. There has been no examination in depth of the internal struggles of the witness in consciousness; taking refuge in reflection and attempting to achieve a decision and a choice as well as

61 J.P. Sartre (1973) *Existentialism and Humanism* London: Methuen
65 J.P. Sartre (1955) *No Exit and Three other Plays*, New York: Random House
67 ibid. 115
71 ibid. pages 53-6
responsibility in the face of anguish. The project makes use of a Sartrean approach in order to create conceptual appropriation for evaluating ‘the I’ of the witness undergoing a reflective order in consciousness. His *structure of exigency for an original possibility* to develop a response and responsibility in the form of ‘logical requirements of the consequences of our freedom’ is an essential part of the human condition when reflecting. Viewing anguish of the witness by outlining it with the help of Sartre reveals the ways in which ‘the I’ placates the anguish.

Moving from anguish, the research arrives at a point of consciousness: a bitter recognition of how counter-anguish produces an enthusiasm with Apathy (an apathetical attitude) as the single motivator. This aspect of the witness’s tendency is unexplored and not addressed, remaining almost hidden and unspeakable. The analysis brings light to this unutterable tendency of the witness only when anguish claims its own annihilation in consciousness. It does not employ the word Apathy in its conventional sense, but rather it suggests that gradually the witness will generate it as the counter-anguish or as the transcended anguish out of necessity. Instead of dismissing Apathy’s declaration not as a means of denial or indifference to the grim reality by which the witness is haunted but rather as the logical and rational requirement of the consequences of self-conscious reflection. This notion of Apathy posits that when the necessity of counter-anguish is manifested and encouraged to seek out to determine its choices of freedom, an apathetical stance occurs as an involuntary anti-choice, as an unrecognised necessity of consciousness. The investigation implicates its definable and rational causes, not seeking to justify but rather reflect within supposition. Does this Apathy stop the anguish? To suggest relief, release and resolution in Apathy is misleading. Instead it is necessary to emphasize that the experience of the witness in the face of coma, death, dying and suffering leads to the kind of self-reflection that puts ‘the I’ radically in question and

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72 ibid. Sartre’s idea of anguish in the face of the future and in the face of the past makes visible of the necessity of a structure, he calls this the *structure of exigency*.


74 Yet, if examined psychoanalytically, it is possible to see that it is synergetic with Freud’s task of detachment, which my research probes within the chapter.
negotiates a counter-anguish which is synergetic with an apathetical attitude. Predominantly concerned with choices and responsibility in the face of itself, ‘the I’ captures this ‘shelter’ at the expense of overstepping and annihilating what torments.

The study manifests a comparative analysis between fear and anguish while illustrating the testimonial accounts from C.S. Lewis on the death of his wife, and other witness accounts from the disasters of the last century and from the current collective memory of 9/11 and 7/7 as well as taking from literary accounts of J. Luis Borges and Franz Kafka. Using Phillips’s psychoanalytic inquiry on *Terrors and Experts* to set the attitude to fears, marks the understanding of pre-emptive defences in the mind of the witness which the chapter suggests is Apathy. A careful and considered conceptual appropriation to the witness’s mindset as the perceiving subject is explored in Chapter One by engaging with the theories and the dark voice of Bataille, and by positioning ‘the I’ in consciousness with the help of Sartre to depict the possible choices and meditations on anguish brings a new insight and an original contribution to knowledge because it acknowledges and identifies with the unspeakable tendency of the witness as Apathy.

The doctoral analysis deploys predominantly Maurice Blanchot’s testimony and fragmentary text while tracking his narrative voice in order to conceptualise and contextualise the experience of the witness in the encounter of the Other and disaster. What distinguishes Blanchot from other writers is not only his unique meditation on death, dying and disaster but also his language that brings abstract and dark affinities of the human mind, probing the unspeakable, indescribable and attempting to overcome the terror in the form of writing. What is ‘indissociable from the fascinating power of any Blanchotian theme or critical motif’ writes Christian Fynsk in his foreword to *Blanchot Reader*, ‘is the haunting presence of language

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75 C.S. Lewis (1966) *A Grief Observed*, London; Faber and Faber
that brings language itself into question as it searches the borders of what can be said in its time.\textsuperscript{79} He gives responsibility to his reader. The author and reader find themselves haunted by the language that challenges the relationship to its interpretations. Blanchot would allow his reader to take distance from the suffering while he creates the same distance for himself under the cover of writing. The writer’s language represents its own impossibility but creates the opportunity and possibility to express the negation, the negotiations of distance and its individual logic which generates the practice of writing. Death is the nest for him where anguish and meaning, liberation and annihilation are preserved. It is the concern of language, twisting its form for the sake of capturing the unspeakable that is deployed in this doctorate from the writings of Blanchot.

It is impossible for a single doctorate to grasp Blanchot’s work in its entirety. His major themes -literature, death, ethics and politics - are elaborated under critical theory, literary reviews, novels, and fragmentary style that escapes any definition of genre ‘as it is a mixture of both philosophical and literary content expressed in a highly aphoristic and enigmatic style.’\textsuperscript{80} As a critic, he would write/decipher the experience of (writing and language of) a wide range of writers from Lautreamont, Albert Camus, Rene Char, Pascal, Nietzsche\textsuperscript{81} to Franz Kafka, Mallarme, Holderlin, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Sartre\textsuperscript{82} while reflecting on a number of titles such as surrealism, war, the apocalypse, transgression, dreams, friendship, silence, night, image and inspiration. He has influenced the contemporary French theorist like Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Georges Bataille and moved forward the ideas of Hegel and Heidegger on death and dying. Negativity, absence, death, suffering and pain lie at the heart of his language which claims its own response and responsibility. He offers ‘a secret way of seeing’ that allows the reader to ‘distort the logical exactness of the first meaning.’\textsuperscript{83}

\textsuperscript{79} Blanchot Reader, Fiction and Literary Essays (1999) New York: Station Hill, p. xv
\textsuperscript{81} M. Blanchot (1997) Friendship, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press
\textsuperscript{83} ibid. p. 57
In his novels his characters speak of this mystical secret; it is worth remembering Thomas
where he comments ‘I calm myself with fear, I taste life in the feeling which separates me
from it. All these passions, forced within me, produce nothing other than that which I am and
the entire universe exhausts its rage to make me feel something, vaguely, of myself, feel some
being which does not feel itself.’

This separation from Outside and from one’s self
announces itself as an impossible experience. Blanchot invites us to abandon all hope but
demands a recognition that occupies us by way of the impossible. We are led to figure what it
means being human. Outside, for Blanchot, is ‘bereft of intimacy and repose’; it ‘prevents,
precedes, and dissolves the possibility of any personal relationship’; its ‘menacing, vague and
vacant’; ‘nil and limitless, suffocating condensation,’ endlessly declare itself as nothingness.

The research particularly focuses on his testimony The Instant of My Death and The Writing
of Disaster in order to elaborate the witness’s encounter with death and the need to
construct a relation to the Other and disaster. The Instant of My Death is a succinct
testimonial treatise where presumably, we are told, Blanchot himself is encountering a Nazi
lieutenant as his executioner. He describes an event in which he participates as both a victim
and a witness, and is saved in an instant which leaves him in abeyance and creates an
interruption. The project applies his experience to the witness which guides us to the
experience of a dying stronger than death. For Blanchot, the horror of the Holocaust, the
encounter with the Persecutor (Nazi lieutenant) as the grim reaper himself and the cruelties of
dying bring responsibility, and claim a response that is hanging over every thinker. Within his
testimony, the chapter typifies the impossible image of death and dying for the one witnessing
while referring and illuminating the experience of disaster from his fragmentary work The
Writing of Disaster. One important decision is to concentrate on his testimonial language which conveys affliction of the witness (and the victim) and the encounter of the Other; undergoing a passivity by way of depriving the witness of the power to say ‘I’ and revealing a relation to the impossible by aligning with the experience and with life. For this reason, the research does not aim to bring a critical and analytical inquiry to his theories but rather it takes its form, ideas, and thoughts from his work in order to elaborate and evaluate the witness’s mind-set in the face of the Other and disaster. It outlines and refers to Blanchot’s philosophical and fragmentary work The Writing of Disaster to the extent that it illuminates the possibility of a relation to the Other and disaster while making use of his literary outputs and his novels in order to explain and exemplify the conception of death, dying and suffering.

By moving forward the witness’s impossible experience whose depiction and description find its manifestation with the help of Blanchot’s reflections that declare the necessity, responsibility and response to the Other and to the disaster, the chapter implicates an original contribution to knowledge by inventing the witness’s own Other within the gap. A retrospective reflection which is improvisational and relies on feeling, response, meditation and negotiations of the witness comes to light with Blanchot. It gives rise to ‘the I’ that suspends the event, reserves the distance in abeyance and structures one’s own Other within the gap in order to be able to answer to the Persecutor and to be able to deal with disaster and the Other. The terms the gap and one’s own Other correspond with the Blanchotian approach which recognises the suspension of thought and creates an interval ‘between no-longer and

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89 This research can be expanded in future studies on Blanchot’s conception of death and his views on the Other which was influenced by Emmanuel Levinisian ethics. The Writing of Disaster includes significant fragments on the philosophy of Levinas, developing his engagement with his work in The Infinite Conversation. See M. Blanchot (1993) The Infinite Conversation, Minnesota and London: University of Minnesota Press

not-yet. The research, in order to capture this gap and one’s own Other, juxtaposes reflections on the personal experience of the author as a witness, the witness accounts of C.S. Lewis\(^2\) and Simone de Beauvoir\(^3\) and the negotiations and meditations on suffering in art and music from Orlan and Diamanda Galas. Fusing the techniques of different genres (autobiographical accounts, literary studies, philosophical theories, and visual arts) in an attempt to capture the meditation with exposure\(^4\) brings an inventive and unique research to the encounter of death, disaster and the Other. It is also possible to see in the film Disaster, which accompanies the second chapter, the essential visualisation of the gesture that positions the witness in denial towards the encounter.

The research probes a cultural and critical study on the spectator’s attitude in the face of representation with the deployment of theories of Susan Sontag, Jean Baudrillard, Guy Debord, Sandra Gilbert and Adam Phillips while utilising the study of Phillip Aries’ masterful work *The Hour of Death*\(^5\) which guides every researcher who attempts to study death and dying. His overt and insightful observations help us to establish a comparative analysis between the tamed\(^6\) and unsettling, untamed perception towards death. A careful and considered understanding of the attitude would reveal not only the spectator’s place in contemporary society but also the attitude towards the witness.

Susan Sontag was an American intellectual who felt the responsibility of a writer whose task was analogous to a Sisyphean one: to ‘embody (and defend) a standard of mental life and of

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\(^{91}\) M. Blanchot (1995) *The Writing of Disaster*, London; University of Nebraska Press, pages xi, 5, 8 the research changes his ‘interval’ to ‘the gap.’

\(^{92}\) C.S. Lewis (1966) *A Grief Observed*, London; Faber and Faber


\(^{94}\) The reader bears witness to the possible negotiations and meditation with exposure of the author in the process of an approach that enters into a discussion with and about Blanchot’s reflections, creating a reflective conversation to raise awareness of critical and contextual issues of the impossible experiences in the face of the Other and disaster. In that sense the author who is a witness states responses to Blanchotian approach.


\(^{96}\) P. Aries (1994) *Western Attitudes toward Death from the Middle Ages to the Present*, London: Marion Boyars, pages. 1-24
discourse, other than the nihilistic one promoted by media.\textsuperscript{97} She was not a conformist; she defended experiencing firsthand was necessary in order to have a public opinion on war, suffering and injustice.\textsuperscript{98} Her wide-ranging interest from cinema, literature to theatre, photography and interest in writers like Emile Cioran, Simone Weil, Albert Camus, Pavese, Michel Leiris\textsuperscript{99} gave rise to an eloquent and widely read essayist who had a taste for ‘everything’\textsuperscript{100} and who wrote about what she was discovering on the way. She would say ‘What you accumulate as a writer’ was ‘mostly uncertainties and anxieties.’\textsuperscript{101} She conveyed her anxieties and concerns on the pain of others in her book \textit{Regarding the Pain of Others}\textsuperscript{102} probing the desensitising impact of the images of disaster and atrocity in media and television while emphasising the obligation to look at these images in order to raise awareness on the part of the spectator. The research investigates ‘the point of exhibiting these pictures’ and whether ‘they actually teach us anything or not’\textsuperscript{103} in order to be able to analyse the responses of the spectator in the face of representation. Her provocating questions and detailed analysis and knowledge of the very first photographs of cruelty help us to reach an understanding of the attitude towards Other’s pain on the part of the spectator. The research demonstrates a heartless and an unbearable portrayal of the representation by investigating the modes of reading and viewing Saddam Hussein’s sons \textit{before} and \textit{after} photos which were released in July 2003 almost in every newspaper and television. Putting the emphasis on the manipulation and control of the images where the logic of disappearance and the disappearance of responsiveness are dictated by the representation bring questions on the spectacle and the boundaries between real and imaginary. Terms such as \textit{the spectacle}\textsuperscript{104} and \textit{the ideological control}\textsuperscript{105} correspond to a Baudrillardian and Debordian criticism where the attention is drawn to the excess that destabilises with its rather tenacious disruption without

\textsuperscript{98} ibid. see her essay on Sarajevo \textit{Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo}, pages 299-322 and ‘There’ and ‘Here’, pages 323-329
\textsuperscript{99} S. Sontag (1966 ) \textit{Against Interpretation}, London: Vintage
\textsuperscript{100} ibid. p. 268
\textsuperscript{101} ibid. p. 267
\textsuperscript{103} ibid. p. 82
\textsuperscript{104} G. Debord (1994) \textit{The Society of Spectacle}, New York: Zone Books
limit, leaving no value whatsoever, dictating its pitiless, cold-hearted representations for witnesses and spectators. It is impossible to dismiss Jean Baudrillard and Guy Debord’s approaches to the representation of reality. Even though Debord and Baudrillard have been criticised by Sontag as ‘patronising reality,’ their provoking ideas of the present-day reality challenge and provoke causes and effects of our cultural pessimism.

The investigation recalls Baudrillard’s and Debord’s critique of contemporary capital, cultural imperatives and the role of the mediation in social relationships under the influence of the representation in order to come to terms with the crucial impact of the real and its representation. Baudrillard’s voice enables us to view the spectacle within its violation towards its spectator. He encourages us by deflating us; that his sinister scepticism can make our lives, in their both cruel and clear-cut expressions, more awakened and more charged with alluring meaning. An individual’s death is said to follow them around like a little black dog, Baudrillard is the black dog that not only follows but also barks and bites in order to remind us of the vertiginous tricks of the spectacle. He would argue that the representation of death is reinterpreted under its ideological control and power reinforcing its exercise on the witness and spectator, as a means of ‘a power without sovereignty.’ The contemporary situation, according to him, is volatile, becoming an allegory of death, and as a result the ideal disappears leaving no meaning and creates its own perfect simulacra; masking and perverting a basic reality and the absence of a basic reality, consequently bearing no relation to any reality. Similarly Debord argued in The Society of Spectacle that all relationships have become transactional and life is reduced to spectacle, accumulating alienation from the reality and creating the separateness between the viewer and the representation. Their diagnosis and nihilistic criticism towards the distinction between reality and its representation, and the

110 ibid. p. 22
role of the spectacle help us to identify the attitude of the spectator within the chapter by speculating on the ‘reabsorption of the metaphor of life’\textsuperscript{111} and death. This research by deploying the theories of Sontag, Baudrillard, and Debord, confirms that the spectator’s attitude is prescribed by the representation that creates a devoid of meaning to the extent that s/he is losing the capacity to react\textsuperscript{112}, to empathise and to show concern for the Other’s pain.

The study brings an alternative analysis on the spectator’s stance in the face of representation by probing the attitude towards the witness - the mourner in Western society. For this, it makes use of Sandra Gilbert’s study on modern ways of dying and grief\textsuperscript{113} by applying her own testimonial description, and observations on hospices and the treatment towards the dying patients on a social level. Publishing her evocative study, combining different genres – autobiographical narrative, literary and poetic accounts – writing out of the same impulse that triggered a need to formulate the unbearable like C.S. Lewis and Simone de Beauvoir, she offers a unique reflection on not only her own witnessing (losing her husband) but also on ‘the poetics of bereavement’\textsuperscript{114} from Sylvia Plath, Walt Whitman to Elizabeth Barret Browning. Her ‘personal witnessing’ and ‘impersonal commentary’\textsuperscript{115} on the voices of elegy and lamentation re-captures the vocabulary of death while talking of the shame of the mourner in the Western society who ‘wants to hide itself deep in the clefts of the earth.’\textsuperscript{116} Her own personal trauma represents every other witness’s testimonial necessity to ‘manage,’ to negotiate, to reflect and to identify with the reality of death and dying. Gilbert is as scrupulous in recording such feelings like shame and embarrassment as she is addressing the collective and private denial of death. She writes ‘it is, ultimately, the mourner who is embarrassed by her own suffering, encumbered with a weight of woe that fences her around.

\textsuperscript{111} J. Baudrillard (1994) \textit{The Illusion of the End}, Cambridge: Polity Press, p. 95
\textsuperscript{113} S.M. Gilbert (2006) \textit{Death’s Door, Modern Dying and the Ways We Grieve}, London, New York: W. W. Norton & Company
\textsuperscript{114} ibid. p. xviii
\textsuperscript{115} ibid. p. xxii
\textsuperscript{116} ibid. p. 264
with shame and locks or mutes her speech.¹¹⁷ In the studies of Aries¹¹⁸ and Geoffrey Gorer¹¹⁹ the same implication has arisen in regard to the attitude towards the witness-mourner in the Western society which has a powerful impact on the spectator’s attitude. The display of the emotions and sadness in Western society with the privatisation of death and the medicalisation of dying has moved the witness behind closed-doors. Aries’ study (please see the diagram below) has shown the reader our relationship with death moved from being healthy to a pathological one with the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries; its tame-ness has become a wild, insecure, uncertain monster which only is associated with traumatic experiences that needed to be endured privately. Aries’ work is intensified by Zygmunt Bauman in his Immortality, Mortality and Other Life Strategies that ‘death [has] come perilously close to being declared a personal guilt’¹²⁰ and ‘flared [to] the collective and public denial or concealment.’¹²¹ Bauman contests the pessimistic view that death ‘defies the power of reason’ and becomes ‘the major scandal,’ and ‘the ultimate humiliation of reason’ which has implicated the ways to deal with death and the Other’s pain by way of segregating, separating, dumping onto the rubbish tip, flushing it down ‘into the sewer of oblivion.’¹²² Commencing with Liquid Modernity¹²³ Bauman has tended to draw significantly on the condition of the individual in relation to community, society, time and space, illustrating ‘liquidising powers’¹²⁴ and the hidden works of ‘fluid modernity.’ Yet again, his picture offers a re-description of a Huxleyian like dystopia; in his liquid modernity procrastination, while escapism and gratification are become a blessing, insecurity, uncertainty, and the Other’s pain have become the curse. He diagnoses and anatomises what he calls fluid modernity as the era of disengagement, elusiveness, Houdini-like escape and hopeless pursuit for desire,

¹¹⁷ ibid. p. 255
¹¹⁸ P. Aries (1994) Western Attitudes toward Death from the Middle Ages to the Present, London: Marion Boyars
¹²¹ ibid. p. 130
¹²² ibid. pages 134, 15, 131
¹²⁴ ibid. p.14
Figure 1: Illustrates P. Aries (1994) 'Western Attitudes Towards Death from the Middle Ages to the Present' London: Marion Boyars
gratification and procrastination in his study. It signifies the outcome of the new ‘techniques of power’ whose ‘private dramas are staged, put on display and publicly watched.’ Questioning the move from the heavy to light tendency of the individual at a social and private level, he also draws the picture of the spectator’s stance in the face of representation. Bauman’s theory of this new attitude of the individual sets the context for the spectator within the research; it highlights the lack of responsibility and response, and the logic of survival on the part of the spectator. Cultural and social critique reveals ways in which the spectator deals with death. Therefore it becomes possible to see the distinguishing elements between the witness and the spectator in regard to their encounter with death, dying and suffering, the study expands the discussions of the attitude by invoking ‘the language of survival’ of the spectator.

Sovereign absence:
There have been personal triggers of anguish that have prompted the writer and the artist into the terrain of postgraduate researcher. The film-maker has become a theorist to reflect, theorise and speculate the means through which to come to terms with the filmic and experiential spaces between life and death. Earlier histories of humanity conquered the moment of great anguish when confronted with the corpse and the decaying body which marked ‘the function of rites of mourning to appease.’ The Greeks of the archaic period declared that the ultimate reality of death was inseparable from life. In 399 BC Socrates asserted that philosophers were to ‘directly and of their own accord’ prepare ‘themselves for death and dying.’ For Montaigne in the sixteenth century, there was little that occupied his mind more than the images of death. His goal of career was to transform death into the necessary object of life’s aim. In 1915, with the ‘painful disillusionment’ of World War

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125 ibid. pages 14, 70
129 ibid. 61
One, Sigmund Freud was to probe the question; ‘Would it not be better to give death the place in reality and in our thoughts that is its due, and bring out our unconscious attitude to death, which we have hitherto so carefully suppressed, a little more?’131 Later in 1920, he was to suggest, similar to Montaigne, death as the real aim of all life.132 This was similar to what Arthur Schopenhauer, a century earlier, writing in his essay in regard to misfortune and stating one had to look death in the face; one had to meet it with courage.133 In visuality the apocalyptic vision started early as Dante’s Inferno134, Hieronymus Bosch’s fifteenth and sixteenth century paintings of suffering, Goya’s disasters and nightmares135 shaped and has changed utterly the way scholars, writers, musicians and film-makers conceptualise death and dying especially when triggered and framed by war. With Romanticism and Enlightenment morbid imaginings, macabre rhythms, later wartime eulogies, deathbed scenes and witness accounts have transformed death from an inevitability to a battle. Nietzschean nihilism declared the death of God136; early nineteenth century Romantic poets like Keats and Shelley spread the views of death and dying while William Blake depicting the notion of hell in his drawings; writers like Leutréamont137, Joseph Conrad138 and Albert Camus139 delivering readers the horrors and the darkest visions of the mind. Twentieth century intellectuals like Franz Kafka, Maurice Blanchot, Emile Cioran dwelt on the work of Death seeking to construct and convey the language of death.

To adapt to the reality and actuality of death and dying has been the fundamental and common affliction of an individual who becomes a writer, artist, film-maker or a researcher. In this thesis, I summon a concept and term to manage, meditate and medicate loss and death:

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131 ibid. see his essay on Timely Reflections on War and Death, pages 169-194  
the witness. Through the language of memory and personal experience the witness has sought to ‘manage’ and come to terms with the reality and the violence of death, dying and suffering. As Holocaust academic Lawrence L. Langer states in his foreword on *Witness, Voices from the Holocaust* that without the witness testimony ‘the human dimensions of the catastrophe would remain a subject of speculation.’\(^{140}\) The testimony of the witness has conveyed the means to negotiate and meditate on the impossibility of death and dying. The urgency and the necessity to give meaning to the indescribable and the unspeakable have been not only the focus of philosophy, psychoanalysis, history or cultural theory but also art, film and music. Each theorist, writer, artist and film-maker that guides this doctoral study has something essential in common; it is death, dying and suffering that compel them to speak, write, create and reflect to come closer to identify with the sovereign absence, and reach to an understanding of consolation. It is possible to say as Adam Phillips would state in *Terrors and Experts* (for Sigmund Freud, Melanie Klein, D.W. Winnicott and Jacques Lacan) the theorists, writers and artists that the doctoral study pursue, offer the reader, a new re-description of the unacceptable – of what we are suffering from, of what we have to fear – they become, by the same token the masters of our suffering. By punctuating our [and their own] unhappiness, they make it legible. They tell us persuasive stories about where the misery comes from. They want to change our (and their) relationship to the fear they have formulated for us. The experts construct the terror, and then the terror makes the expert.\(^{141}\)

The witness herself/himself is not in a position to claim an expertise, and her/his anguish is not cancelled in the identification with the encounter of death, dying and suffering. Rather s/he attempts to articulate what torments him/her and tries to master the sovereign absence of a familial Other in his/her work as both a practitioner and a researcher.


ON APATHY AND THE WITNESS

CHAPTER ONE
Building on the increasing interest with the perception of Death, dying and suffering in contemporary theory¹, this chapter examines the challenges of the existential encounter that the witness confronts as the perceiving subject. The chapter identifies challenges in the stages which arrive at apathy. Issues arising from personal catastrophes to existential tremors leave the witness facing impossibility through mortality, which opens up an existential and a philosophical experience. The author - ‘the reflective I’- confronts her aunt in a coma and speculates the need to formulate the loss, the fear and the anguish by undertaking an existential mission.

The first stage explores the very encounter of the unknown that declares the impossibility of reason and the arrival of the unexpected as fear. Fear puts the witness into a condition in which self-referential knowledge can no longer manifest an act of understanding because the inability to act in the face of the unexpected uncertainty offers no strategy and no possibility of a solution. Rather, it confirms ‘an instance of unknowing- a sovereign moment’² with George Bataille’s phrase. In order to understand the very impact of fears, Bataille’s conceptualisation of a sovereign moment introduces an understanding of the ways the life and death relationship undergoes a persistent difficulty encountered since the beginning of human existence. Fear (or borrowing Bataille’s term) - the sovereign moment - cannot be reflected upon, fixed or expressed because in its impossibility rests the inexpressible.

The second stage is where anguish occurs in the face of absent meaning as the aftermath of the sovereign moment when there can be no frames of reference for action. The witness takes refuge in reflection as the perceiving subject. The chapter follows the reasoning of the perceiving subject with the help of Jean Paul Sartre’s idea of anguish in the face of the past and the future. He describes a necessary structure where/when the individual reflects and recognizes the apprehension of the self in the mode of ‘not-being’ in the face of anguish. Only counter-anguish calls for decision to ‘renew the self’ as a means of catharsis. Sartre’s interpretation formulates the necessary stages of the self-reflective process and draws attention to the witness’s mind-set as the perceiving subject.

The third step is a response and responsibility to anguish, by undertaking an existential mission in order to acknowledge the choices and the possibility of freedom from the unbearable. That is where remaking-the-self takes over the commanding role of apathy to designate the counter-anguish. Indecision in the face of an impossible situation waits to turn into decision and non-determinant defence into determinant motive as an act of judgement (or reasoning). As opposed to the theoretical approach, the film Apathy captures the witness in the moment of indecision where there can be no decision or an act of judgement. The film functions as a mirroring of what becomes disturbing and haunting for the witness. It is very much the way the author - as a witness - observes things and composes the images in order to get through those disquieting moments while staring in denial.

These challenges arise when the witness turns into herself and attempts to articulate the process of thought in self-reflection. It is necessary to probe how the self-reflective process modifies the range of challenges the witness faces in the encounter of death, dying, suffering and coma, and influences the way she is inclined to deal with anguish. This chapter is an attempt to enact this project by shifting the attention from the perceived object to the perceiving subject. These listed stages affirm a necessity to act, to recognise and to

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acknowledge the (witness’s) predicament, to determine the choices, to take responsibility and to handle the impossible experience for the sake of tolerance of its agonising appearance. Borrowing from the reflected experiences of C.S. Lewis on the death of his wife, and witness accounts in the face of unknown/unfamiliar fear; depicting and demonstrating the thought process from Bataille’s idea of a sovereign moment and Sartre’s anguish; and anticipating the pre-emptive conditions with the help of Adam Phillips, I am able to highlight crucial points with respect to the role of the witness in self-reflection. The chapter proposes an important conceptual diagnosis as the original contribution to knowledge, by identifying apathy as an anti-choice and an unrecognised necessity of consciousness in the face of death, dying, coma and suffering. While this part of the thesis scrutinizes the witness’s way of placating anguish by means of apathy as an inevitable and unavoidable deduction of the self-reflective consciousness, the film captures the unsettling moments and displays the difficult and different encounters which all bring back the anguish without an escape. The film reveals the prevailing impressions from the memory as snapshots and tries to create an atmosphere where the indifference, the avoidance, escaping and oppression stare back. The visual proposition offers no ‘comfort zone,’ except the incidental and tangible where the asymmetry encounters a texture, a shadow on the edge of the screen.

It is necessary to underline that there is ‘an I’ that is mediated through reflection as well as the unmediated I which focuses on the emotional and expressive discursive (autobiographical) self that is projected in writing as well as in the visual representation. The author as a witness tries to explore the means to structure apathy as performed from a position of wished-for-freedom in the face of death, dying, coma and suffering, and identify the witness’s self-reflective process of thought to come to terms with/understand/articulate the anguish in the encounter of coma. While this part of the thesis proposes a new insight and an answer to the existential encounter of the witness, the aim of the practice component focuses on what is encountered in everyday life, on television and in media. The visual proposition complements the written text by means of displaying the anguish of the witness.
The existential encounter of the witness

Perceiving subject:

There are no conceivable signs except the movements of food in and out, being stuffed into S’ nose, air reserved in tubes that she cannot even inhale by herself, going into her throat where there is a hole opened just in her neck.

Breathing in and out,

Tick tacks of the machines…

Misery sneaks into the view, makes a disturbing noise…

Images in memory; what I am actually viewing is just like one of those - in an unfamiliar appearance - subtle smiles insistently saying that 'it isn't real.' But it is. There is a body lying there, subverting the cliché of ‘alive and breathing.’ It is difficult to render the body ugly or repulsive as I know it belongs to my aunt. Everyone stares, trying to behave as if such processes and practices are ‘normal.’ S is still (but) living.

Is it bearable? No. But will the witness get used to this scene? Yes, maybe in order to feel safe within.

Perhaps there is a familiar safety within…

I look at S, at her body, which I cannot recognise anymore. There is emptiness in her skull, somebody already took away a part of her brain and now her skull is not complete.

The intimacy of shock is present in its absence.
The witness, in the face of such loss of meaning and such moments of shock and fear, tries to comprehend ‘the possibility of human,’ searching meaning but finding no means of escape easily. What is the witness thinking, seeing and perceiving? How to assure life when there is nothing to confirm the neutrality of the beginnings and the ends?

But - hold on.

S is in a coma.

What may pass through the witness’s mind is a demand from the body to continue living and breathing just for the sake of our own satisfaction and hope. Hope must not end, so that the witness can linger around the body and claim some assurance towards life and being alive. This act of survival, and to ‘do’ everything possible to make that unrecognisable body keep on breathing brings ascetic expectations to the relationship between life and death. It can be viewed as ascetic because in the face of hopelessness the witness would still try to look for a solution when there is neither a solution nor a possible escape from the reality. That is when

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4 It is important to note Georges Bataille, where he states that “Civilisation in its entirety, the possibility of human, life depends upon a reasoned estimation of the means to assure life. But this life-this civilised life—which we are responsible for assuring, cannot be reduced to these means, which make it possible. Beyond calculated means, we look for the ‘end—or the ends’, -of these means.’ G. Bataille The Tears of Eros, 1989, San Francisco; City Lights Books, p. 19 (italics are in the original)
death becomes the hope in its hopelessness of not even being able to die. Some directors have been re-enacting this kind of hopelessness and despair in such a way that they allow the viewer the ability to meditate on what it means to be hopeless of not even being able to die. One intensely powerful example would be, undoubtedly, Ingmar Bergman’s *Cries and Whispers*. Bergman illustrates painstakingly powerful experience while transcending and elevating it into something which can be shared and can be reflected upon in the extracts from the film above.

Perhaps logic forbids raising what a human being is condemned to discharge intrinsically and quite instinctively, and it is to be taken for granted in such a manner that I as a witness - when staring at S - cannot end or expect to abandon what is insistently meant to continue. There is a shock in the recognition that S can live in this coma state for years. The witness can get used to S’ non-existence and can plunge herself into the deep, helplessly.

Because,

**The corpse-like body seems breathing.**

Can I - as a witness - disburden and reverse the fear of death to something natural if I think along with Freud that the ‘aim of all life is death?’ Can I quieten these nightmares if I reach the awareness of ‘the perpetual recurrence of the same thing?’ It is precarious and doubtful. This is not the desire of immortality, eventually I might accept my ‘aim,’ and instead of distancing myself from the reality of death, I can become enveloped by the catastrophic pleasures of that journey. Nevertheless, the profound difficulty is to accept the non-existence

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5 S. Kierkegaard (1989) *Sickness Unto Death*, London: Penguin Books, p.48 Kierkegaard demonstrates despair where the torture of despair is the inability to die. He states, ‘When death is the greatest danger, one hopes for life. But when one learns to know the even more horrifying danger, one hopes for death. When the danger is so great that death has become the hope, then despair is the hopelessness of not even being able to die.’

6 The images from the film captured by Matthew Swiezynski, please see more extracts from the film: [http://theartofmemory.blogspot.com/](http://theartofmemory.blogspot.com/) under cinematography, Ingmar Bergman, film, melancholia, Sven Nykvist


8 ibid.
of the loved ones, even when they are still breathing, and witness ‘the irrecoverable and contingent.’

The eyes of the witness struggle to turn what is encountered into a bearable appearance because coma creates a disturbing impression that precedes the essence of the victim. What is left is the existence of the breathing-body that has abandoned the consciousness: ‘commenting blankly; staring at me with the indifference of the impossible.’ To understand the processes of the mind in the face of such encounters, how can I placate the anguish not only theoretically but visually to offer an insight and approach to the existential encounter of the witness?

Through an awareness of self-reflexive thought process I - as a witness - have tried to not only explore the means to deal with and come to terms with the anguish but also to assemble a short film which demonstrates the unsettling moments by means of effect of throwing back distressing scenes as well as dissolving these within created metaphors. While the images signify the shattered visions through pain, agony and fear, this chapter examines the process of thought in stages where apathy has become the solution and freedom from the unbearable impossibility in the face of death, dying, suffering and coma. The representation of apathy

9 J.L. Borges (1999) *Collected Fictions*, London: Penguin Books. Borges, in his story ‘The Immortal,’ illustrates a man who discovers the city of immortals and by drinking the water of the river he becomes one, but soon realizes that there is nothing remarkable about being immortal. ‘Everything in the world has the value of the irrecoverable and contingent. Among the immortals, on the other hand, every act is the echo of others that preceded it in the past, with no visible beginning. Nothing is preciously in peril of being lost.’ P.192

10 The text is used in the film, read by different individuals and overlapped on top of each other. The text helps to identify the pressure of the hidden disturbance created by not only the media, films and events but also by becoming a witness of death, dying, coma and suffering.
however, does not offer an escape within the images. Rather ‘the I’ is to enter the shroud for the sake of a possibility of protection. There is no time for self-conscious reflection because ‘the I’ is preoccupied with staring rather than seeing and torn apart by conflicting pressures in visuality of anguish. The film *Apathy* starts facing the wall: walls are used as a means of self-defence, building one’s own and always remaining *inside* for the sake of protection. The viewer stares at the remains of decay. The staring turns itself into *a hammer without a master* that waits to break the silence and unknowing. Concurrently, the image is accompanied with the echoes of voices that are juxtaposed with each other, whispering the same curse repeatedly. Corners and shadows offer some safety in order to hide while the viewer sees the dead bodies and gaping eyes: faces that are staring with indifference. Time and change declare themselves with the movements of the hands of both young and old. The sovereign moments encourage a certain act upon the perceived: an escape or running away is necessary. However, an instance of unknowing reveals itself and the gaze wonders without an escape. What lies ahead is not an act of destroying the walls - the self-protection from outside - but rather the unsettling obscurity that the TV screen displays. The thick glass in the film represents the TV screen that brings all kinds of cruelty for the sake of entertainment. As a result, the viewer is left wounded just like the witness. Blades are used in the film as if to leave visible traces upon the viewer like souvenirs of the sovereign moments. Yet the viewer manages to smash her/his way into the inner depths of the mind, the glass-wall is broken and what remains, is the wound and the incessant death, dying, coma and suffering. Still it cannot be predicted that the viewer becomes the witness. It can be said that the viewer comes close to empathise with the witness when viewing the film.

The goal of the chapter is to identify the stages in how the video work aligns, develops and resonates with the research literature by utilising the theories of Georges Bataille and of Jean Paul Sartre in a visual way. Bataille’s notion of ‘sovereign moment’ - which the project applies to the perception of fear - and Sartre’s anguish frame and formulate the concept for the video. The focus is to capture the moments of anguish and fear while exploring the
metaphors that are associated with the word apathy. The sound and the echoes of voices are edited in a way where sometimes they precede or follow the images in the film. The written text operates in the context of film not as a means of justification but rather as a means of mirroring the apathetical attitude without an escape.

If there is a possibility of escape from the impossible encounter, then it is where consciousness of fear and anguish must reveal, and develop into an understanding of the intolerable confrontation in the task of writing as opposed to audio and visual proposition. To articulate the stages of the self-reflective process can introduce the compelling nature of consciousness and to try to modify the range of challenges the witness faces can bring a new insight.

Fear:

I close my eyes
and hear my fear hidden within silence.
My fear: when broken it becomes
the evil unknown.
Welcome, my mystery.11
Carlos Fuentes Lemus

Personal, social and cultural fears are startling and worrisome because of not only their difficulty of comprehension but also they move the thought further away from the knowledge: declaring the suspension of any self-referential knowledge while leaving the witness with an inability to act. The individual fails to understand their meaning as well as their power upon us. Zygmunt Bauman commences his analysis of modern fears in his book Liquid Fear stating that fear is ‘diffuse, scattered, unclear, unattached, unanchored, free floating, with no clear address or cause.’12 He confirms that ‘fear is the name we give to our uncertainty.’13 The

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13 ibid.
uncertainty appears like the negative certainty when the unexpected threat strikes; being is left with no escape - without knowing what is to be done let alone what can be and cannot be done to stop it. For Bauman, fear’s uncertainty targets all the unknown anxieties, dreads and possibilities of the unexpected and unpredictable. The psychoanalyst Adam Phillips deploys similar vocabulary to Bauman in his book *Terrors and Experts*: ‘fear inspires futures that it has already perceived to be intrinsically uncertain.’\(^{14}\) The difficulty is that it appeals to a strategy which will offer some security from the insecure, the uncertain and the impossible state. However one way forward is to attempt to separate fear from its object and distance one’s self from its difficulty in order to give meaning to its impossibility, and to come to grips with the uncertainty – our negative certainty.

It is possible to add, echoing Bauman and Phillips, that uncertainty manifests itself most successfully and poignantly through fear which is external, bodily, and/or in relation to others. Given the witness’s (and the victim’s) vulnerability, fear can be depicted as to come face-to-face with the troubling (faceless) uncertainty and the insecurity in modern life: to look into the eyes of the devil and see no calculability, predictability and no reference, rather just the apprehension of fear itself; the thing-in-itself.

What ‘the I’ perceives is S’ existence in the mode of not being anymore. This impossible state as the very first encounter of the unknown and the unfamiliar declares an intense moment. The uncertainty that is created within the appearance of the unfamiliar leaves me in silence; a sinister silence descended on every other witness in the face of a/the victim whose life intertwined with theirs. The arrival of the unexpected determines the practice of fear: the feeling of impotence which arouses and targets all the anxieties of the incomprehensible.

The appearance does not offer any justification, except the motionless body itself: to struggle with the absence of the presence, which is neither life - less nor death - less. The witnessing

causes contradictions and fears in my mind, experiences an intense transformation which mirrors itself back within an impossible state. This impossibility creates infinite series of images and possibilities in consciousness as the means of separation and distance from the reality. This is, if you like, a pause in order to digest the indigestible. This distance is necessary for the witness in order to comprehend the fear, the unfathomable, and to reflect upon what is encountered.

If I want to analyse the process of thought in which the witness engages in the face of such encounters, it is first necessary to understand what happens at the first moment of the encounter and how it declares and frames itself as the fear of the unknown and uncertainty before it gives rise to anguish. Having said that, I do not attempt to analyse the social and the cultural fears but rather I will try to comprehend fear as the personal catastrophe from a witness point of view which opens up an existential and philosophical experience.

In a fear to escape endlessly, only the witness of the close encounter (death, dying, suffering and in my case the coma) may go through an impossible experience when she tries to come to grips with the absence of meaning. The witness becomes haunted by the unknown and the absent, left with no formulation because the unexpected event disturbs thought and leaves its witness with an impossibility of not only language but also self-referential knowledge. It is as if what aches makes itself known and signs a pact with suffering while distancing thought from its object.

The knowledge that is fear, the unknown, the unpredictable faceless devil which claims its sovereignty when the thought disappears into nothing at the very moments of the encounter, bears no easy affiliation to uncertainty. In order to understand its power upon the witness, Georges Bataille’s conceptualisation of sovereignty tracks the process. Bataille talks of different kinds of sovereignties in his writings, that of economical and political as well as where he explains the relationship between death and thought as undergoing a sovereign
moment at the moment of the encounter. To ponder Bataille’s idea of a sovereign moment can bring some difficult connotations to unknowing and to my existential task but to apply his idea to the very impact of fears in terms of what goes through the witness’s mind might help me to articulate the thought process.

Bataille defines the suspension of thought and the very encounter of the moment (of fear, dread, terror) as the sovereign moment. According to him, ‘we meet the continuation of the persistent difficulty, encountered since the beginning, which distances thought from its object when it is a sovereign moment.’ The sovereign moment is never subservient to reason. The sovereign moment is, then, the moment which is always in search for a possibility of escape from the external threat.

For Bataille, sovereignty refers to the absence of meaning and an instance ‘unknowing’ when faced with death, suffering and dying. That ‘unknowing’ is not a denial of knowledge for him. Rather it is an exercise generated out of discourse, out of self-referential knowledge. In the examination of thought, he describes sovereignty as the moment where the process of thought and calculation is ambivalent. He confirms that

the consciousness of the moment is not sovereign except in unknowing. Only by cancelling, or at least neutralizing, every operation of knowledge within ourselves are we in the moment, without fleeing it. This is possible in the grip of strong emotions that shut off, interrupt or override the flow of thought.

The sovereignty of fear declares itself as the unknown knowledge for the witness. Bataille’s configuration becomes applicable to the impact of fear and reveals the framework of the witness in the face of a troubling and unsettling encounter.

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16 ibid p. 44
18 ibid.
In the face of fear, all absences of meaning are unredeemable, and the future possibilities cannot be recuperated. The only promise that the fear gives, it could be said, is that everything is in peril of being lost (recalling Borges’ story the *Immortals*). Yet fear does not submit itself to reason. It will always elude its meaning, because it never brings any understanding or any knowledge to one’s consciousness. It holds all the references within the terrified imagination in its infinity. It oppresses while creating vulnerability, defencelessness and insecurity on the part of witness.

Imagine a man who witnesses his wife nearly killed. The accident happens in front of his eyes, when they are to cross the street. A car hits his wife and takes her consciousness away and almost her life. Or imagine the witness/the survivor of the terrorists attacks of 9/11, and 7/7 London Bombings. One of the witnesses tries to articulate the fear: ‘Suddenly people panicked and started screaming and were walking on each other's backs trying to get the hell out of there. I couldn't move, I didn't know what to do, whether to run or not. People ran and left their shoes and belongings when they smelt the burning.’ Denial also emerges from the witness of tragedies such as Katrina or the Tsunami. A witness states: ‘I could not believe what was happening before my eyes.’ Imagine the ongoing violence in Iraq, living in fear on a daily basis. The incidents, the experienced dread of the moments as the very first cut of the lancet; the fear is what we cannot comprehend or believe, neither will the witness/victim/survivor.

In the witnessing of the eyes of the coma, the sovereign moment declares itself in the form of fear: leaving me in silence. As a witness, I encounter a language only known to itself and unknown to me. The more I try to turn this abysmal silence into a meaningful realisation, the more I - as a witness - will look for a common language in order to deal with this

19  [http://www.guardian.co.uk/attackonlondon/story/0,16132,1533421,00.html](http://www.guardian.co.uk/attackonlondon/story/0,16132,1533421,00.html) Sofiane Mohellebi, 35, was travelling from Oxford Circus to Walthamstow. Reports from the Press Association, Sky News and the BBC, Thursday July 21, 2005, Guardian Unlimited

20  [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/london/4659243.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/london/4659243.stm) Eye witness accounts, July 8, 2005, reports from BBC News
impossibility. Yet I cannot speak about it without altering it. Fear - the sovereign moment - resembles the cul-de-sacs of the modern world, with no available solution, resolution or hiding place. At this point, it is possible to suggest that one of the exercises of the self necessitates this alteration (from fear to anguish) to take place within consciousness as a means of self-reflection because the perceived situation leaves me with the impossibility of reason. This impossibility of the situation claims its annihilation for the sake of freedom. This is when the strong emotions shut off, interrupt and override the flow of thought. Knowledge is not part of the moment here, as Bataille would describe. Sovereignty is an impossibility of any self-referential knowledge: the object of fear while claiming its sovereign uncertainty occurs in a moment which remains beyond knowledge, bearing no subjectivity.

‘Sovereignty,’ Bataille claims, ‘is the object which eludes us all, which nobody has seized and which nobody can seize for this reason: we cannot possess it, like an object.’ When thought fails to answer to its impossibility that is when it becomes sovereign and transcends my ability to act in the moment. It is possible to argue that the fear, the sovereign moment has to annihilate itself in order to detach itself from the unknowing and the uncertainty to reach to a decisive moment or rather to grasp its meaning. But its annihilation is impossible since I cannot capture the object of fear because the tacit awareness of the sovereign moment is never to be reflected upon: in its impossibility rests the inexpressible, and the postulation of the situations that are inaccessible even to consciousness.

Instead, it is imperative to emphasise that the sovereign moment relentlessly gives rise to anguish that has occupied being, ontologically, from the very early ages of human existence on earth. It can be suggested that the witness, in order to deal with the ‘unknowing,’ could attempt to take refuge in reflection. The process of thought arrives at a point; when the sovereign moment declares the suspension of thought, the absence of meaning leaves the

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22 Such a realization is synergetic with Polanyi: ‘The structure of tacit knowing is manifested most clearly in the act of understanding.’ The witness encounters an instance of ‘unknowing’ which brings unspecific manifestations to the knowledge which cannot be reflected in the consciousness. M. Polanyi (1959) The Study of Man, London: University of Chicago Press, p. 28
witness at a blind alley. To recover from this impossibility and to come to grips with the meaning of the uncertainty, the existential encounter can formulate a self-conscious reflection by going through a process of altering the sovereign moment to anguish in order to turn the unbearable into the bearable. This anguish is not a free creation of the mind rather it is the human predicament that occurs in the face of absent meaning: the aftermath of the sovereign moment. I ponder whether anguish is a perfectly adapted failure, disability or its own beast that can neither be overcome nor be hidden from, neither fought against nor fled from, just like fear.

The existentialist perspective has tried to articulate and ‘manage’ anguish while separating fear from it. An example of this could be found in Jean Paul Sartre’s attempts, in his book *Being and Nothingness*, considering fear as an obstacle offering no apprehension of self-reflective approach. In his examination of the self-reflective process Sartre argues that fear is ‘the unreflective apprehension’ because it does not offer any logical possibilities, or any affirmative judgement towards a solution, to my situation, to my witnessing whereas ‘anguish is the reflective apprehension of the self’\(^{23}\) within consciousness, which would provoke me to tolerate its impossibility. Sartre distinguishes between two types of consciousness: reflective and unreflective. What Sartre means by reflective and unreflective can be reconciled. In unreflective consciousness the object of fear for instance cannot become an object of consciousness because its sovereignty escapes me (recalling Bataille). It cannot be overcome. It cannot be reflected upon, whereas for reflective consciousness, it brings the responsibility and the choice that can also be described as moral consciousness where being reflects upon and sees what is lacking in relation to itself.

Fear will always bring back the sovereign moment by not letting the witness reflect upon the unknowing within consciousness because *we cannot possess it like an object*. Sartre’s idea of

\(^{23}\) J.P. Sartre (2000) *Being and Nothingness*, London: Routledge, pages 53-56, Sartre unreflective and reflective consciousness will be examined more while examining his idea of anguish.
anguish will be examined in the following pages, but before doing this it is necessary to evaluate the mechanism that separates fear from its empty object and recognizes it as the cul-de-sac of this process.

Imagine an earthquake: the very moment of the earthquake brings fear as the sovereign moment. The ‘unknowing’ of the external threat which cannot be conquered or evaded does not let the witness reflect upon its reality because it is unpredictable and it does not bear any reasoning in itself. The anguish will emerge within the aftermath of the earthquake when the reality of the situation generates the reflective apprehension of the self in the mode of ‘not-being.’

When viewing death and coma, fear and anguish can be distinguished. It is important and necessary to understand what goes through the mind of the witness when looking at coma. Here coma can be said to be related with anguish rather than fear (the very first encounter of the coma patient; the unrecognisable body) because fear associates with the unknown and unfamiliar threat - the sovereign moment - whereas anguish can be said to be related with the constant suffering and pain, which reveals itself as the consequence of fear, allowing a self-reflective apprehension in order to find a way to handle the situation. Fear is the mystery of the unknown whereas anguish is the very misery of that unknown compelling the witness to reflect upon and act on its misery.

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24 To clarify the distinction between fear and anguish we can look at how Christopher Macann explains the distinctive aspects in Sartre’s anguish:

‘Anguish has to be distinguished from fear since fear is ordinarily understood to be fear in the face of some external threat, therefore in the face of a threat which can either be conquered or evaded by means of two basic strategies of fight or flight. But anguish is essentially the anguish of the self in the face of itself, therefore anguish in the face of that which can neither be overcome and circumvented.’


Such a scenario recalls Franz Kafka’s Gregory Samsa finding himself one morning changed into a giant bug without realising at first what he had become.\textsuperscript{26} Soon the family was to confront his new existence with fear as the unreflective apprehension: the uncertainty of his being in its most awkward sense. They were to live with this repellent metamorphosis, soon not to be astonished with his appearance. They were to imprison themselves in anguish while years passed. Hence, ‘Gregory was a member of the family and was therefore not to be treated as an enemy, on the contrary the family duty required them to swallow their loathing and simply grin and bear it.’\textsuperscript{27} This is not to assume that they could adapt to his new speechless and daunting form as Gregory, but rather their attitude was the obligation and responsibility not only to their duties of family life but also to themselves in order to deal with their anguish.

Kafka draws a picture of fear and anguish in the face of an impossible situation from a family’s perspective and tells us their way of coming to terms with the anguish. It is possible to illustrate this impossible state with a different perspective by looking at a witness account from the Holocaust. The aim of an existential analysis is to separate fear from its empty object, because it loses its grip within itself. A witness account from Holocaust demonstrates this separation:

you saw people, you saw fires. You saw carts, two wheelers, and then you saw some carrying corpses. And it becomes a natural thing to you. You know, you didn’t see them anymore. How one can adapt himself to situation like this so fast, I couldn’t believe it.\textsuperscript{28}

The witness is left with an impossible reasoning. As Sartre would argue fear becomes an obstacle. Only anguish develops into the acknowledgment, the recognition of what I fear, by using the annihilation of horror and fear as a motive. Sartre would claim that anguish is the destruction of fear, but when I tried to describe the thought process with the help of Bataille’s idea of sovereign moment I demonstrated that there was no easy annihilation of what I fear because the moment and the impact of fear remained outside, shut off, or beyond knowledge.

\textsuperscript{26} F. Kafka (2002) \textit{Stories 1904-1924}, ‘Metamorphosis,’ London: Abacus

\textsuperscript{27} ibid. p. 126

As opposed to Sartre, it is possible to argue that fear - the sovereign moment - cannot reach to a decisive nexus to annihilate itself within consciousness because its destruction is impossible and beyond knowledge: the cul-de-sac. Anguish is then not the destruction of fear but rather is the aftermath and consequence of fear as the unreflective apprehension of the self in the face of suffering, despair and burden of responsibility. Being, it can be said that, is forced into a position of anguish in order to make a choice. Therefore, it is possible to state that fear would disappear to give away to anguish in order to recognise and reach to an awareness of a possibility of a solution for the sake of freedom from its burden.

The recognition of the absence of a solution follows itself back into the blackness of the void where anguish starts stabbing mercilessly. The more one confronts the ambivalent manifestation of death, dying and suffering within its intolerable continuity in this life, the more the abyss recreates and reopens the anguish and demands to chase a kind of relief from its constraints. This acquaintance with the absence meaning and lack of solution undermines and defeats all the necessary reason while provoking fear, terror, and agony.

What the witness perceives precipitates appearances of different possibilities based on the images, narratives, memories, fears, threats in her/his imagination and in her/his consciousness. The perceived is a threat to reality, which brings out the dead, dying and suffering - the beast - from its bleak cage and does not let the witness bury her/his head in sand and become apathetical totally in her/his witnessing. I offer apathy as an inevitable involuntary strategy and an anti-choice here, because one looks for a resolution and decision in order to deal with the anguish, not only come to terms with the anguish but also to accept the anguish (or rather not to avoid accepting the anguish.)

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30 I will try to show what kind of process of self-reflecting the witness goes through and how this apathy becomes the existential destiny as a means of resolution.
the anguish, but how far can one go with the incapacity of reason? An effective antidote is necessary for the witness to annihilate the anguish.

**Anguish:**

When an individual encounters his/her fellow being in the mode of *not being* anymore, s/he confronts the discontinuity of existence. In the awareness of their disappearance the threat of death was unjustifiable, and still is. In a search for acceptance, the individual has to authenticate the distinctive judgements, decisions, and introspections towards death. Bataille tells us that the first man/woman when confronting the inevitable death encountered anguish: they became confusedly aware of the decay, the absent, and the decomposition as ‘their greatest anguish.’ How could the individual bend backwards in order not to find himself/herself in the abyss of anguish?

One quest for an individual is a search for a secure hiding place when staring at death, dying and suffering. S/he cannot escape the demand to turn nothingness and the absent meaning into a meaningful life. Existentialism has been the perspective that has tried to offer meaning: the resolutions, however conditional and volatile, develop through conflicts, tumults, dread, anxiety, and awareness of death, while exploring the unknown territories of consciousness of existing. Therefore, the essential and immediate reaction to the arrival of the unexpected can be questioned within consciousness.

How one confronts the reality of death and the unnerving misery of the dying depends on the consciousness of anguish. It is a solitary confinement of the self-alone with herself/himself. Only when I consider the idea of death from the perspective of the first person, from the witness point of view does death appear to me strange, unfamiliar and unbearable. The fear of the imagined future, the apprehension of *not being* leaves me with a riddle that has no comprehensive depiction. All reason, persuasion and dialogue would fail in the face of

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sovereign moments and in the face of absence, unless I am to acknowledge the anguish within consciousness as Sartre would argue.

As a witness, I find myself in a situation where the perceived object brings its unfamiliar manifestation to my consciousness. The appearance of the unrecognised takes the shape of a monster, which distracts me while creating the horror of my future possibilities based on my past and present. The reflective defence separates me from my own past and future, and forms an interruption in time regarding ‘what I’m not yet.’ The repulsion, the denial and fear that I experience declare the possibility of my life being changed: only anguish, according to Sartre, reveals ‘my consciousness of being my own future in the mode of not-being.’

Anguish has been the existential mission tracked by many philosophers. Sartre, inspired by Heidegger and Kierkegaard, examines the anguish in his book *Being and Nothingness*. When a structure of/for Being is offered by Sartre as part of the reflective consciousness, the attention is shifted from the perceived object to the perceiving subject; from the *perici* to *percipere*. I have been trying to examine the witness so far as the perceiving subject in order to follow her/his reasoning as s/he herself/himself understands it. It is worth trying to follow Sartre’s reasoning of anguish because Sartre introduces anguish as the apprehension of one’s freedom. I could only reach an awareness of this freedom that Sartre suggests by engaging in a self-reflective process within consciousness. This is not an attempt to engage directly with philosophical debates about anguish or death but rather my concern is to describe anguish and the compelling nature of consciousness in the process of self-reflection, to construct a space of research and analysis in the artificial space between the film and exegesis. To also understand the framing of the film *Apathy* the reader must keep in mind that the existential

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33 J.P. Sartre (2000) *Being and Nothingness*, London: Routledge—which appeals to the Berkeleian formula ‘esse est percipi’-to be is to be perceived’ For Phenomenology Macann (1993, *Four Phenomenological Philosophers*, London: Routledge, p.113) says that consciousness is already a consciousness ‘of’ (as Berkeley and Husserl admit too), it relates to the very being of consciousness to transcend itself, to exceed itself beyond. Sartre here extends consciousness to self-transcending with his pre-reflective cogito.
mission entails evaluating not only the task of writing to capture the self-reflective process but also formulating a visual proposition that manifests the process as a means of reflections on the reflexive mode of understanding and awareness of the anguish. In the film anguish is demonstrated in the eyes of the victims and the witnesses that the viewer confronts. Complexities in re-enacting past experiences that are encountered through daily life leave the viewer of *Apathy* with anguish. The film in that sense cannot offer a critical reflection because it is barred from the outset. That is why the viewer defers, in a sense, to a persistent possibility beyond calculation, i.e. the future. Yet the existential mission in the task of writing can help me to elaborate its effect on consciousness. As I will address the anguish further from Sartre - and reflect upon in visuality - the aim of the writing is to illustrate what goes in the mind of the witness in the face of anguish, and how and why the need to feel free becomes overpowering and crucial within consciousness.

Sartre brings into consciousness two distinguishing elements Being-in-itself and Being-for-itself; while Being-for-itself is the human consciousness that reflects in order to distance itself as the knowledge of being conscious of - as ‘all consciousness is consciousness of something.’ Being-in-itself is devoid of that consciousness. The condition of consciousness to be conscious ‘of’ derives from a conscious self as being the one -who is that consciousness. The conscious self is the only mode of existence. For consciousness to be consciousness ‘of’ something, and to be conscious ‘of’ is to exist oneself as the one, who is conscious. Consciousness in Sartrean sense could not be what it is unless it links itself to a being.

Consciousness becomes a necessary tool for me as a witness to elucidate the essential and the immediate reaction to the unknown, the unfamiliar and to what lacks itself in relation to being. The structure offered by Sartre requires me to consider the possibilities of making

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34 Hegelian categories of the For-itself and the In-itself change in Sartre by taking over the commanding role of ontological duality. The dualism of interior and exterior is eliminated. For detailed explanations: C. Macann 1993, *Four Phenomenological Philosophers*, London: Routledge, pages 110-158

choices and taking responsibility in the face of anguish by turning to the self and trying to grasp what being lacks in the face of itself as anguish.

In the examination of anguish Sartre takes Kierkegaard’s and Heidegger’s views. According to Kierkegaard anguish is also an apprehension of one’s freedom, whereas Heidegger describes anguish as the apprehension of Nothingness.36 Sartre agrees that anguish is the acknowledgment by the self of the possibility to make choices and that anguish is the creation / invention / discovery of Nothingness as future possibility. For Sartre human being invites Nothingness as the annihilating power of consciousness in Being-for-itself. Sartrean man is to find freedom in Nothingness, and this force of consciousness makes itself known in anguish as ‘the mode of being of freedom.'37 This vision of freedom that Sartre brings into Being is the realisation of the self in the mode of reflecting on and mirroring what is unbearable; a recognition and an apprehension of what transcends man. Sartre sees anguish as the mode of being of freedom because in the face of not-being, he claims that one feels the burden of the immense responsibility and as a result experiences anguish, and this anguish is the realisation of the kind of freedom that makes one aware of the possibility of making choices.

In order to come to grips with Sartre’s anguish, it is necessary to probe how he demonstrates it as anguish in the face of the future and in the face of the past. He describes anguish in the face of the future with an example of a man with vertigo38. The fear of falling while walking along the edge of a precipice breeds a threat of death, causing him to consider his possibilities. The reflective order alerts him where he is going; will he be able to walk along safely while thinking that he can easily fall? Nothing prevents him falling unless he pays

attention to where he is going. He can reject the situation, because the experience of anguish puts him in the mode of ‘not-being’ in the future. If he wants to remain on the path, he will still be troubled by the experience of anguish that displays itself with agony, and fear, creating terrified imagination of a possibility of him ‘not-being’. He can use this fear as a motive in order to put forward his possibilities in the face of the future. Sartre states that, ‘Fortunately these motives in their turn, from the sole fact that they are motives of a possibility, present themselves ineffective, as non-determinant. It is the counter-anguish, which generally puts an end to anguish by transmuting it into indecision. Indecision in turn, calls for decision.’ With anguish in the face of the future, he is able to put himself at a distance, and avoid walking along that precipice. The choice of not walking along that precipice is the freedom that Sartre infers. In the case of being a witness, the precipice can be said to be the abyss created by the unknown and the uncertainty that ‘the I’ encounters. In the face of abyss ‘the I’ may try to manage this anguish by reflecting on what is unbearable in order not only to come to terms with its reality but also to acknowledge the choices and take responsibility, because nothing prevents ‘the I’ ‘falling unless s/he pays attention.’ The reflective order is necessary for ‘the I’ (just like the man with the vertigo) in order to acknowledge the anguish and find a way to deal with it.

With the example of a gambler who is determined not to gamble again, anguish in the face of the past is illustrated. His resolution of not-playing anymore is always there, every time he is near to a gaming table, reminding him his past memories and the experienced fear. The fact that actually nothing prevents him from gambling again is the very anguish that is also the consciousness of freedom. If to imagine coming face-to-face with the anguish, and just like this gambler trying to turn the experienced fear into a manageable anguish, it is possible to say that, ‘the I’ will capture the possibilities in the face of the past and realise that nothing prevents her finding herself in anguish. The recognition and acknowledgment of the anguish in the face of the past may generate the pre-emptive preconditions for freedom.

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39 ibid. p. 56
‘That freedom’ Sartre states, ‘which manifests itself through anguish, is characterised by a constantly renewed obligation to remake the Self which designates the free being.’\textsuperscript{40} If ‘the I’ chooses to reflect the anguish, she faces the demand of consciousness to renew itself and transcend the anguish for the sake of freedom from its impossibility. I could only imagine this freedom as ‘a complex and textured array of overlapping notions that includes discovery, authenticity, independence, artistic creation, escape, bliss, uniqueness, irony, will, power, self-indulgence, fantasy, transgression, perversion, comedy, desire, genius, the call of the wild and the search for strange’\textsuperscript{41} as Ziyad Marar proposes in his analysis of the paradoxical relationship between feeling free and feeling justified. According to him the individual is left troubled in between feeling free and feeling justified in order to reach the kind of happiness s/he seeks; yet the relationship of these two aspects of being is caught in between self-expression (which is about turning away to feel free,) and the other (which is about turning towards the other to feel justified). What is significant is his usage of the word freedom, because if I am to imagine the freedom of the witness in the face of anguish, I cannot simply point out what kind of freedom that Sartre suggests is possible. But if I were to use the word in the sense Marar describes, I may, then, realise and recognise the means of choice and responsibility in a Sartrean sense in the face of such an encounter. I find the definition given by Marar to be helpful because it highlights the ways in which the witness may reach an understanding of the freedom which comprises not only responsibility but the notions of \textit{discovery, authenticity, independence, artistic creation, escape, bliss, uniqueness, irony, will, power, self-indulgence, fantasy, transgression, the call of the wild and the search for strange}. The freedom, however, requires not only the obligation to renew the self but also ‘a developed sense of agency, authorship, being in control of events rather than controlled by them.’\textsuperscript{42} Therefore, the freedom the witness seeks is hidden in the modes and notions of different approaches to anguish where the individual attempts to ‘control’ and manage the encounter and the event.

\textsuperscript{40} ibid p. 58  
\textsuperscript{42} ibid. p. 32
Turning back to Sartre, anguish reveals the possibility of making choices and to take responsibility of those choices. In the existentialist view, an individual is what s/he makes of her/himself by making his/her own decisions and moving towards the future. As part of the human reality anguish becomes the emotional apprehension of myself; condemning me to take personal responsibility for my own actions. In Sartre’s view of anguish, dealing with responsibility is one form of anguish; it is what makes a person aware of their choices and responsibilities. Because Sartrean man is always the one who chooses to take responsibility; when a man commits himself to anything, fully realising that he is not only choosing what he will be, but is thereby at the same time a legislator deciding for the whole mankind-in such a moment man cannot escape from the sense of complete and profound responsibility.43

The existential encounter, then, leaves me with a certain responsibility towards the impossibility for the sake of feeling free as well as for the sake of remaking the self. Nothingness haunts being in Sartrean sense. Anguish here can be said to be a state of consciousness of the human predicament, which arises when faced with the sovereign moment when one becomes a witness. If I were to give a description for anguish, this would be: the recognition of the self-reflection which is based on complete absence of justification.44 I as a witness - while considering my own past and future in the mode of not-being - will not be able to escape the anguish. The process of thought and self-reflection will leave me with a mode of self-consumption in the face of despair and anguish.45 The witness who faces the danger of inability to construct her/his possibilities in the face of anguish and despair, in its tormenting contradiction is bound to construct a reflective defence within consciousness in

43 J.P. Sartre (1973) Existentialism and Humanism London: Methuen, p. 30, he continues: ‘there are many, indeed, who show no such anxiety. But we affirm that they are merely disguising their anguish or in flight from it.’
44 Ibid. p. 57
45 Kierkegaard’s self-consumption in the face of despair resonates here: S. Kierkegaard (1989) Sickness Unto Death, London; Penguin Books, p. 48 Kierkegaard in his book Sickness Unto Death introduces us despair not unlikely to Sartre’s anguish, in the first chapter one can find so many similarities to Sartre’s anguish, where it can be said that Kierkegaard’s self awareness applies to Sartre’s self- consciousness. Except in the second chapter of the book, despair becomes the sin in the face of God. Now the distinguishing element here takes its shape different from Sartre’s anguish within the religious tone in Kierkegaard. Despair as sin becomes responding to a call, says independent researcher Rob Mathers, and it evokes conscience in a way that talks about hope and faith, which are not our concerns right now. It is also important to remember that Sartre’s atheist stance makes it more abstract when compared with Kierkegaard.
order to flee from anguish. Then can s/he not only overcome anguish and but also grasp its true colours: the sense of an irreversible comatose condemnation of the consciousness.

That sovereign moment and fear give rise to anguish. When the individual cannot handle the impossible situation, as a result s/he can attempt to take refuge in reflection in order to come to terms with what is encountered. I have observed Sartre’s idea of anguish and the process of thought that take over in order to reach a decisive moment which demands a counter anguish. The process of thought in altering the sovereign moment to anguish, and anguish to a counter anguish creates a double failure because indecision waits to turn into decision, non-determinant defence into determinant motive- as an act of judgment. The double failure requires not forgetfulness but an acceptance and a structure of exigency46 to develop into determination. Anguish requires here its own annihilation in order to produce the conditions in which its reflection becomes decisive towards creating a counter-anguish, only then does it come to bear itself. Sartre essentially sees anguish as something that cannot be overcome unless it is to be understood as consciousness of anguish. In the face of anguish, man’s decisions do not reflect the highest degree of personal judgment unless this anguish is to be recognized. The double failure is to accept this anguish while denying it, to flee from it while knowing that one is fleeing. It is a scar that will never forget itself, always itching and remaining forever. This is similar to Beckett-ian tendency, which does not want to go on, but unable not to go on.47

When the obedience is to anguish, not to consciousness of that anguish which might offer some freedom from its torment, I cannot reach an awareness of freedom as noted by Sartre.

46 Sartre’s idea of anguish in the face of the future and in the face of the past makes visible of the necessity of a structure, he calls this the structure of exigency.
47 As Beckett states, ‘the yeses and the noes mean nothing in this mouth, no more than sighs it sighs in its toil, or answers to a question not understood, a question unspoken, in the eyes of a mute…….who does not understand, never understood, who stares at himself in a glass, stares before him in the desert, sighing yes, sighing no, on and off. But there is a reasoning somewhere, moments of reasoning, that is to say same things recur, they drive one another out, they draw one another back, no need to know what things.’ S. Beckett (1999) Texts for Nothing, London: John Calders Publishers, p. 45
As if the anguish waits to be embalmed by consciousness, so that it would look all the more
promising and quiet, without reminding one of its unfamiliar and disturbing appearance.
Nevertheless, it is crucial to observe that the possibility of making choices in anguish brings
the apprehension of freedom that Sartre suggests. However, I cannot avoid its difficulty.
Anguish in the face of the future and the past demonstrated the individual in the process of
making choices. The witness in the face of death, dying, suffering and coma will not reach a
decisive moment without struggle. But the process of thought in which the witness engages is
bound to offer some freedom from the misery of the unknown. The witness in the hope of
dispelling the meaninglessness, I would like to suggest, cannot resist the temptation of an
apathetical attitude if s/he chooses to overcome the anguish, to accept consciousness of that
anguish as the response and decision towards its reality. Sartre’s existentialist perspective
argues that the individual is nothing except what s/he chooses to become and to do, as well as
what s/he chooses to know, under what aspect s/he chooses to see the world. This choice of
knowing is an exercise of the self, of the human predicament in the face of suffering, death
and dying, revealing the essential structures of consciousness by carrying out the self-
conscious reflection. This choice, supposing it is possible, it can only be stated as an anti-
choice in the face of anguish. What I mean by anti-choice is that it will not logically be made
but involuntarily adopted in consciousness when taking refuge in reflection. By creating the
counter-anguish the witness can attempt to reach to an awareness of a possibility of escape
which, I would like to propose, produces an enthusiasm with apathy as the single motivator.

Apathy:
In this self-reflective process the perceiving subject—the witness, in order to annihilate
anguish, accepts consciousness of that anguish, and let us imagine, creates the counter-
anguish. What if this counter anguish draws its power from apathy? The counter-anguish, to
think along with Sartre, recognizes anguish within consciousness by altering it into
indecision, and ‘indecision in turn, calls for decision.’ Can it be suggested that this decision is the decision to acknowledge apathy? The counter-anguish can be said to cause a state of mind in which the intention is gradually to become apathetical towards its consciousness, in order to deal with the absence of meaning. This apathy can be understood as the unrecognised and unspoken necessity of consciousness.

Apathy is not a failure of effort or a lack of apprehension. Rather, it can be seen as a defensive act; defence against Death, dying, coma and suffering. It is possible to describe this apathy as a protection, a decisive resolution and an anti-choice in the face of anguish. But how do I arrive at a state of apathy, and how do I start to remake the self? If I agree with Sartre that remaking the self becomes an obligation in the face of anguish in order to free myself from its impossible state, can, then, apathy be suggested as the freedom that I (the witness) seek? What is cruel here is the irony that turns the counter-anguish to apathy in order to negate itself in indecisiveness. The seduction of oblivion and the release from the effort both take place within the process of this counter-anguish that, I may add, draws its power from an apathetical attitude. As Hume confirms ‘reason’ here ‘should be the slave of passion’ to eliminate anguish from its void. Anguish in the face of absence is what individuals wish in order to transcend it, and only the one who desires will overcome.

Death, dying and suffering for the one witnessing triggers profound difficulty of reasoning and articulation. For the witness - unable to reason - death becomes as Zygmunt Bauman confirms, ‘the scandal, the ultimate humiliation of reason’ leaving no confidence to reason. Similar to his remark, here apathy exploits the consciousness of that humiliation as a necessity and an obligation in order to remake the self in a Sartrean sense. Remaking the self takes over the commanding role of apathy, to choose freedom from an impossible experience.

48 recalling footnote 34 bit more here darl – explanation here.
In the witness’s case, the kind of apathy I suggest can be said to operate all the courage and confidence towards negation as an anti-choice, in order to free herself/himself from it. Because anguish claims its own obliteration in the state of reluctance to suffer more when there is nothing one can do. As C.S. Lewis writes on the death of his wife, ‘you don’t merely suffer but have to keep on thinking about the fact that you suffer.’\textsuperscript{51} The existential undertaking\textsuperscript{52}, in the face of anguish, claims struggle, while considering the need to take responsibility of its decision. The process of thought does not arrive at a state of apathy decisively. It needs to build itself from a point where the self-reflective perceiving subject would see in its necessity a continuous imperative. The continuous imperative that would owe everything to the consciousness of discontinuity; anguish in the face of itself.

Freud, when he wrote his classic \textit{Mourning and Melancholia}, observed the work of mourning as the task of detachment: reality’s imperative which ‘behest cannot be at once obeyed.’ When ‘the loved object no longer exists’, the griever struggles with the demand of the libido to detach itself from the lost loved object. This struggle he says ‘can be so intense’ but the task is ‘carried through bit by bit, under great expense of time and cathectic energy.’ ‘Testing of reality’\textsuperscript{53} declares the loss and the anguish, demands and struggles with the task of detachment. This task of detachment, I may note, can gradually create an enthusiasm for apathy. Eventually, for Freud the griever must withdraw libido from the attachments in order to detach her/himself from the anguish. This is similar to creating the counter-anguish which recognizes a \textbf{continuous (reality’s) imperative} that demands an apathetical attitude as a means of solution and protection. But, to determine apathy as an anti-choice in order not to

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{51} C.S. Lewis (1966) \textit{A Grief Observed}, London; Faber and Faber, p. 10
\item\textsuperscript{52} I would like to call this process of thought that demands a self-reflective consciousness: the existential undertaking, in which its power declares its explanation nowhere but from consciousness itself.
\item\textsuperscript{53} S. Freud (1917) \textit{Mourning and Melancholia}, (translated by Joan Riviere,) General Psychological Theory. Ed. New York: Collier, pages 165-66
\end{itemize}
turn away from reality that ‘ensues, the object being clung to through a hallucinatory wish-psychosis’ cannot be assumed an easy task.

The psychological usage of the term apathy and the apathy I employ differ. Apathy is seen as a state of indifference in psychology, where/when an individual is impassive, unresponsive or indifferent, disassociated and detached from the aspect of emotional, social or physical life. The apathy I suggest here is not a sign of pathology or a disease. On the contrary, it may the inevitable and unavoidable deduction of the self-reflective consciousness when one goes through an existential mission in which the process of thought produces its defensive mechanism as a means of apathy. The witness strives for a level of apathy (the task of detachment in a Freudian sense) in order to handle and overcome the impossible state that s/he encounters. When the process of thought is analysed within stages (as I have tried to do with Sartre’s idea of anguish) of consciousness, it is possible to observe that there is a need to construct a counter-anguish. It is bound to turn itself into a form of apathy which troubles (me) the witness to see this as a decisive resolution and an anti-choice, while leaving (me) her/him with no other choice but to adopt this state eventually and involuntarily in order to bear its reality. The witness - the perceiving subject - tries to transform the perceived object into consciousness in order to change its unfamiliar appearance not only for the sake of meaning but also for a possible freedom and protection from its frightful bleakness. This bleakness can be said to draw its power from what Sartre calls passive sadness in his Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions. The passive sadness is where

We naturally draw back into ourselves, we “efface ourselves,”…that is the Refuge. The entire universe is bleak, and it is precisely in order to protect ourselves from its frightful, illimitable monotony that we make some place of or other into a “shelter.” That is the one differentiating factor in the absolute monotony of the world: a bleak wall, a little darkness to screen us from that bleak immensity.

54 ibid.
Under the *little darkness*, opposed to the unknown mystery of the outside, ‘the I’ will prefer to face the misery; as the voice from the holocaust articulates: ‘the misery’[^56] you knew was better than the mystery that you did not know.^[57] because the bleakness of this world and of the unknown provokes a violent and an unpleasant reaction for the perceiving subject in the face of the unknown mystery.

The self-conscious reflection offers not a solution but rather a decision and an anti-choice that will recognize the apathy within consciousness. Consciousness is here very much like a view, another perspective which is personal, intimate and agonizing, yet it is capable of forming its own *structure of exigency* for an *original possibility* to assure life, and to take responsibility. There is no doubt that the individual has been the witness and the spectator of the continuity as well as the discontinuity of being in its discontinuous order. This ‘divine continuity’[^58] (as Bataille would suggest) is the only thing that reassures life and death relationship even though the cruelty of death, dying and suffering always reveals the anguish to the point of disbelief and uncertainty in the mind of the witness.

Being is forced either to see and confront facts or to resent the change no matter how much s/he understands the rationale behind it or not. As a witness, I stare at the coma knowing that what I perceive brings no understanding or comprehension to my perception, because I cannot reasonably come to terms with its reality. Yet, if I am to reflect on this and turn to myself as the perceiving subject in order to make what is seen intelligible, I will encounter its unfamiliar appearance and will try to transform it into a familiar one. I am compelled to look at the world from a different perspective in order to detach myself from the unbearable. To recall Italo

[^56]: If the misery can be said that it is drawing the picture of apathy (which is witnessed already, which is known-anguish), whereas the mystery becomes the known unknown, the non-experience (which I will try to explore on the second chapter) that creates the abyss of anguish within its unknown ambiguity.

[^57]: A witness voice from the Holocaust, from the documentary BBC2: Auschwitz, (03/December/2004)

[^58]: Bataille states that ‘for us as discontinuous beings death implies the continuity of being’ where ‘man as discontinuous beings try to maintain their separate existences, but death, or at least the contemplation of death, brings them back to continuity.’ G. Bataille (1986) *Eroticism, Death and Sensuality*, San Francisco: City Lights Books, pages 82-83
Calvino’s text on Lightness where he says ‘whenever humanity seems condemned to heaviness, I think I should fly like Perseus into a different space.’ He continues

I don’t mean escaping into dreams or into the irrational, I mean that I have to change my approach, look at the world from a different perspective, with a different logic and with fresh methods of cognition and verification.59

Consciousness becomes a tool to look at the world from a different point of view. Apathy within consciousness is not lack of emotion, of motivation or lack of enthusiasm towards the reality but rather it is a decisive solution and an anti-choice, which eventually will encourage me-the witness to the point of acceptance. Imagine a Palestinian woman (a mother) that encounters daily violence and killing, struggling to envisage a future not only for herself but for her children. This woman under these circumstances cannot imagine a secure future and confronts Nothingness as anguish. But she has to try to live a ‘normal’ life for her children. Of course there are no easy answers or resolutions to assuage the difficult experiences. Yet the assimilation of the loss and redefinition of life and meaning, and that of death, necessitates a responsibility to ensure immunization against apprehension.60 This woman, deeply scarred by war and loss, has no opportunity to escape unless she has to accept apathy as an anti-choice in order to survive and to live a ‘normal’ life. Apathy is more or less like an unspoken understanding of anguish that will enable the witness to abide in misery’s infinite threat.

The existential destiny of the witness becomes Apathy: eventually and slowly turning out to be an anti-choice which is never chosen voluntarily but rather out of necessity. This might of course bring certain heaviness on the part of being. Nevertheless, the step from observations to theories, from reflecting to a determined decision does rest on the recognized necessity of a ‘shelter.’ Bearing in mind Sartre’s existential mission, the reason can hope to draw its own individual limitations only at the expense of overstepping and transcending them within

60 As Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross states, ‘we cannot function efficiently in the constant awareness of illness.’ regarding to the witnesses, to the patient’s family. E. Kubler-Ross (2001) On Death and Dying, London: Routledge, pages 139-160 This would easily apply to the victims and witnesses of war and violence.
consciousness. It is possible to capture this ‘shelter’ within the tendency to become apathetical gradually, and to accept this as an anti-choice for the sake of freedom from its impossible state.

Does apathy already exist, waiting to be evoked within consciousness in the face of anguish? I may observe that apathy has a reason that underlies change or becoming, as the crucial aspect of the self-reflective consciousness, which suffers alteration as well as demands its alteration. Given the witness’s helplessness, and the critical reasoning, apathy can have its definable and rational causes. Perhaps, the most difficult thing is to acknowledge the decision and bear it. Apathy, at least from an existential point of view, makes me want to believe in a possibility of an act of catharsis. I can assume that anguish once was a violation, but transforms itself into apathy and becomes that transformation not for the sake of justification but for the sake of tolerance towards its impossibility. At this point, apathy transcends anguish even though it seems more like ‘a cut that fits the knife blade that made it,’ the wound that stitches its wounding object inside (the wound) in order to forget.

This bleak life leaves the witness with a certain passive sadness in the face of loss, and the repetition is to occur, it is not once but so many times I might find myself facing the reality of loss and trying to acknowledge its absent meaning. Can the recurrence be reassuring because it recognises its reflection? Surely, in the rehearsal of anguish, there is no justification or rationalisation towards its repetition. Yet ‘the repetition,’ confirms Adam Phillips ‘is reassuring because it implies that there is a recognisable something - a pattern of relationship, a scenario, an impulse, a fear - that is being repeated.’ According to Phillips, ‘repetition confirms our powers of recognition, our competence at distinguishing the familiar from the unfamiliar.’ In that sense, there will be a rehearsal of anguish in the face of death, dying and suffering, undergoing its violent transformation and compelling me to recognise apathy and

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its cause. Put another way, ‘Once unpleasure has been experienced, its anticipated repetition has to be pre-empted.’\textsuperscript{63} However, this does not mean responses to loss and to the existential undertaking will evoke the same attitude towards the reality, but the repetition allows its anticipated echoes in the mind of the witness as part of the secure referent that of personal and intimate in order to (attempt to) reassemble its pre-emptive defence, which, I propose, is apathy.

Coma becomes the concrete representation of not-being and the immediacy whose image constructed not as a reflection but rather as a negation of the current moment of intense awareness. Self-reflective order throws me outside the moment and into a situation in which the separation with all its convulsions, contradictions and suspensions need to be transcended by recognising the anguish within consciousness, and transcend itself. This transcended anguish as a means of apathy brings into being agonising ambivalence in a profound and inextricable way for its own separation from its impossibility.

Death, dying, coma and suffering in the mind of the witness reinforce the infinite possibility of not-being in the face of anguish; creating a trembling: the essence of ambiguity.\textsuperscript{64} The determination is ambivalent and even though the purpose is ambiguous in its involuntary assessment too, in the dark a voice tells of a past with allusion to a present and to a shattering future in the mode of not-being: triggering the experienced fear and the impossibility of the void. What one is ‘not yet’ is to endure in relation to the future. To redirect one’s attempt to maintain some distance from what is encountered (for it not to overpower or collapse), there occurs the indecisiveness. The indecision breaks all the agreement with death and compels (me) the witness to a kind of realisation towards anguish within consciousness in order to create a counter-anguish that will turn itself into apathy as an anti-choice. That is when apathy is performed from a position of wished-for-freedom that will attempt to overshadow the

\textsuperscript{63} ibid.

\textsuperscript{64} Sartre states, ‘one can stop oneself from running, but not from trembling.’ J.P. Sartre (1994) \textit{Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions}, London: Routledge, p. 50
anguish where consciousness intervenes to transcend. **Apathy becomes the existential destiny of the witness** in the face of anguish, whereas it is the social destiny of the spectator, which I discuss in the third chapter.

Before concluding this chapter, it is worth remembering René Char where he confirms

Death’s task in life:

‘We will pass from imagined death to death’s actual reeds. Life brushes against us, distract itself with us in the process.

Death is neither over here nor over there.

It is life alone that kills us. Death is only the host who rescues the house from its fence and shoves it to the edge of the forest.

*Early sun, I see you, but only where you no longer are.*’

In this chapter, I framed the witness as the perceiving subject, taking refuge in reflection and existentially probing the anguish to reach an understanding of a possibility of awareness of a solution in consciousness. To focus on the conscious experience of the witness undertaking an existential mission revealed the process of thought in the face of fear and anguish, arriving at an apathetical mode. The filmic eye of the witness while capturing and describing the external struggle, the rationale and the logic of the exegesis gave way to reflective meditations and negotiations in consciousness. The link between the film and the exegesis, in that sense, illustrates both the external and the internal difficulties of the witness as a researcher and a film-maker. Through apathy a new configuration occurs where ‘the unmediated I’ and ‘the mediated I’ of the witness attempt to ‘manage’ the encounter and the event, gradually striving for the distance and the space to address, formulate, describe and articulate the suffering.

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65 R., Char *In a Crude Mountain Shelter*, (translated by Susanne Dubroff,) italics R. Char’s
To establish a new insight and analysis of the challenges confronted by the witness in the face of death, dying, coma and suffering necessitates not only interrogating the witness as the perceiving subject but also identifying with the Other as the perceived object. The Other’s condition has changed to such an extent that it is no longer possible to recognise for the one witnessing. The author - ‘the reflective I’ - perceives her aunt in a coma and struggles to construct a relation to the reality of events and S’ unrecognised body. The existential encounter compels understanding and recognition of the Other who is struck by the disaster because the condition-absence of the Other triggers an unknown/unfamiliar impossibility. This chapter is an attempt to propose an original approach of the witness and analysis of how the witness handles the experience of disaster and absence of the Other. Nevertheless, this attempt is not one of solution but an exercise in the possibility of concern and connection that the witness is capable to construct. What occurs when the witness tries to turn the unbearable to bearable, unfamiliar to familiar is the focus of this chapter.

In order to enact an inclusive and original scrutiny of the witness’s approach, my research utilizes several works by Maurice Blanchot, particularly The Writing of Disaster and The Instant of My Death. His approach to the Other (influenced by Emmanuel Levinas1) is concerned with the necessity to recognise the impossible experience. Blanchot introduces two different relations: the Other’s relation to me and my relation to the Other in the face of disaster. In the latter there is no formulation of an easy relation whereas in the former he sees the Other as the Persecutor who ‘charges me with measureless responsibility.’2 In both cases there occurs obedience to passivity which he identifies with human weakness. Yet he formulates answers to the Persecutor, the unbearable paradoxes and to the impossibility in the task of writing. Blanchot’s critical and unique approach to the Other and to the

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1 The chapter does not reflect upon Levinasian approach to the Other when focusing on Blanchot’s ontological questions. However this mode of inquiry becomes important as the thesis progresses. For further reflections please see E. Levinas (1981) Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence, London: The Hague
disaster, neither nihilistic nor existential but creative, makes it possible to capture the witness’s mind-set. It not only gives rise to an interruption in time but also meditation with exposure. With the ideas deployed from Blanchot, the chapter portrays an/the author (who is a witness) in an attempt to express the uncertainty/impossibility in the face of the Other as necessarily formulating her own Other within the gap to be able to speak of the encounter. This approach to the Other presents difficulties of an unusual sort which trouble the witness to confront and to encounter.

It is significant that so many writers and artists have covered (or more accurately, tried to uncover) the unjustifiable absence of the Other in their work in order to overcome the terror and give meaning to the absence. This part of inquiry draws attention to the ways in which writers like Simone de Beauvoir (on the death of her mother), C. S. Lewis (on the death of his wife) and artists like Orlan and Diamanda Galás articulate their suffering. With the purpose of examining the articulation of the impossible experience of the witness (and of these writers/artists) Maurice Blanchot’s thought-provoking ideas on the disaster and on the Other provide a deeper understanding and offer a guide through impossible experiences and emotions. It is important to state that Blanchot’s stance is manifested not as a means of mourning but rather as a means of meditating on disastrous thoughts in order to ‘learn to think with pain.’ What is communicated is the violence of the incomprehensible and what is confronted strikes as a means (in the form) of disaster. In this respect, his language allows the author not only to construct and recognise ‘the reflective I’ - as it conceptualises and contextualises the disaster - but also to create distance from the suffering and create her own Other within the gap.

If perceiving the image of the Other presupposes distance and separation in order to give meaning to what is perceived, then this meaning is to be contingent upon the relation to the Other and to the reality of events that waits to be structured out of experience. The study scrutinizes the witness implicated in a dialogue that is exterior to ‘the I’ trying to nullify the moment of the encounter in

\[3\text{ ibid. p. 145}\]
order to sustain the necessary relation to the Other and to the disaster. ‘The reflective I’ reconciles and compromises the encounter of death, dying, suffering and coma. This chapter presents the approach/condition of the witness as the most reflective that reveals **one’s own Other** - as invented - out of experience as well as out of necessity. It states that one’s own Other emerges in order to conceptually handle the impossible experience in the face of the Other and the disaster.

With particular reference to the ways in which the impossible experience is articulated, the investigation speculates the witness’s difficulty to relate to the Other who confronts the disaster along with **the meaning that waits to be constructed for the sake of reality**. It probes not only the Other but the gap of separation from ‘the I.’ The separation invites a suspension and an interruption between the witness and the watched. This is when the un/knowledge of disaster strikes and the absence of meaning haunts the witness that the suffering awakens one’s own Other and abandons it to the gap. Blanchot defines this gap as an ‘interval’ which reveals itself in ‘between no longer and not yet.’

This portrayal could be applied to coma, as *no longer* being alive and *not yet* dead. The approach to the Other involves an engagement with the gap. The gap preserves the questions by keeping them open and by allowing the *interminable and incessant* exposure that Blanchot assigns to the language of the impossible.

Through Blanchot’s writings and ideas on death, the Other and the disaster, this part of the thesis elucidates and develops the line of reasoning of the witness’s own Other within the gap as the crucial response and responsibility for the perceived object. This argument in relation to the overall thesis answers the conditional approach of the witness to the Other and to the disaster. The analysis proposes **what ties one to the Other and disaster is one’s own Other within the gap** as the original contribution to knowledge. While the written text explores the means to capture/describe/structure one’s own Other within language, the visual representation utilises Blanchot’s idea of the Other and disaster in a way where the viewer becomes the Other and stares at the anguish. The most basic human experience resonates and wears the mask of blankness. The aim of the practice-component is

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4 ibid.
to demonstrate the witness in between captivity and escape, from a position of weakness. The film *Disaster* complements the written text by means of displaying this gesture and response to the Other.

**The existential encounter of the witness**

**Perceived object who is struck by disaster:**

S’ eyes have been expressionless and unresponsive already for two and half years. She has been secured against the outer world. The disaster sealed the promise of her being. She is in somewhere else. Everybody says - me included - that she is hearing, so talking and chatting continues with/around her, but for how long and how!

*Open your eyes*

*Make us surprised, *

*Look who is here, ohh you have not seen her since…. *

**Pretending pretentiously. Deluding consistently.**

It is startling: the dilemmas between what is real and what is not. More precisely, to what extent must I try to perceive that body which is lying there motionless as a proof of S’ existence and for how long can I really delude myself that she might be how she used to be?

**There is no undoing of the disaster.**

She is almost dead -1% chance of surviving-present (inhale and exhale) without a section of brain.

*Is this a miracle?*

*Miracle of the disaster?*
We did not lose her completely.

Some bodies are at peace and rest six feet under, but what about the unrecognisable bodies in bed, around us? How to comprehend what happened and how to acquaint one’s self with disaster? The disaster happened and condemned the body to a motionless state. One conceives the disaster in the past and experiences outside of one’s self. Nevertheless, it becomes almost the absolute mutability, without any proper answers to so many overly complex questions.

There is no realization of the disaster, it happened and now it threatens by breaking every attempt to give meaning. Its meaning is ambivalent, and withstands the desperate attempt of the witness to pull it out of itself and into his/her world. The responsibility towards the Other leaves me in search for a substitute as a means of response. Yet the impossible experience escapes me because in relation to the Other there remains the silence that cannot be easily spoken.

Dealing with disaster occurs with the awareness of what has already taken place, so that an understanding of the knowledge of disaster is ready to take place. The actuality of the event-the disaster-does not put you in question. Because it annuls ‘I’, it can only be the event of the other, as Wittgenstein points out in Death’s case quite realistically; ‘Death is not an event of life. Death is not lived through.’ Just like that, the disaster never happened for the witness, and the Other -the victim - will not accompany the shadows of Death yet.

This is not even her ghost, simply her body being alive in the literal sense, nothing more - as it seems. One remembers Simone de Beauvoir’s text on her mother’s death from cancer. She writes astonished at the violence of her distress, looking at her mother’s body: ‘this body, suddenly reduced by her capitulation to being a body and nothing more, hardly differed at all from a corpse - a poor defenseless carcass turned and manipulated by professional hands, one in which life seemed to carry on only because of its own stupid momentum.’

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The reality is whispering, yes. Let us imagine the unrecognisable body opened her eyes, she decided to look at the world around her; what kind of actuality and reality will S comprehend as opposed to my unknowingly concealed intelligibility? The new undertakers of our time - doctors - say that if S ever opens her eyes to reality around her, the quintessential experience will start with that very inception and intuition, which might lead to more suffering, both mentally and physically.

'NOTHING IS KNOWN.'

One of the exercises of the self is to take refuge in reflection in the face of anguish and to transcend this anguish by negating it: to annihilate in order to put aside what causes interruption in consciousness, as well as in order to save one’s self from the un-knowledge of disaster. The witness reflects upon the anguish. S/he attempts to reverse its reflection towards remaking the self for a possible flight: this was introduced in the first chapter, as one of the attitudes and dispositions of the witness. S/he confronts the necessary reflection as a means of anguish and adopts an apathetical attitude in order to discharge what is unbearable. Apathy here as Maurice Blanchot would confirm, becomes the ‘spirit of denial applied to the man’ who has chosen to be ‘sovereign.’ This kind of sovereignty characterises anguish in the face of freedom as apprehension of self-conscious reflection, and underlines the necessary and involuntary attitude without an immediate relation to the Other. This sovereignty also, as suggested in the first chapter, emphasises the witness’ existential destiny in the face of death, dying, coma and suffering, as transforming itself into an anti-choice of apathy, which results when reflecting on her/his own as the perceiving subject.

In this part of thesis, I analyse the perceived object whose conditions changed when disaster struck. This is distinct from the self-conscious reflection of the perceiving subject who accepts anguish and eventually recognizes apathy indecisively in order to overcome the terror. When I attempted to analyse the process of the self-reflection of the witness within consciousness as the perceiving subject,

thought was drawn to boundaries for the sake of freedom from its agony and terror. The involuntary acceptance of the anti-choice was suggested as a resolution of the self-reflective process when the witness was turning away from the other: the attention was ‘insider’s’ point of view, if you like.

The Other is the concern of this chapter. The disaster cannot be captured, along with the relation that waits to be constructed. The attempt to articulate what happens in the witness’s mind when looking at coma - the perceived object - and to construct a relation to the Other and to the disaster is an exercise on the process through understanding rather than knowing, identifying rather than solving or looking for a resolution. The relationship between life and death for the one who is looking ‘outside’ in order to comprehend her/his own death is a necessary approach through our being with others. The kind of deduction I seek is based on the relation to the Other and to the disaster, without offering a solution but rather an idea, an approach and an insight to the possibility of concern, and connection that I as a witness am able to construct.

The thoughts of disaster become disastrous thoughts.

The witness, it can be said, is left with the unknown and the ungraspable impossibility: the absolute desolation of the coma that disorients every meaning and knowledge by placing its witness outside of its reach, in a distance. It is as if, the way ‘I’ perceives the disaster is from a distance where words are replaced with silence and recognition with separation. The knowledge of the disaster becomes mute, as well as the decision and the response: the decision to acquaint oneself with the disaster, and to accept the response. This mutable gesture can be captured in the visual representation - in the film Disaster. There is an expectation of the manifestation of the disaster but the viewer cannot see or stare at it even, because its existence continually evades the witness and the spectator. The exposure of thought is hidden and not revealed behind the agony, yet ready to confront the expression in a radical

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8 Simone de Beauvoir reminds us that it is not possible to capture what death means by only taking an ‘insider’s’ point of view alone. We also need to understand and bring to bear what we can learn from an ‘outsider’s’ point of view since the subjective data is also dependent on the objective perspective for us to construct a relation to the world. S. de Beauvoir (1969) *A Very Easy Death*, (translated by P. O’Brian) Middlesex; Penguin Books; S. de Beauvoir (1972) *Old Age*, (translated by P. O’Brian) London; Andre Deutsch/Weidenfield and Nicolson
sense. Even though the old woman in the film avoids being afflicted by the Other and disaster, the
anguish is confirmed within the denial: the denial of the absent Other as well as the denial of the
knowledge of disaster. The viewer confronts the old woman in the film who avoids seeing, and staring
directly, rather what is confronted is the very threat into reality that is unknown. The watcher is not
sure what the old woman encounters but glad not to know because only in that way s/he can delude
herself/himself that the escape is possible. It brings back the trembles between the known and the
unknown, while leaving one with certain heaviness towards captivity and escape. There is resistance,
which cannot be dismissed however the false comfort cannot liberate one from the misery of the
Outside. All conjecture concerning the unknown threat escapes the viewer – just like the witness -
with the knowledge of what stalks her/him continuously. It is the expression of recoil before death and
suffering, yet no mastery is ever possible over disaster or the Other. In the visuality of disaster; what
is seen is the despair’s defiance, which immerses the soul in darkness. The film Disaster displays –
repetitively - the multiplication of the images to the point of defocusing and trembling. This creates a
suspension of belief as well as disbelief since the viewer does not really ‘see’ what passes the old
woman and what the old woman avoids ‘seeing,’ yet, stuck in between captivity and escape.

The editing pace intentionally suggests a pattern of repetition and trembling to emphasise an
unsettling – and unsettled - reaction. The sound/scream is the infinite reflection of the cruel monster
that introduces the misery and anguish. Diamanda Galas’ agonising voice and piano tunes penetrate
the images and almost precede them. While one is made acquainted with the chilling reality of
suffering in Diamanda Galas’ multi-octave voice Maurice Blanchot’s idea of disaster and the Other
frames the film. For Blanchot the disaster escapes and nullifies me with its impossibility, and the
Other who is struck by the disaster is the faceless stranger that exceeds my grasp and escapes my
power. The video work demonstrates what escapes me, what cannot be captured but what arrests me endlessly within its impossibility by displaying the gesture of the witness in denial.

The film does not offer any explanation. Only escape and denial are options, while the written text focuses on formulating an answer to the impossibility. Because the relation to the Other and to the disaster necessitates an explanation of reality in the task of writing. Nevertheless, I ponder how important is the concept of necessity to a given explanation for reality if nothing in the explanation compels acceptance? Why accept it anyway?

Maurice Blanchot and the language of the impossible:

The emptiness waits to be filled with meaning, and this meaning is contingent upon my relation to the Other and the Other’s relation to me. A concern and connection with the Other affirms my being in this world. Zygmunt Bauman reminds us that responsibility for the Other is what stops meaninglessness and if there will be a confirmation of the meaning and an affirmation through my relation to the Other, its possibility is hidden within the connection that I am able to construct. Nevertheless, the responsibility offers no expectation and no calculation of gain or reward, because it appears ‘uninvited; it is not let in knowingly- it has been neither deliberately conceived, nor accepted with a sigh of resignation. It is there whether I know of it or not.’

In a/the confrontation and face-to-face

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10 ibid. p.45 Baumann explores Levinasian ethics. Levinas states, ’The responsibility for the other cannot have begun in my commitment, in my decision. The unlimited responsibility in which I find myself comes from the other side of my freedom, from a ‘prior to every memory’, an ‘ulterior to every accomplishment’, from the non-present par excellence, the non original, anarchial, prior to or beyond essence…It is as though the first movement of responsibility could not consist in awaiting nor even in welcoming the order (which would still be a quasi-activity), but consists in obeying this order before it is formulated.’ Cited from Baumann: E. Levinas (1981) Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence, (translated by A. Linges.) What we are trying to show; how the witness attempts to construct a relation to the world within the responsibility for the Other, but our concern is not to display Levinasian ethics here.
with the Other, something fatal and irrevocable occurs to expose itself within the responsibility in order to construct an ‘order’ and a ‘concern’ with the Other.

As a witness, the Other’s existence is not immediately as sure as my own and the disaster is not present to me - never will be - so all conjecture concerning her and the disaster is entirely lacking all meaning. In order to understand the disaster, I must come to grips with the Other and her changing conditions; since this emergence refers to the essential relation. It seems as if the disaster reveals the meaning to me; only then is the appearance capable of revealing to me the relation to which it refers - as part of the reality.

Unspoken thoughts of disaster, keep asking the same questions repeatedly: How is the knowledge of disaster experienced? How is the Other viewed in relation to me when the disaster, which takes place here in this world, extinguish every attempt to give meaning, to understand, to rationalise and to deal with the Other? In order to be able to answer these questions, I follow Maurice Blanchot’s distinctive way of thinking in order to construct our relation to the Other, and to come to terms with the disaster. French thinker Maurice Blanchot has been known as one of the most influential writers on death, disaster and the Other. He published The Writing of the Disaster in 1980 that raised reflections upon the attempts to understand, to abide in and to deal with disaster’s endless threat, and the Other whose absence needs meaning. While utilizing Blanchot’s idea of the Other and the disaster I will introduce such terms as one’s own Other and the gap in order to describe what occurs in the witness’s mind in the face of such encounters, as trying to associate herself with the notion of disaster and as attempting to handle the situation conceptually.

I speculate on the insistence of the witness’s need to formulate a relation to the Other and to the disaster in a way where a kind of meditation with exposure can happen through language. What I mean by meditation with exposure is that while ‘the I’ – of the witness - stares at the perceived object and tries to come to terms with the unknown and unfamiliar appearance of the Other and the disaster, something crucial and immutable happens, and exposes itself in order to form a relation to the world.
for the sake of reality. Given the witness’s vulnerability as well as responsibility and response to the
Other, there occurs a situation, I would like to suggest, that reveals itself within the awareness of a
persistent gap in time: between ‘the I’ – of the witness - and the Other, between the witness and the
world. While the Other exposes herself to the witness within the impossibility of a relation, the
witness meditates her/his relation to the world with/in language as it conceptualises and contextualises
the experience. Therefore, an interruption in time allows ‘the I’ – of the witness - to undertake
meditation with exposure in order to connect and attach to the encounter of the Other and disaster.
The language, here, becomes its voice of suffering as well as its truth; not as a means of method or
solution but rather as a means of approach to give meaning to the meaninglessness and to the
impossibility.

It is possible to observe in Blanchot this imperative approach and meditation with exposure, which are
both unthinkable without language. To reflect upon the experiences and language of Blanchot will
help me not only to identify the process of meditation in the face of disaster but also to describe the
quiet screams inside through language when confronted with the Other. It is necessary to recognise
the power of language in Blanchot which is ready to reveal its neutral (neither one nor the other:
impersonal) authority within the expression of the impossible experience as ‘the exposure of thought
to language [that] transgresses its own unity and totality.”¹¹ In Blanchot, the narrative voice invites the
fragmentation of the experience where the desire of overcoming the terror of death is articulated in the
dream of writing. The language as writing transforms the physical reality into something ideal, which
is the negation of terror while creating its own power upon the writer and the reader, by becoming
anonymous and displacing the subject through language.

There is a stance demonstrated in Blanchot that takes its form of practice from writing; either in
fictional form, critical commentary or philosophical. In his essay ‘Literature and the Right to Death’¹²
Blanchot assigns literature an *irreconcilable task* which manifests itself in contradictory moments,

Stanford/California; Stanford University Press, pages 300-44
divisions and oppositions which all refer to an unstable ambiguity of the human expression of the impossible. This irreconcilable exercise of the human expression unveils one’s own Other within the gap. It is a force and the form that maintains its own language by encountering the Other, the disaster and the obscure depths of existence. The language deployed here is an attempt to phrase the horror and the impossible experience. If ‘the I’ of the witness is able to capture and create this language through writing, I can imagine that this is where writing allows the witness to take a distance from suffering as if the witness in anguish disjoined from her/himself. One must add that the language here exists to express only its own impossibility. But how is it possible to illustrate what happens in the witness’s mind in such encounters with respect to the experience of impossibility, when the witness tries to construct a relation to the Other and to the disaster?

With Blanchot’s idea of the Other and the disaster, I describe one’s own Other which lies dormant within the gap, insistently re-creating and making itself known with every encounter, forever marking me, you and the Other by death; becoming the black dog. Language here takes on two functions: there is the crucial aspect of a restraining cage as well as the emancipation of being where Other’s affliction declares itself within the demand for responsibility. One’s own Other, I will argue, becomes the witness and the victim at the same time drawn from the absence and infinite distance in order to evoke the impossible while creating the gap in time.

Blanchot suggests two languages or two requirements in order to answer to the impossible: ‘one dialectical, the other not; one where negativity is the task, the other where the neutral remains apart, cut off both from being and not-being.’ I can apply these suggestions, and with Blanchot’s narrative voice (and mine) try to elaborate the state that the witness finds him/herself in the face of such encounters. This approach both offers entering into a discussion with and about his theory where the

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13 An individual’s death is said to follow them around like a little black dog. ‘In ancient European folklore, the dog is seen as both the guardian and consumer of dead spirits, especially with the Wild Hunt where a pack of dogs with a master of the hunt flies through the sky looking for lost souls.’
http://www2.prestel.co.uk/aspen/sussex/blackdog.html

writing of the witness is also exposed.\(^{15}\) This impossible language speaks the knowledge of suffering, which is essentially linked to Death and disaster as well as to the responsibility in the face of exile from its impossibility. The exile is taken to hyperbole and given a setting that ‘the I’ of the witness can no longer push death away but at the same time cannot occupy the same order of time with the Other, writes Blanchot. In this sense I as a witness cannot attribute Death to the Other. Rather my own Other declares the impossible within the gap. An approach to impossibility can be seen as an accomplishment.

The gap:

The experience of disaster and death is preoccupied without knowing in order to protect what remains in the mind of the witness. Therefore, the experience (or rather the non-experience) feeds the act of refusal and denial. Is the knowledge of disaster bound to offer an acceptance or an allusion to reality for the sake of continuum? The questions on the knowledge of disaster create denial and withdrawal: ‘the burden that weighs upon one as the obligation to assume it’\(^{16}\) even though one feels obliged to exclude the very knowledge. For instance, the comatose state causes an interruption in the continuity of life, and the disaster cannot be captured through its appearance, because it is outside of the realm of the experience of the witness. This impossibility of attachment to both the coma itself and the disaster breeds a particular situation towards its knowledge in time, that of a gap or an interval. Blanchot tells us that this interval occurs ‘between no longer and not yet’\(^{17}\) which can easily be applied to the coma itself as no longer being alive and not yet dead. This gap brings forward the meaninglessness of the knowledge that cannot be depicted to which I cannot direct myself, but it directs itself to me in the face of the ungraspable. What is experienced here is not the knowledge but rather its impossibility of any meaning that manifests itself within the gap. The witness, who is left with the unknown and unfamiliar appearance of the Other, experiences an interruption in time, and engages this space in time in between no longer and not yet.

\(^{15}\) That is to say that the reader will bear witness to the ‘meditation with exposure’ of the writer who is a witness (I), while she tries to understand the process within the language and with the help of Blanchot’s way of thinking towards disaster and the Other.


\(^{17}\) ibid. xi
The witness, let us imagine, encounters the eyes of death; the eyes of the coma (in my case) that create detachment, passivity and an odd sense of patience so that is it to obliterate the occurrence? When the witnesses were told that S opened her eyes after months for the first time, all rushed there as if everything was to change: to look at S’ eyes and to see that charming light and desire to live. However, there was no awareness of reality. One can easily get lost within the illusion of imagination without relating any thought to reality.

**Expectation at its highest optimism and hope…**

*The light of the candle was suddenly*  
*blown out,*  
*The darkness was once again welcoming*  
*the witnesses as if never left.*

Yes, the witnesses went to see S’ eyes.

**Those Empty-Lost Eyes.**  

There was *no* charm, *no* air, *no* wind, and *no* affection towards life around her. S just wanted to close them again as if she had been so tired that she could not even dare to give them some breathing anymore.

*The air moves…silently.*  
*E pur si muove.*  
*(And yet it moves.)*

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18 Galileo Galilei, after his recantation, cited from T. Lynch (2001) *Bodies in Motion and at Rest*, London; Vintage
A hushed conflict has emerged from those eyes. The demand from the person whose eyes are lost in an unknown place and whose eyes whisper death, and remind the un-knowledge of disaster, is ready to scream aloud inside the abysmal gap. The eyes of the victim create blindness in the eyes of the witnesses.

**Reluctant disappearance of the eyes…whisper-less.**

When one precisely and quietly witnesses the empty-expressionless eyes of a being, that powerful emptiness requires a simple affirmation and confirmation? Is that all? Blanchot observes ‘Alone, and thus exposed to the thought of the disaster which disrupts solitude and overflows every variety of thought, as the intense, silent and disastrous affirmation of the outside.’\(^{19}\) It is assumed that the eyes are the only parts of the body, which declare to us the arrival of death as the disastrous affirmation of the outside. The eyes of coma - when they are open - seem already……dead. They move, from right to left, they do not follow, they just dangle, as if the wind is there to lead them, like an old swing. Dangle without dangling. The suspense that is created by the reluctant movements of the eyes, welcomes despair in the air, which is ready to give up and let go itself: must let go itself - otherwise it stays, it hangs itself there in *between no longer and not yet*.

Restoring meaning fulfillingly for the sake of a possibility of awareness is an attempt to understand the constant failure of every approach when one tries to acknowledge what is in ‘between no longer and not yet.’ The gap, which is bound to reveal itself with every occurrence of the disaster and with the encounter of the eyes of death, opens an impossible and devastating abyss: an abyss, which I as a witness can delve into or try to seal. It is the battle veering between engagement and escape.

No motion has she now, no force;
She neither hears, nor sees;

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Rolled round in earth's diurnal course,

With rocks, and stones and trees.\textsuperscript{20}

No, S is not dead. Yet.

That is the (only) truth that ‘the I’ is required to accept because there is the proof of the ticks tacks of the machine which confirm S is still breathing. In spite of the fact that the denial, the un-knowledge of disaster and death already are out of their cave, and writing endlessly on the blackboard of the mind, ‘you cannot try to solve the unknown’: I as a witness am compelled to recognise the unfamiliar in order to make it familiar.

The thoughts of disaster are filling the void almost perfectly and submitting me to neither denial nor acceptance but imprisonment: a kind of imprisonment that would try to overcome the impossible state and obliterate the occurrence. Blanchot describes this state as approaching a terrifying threshold where the imprisonment manifests itself through a ‘delirious and desiring machine.’\textsuperscript{21} This \textit{delirious and desiring machine} requires an explanation and recognition of the unrecognisable while trying to ‘make dysfunction function’\textsuperscript{22} according to Blanchot. As if the quintessential evidence appears to be quite quiet within its presence of the absence.

This process of making unfamiliar familiar, making \textit{dysfunction function} puts ‘the I’ of the witness in a situation where every attempt to give meaning to what is perceived and to what has already taken place reverses itself and leaves the witness, I would like to suggest, within the gap of between no longer and not yet. Within this gap there is the unknown, and the unfamiliar that demand an understanding and recognition in order to come to terms with the reality of loss, and in order to find a way to deal with the absence of meaning. This \textit{delirious and desiring machine} that Blanchot observes works mysteriously for the sake of meaning and freedom from the unknown.

\textsuperscript{20} Cited from D.J. Enright (1983) \textit{The Oxford Book of Death}, London; Oxford University press, p. 113
\textsuperscript{21} ibid. p.8
\textsuperscript{22} ibid. p.8

Wordsworth, \textit{A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal}.
But how does ‘the I’ recognise the unknown? The familiarity of the unfamiliar, how does it build itself from an unknown subject? This impossible state is demonstrated in the reflections of C.S. Lewis’ passage from his book *A Grief Observed* which was written after his wife’s death. He asks:

Why do I make room in my mind for such filth and nonsense? Do I hope that if feeling disguises itself as thought I shall feel less? Aren’t all these notes senseless writhing of a man who won’t accept the fact that there is nothing we can do with suffering except to suffer it? Who still thinks there is some device (if only he could find it) which will make pain not to be pain. It doesn’t really matter whether you grip the arms of the dentist’s chair or let your hands lie in your lap. The drill drills on.23

In Lewis’s reflections on the death of his wife, readers observe that grief and the denial appear like self-pity, fear and anger towards the unknown. He looks for an answer within the words, assumptions and perceptions of the reality: the reality of the loss, the reality of the unfamiliar and the unknown. He sees death as revealing the only one thing, which was always there: the vacuity.24 The emptiness, that disintegrates the mundane and the familiar that one has been holding onto without noticing, needs to be filled with understanding - a kind of understanding where one will come to terms with the unknown as if known and knowledgeable. The state of mind concentrates on what is uncanny and fearful - or what appears to be - as if there is no other choice, and leaves Lewis within the gap searching for an escape from alterity in time. When one needs to attack those uncertainties in order to comprehend what is hidden behind within its relation to the Other whose absence needs understanding, as Lewis, one tries to meditate with exposure and to explain by means of the inexplicable.

It is also possible to try to depict Lewis’s frustration with Blanchot’s words, and draw attention to the gap that marks the separation, and turns him (Lewis) aside to the infinite becoming of dying in the encounter with the absent Other. As if Blanchot describes Lewis’ meditation with exposure in such a way that being is suspended as soon as thinking is invited to recognise its own interruption. He writes:

The other cannot consent to affirm himself as the Utterly Other, for alterity does not let him rest but works upon him unproductively, displacing him ever so slightly, completely, immeasurably, so that escaping the recognition of the law and of every denomination

23 C.S. Lewis (1966) *A Grief Observed*, London; Faber and Faber, p.29
24 ibid. p.25
whatsoever, the other-desire without either desiring a subject or desired object- marks the
desire (the separation) of dying: the dying which is in play in every living being and which
removes each (ceaselessly, little by little, and every time all at once) from itself as identity, as
unity and as vital becoming.\footnote{M. Blanchot (1995) \textit{The Writing of Disaster}, London; University of Nebraska Press, p. 34}

The separation that declares itself within the absent Other and within the gap is an experience of
weakness in the face of alterity and an overpowering world for Blanchot. Yet as revealed in Lewis \textit{the
drill drills on}. The demand (of an understanding) or the constraint (of the impossible) both confirms
the separation while attempting to make the continuous out of the discontinuous. The expression of
the impossible experience communicates without knowing: as if from the gap it speaks of its own
language in order to find a way to construct a relation to the absent Other.

The way Lewis attacks is also by materialising the loss and denial in a way that the purpose of the
effort develops into understanding within the absent Other, only when ‘effort can make sense where
its purpose is intelligible.’\footnote{M. Midgley (1997) \textit{Wickedness- A Philosophical Essay}, London; Routledge, p.43}
Therefore, the act of struggle declares reconciliation with the
unidentified, and the act is bound to become cathartic as long as the purpose can be intelligible.\footnote{Adam Phillips says ‘To be human in the best sense is to have some understanding- to be able to give some
kind of account-of what we are suffering from.’ A. Philips (2002) \textit{Equals}, London; Faber and Faber, p.103}
The perception of reality makes us more aware of the existence of the void, and the vacuity is bound to
deliver its meaning with the recognition of death, disaster and suffering. The discontinuity that one
confronts in the face of death and disaster is not a form that allows sovereignty over anguish.
However, thought persists within the continuity, within the realisation and awareness of what
disappears and continues past one, past the event or an occurrence, while stepping into the gap. It can
be suggested that inside the gap is where everything happens: the segregation, the passivity, the
weakness, sinking into the void and the recognition of the infinite becoming of dying in the encounter
with the Other. Once it is there, it receives life as a wound.\footnote{As Maldoror suggests, ‘no longer to witness the livid pack of miseries relentlessly pursuing the human lizards
over the sloughs and pits of immense despair. But I shall not complain. I received life as a wound and I have

25 M. Blanchot (1995) \textit{The Writing of Disaster}, London; University of Nebraska Press, p. 34
26 M. Midgley (1997) \textit{Wickedness- A Philosophical Essay}, London; Routledge, p.43
27 Adam Phillips says ‘To be human in the best sense is to have some understanding- to be able to give some
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28 As Maldoror suggests, ‘no longer to witness the livid pack of miseries relentlessly pursuing the human lizards
over the sloughs and pits of immense despair. But I shall not complain. I received life as a wound and I have

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At some point, the witness can realise that this gap is her/his power, even though this is not itself a solution to anything. It is an affirmation of the distance that preserves the questions by keeping them open and by allowing the interminable and the incessant exposure of thought that Blanchot assigns to the language of impossible experience. Within the gap the impossible experience in the face of the Other and disaster both liberates and imprisons the thought of overcoming the terror that is encountered. It is possible to anticipate and to suggest that the expression of the impossible experience forms and shapes the gap; as if the knowledge of disaster can only be experienced within the gap; not as knowing but rather challenging to deal with it. But what about the Other, what happens within this gap to the Other, and how is the relation constructed through this gap?

One’s own other:

Nietzsche’s Zarathustra asks the question; ‘What is the heaviest thing, you heroes?’ and reflects on the impending, yet obscure in the face of irreparable disturbances. ‘Is it not this:’ he poses ‘to debase yourself in order to injure your pride? To let your folly shine out in order to mock your wisdom?’ These questions are to remind us the kind of struggle that the heaviness strikes us in the face of the Other and of the disaster. The witness decides to undertake meditation with exposure and to approach the terror head-on. Therefore, one must ask: what is the heaviest thing with respect to disaster and the Other and how is the Other viewed in relation to the witness?

In the case of coma, I perceive the Other (S) as a faceless stranger (as Blanchot would say) that I can neither come to terms with nor draw her face. It leaves me utterly passive and withdrawn from all prediction, from all knowing. It not only creates a kind of uncertainty towards life and death but also creates a violent incomprehension that would imprison the thought within its impossibility. If to follow Blanchot’s approach that illustrates both relations; that of my relation to the Other, and that of the Other’s relation to me, I could maybe explain more clearly.

Supposing that as Blanchot observes: in my relation to the Other, the Other surpasses me, and escapes me, I as a witness cannot capture the reality, because its violent and unjustifiable appearance anguishes itself, restrains itself, yet exposes itself while condemning me to an impossible situation. If it is true that such an encounter can cause the radical experience in an unjustifiable way, there would be no formulation which would affirm a relation. That is why Blanchot observes this state as the human weakness, which results in obedience to the infinite passivity that draws me (the witness) to its game by disindividualising me even from myself. Here ‘the I’ disappears and reveals the Other in my place. One can imagine that what becomes the heaviest thing here may be said to be not the isolation but rather the engagement with the Other that debases me and mocks my wisdom. According to Blanchot, in my relation to the Other ‘the I’ – of the witness - becomes weak unjustifiably.

But the Other’s relation to me, Blanchot suggests, ‘everything seems to reverse itself: the distance becomes the close-by, this proximity becomes the obsession that afflicts me, that weighs down upon me, that separates me from myself,’ while abandoning every reason, every judgement. This is where the Other becomes the Persecutor for Blanchot. He sees the Other as the Persecutor whose existence devastates, burdens and nullifies me, ‘by charging me with measureless responsibility which cannot be mine since it extends all the way to substitution.’ The Persecutor takes the thought away from me. ‘The I’ becomes the prisoner of the disaster and the Other, according to him.

In the face of such paradox, the absolute anguish incarcerates ‘the I’ of the witness inside the gap and does alienate her/him from outside. In the Other’s relation to me, this is where it is possible to state that ‘the I’ encounters the gap - the interval which is described as that of ‘between no longer and not yet,’ and confronts the Persecutor who is actively and passively marking me by Death and disaster. The Other becomes the Persecutor, for Blanchot, not only because s/he overwhelms me with his/her

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30 ibid. pages 20-21
32 ibid. pp. 19-25 His work in particular is influenced by Levinasian ethics and the question of responsibility to the Other.
appearance but also with his/her crimes ‘by making me answer for his/her crimes.’ This state is the very sadomasochistic tendency that the Persecutor causes me to consider, because there is both a passivity and a responsibility towards the Other who actively (as Blanchot argues) and passively (in a comatose state) tends to put me outside of the world and triggers the impossible state. The passivity and the responsibility that I feel leave me with an unbearable paradox. The difficulty of a relation to the Other and to the disaster can be said to claim a response and a responsibility while demanding nothing of my determination which brings passivity. It is a position that eliminates ‘the I’ but at the same time necessitates a response on the part of being in order to construct a relation and to understand the Other.

It is possible to examine why Blanchot sees the Other as the Persecutor; for instance in the events that occurred on the unspeakable disaster, the Holocaust. By being a witness that it is irreducible to the simpler terms and to the experience of disaster, Blanchot describes a young man (presumably Blanchot himself) who is taken from his house by a Nazi lieutenant in his story The Instant of my Death. Before we start to scrutinize it is necessary to distinguish the Other - the Persecutor - in his story and in the comatose state that I am trying to analyse. The Persecutor in his story is the Nazi lieutenant whereas in my witnessing the Persecutor is the coma that stares back at the witness. There is a salient difference between these two encounters: the first actively afflicts me because he (Nazi lieutenant) can kill me, while the latter (the coma) creates a passive affliction. Yet Blanchot’s Persecutor is the disaster and the Other either actively or passively afflicts me and leaves me with a cruel paradox and an impossibility in the face of itself.

His story reveals the testimony of a young man who was placed before a wall to be executed. Death already had arrived, staring at the eyes of the young man. A Nazi lieutenant was showing him the way for the final order: ‘This is what you have come to:’ putting his men in a row in order to execute him. Nevertheless, at that instant, a distant explosion happens and Russians take over. The young man, who

33 Ibid. p. 19
was standing before Death, slowly catches himself getting away, disappearing to a distant forest and
miraculously stepping back from the brink of the disaster with a certain feeling of lightness:

The feeling of lightness that I would not know how to translate: Freed from life? The infinite
opening up? Neither happiness, nor unhappiness. Nor the absence of fear and perhaps already
the step beyond. I know, I imagine that this unanalyzable feeling changed what there
remained for him of existence. As if the death outside of him could only henceforth collide
with the death in him: “I am alive. No, you are dead.”

He describes an event that is not the act of dying but rather it is the death itself; the possibility, which
overshadows all other possibilities. The possibility of an escape could only be a miracle, yet, the
young man in the face of an absolute death is saved, and ‘prevented from dying from death itself.’
The cruelty here takes the shape of the Other – the Persecutor, and when death escapes him, he is left
with a certain lightness; the awareness in that calm is the very infinite passivity (in the face of disaster
and the Other) forever marking him by death. The experience withdraws itself. The lightness of the
escape suggests neither freedom nor downfall, neither a relief nor rescue but a faithful passivity
towards the impossible. Because the young man (Blanchot), had already encountered Death, when he
was brought before a firing squad. Such an encounter brings back together all the trembles between
understanding/not understanding, between real/unreal, between knowledge/un-knowledge.

Blanchot (the young man) draws the picture of an unspeakable approach to disaster and the Other in
this story with his different voices that of one dialectical and the other not. Blanchot talks of an
encounter of Death that the extreme experience as if lived through in reality. It summons
Wittgenstein’s statement where he says ‘death is not lived through,’ but, here, what is confronted in
Blanchot’s text is that he depicts the encounter of Death as if he already is dead and telling us this
intense, unspeakable impossibility from an unknown place. His story reveals an experience that is
unknown even to Blanchot, yet, he arrests this impossible experience within the gap which would be
to occur at once with the eventuality of death. In a manner of anticipation the witness (and the victim)
is forced to see and participate in an event which does not happen. The thought invites a suspension

35 ibid. p. 3 Blanchot starts to his story ‘I remember a young man – a man still young – prevented from dying
from death itself – and perhaps the error of injustice.’
of Death, London, Chicago: Chicago University Press, pages. 53-81
that opens up to its discontinuity and tries to complete itself in order to designate the unknown and the impossible experience. The experience declares itself from the gap, from the suspension, from the interruption only passively and creates abeyance \(^{37}\) (with Derrida’s phrase: demeure en instance) not only for the sake of distance but also for the necessity to recognise itself.

The abeyance that leaves this young man in anticipation to think against thought confirms the patience of passivity that Blanchot observes in *The Writing of Disaster*. Through patience, all relationship between a patient self and me, says Blanchot, is destroyed so it becomes ‘the passivity of dying whereby an I that is no longer I, answers to the limitlessness of disaster.’ \(^{38}\) What the young man encounters is the unknown, death and disaster, and abeyance is its persistence upon the patience that does not reach him in the present but rather it is always-already there with respect to quiet-infinite affliction: ‘Other’s affliction and the other as affliction.’ \(^{39}\) What remains is abeyance that demands patience.

When the young man tells himself after the escape: ‘I am alive. No, you are dead,’ it is possible to suggest that it is the very gap that imprisons the disastrous thoughts inside and speaks of the encounter. This is also where ‘the I’ disappears, and Death as the Other takes over. However, the reader is not sure who is speaking and with whom. It is the inner dialogue answering himself as well as the other. Derrida in his reading of Blanchot’s story emphasises that a witness is speaking to other in a dialogue, which is almost transcendent, \(^{40}\) where it can be said that captivity and escape merge both declaring what is no longer and not yet. According to Kevin Hart Blanchot rejects the notion of transcendent being. Therefore, it is the experience of non-experience that is seen as transcendental for Derrida that speaks through the inner voice. \(^{41}\) This may be said to be the manifestation of the gap. \(^{42}\)

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\(^{37}\) Derrida draws attention to the very abeyance (demeure en instance) in Blanchot’s story: ‘as an encounter of the death outside of him with the death that is already dying in him’ which creates the abeyance as if Blanchot (the young man) is still waiting for this encounter to happen. For further reflections please see J. Derrida (2000) *Demeure, Fiction and Testimony*, California: Stanford University press, pages. 95-6-


\(^{39}\) ibid. p. 25


staring from inside at itself, seeking an impossible answer. As if abeyance becomes the shroud of the
gap therefore a violent intensity takes over without salvation, which is neither mine nor the Other’s,
but rather the gap that creates itself endlessly within its own Other.

The minute that he was put before Death, the reader knows along with the young man what is bound
to happen. The readers have seen, stared at and read about similar scenes. The Persecutor’s remark
where he says ‘this is what you have come to’ is the very ultimate call of Death, already an invitation
that leads to nothing but Death. Derrida’s reading of Blanchot’s text confirms that the reader
confronts not only Blanchot but also the narrator, and the young man. It is a testimony of the witness.
According to Derrida ‘the narrator testifies for the witness that is for the young man. The witness ‘for’
the witness, the narrator testifies first ‘for’ an accused.’

The voices merge in the fictions of Blanchot, here, the voice of the narrator blends into the Other - the young man. He not only puts
himself in the place of witness, but he also becomes the victim.

It is the Other-ness here that interests Blanchot (and me), which directs itself to the witness as the
unknown, and plagues the witness in bitter reflections of the impossible. The reader confronts the
experience in a radical sense in his story; the experience that evokes the impossible with his different
voices: the narrator, the witness and the victim-all voices are bound to convey, I would like to
suggest, one’s own Other by dissolving the self, eliminating ‘the I’ and transgressing the Other. This
can be suggested that it is where/when one’s own Other enacts the perpetual obliteration that the
known unknown, the experience of the non-experience, and thought ensure the uninterrupted
abeyance, realising its own uncertainty while continuously gazing into the abyss as well as trying to
construct the necessary relation to the Other and to the disaster.

42 Blanchot’s interval, I have chosen to call Blanchot’s interval the gap that imprisons the Other and me both,
inside of itself and does alienate from outside by negating every meaning and knowledge, condemning me to
neither activity nor passivity- but rather to the action of passiveness.
44 see Blanchot’s other stories, Thomas the Obscure, Death Sentence, When the Time Comes – all can be read in
It is necessary to clarify what I mean by one’s own Other. This configuration is bound to make itself known in the face of disaster and Death by imprisoning the witness within the gap, creating the wounded space\textsuperscript{45} with Blanchot’s words, where neither protection nor destruction touches. One’s own Other cannot authorize choice but rather forms the necessary relation both to disaster and the Other out of experience as well as out of necessity. I would like to suggest that it is what ties us to the impossibility of experience, passively. The very patience of passivity that leads ‘the I’ to suspend the event, to reserve the distance in abeyance structures one’s own Other within the gap in order to be able to answer to the Persecutor, and to be able to deal with the Other and the disaster.

The absence of meaning and the absence of knowledge bypass my relation to the Other, leaving ‘the I’ to an infinite distance and passivity, while the Other’s relation to me discloses the gap that pierces itself, crashes into itself and breaks through without reaching the object in thought. The alterity of the Other confirms the mystery of the outside within the persistent failure of every approach in order to realise its abysmal uncertainty. In the hope of dispelling the emptiness, the unknown and the absence, the demand for certainty speaks to the fascination of a fantastic impossibility that opens a rift, a wound. Therefore it constructs its own Other as a means of departure seeking out an originality to stimulate the hyperbolic tendency towards abeyance not only for the sake of a relation but also for the sake of lightness: this may be the heaviest thing.

While trying to capture what takes place in the witness’s mind when attempting to construct a relation to the Other and to the disaster, the emphasis has been on the language that speaks without knowing

\textsuperscript{45} Blanchot in the context of human relation pictures the Outside as the thought of neutral that is speaking voluntarily and involuntarily in order both to response and refuse the knowledge of disaster. This neutral language; neither one nor the other but impersonal, speaks of the impossible experience in order to overcome the encounter of terror. Blanchot observes this space as the wounded space. M. Blanchot (1995) \textit{The Writing of Disaster}, London; University of Nebraska Press, p. 30
He talks about Blanchot’s atheistic stance: ‘…[he] takes the Outside to dispel any possibility of belief in God: no unity and light are possible there. We can see Blanchot, then, standing at the juncture of two important positions: exposing the philosophy of neuter (Parmenides and Heidegger), and affirming the thought of neutral (Heraclitus and Char). The one bypasses the infinity, while the other restores infinity at the level of ethics while maintaining it as a resource of an atheism that cannot be quite affirmed.’ Also, see pages. 224-5
and that tries to handle the impossible situation as a means of exile from its misery by creating one’s own Other within the gap. But one can anticipate that this language changes form and develops into another medium in order to meditate and reflect upon the impossibility. It is possible to find some examples in art and music where the artist challenges to create her/his own Other by undergoing physical transformation such as Carnal artist Orlan46 or lamenting for the Other in a way as if from the gap the necessary relation screams out loud as a means of meditation in Diamanda Galás’ sorrowful voice.47

Orlan’s art is a confrontation with the conventional ideas to the point of a masochistic demonstration by undergoing nine plastic surgery operations between 1990 and ‘93, challenging the relationship of body and identity. What the audience sees in Orlan’s work is the transgression-parody in order to pursue a radical definition of freedom. Could I actually say she was deliberately creating her own Other? The operations were genuine performances where the audience witnessed all the stages in an operating room: portraying the dripping blood and scars, while Orlan under the influence of local anaesthetic was at the same time reading from significant literary text or sometimes using the blood to paint a series of self-portraits. The operating rooms become her studio she says. She sees her own

46 Orlan, http://www.orlan.net/, webmaster: M. D. de Virville, M.C. Flaude, designers and writers: M.C. Flaude, R. Gatel, date of access 10.08.04
47 Diamanda Galás, http://www.diamandagalas.com/, website manager: C. Vazquez, webmaster: K. Wagner, minister of information and researcher M.Flanagan, date of access 02.10.03
body as ‘an autopsied corpse that continues to speak, as if detached from its body.’

In that sense, it is as if her own Other becomes and resonates with the corpse like body, and speaks of the suffering.

This series of operations were criticised and generated debates about whether Orlan was insane or ‘merely a sensation-hawking huckster.’ Yet, she went through these operations not for the sake of pleasing a larger society by becoming more beautiful according to conventional aesthetics but rather to engage in her own Other as an act of freedom: freedom from her own identity and her own body.

Eleanor Heartney says ‘Orlan points out, she is opposed to any kind of “either/or,” the idea that we must choose between one vision of reality and the other.’ It confirms the wounded space that is seen in Blanchot: the impersonal being, deliberately interrupted by the religious and conventional thoughts, by the outside. She not only becomes the witness but also the victim, where the subject and the object distinction are dissolved while challenging the concept of pain. One reads in her website that the carnal art does not long for pain, does not seek pain or redemption as a source of purification; it rather swings between defiguration and refiguration. She claims art belongs to resistance, which challenges our preconceptions, and disrupts our thoughts: ‘it is outside the norms, outside the law against bourgeois order: it is not there to cradle us, to reinforce our comfort, to serve up again what we already know. It must take risks….it is deviant. Art is its only justification.’

When one tries to understand what compels the artist to undertake such extremes for the sake of art, is the hyperbolic tendency towards nihilism. It can be argued that in the very performances of the artist, this is a sort of escape from one’s own self-reflection and image in order to confront conventional ideas about the order of nature. Orlan challenges not only her own Other but also the distinctions between subject/object, between real/unreal and between familiar/unfamiliar, bringing back all the trembles in the face of the Other and reminding us of our own Other in the face of disaster, death and danger. This is not to say that one’s own Other is represented within one’s own body. Rather it can be

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48 Extract from Orlan’s lecture *This is my body, This is my software*, presented on 21 March 2007 in Rutgers University, New Jersey, USA, on July 26 2007 in University of Western Australia, Perth. [http://www.orlan.net/](http://www.orlan.net/)


50 ibid. p. 229

51 ibid. p. 215
suggested that the similar kind of meditation with death, dying and suffering is exposed in Orlan’s work through her body. What is confronted in her work is the radical and an exterior experience, and a detached kind of suffering that is also explored above in Blanchot. One’s own Other, here, underlines the delights of cruelty and disobedient convulsions striving towards where sovereignty and nihilism merge. While Orlan’s is the provocative exploration of one’s own Other with an indifferent lucidity; liberating herself from her reflection, Diamanda Galás’ chilling voice addresses the inhumanity, redemption, damnation and human suffering in the face of unjustifiable violation of the disaster.52

In Diamanda Galás’ multi-octave voice one encounters both the annihilation and the liberation, both feeling free and feeling justified -with the other whose haunting voice/words confirm all the darkest screams, all those cries, anguish and grief, the gap and one’s own Other. It is as if she sings from the gap for the witnesses that are condemned to silence, and not only challenges the unspoken injustice done to humanity but also confronts one’s own Other in a way where the audience directly experiences the suffering within her screams. Diamanda Galás, similar to Blanchot, asks us to be able to think with pain. One could hear the secret language of suffering for the Other who is dead.

Her work is highly political and concentrates on a range of topics such as AIDS (which her artist brother Philip Dimitri Galás succumbed to in 1986), isolation, political imprisonment, alternative morality and historical issues that all highlight awareness and destruction in the face of impossible experiences. She asks: ‘How does an individual survive in the most absurd, excessive situations? What kind of spirit does it take to survive? What does the person have to tell him or herself in order to survive situations that are impossible?’ Known only to the witness and to the survivor, these questions introduce the necessity to give meaning to the impossibility, occupying us with our own Other within the gap in order to structure a relation to the world.

52 Not only in art and music but also in films we come across with the same kind of provocative explorations of death, sex, danger and one’s own Other, i.e. David Cronenberg’s Crash.
Diamanda Galás’ voice is the voice of concern that sings and screams ‘like a demon going to war, a
dvalkyrie scatting, a lizard queen seeking revenge for the dead,’ while treating ‘her piercingly beautiful
multi-octave voice as an instrument whose sound defies description, penetrating like wind to the bone,
resurrecting the dead in the living.’53 The responsibility and response for the Other and to the disaster
can be captured in her passionate commitment to give voice to one’s own Other for the ones whose
screams imprisoned inside, just like Blanchot’s language that touches the experience in its secret and
exposes the human expression of the impossible.

The responsibility to/for disaster and one’s own other:

Inexpressible life
The only one in the final analysis to which you consent to
unite yourself
The one that is refused to you every day by beings and by
things
From which you obtain with difficulty here and there a
few bare fragments
At the end of merciless fights
Outside of it all but submissive agony crude end.54
René Char

This inexpressible life in the face of disaster and death displays the absence of meaning: it starts by
giving rise to the emptiness with the very first encounter and condemns itself to the unfathomable
impossible by drawing one from the order, leaving her/him to Nothingness, and in silence. Within the
silence, those merciless fights are to lock one away from outside, from the Other and from one’s self
in order to formulate one’s own Other within the gap.

The encounters, I have analysed, put the witness in distance involuntarily and as a consequence, I
suggest, this creates the gap within one’s own Other in order to answer to the impossible. This
distance may be said to be the exile from the impossible. If the encounter of terror brings an
awareness of the exile to this gap in order to formulate one’s own Other as suggested, then this is the
very moment that the witness has to assume a kind of responsibility towards the reality. One can

53 Extracted from recent press items in her website, please check
exploit one’s own Other by taking the responsibility as a response to the Other. Conversely, one is always-already exploited, manipulated and tortured by the Other and by the un-knowledge of disaster to the point of indifference, separation and passivity. Here according to Blanchot the immediacy and the absolute presence of the absence put the witness in a situation that the exile needs to be understood as an attempt to construct a relation to the Other and the disaster. Thereby, the immediacy is ready to exile from the realm of experience for the sake of infinite distance and passivity. Blanchot states that it is the infinite - ‘a violent abduction’\textsuperscript{55} - where one is left with the unbearable paradox. For Blanchot, that absolute paradox is the very reason that disaster puts the Other in a situation where the Other escapes ‘the I’, exceeds my grasp and brings the violence of the incomprehensible.

The encounter with Death and coma creates the rupture. In the immediacy of my relation to the Other, and Death (that the Other and the disaster occupy endlessly towards their meaning,) leads ‘the I’ to take responsibility. But ‘the I’ will never be ready to give itself to Death or to the Other, but rather the un-knowledge constructs the space in which one’s own Other emerges. This approach to or apprehension of death arrests ‘the I’ with the experience of anticipation.\textsuperscript{56} What kind of experience of anticipation emerges from the gap?

The disaster annihilates our relation to the world and puts the witness inside the gap and creates one’s own Other to construct a relation to the Other. This formulates the necessary response and responsibility towards the Other and the disaster. Here the responsibility invites an obligation: I have to assume a kind of responsibility in order to give meaning to this state. So can I say that the responsibility is the exile to alterity and change in time that endlessly withdraws ‘the I’ from outside, from continuity, by separating me from myself, and once again revealing the Other in place of me? As evaluated above in Blanchot, this demand for responsibility requires an impossible language that is

\textsuperscript{55} M. Blanchot (1995) \textit{The Writing of Disaster}, London; University of Nebraska Press, p. 24, he talks about the word’s definition by Levinas, where language as contact is defined as immediacy-‘it is the absolute presence which undermines and overturns everything.’

\textsuperscript{56} Derrida reminds us in \textit{The Gift of Death} that the approach or apprehension of death evokes an experience of anticipation towards the meaning of death that waits to be given what in fact cannot be simply constructed appropriately without the other. Please see for further reflections: J. Derrida (1996) \textit{The Gift of Death}, London, Chicago: Chicago University Press, p. 40
 impersonal which is ‘separated from subjectivity, from all forms of present-consciousness without either understanding it or bearing it.’\textsuperscript{57} That is where the gap intervenes, gives rise to the wounded space, where one’s own Other engages indifference, passivity and the apprehension of death where sovereignty and nihilism merge.

One’s own Other is private and concealed within the individual: between ‘the I’ and the Other it tends to construct its own gap and it tries to obliterate the un-knowledge, the non-experience and the unknown, always-already falls into the gap. The knowledge of disaster and the Other endlessly constitute the absolute and irrevocable status of being, reminding mortality, alterity, mutability while renouncing death. It is possible to suggest that \textbf{one’s own Other is formulated out of experience but also out of necessity in order to provide distance to stare and address our relationship with death}. Death takes the shape of the Other, the disaster and the impossible, nevertheless this does not mean that I fall into an absolute denial because this is how the certainty of death is expressed through the language of one’s own Other. The private language of one’s own Other is exposed to the witness not by way of consciousness but by way of confrontation and need to give meaning to the void. Here there is no decision or determination towards a resolution in one’s own Other, instead there is the object (perceived object – the Other), and the exposure of thought that ‘learns to think with pain,’\textsuperscript{58} in Blanchot’s words.

One’s own Other is the cage inside, following Kafka’s aphorism: ‘A cage went in search of a bird.’\textsuperscript{59} As if the cage is always in search of a bird for some kind of completion but always fails to complete itself, rather this cage domesticates the encounter with death, without coming face-to-face with it; it welcomes the abyss endlessly, but at the same time it sustains itself in death, by digging a grave for every Other that accompanies the shadows of death, dying and disaster in the hope of dispelling one’s

\textsuperscript{57} M. Blanchot (1995) \textit{The Writing of Disaster}, London; University of Nebraska Press, p 27
\textsuperscript{58} ibid. p. 145
identity in relation to the unknown and non-experience. It is exposed either within the language or within the thought - that eludes its meaning - or rather within the quiet screams.

The individual sits outside and sees people walking, always likely to fall down but not prepared to fall down. The way one connects oneself to the world and to the Other is hidden within the relation that one is prepared to construct. I am required to take responsibility not as an obligation but rather as a response to the world and to the Other. The vicissitudes of life - perpetually changing, dying and renewing itself - signifies the need to operate a certain meaning upon meaninglessness and nothingness in the face of unfamiliar. One not only tries to create the meaning out of something that one does not know, but also confronts the disastrous thoughts within the gap which delivers nothing but the limitless insecurity.

This ‘limitless insecurity’ is expressed in one of Kafka’s stories. Kafka’s character in his story ‘He’ feels imprisoned, constricted by the melancholy, the impotence, the sicknesses on this earth, with no conception of freedom imagining himself resigned to a prison. ‘But it was a barred cage that he was in. Calmly and insolently, as if at home, the din of the world streamed out and in through the bars.’ Yet, he has never been granted a free life, which would not create any anxiety over him, because he has no anxiety of any kind about himself. ‘There exists, however, a Someone’ writes Kafka who is ‘completely unknown to him, who has a great and continuous anxiety for him-for him alone.’ This anxiety of Someone is the very Other that concerns him, continuously causing him terror and torture in the face of itself while his knowledge of the world changes indiscernibly. The denial becomes the

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60 The apprehension of anything-disastrous-can-happen-to-anyone-anytime.
61 Blanchot describes the ancient Greek myth of Orpheus (the poet and the musician) who arrives in Hades to bring his wife Eurydice back to life. But in one condition: to walk in front of her and never look back until reaching the upper world. Yet, he breaks his promise and Eurydice vanishes from his sight forever into the underworld. Blanchot talks about his punishment for his impatience, and the absence in words of Orpheus. ‘Through Orpheus we are reminded that speaking poetically and disappearing belong to the profundity of a single movement, that he who sings must jeopardise himself entirely and, in the end, perish, for he speaks only when the anticipated approach towards death, the premature separation, the adieu given in advance obliterate in him the false certitude of being, dissipate protective safeguards, deliver him to a limitless insecurity.’ Cited from U. Haase, and W. Large (2001) Maurice Blanchot: Routledge Critical Thinkers, London: Routledge, p. 64
63 ibid. p 154
affirmation of his own Other. The state of being in the gap is like Kafka’s character; when this man is left with two antagonists: ‘The first pushes him from behind, from his origin. The second blocks his road ahead. He struggles with both.’ This struggle over antagonistic tendencies of being occurs within the impossible by implying detachment on the part of being in relation to itself.

To create one’s own Other while annihilating the Other in and through the disaster is still try to oppose directly with the encounter and therefore to engage with the suffering that the encounter triggers. The language produces its own impossibility and precedes ‘the I’ as the power of expression in the face of the unfathomable. One’s own Other is not ready to expose itself without difficulty: it cannot be completed, even under our control. As Blanchot argues (whether I am ready to adopt this or not,) I will always have to cross the abyss and jump in order to grasp it. The Other and the disaster approach us all at some point in our lives, and even though the witness is left alone-haunted, s/he needs to work on it and take responsibility rather than denying it because disaster and the Other constitute our existence in this world. Thus, the Other constructs for me the actuality of my own Other within the gap, and that is how I conceptually become close to handle the impossible.

64 ibid. p. 160
ON REPRESENTATION AND THE SPECTATOR

CHAPTER THREE
The particular position occupied by this research through the first two chapters is situated within a context of the existential encounter of the witness in the face of death, dying, coma and suffering. A critical investigation of the stand of the witness; reflections on the reflexive mode of understanding/awareness to the ways in which the witness handles the impossible situation in the face of fear, anguish, the Other and the disaster have brought a crucial insight as to how the existential encounter is articulated and communicated within consciousness. The emphasis has been chosen to demonstrate that the existential destiny of the witness is Apathy. This chapter proposes that the social destiny of the spectator is also Apathy.

Any visual representation, especially when it comes to viewing and comprehending the images of death, dying and suffering, creates a disturbing pause and a distance from its reality while triggering a desensitised impression upon its spectator. In order to explore the distinction between being a spectator and witness, this chapter draws attention to the extent to which the visual representation of death constructs an individual’s perception of death, as well as the ways in which the reality of death is dealt with in the mind of the spectator as opposed to the witness. This part of the project develops as an inquiry that investigates the contemporary function of the images of death, and social stigma attached to death in the context of images used in media while describing the spectator’s attitude.

The spectator’s attitude resembles that of a tourist’s. When John Taylor defines the spectator in his book Body Horror as ‘tourists of reality,’ he talks about the spectator as anaesthetized when confronting ongoing repulsive photographs in media. In Western culture where the loss has become an embarrassment, claiming its mentally secure characters, with Phillip Aries’ words by banishing more and more sadness and mourning from the society; the mourner/the witness has been disquieted,

1 J. Taylor (1998) Body Horror, Manchester; Manchester University Press, p. 21
2 P. Aries (1994) Western Attitudes toward Death from the Middle Ages to the Present, London: Marion Boyars, p. 102 ‘One does not have the right to become emotional other than in private, that is to say, secretly.’ p. 88
shut down, and is condemned to quiet screams behind the closed doors. This chapter probes how the spectator is expected to make some noise. The spectator will not be able to see her/himself in the position of the victims, not only because it is outside of her or his realm but also because s/he cannot really imagine the reality that the victims go through unless s/he is to be a witness or a victim.

Through a consideration of the attitude towards death from Philip Aries, the aim is to identify to what extent death’s display in media is pertinent to the principles of values, particularly in the way which the actuality of the perceived image is dissipated with the help of media. It poses further questions on the spectator's response, and on manipulation of the attraction and fascination. With particular reference to the ways in which the images of death are consumed, and the image-spectator relationship is perceived, the investigation focuses on the purpose that is attributed to these images and the spectator’s mind-set in the face of the representation. The methodology comprises sociological and cultural theories informed with a disciplined study of visual data in order to identify and propose a new insight and awareness into the ideas and values attached to the images of death.

The chapter concentrates on the critical discourses from Susan Sontag, particularly Regarding the Pain of Others, on the usage of the images. She probes whether one day we will get used to these images or not, whether they teach us anything and whether we need to see them. Zygmunt Bauman’s Liquid Modernity, and Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies explores the new contemporary attitude that is short-lived, vulnerable, problematic and ‘unaffected and unscathed.’ Of influence is Jean Baudrillard’s Simulacra and Simulations, and his Selected Writings, specially working with apocalyptic thinking and ideological control. Similarly Paul Virilio’s Art and Fear and Guy Debord’s The Society of Spectacle thought provoking ideas manifest the logic of spectacle and the spectator’s attitude in the face of bloodshed-representation.

5 J. Baudrillard (1983) Simulacra and Simulations, New York: Semiotext(e)
The project also theorizes and applies ideas from Sandra M. Gilbert (Death’s Door, Modern Dying and the Ways We Grieve) and from Adam Phillips (Houdini’s Box, On the Arts of Escape) in order to describe the spectator’s stunt whose only encouragement, in the face of disturbing spectacle and death’s display, is a detached curiosity and the superficial control with a Houdini-act like escapism as its only remedy for the sake of survival. The chapter elaborates and analyses the spectator’s attitude formulating ‘a callous treatment.’9 The visual proposition for this chapter - The Other - positions the viewer in a situation where s/he is implicated in the representation of a coma patient. This leaves her/him to make a choice whether she becomes a witness or a spectator with an impersonal stance like that of a doctor’s.

This chapter identifies the spectator’s approach and her/his stance to a doctor’s mind-set to his/her patients: with a perfect detached, abstract and ‘objective’ devoid-of-emotion while condemning her/his approach to a Houdini-act like escapism. It states that the spectator’s stance is not only a result of separateness that is created by the representation but also the result of the attitude towards death in the contemporary society that has put mourning behind closed doors. The purpose and focus of this part of the thesis investigate cultural and social aspects of the spectator. It offers a new insight and an original contribution to knowledge by identifying the spectator’s attitude with a doctor’s. It probes not only the spectator’s stance but also the desensitised impression within the perceived role of subject matter. Only then the author reaches an understanding of the differences and similarities between the witness and the spectator’s attitude towards death, dying and suffering.

From witness to spectator:

S still is still, with an eyes-open unconsciousness10 looking around but not seeing; capturing something that is only known to her, while breathing the same air with you and me, condemned to

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9 ibid. pages 37-39
10 S.M. Gilbert (2006) Death’s Door, Modern Dying and the Ways We Grieve, London, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, p.172 in Sandra Gilbert’s book we learn how ‘Numerous medical researchers and bioethicists have discussed the dilemmas of definition along with the moral problems posed by comatose
bed, motionless. S is not in a hospital bed, but is already dehumanised by the machine that is depersonalising her. Every urge to give meaning to what is perceived, almost imperceptibly, leads to a passion (or rage) to create the emotional void, to acknowledge the apathy and one’s own Other within the gap\(^{11}\) endlessly. **The witness already is becoming a spectator, recognizing the decision of the reality and struggling to tolerate its impossibility.**

The witness differs from the spectator, because s/he has already encountered the impossibility at the point of engagement and commitment. When one becomes a witness the existential mission, as suggested in the first chapter, one tries to assure and placate the anguish for a reason; a reason to restore confidence (that of falling and catching oneself from falling) in life and death, and to take responsibility for the sake of survival. If s/he were not to attempt to create meaning out of anguish, the anguish would hardly have any meaning. The devouring needs of a fast changing world require both for the witness and the spectator to draw his/her boundaries and wounds, because there is no death, dying and suffering that would not humiliate life, and destroy its claims.

Contextualising everyday experiences of the witness and the spectator to understand how the spectator’s response and attitude differs from the witness entails probing the images of death and their effect on contemporary consciousness. It can be said that the witness is capable of recreating misery’s shadow (recalling his or her own experienced fear and anguish) when s/he encounters the images of Death, dying and suffering unless s/he is to remind herself/himself to discharge the anguish\(^{12}\). It would seem that in the witness’s case, there is a possibility of always-already a call for reflection whereas in spectator’s case there is no call for reflection.

patients or by those in what is called a persistent vegetative state—that is, patients who “have an eyes-open unconsciousness” and thus seem to be “awake but unaware.”\(^{10}\)

\(^{11}\) To understand what I mean by the apathetical attitude and one’s own other, please see the first and the second chapters on Apathy and the Witness, and on Disaster and the Other.

\(^{12}\) My concern is not one of psychoanalysis but it is worth mentioning Freud’s own words where he says ‘the signal announces:… the present situation reminds me of one of the traumatic experiences I had before, therefore I will anticipate the trauma and behave as though it had already come, while there is yet time to think aside.’ Cited from The Broken Connection: On Death and the Continuity of Life by Robert Jay Lifton [online], also see Sandra Gilbert quoting Freud from Mourning and Melancholia where the task of detachment becomes ‘the work of mourning.’ S.M. Gilbert (2006) Death’s Door, Modern Dying and the Ways We Grieve, London, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, p. 16, here the work of mourning declaring its detachment as well as its apathetical attitude.
When death and suffering occur in someone else's body as an image or a narrative, there is always a pause (the sovereign moment), which conceals the reality and masks the dangerous ground of perceiving the other's body and suffering away from the viewer, so that one can feel safe and protected from its reality, up until something similar might take place in our own lives and catch us closely-unexpectedly all of a sudden. That is exactly when one becomes a witness and when death is near; when the suffering finds its way on one of the loved ones' bodies or on yours.

In consciousness the anguish takes over, and the witness succumbs to the temptation of apathy while creating one’s own Other in the face of disaster and the Other. Another way of capturing this apathy is to look at a witness account from the Holocaust as to how the witness of a dreadful encounter recognises and exercises the experienced fear and dread. The voice of the witness tells us how he is condemned to turn away his gaze from the scene - in order to create the necessary apathetical attitude towards the gruesome settings of the world around:

Right across from us was a charnel house filled with corpses, not just inside but overflowing all over. There were corpses all over. I lived, walked beside dead people. And after a while it just got to be so that one noticed, and one had to say to oneself, “I am not going to see who it is. I am not going to recognize anyone in this person who is lying there.” It got to the point where I realized that I had to close my eyes to a number of things. Otherwise I would not have survived even at that time, because I saw people around me going mad. I was not only having to live with all these things, but with madness.13

The witness who has chosen to be sovereign in the face of such unspeakable disaster is a survivor by becoming apathetical. There is a lot to escape from for the reader of the above account let alone for the witness. The witness - as the bearer of memory - and the spectator continue hearing everyday these kinds of stories, reading them in the paper, noticing them on television, or gawking at the images of death, dying and suffering. The disturbing thoughts remain so quiet in the mind that one cannot even acknowledge empathy or apathy while the difference between reality and its representation is being blurred. Yet the stories and images do not let the demons lie at rest for a while. The representation of death, dying and suffering has an unsettling effect on consciousness and ‘history’ as film-maker Atom Agoyan confirms ‘is not perfect, it is filled with human behaviour that

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is so dreadful that we can be ashamed, horrified and feel sort of alienated.’

We remain horrified, ashamed and feel alienated because history is still repeating itself and is still demonstrating the same dreadful behaviour while both the witness and the spectator are forever attempting to alter suffering into something bearable and tolerable.

The witness holds responsibility. It is a noun: the witness. It is also a verb: witnessing. Conversely, the spectator can reject any responsibilities since s/he does not experience the agony and suffer the consequences. In order to understand whether that is really the case we need to analyse how the spectator handles the situation in the face of the representation of reality and how the imagination is capable of controlling the darkest experience in the face of death’s showcase.

Death triggers, as Elisabeth Bronfen writes, a disorder to stability evoking disruption and vulnerability within its representation, but without touching, because death is ‘both most referential and self-referential, a reality for the experiencing subject but non-verifiable for the speculating spectator survivor.’ Here it is possible to state that the witness and spectator will have different mind-sets towards death’s showcase. That is the spectator is not forced to acknowledge the actuality of events because the representation of death may point and evoke a detached curiosity but very rarely touch, instead it turns into a disturbing repressed knowledge that is ambivalent, whereas for the witness, mortality and mutability requires a meaning. On the one hand, the existential attitude demands a recognition and realisation of death, mortality and discontinuity in this life. On the other, the representation of death disrupts the perception and the meaning by manipulating and controlling the exchange between life and death. What emerges is a highly complex tension for the spectator and the witness. The representation of death and the reality have been stimulating, manipulating the mind's eye through its limitations since the images and the macabre literature have started to depict and show death, dying and suffering - as if rubbing salt in the wounds.

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What scratches the wound are the images and the narrative that one confronts in media, television, movies, cyber representations. Since World War One, we have acknowledged, read and - with the invention of camera - stared at representations of death. To demonstrate this one could read Ernst Junger’s description of the French trenches that evokes frighteningly grotesque images during WW1:

My attention was caught by a sickly smell and a bundle hanging on the wire. Jumping out of the trench in the early morning mist, I found myself in front of a huddled-up corpse, a Frenchman. The putrid flesh, like the flesh of fishes, gleamed greenish-white through the rents of the uniform. I turned away and then started back in horror: close to me a figure cowered beside a tree....empty eye sockets and the few wisps of hair on the black and weathered skull told me this was no living man. Another sat with the upper part of the body clapped down over the legs as though broken through the middle. All around lay dozens of corpses, putrefied, calcined, mummified, fixed in a ghastly dance of death.

Junger’s apocalyptic narrative brought forward - with war - its nightmarish description to capture the brutal actuality within its representation, which is bound to disconcert the reader. Yet at the same time the reader is left with a kind of hesitation towards its reality because it lies outside the realm of experience. Or rather imagine staring at the horrific images of WW II; Bergen-Belsen Concentration camp that George Rodger, *Life* Photographer, took in April 1945 where there can be no justification towards such representations. One is silenced at times in the face of such atrocities. The hesitation

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16 It was not the images but the words that would depict the most horrendous atrocity. The images [photographs] have started to haunt us after WWII.
this time pauses evermore towards the reality of those photographs, because one could not come to grips with such massacres.

Adam Phillips’ analogy can apply to such descriptions or the images of death, and ask what claims we could make in regard to the attitude of the witness and spectator? Phillips creates an interesting analogy to the images of death, dying and suffering. He uses Freud's dream interpretation: every single character in your dream as being the aspect of yourself. He invites us to see or imagine ourselves in the positions of the victims. Imagine being Junger and staring at the eyes of death or being the little child that walks by the corpses in Rodger’s photograph, would there be any way that one could identify with such experiences? Yet Phillips states, ‘more revealing and more usefully disturbing, to see ourselves everywhere in the photographs - while unerringly acknowledging that these are real, other people living their predicaments - may be our best refuge from the worst refuge of all: righteous indignation.’

This righteous indignation - restless and repetitive - cannot be passed over in silence if one is a witness, because the witness will remember the practiced anguish and the immediate past. S/he will always try to reverse the sense of reality to a kind of alienation from its object, from what is seen. Phillips reminds us that even though forgetting is motivated, the unbearable still waits to be transformed into something bearable in order to be remembered. In the witness’s case, the process of witnessing death and suffering involves protecting yourself from the reality by becoming apathetic, which is different from the spectator’s. It can be said that the spectator resembles a doctor, creating the impersonal stance, ostensibly in control of the situation whereas the witness of such cruelty remains wounded forever.

‘What begins in recognition….ends in obedience.’

20 ibid. in a way we tried in the first two chapters to make the unbearable bearable, and elaborate the self-conscious reflection by undertaking an existential mission: first scrutinising the perceiving subject and then the perceived object.
As if in the face of death’s representation, the modern human being has been gradually transformed into a corpse similar to Aris Kindt’s dead body in Rembrandt’s (1632) *The Anatomy Lesson* painting. The body of the Aris Kindt (a petty thief who had been hanged - at the dissection, his neck broken, his chest risen, his mouth still open as if he is to make a sound), is surrounded by Dr. Tulp and his colleagues not looking at the body but rather their gaze stuck outside of the canvas. Here W.G. Sebald draws our attention to the way this autopsy is performed; instead of opening the abdomen and removing the intestines, the offending hand is dissected, anatomically the wrong way round. He believes that it was a deliberate intention, stating that, ‘That unshapely hand signifies the violence that has been done to Aris Kindt.’ The viewer stares at that hand as if the corpse is almost in a state of anguish as well as shock, questioning quietly the sense of this examination. The silence and the invisible scream (the hand indicating its peculiarity with a gesture) resembles our relationship with life and death. In face of the fall of being, we are disturbed, agitated, threatened, left with the incomprehensible, behind which nothing stands. When confronted with an image, a scene, a narrative that gives detailed account of suffering, dying and death, one puts one’s self in the place of Aris Kindt: our attachment to death here is like this corpse’s with the living; we try our best to grasp what is unfathomable.

22 Challenges the idea of immortality - puts science in place of religion. However, Rembrandt's main concern in the anatomy lesson paintings is not the portrayal of death, but rather the beginning of an era of scientific rationalism, the artist's photographic accuracy of the corpse. Image from: http://www.cpet.ufl.edu/mms/MMS2006%20-%20Faculty.html

It is possible to find so many analogies about our relationship to death, dying and suffering. What is crucial here is to demonstrate the witness’s and spectator’s attitude towards the images of death. The witness is bound to associate herself/himself with the reality of death within its representation, soon to recognise apathy within consciousness, if s/he is to choose to reflect. Not only the existential encounter threatens to disturb the thought but also the representation renders the dangerous knowledge in the witness’s mind endlessly. When it comes to the spectator, her/his attitude is more like a detached curiosity, there is an act of engagement up to a certain degree but no commitment, with an ability to run away if need be - which I will be trying to analyse in the following pages. But understanding the individual’s attitude towards death entails situating the changing attitude in a broader background.

In order to come to terms with the changes in attitude it is a necessary step to scrutinize the historiographical account of death. Philippe Aries, in his study of the historical alteration in attitude provides a deeper understanding by reminding us in the late nineteenth century hideous images returned to haunt the being. Unlike the Middle Ages where it was the decomposition, the late nineteenth century attitude brought the agony before death. The individual’s spontaneous recognition in the Middle Ages was towards the decomposition and decay of the body. Traditional attitudes towards death were different to ours. There was nothing morbid about it. Changes occurred with the Last Judgement in terms of resurrection of the death. Ceremonial manners were simplistic. The individual was passionate about his/her own attachments. The consciousness of death was present to him/her and accepted as an order of nature. Aries describes the attitude as both familiar and near, evoking no fear or awe: tamed, unlike ours. Between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries, death started to be dramatised. Anxiety of personal interrogation in the deathbed, the will and the

25 Bauman says ‘death was tame because it was not a challenge, in the same sense in which all other elements of the life-process were not challenges in a world in which identities were given, everything was stuck to its place in the great chain of being and things ran their course by themselves.’ (Mortality, Immortality and other Life Strategies, p. 97)
26 P. Aries (1994) Western Attitudes toward Death from the Middle Ages to the Present, London: Marion Boyars, pages. 1-24
inscriptions were a kind of protection against being forgotten. There was an unwillingness to accept the loved one's death. Through the end of 18th century, it was becoming morbid.

Until the end of the 19th century with the commencement of Romanticism, expression of sorrow and visiting tombs became ostentatious. Religion was important, but the macabre literature changed the impression of death. It appeared to be inspiring and erotic. Mourning was displayed. Cemeteries became a necessary part of the city. Yet, with the socio-economic revolution, death was to be placed in distance and hushed. Doctors and hospitals became the new undertakers and sorrow associated with mental stability.

With Aries’s phrase our existential pessimism as morbid, melancholic and bleak as possible shaped the anguish and the instability in the secret hidden depths of the mind. The human being has always known about his/her own death and observed the discontinuity of his/her fellow beings in this life. Yet the knowledge of death, dying and suffering has started to have more of a concrete impact on our life, not only with the macabre literature but also with the help of the images towards the nineteenth century and especially after WWII. The individual while staring at the images of death, dying and suffering, and reading the details of agony, cruelty and hopelessness, has become able to place himself/herself outside of life for the sake of protection. Engagement in self-conscious mission has required stepping over the limits of the realm of life while reaching into the incessant nature of death.

In a place and time where social imperatives seek to establish conceptually secure places for not only the living but for the dead - either existentially or within society, the individual rationale at times recoils passionately from this security and activates a hyperbolic tendency to re-intensify the encounter with death, dying, and suffering. Nevertheless, the spectator defers to a possibility of escape in the encounter of the disturbing images since s/he is not the experiencing subject and there is no claim for identification with the trauma. Yet the film The Other claims an involvement with a coma patient by occupying the viewer with the motionless body of S. The viewer is to be implicated with the representation of coma and to be left with a question that of whether they are to become the
witness or the spectator. There is to be either a deferral or identification with trauma which is often barred from the outset by the form it takes. For the witness (the researcher - the film-maker) personal feelings, expectations and reactions are the beginning of an intelligent critique\textsuperscript{27} whereas for the speculating spectator those personal feelings are non-verifiable unless coma is known to her or him. What is evident to spectator, if not the unrecognised and lifeless body of S, and the lack of self-referential knowledge? For \textit{the speculating spectator} the reality of coma remains ambiguous and does not let him/her explore or discover more about the reality because what is already given and implicated is hard enough to recognise or identify. The mirror of reality would not offer immediacy to reflect upon for the spectator in the face of such encounters. To make the condition more human while the witness bids for practice (both visually and theoretically; both existentially and spatially) the spectator can be said to refuse to practice on what is unfamiliar and not experienced in the first place.

Zygmunt Bauman reminds us that ‘one hopes to discover and locate the troubles which caused one’s own unhappiness, attach to them a name, and so come to know where to look for ways of resisting or conquering them’ when ‘looking at other people’s experience’ and ‘getting a glimpse of other people’s trials and tribulations.’\textsuperscript{28} The film \textit{The Other} portrays the author/witness/film-maker’s encounter of coma and leaves the viewer to look for ways of either conquering or resisting the meaning of traumatic troubles. This highlights something pervasive in regard to the distinguishing elements of being a witness and a spectator; reduced to a principle that of resistance or awareness. Then the distinctive and crucial condition of the spectator can be evaluated as looking for a way to resist the predicament of the other in order to protect herself/himself from its reality. In order to reach an understanding we need to try to understand the spectator’s attitude. This can offer us clues towards the configuration of death in the modern society. It is also imperative to investigate the contemporary function of the images of death, dying and suffering in media, and their effect on the spectator so as to analyse how the representation of death guides the individual’s attitude.

\textsuperscript{27} These interpretations are balanced with rigorous reflection in the first and second chapters as to where those feelings and reactions are derived.
This is not scaremongering, this is really happening.

The attitude towards death used to be - in Aries’ phrase – *tamed*. Now the attitude seems ambivalent, lacking the necessary empathy and recognition due to the changes within the representation. The spectator has become desensitised, but at some level has also started to feel fascinated by the phenomenon of dying and death with the help of media, advertisements and the Internet. With the help of a contemporary click on the Internet, one would easily find and come across death images, and choose from the ‘death and destruction menu’ to confront the mortality. 29 However, viewing the suffering, cruelty and violence that take place in the world, it offers no sensible and constructive insight towards its actuality except the apprehension of anguish and despair.

Regarding the visual representation of wars, atrocities and calamities, Susan Sontag in her book *Regarding the Pain of Others* gives detailed accounts of the first photographs that were published, first newsreel coverage of the terror. The first to be viewed in the magazines and newspapers was the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), whereas day-by-day coverage, and tele-intimacy – as she calls - with death began with the Vietnam War. 30 Ever since, the images of death bringing the painful reality closer in the name of realism and information, heartless and unbearable portrayal stands absent upon its representation. The mass media exploit the ambivalent obscurity and fear, exposing the drama of brutal reality and aggravating certain passivity that its immediacy is consumed by a disturbing fascination leaving its viewer numb and blasé. Then one probes what is left there if not Death itself?

For the sake of transparency, Sontag questions the usage of these images while asking whether one day we will get used to these images or not; whether they teach us anything, and if we need to see them at all: ‘Some people, it was said, might dispute the need for this grisly photographic display, lest

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29 In art we can experience Holocaust at the Imperial War Museum, Apocalypse in RCA, and we can view Joel Peter Watkin's [http://www.edelmangallery.com/witkin.htm, http://www.art-forum.org/z_Witkin/gallery.htm] photographs of the dead bodies, and Helnwein's [http://www.helnwein.com/], disquieting art at stupefaction, or we can even find ourselves attached with Tarantino's ironic, affect-less and funny violent images.
30 S. Sontag (2003) *Regarding the Pain of the Others*, London: Hamish Hamilton-Penguin Books, pages. 18-9 - we also learn from Sandra Gilbert that it was right after WW II that the Western press began to publish ‘recycled Sovfoto images;’ the Holocaust testimony and the atrocity were to be seen in 1944. S.M. Gilbert (2006) *Death’s Door, Modern Dying and the Ways We Grieve*, London, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, pages 210-216
it cater to voyeuristic appetites and perpetuate images of black victimisation - or simply numb the
mind. Nevertheless, there is an obligation to ‘examine’ the pictures.31 How do they function if not to
awaken the righteous anger, to make us feel miserable and once more confirm the reality of death?
According to Sontag, we fail to show empathy or sympathy and fail to hold the reality in mind
because the images anaesthetise, lull and numb the viewer to the point of indifference, and shock can
become habitual. However, this habituation is not automatic she says. Habituation, common to all
animals, need not be conscious nor automatic after repeated presentations. Habituation entails
adaptation without reason; it is not only the familiar but also what keeps the things same with
indifference and without being aware of and alert to what in reality goes around us. What is salient is
that the spectator is inured to the representation rather than to its reality by habituating herself/himself
to the images of death, dying and suffering. As a result the disappearance of responsiveness to the
shocking representations of cruelty emerges.

In the face of representation for the spectator, to suffer or sympathise with the images becomes
problematic. Because the spectator has already become adaptive and accustomed to death’s showcase
to such an extent that s/he can pass over in silence while staring at but not seeing, whereas the witness
has created the emotional void in the face of anguish and built the necessary counter-anguish as a
means of apathy. Our existential pessimism is bound to sensitise what is seen in case of being a
witness as opposed to being a spectator. The spectator will not go through the process of self-
reflection in order to familiarise and sensitise what is seen, because the dead is of concern only when
both interrupting and disturbing the existing anguish or presenting itself as an image of close and
intimate cruelty. As Paul Virilio confirms:

> The mass media, which no longer peddle anything other than obscenity and fear to satisfy the
ratings, contemporary nihilism exposes the drama of an aesthetic of disappearance that no
longer involves the domain of representation exclusively (political, artistic and so on) but our
whole vision of the world: visions of every kind of excess, starting with advertising that

also explores the photographs in her book on Photography, and talks about ‘the very first encounter with the
photographic inventory of horror’ as being ‘a kind of revelation, the prototypically modern revelation, a
ensure the succès de scandale without which the conditioning of appearances would immediately stop being affective.  

The mind cannot process or manage the macabre pursuit: it can neither abandon nor digest its representation and as in Virilio’s words ‘its obscenity and fear’. There is compulsion to look at these images, since we are to face everyday, on the television and in the newspapers, many images of brutality. In that way they become ‘real,’ and here the spectator will have a tendency to become desensitised, whereas the witness might be said to reflect because of the awareness of persistent anguish which prompts him/her to recognise and make the perceived intelligible. Yet engagement with the reality of representation entails an intense awareness and consciousness in the mind. The witness will attempt understanding - to be able to give some kind of account - what s/he is suffering from, while the spectator with her/his eyes-open [un]consciousness (comparable to a coma patient) will look but not see, more or less like one with a functional consciousness without soul.

The common diagnosis is that we have lost our ability to react, to sympathise and empathise, and to view these images as real, because the acknowledgement of ongoing violence and cruelty in this world is hard to bear; within consciousness, the anguish - similar to witness’s obligation - waits to be reversed and obliterate itself. Now it is the time for mental stability, indifferent blankness full-of-forgetting, and always-already a struggle, because there is no available escape or easy emancipation: a callous treatment\textsuperscript{33} with Bauman’s words awaits us. The callous treatment becomes part of the survival mechanism in the face of brutality and cruelty, both for the witness and the spectator.

\textsuperscript{32} P. Virilio (2003) \textit{Art and Fear}, London: Continuum, p. 46
\textsuperscript{33} Z. Bauman (1992) \textit{Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies}, Cambridge: Polity Press, pages, 37-39, Bauman states: ‘The point is to see while pretending that one is not looking. To look ‘inoffensively’, provoking no response, neither inviting nor justifying reciprocation; to attend while demonstrating disattention. What is required is scrutiny disguised as indifference. A reassuring gaze, informing that nothing will follow the perfunctory glance and no mutual rights or duties to be presumed.’ Z., Bauman (1993) \textit{Postmodern Ethics} cited from J. Taylor (1998) \textit{Body Horror}, Manchester: Manchester University Press, p. 40
In July 2003, newspapers and television screens were saturated with Saddam’s sons Uday and Qusay, before and after their death. Images released by US forces show Uday and Qusay Hussein after they were killed in a fire fight with Marines. They died in a gun battle with American troops, the horrific pictures; close up portraits of the smashed, destroyed faces, battered and bloodstained before, and after being cleaned up, with a make up if you like, stitching all the wounds, as if hiding the act of brutality as a means of justification. The caption reads ‘photos were released yesterday to convince sceptical Iraqis that the feared pair really were killed.’ They were indeed really dead and hard to look at.

What one is to understand when viewing these pictures, what one is to feel, and how to read? Why are we given such pictures? Can violence be justifiable within their before and after presentation? How are we to pretend that one is not looking? Violence here exalts Americans into a martyr and celebrates its own heroism, as if showing before the very reality of atrocity in the name of great courage, fearlessness and daring confidence, then with after declaring its fake and masked ‘humanity’ in the name of sympathy and benevolence. This brave new world in Huxley-ian sense, is ready to demonstrate its vindictive power, authority and control without any hesitation in order to justify its vicious pretension; turning the destructive act of judgement into an affirmative act within its representation. Here sorrow glows while cruelty shines, creating a parody of the obliteration within its simulation, reproduction and symbolic justification.

35 quoted from underground free London paper Metro, July,2003
36 see Sontag’s reference to Simone Weil’s essay The Iliad or the Poem of Force 1940, p.11
Such images state publicly what the human being is capable of and ‘may volunteer to do, enthusiastically, self-righteously.’ This is not scaremongering. This is really happening. The arrogance of the torturer, the contract killer, the impropriety of the representations of before and after, leaves its viewer with a cold, remote apathy; desensitising the shock. There is no taught reaction or response in the face of such displays, nothing will rationalise its purpose or function because there can be no reasonable justice or escape from its reality. As Paul Virilio would say it is an insult to the mind; every interpretation when it tries to overlook and annihilate the aspect of manifestations in the hunt for any meaning, is bound to enunciate its nauseous, repellent failure. Here the only distinction between representation and reality is indeed Death only. It looks as if Death is the most referential for the experiencing subject who is a witness, and is the least referential for the not-experiencing subject who is a spectator.

The representation we are exposed to is destabilising with its rather tenacious disruption without limit, leaving no value whatsoever, and dictating its pitiless, cold-hearted representations for the witnesses and the spectators whose eyes struggle to see. The boundaries between true and false, between imaginary and real are threatened by the image and the representation. ‘The real’ is reduced to the representation - to the images - to such an extent that the spectacle dominates without a response and a concern. This separateness is best described by the French thinker and Situationist Guy Debord in his most known book - which was published in 1967 - *The Society of Spectacle*. According to Debord the spectacle which is mediated by the images ‘divides the world into two parts, one of which is held up as a self-representation to the world, and is superior to the world. Spectators are linked only by a one-way relationship to the very center that maintains their isolation from one another.’ He continues

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39 Regina Barreca (1993) *Writing as Voodoo: Sorcery, Hysteria, and Art*, in Goodwin and Bronfen (eds.) *Death and Representation*, London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, p. 174 ‘Just in case you thought there was no distinction between representation and reality, there is death. Just in case you thought experience and the representation of experience melted into one another, death provides a structural principle separating the two. See the difference, death asks, see the way language and vision differ from the actual, the irrevocable, the real?’
40 Recalling Bronfen’s quote, see the footnote 10
that ‘the spectacle thus unites what is separate, but it unites it only in its separateness.’41 What seems to be at stake is the separateness between the real and unreal, between the spectacle and the spectator. This separateness creates apathy, not only by the representation but also by the disquieting rupture of the images through manipulation and control; setting up its own denial, its own annihilation.

The representation of death is continuously reinterpreted through its ideological control and power mechanisms; gradually creating - with Debord’s phrase - an/the abused gaze and false consciousness.42 Debord saw spectacle as the economic realm in which re-constructing itself within the material aspect of power - once as the religious illusion which placed its own power, now disappeared to a kind of inaccessible perception within the material life itself. He charges the society of spectacle not as an outcome of a mechanized improvement but rather a form that chooses its own technological substance. Comparable to Jean Baudrillard’s configuration of ideological control, they both delve into modern day capital, cultural imperatives, production, and the role of mediation in social relationships, declaring the society of spectacle reaches to a new form; that of integrated spectacle with Debord’s Situationist position and that of hyperreal and hallucinatory with Baudrillard’s Post-Structuralism while both bringing the seductive nature of capitalism. They state that the contemporary situation is volatile, and becoming an allegory of death. Thus the reality disappears leaving no meaning and creates its own perfect simulacra: masking and perverting a basic reality and the absence of a basic reality, consequently bearing no relation to any reality. Baudrillard confirms that ‘everything metamorphosed into its inverse’ not only ‘in order to be perpetuated in its purged form’ but also ‘in order to attempt to escape, by simulation of death, its real agony.’43 We witness here not only the curse of the absent but also the curse of the spectacle. The era we are living in is indeed making it impossible to isolate the means of the real, which is why we cannot prove what is real, because it annihilates itself within the representation. The picture of reality has invented itself

42 Debord after publishing The Society of Spectacle in 1967, he also directed a film where he reads extracts from the book in 1973. The film can be seen in http://www.ubu.com/film/debord.html
as the *society of spectacle* in the writings of Baudrillard and Debord; proclaiming its character as the *visible negation of life*44 within its simulated representation while creating a *super illusion*45 which masks the reality and offers nothing but a devoid of its meaning.

In all this - rather bleak and gloomy picture of the world - how is the spectator supposed to react and respond when the spectacle turns cruelty into habit, shock into familiar and death into something justifiable? Thus far, the emphasis has been on the mechanisms of representation and the historical change through which our relation to death has been altered with the manipulation and control of the images. When the logic of disappearance and the disappearance of responsiveness dominate whilst we are dictated by the representation and the spectacle, one is tempted to ponder how the spectator is bound to handle the situation. Now it is in order to understand and elaborate the spectator’s attitude, we need to turn to the spectator himself/herself.

**The spectator’s stunt:**

The spectator is becoming startlingly immune to *super illusion* and to *its own mask* in the face of the dehumanising air of representation. I would suggest that the impersonal stance of the spectator resembles a doctor’s attitude to his/her patients: with a perfect detached, abstract and ‘objective’ devoid-of-emotion. The spectator treats the representation as the hospice46 would treat its terminally ill patients where ‘the extraordinary and the horrible have become reduced to the ordinary and the natural.’47 I cannot talk of a self-reflective consciousness for the spectator because just like a physician, the spectator would try to do his/her ‘duty’ *objectively* in order to normalise the situation with a rather functional consciousness without reflection. The spectator’s role of judging here does not require any justification of her/his decision, just as the doctor is rarely asked to justify her/his decision publicly. Yet the decision of the physician is based on an act of judgement, whereas the

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46 For the descriptions please see the Robin Marantz Henig’s article on hospice treatments, palliative care; *Will we ever arrive at good death?* (7.August.2005) New York Times Magazine
spectator’s action is passive and does not call for commitment or judgement. The representation - the patient becomes an object of indifference: ‘perhaps,’ says Sandra Gilbert, ‘what the doctor sees when s/he gazes at the dying patient is not a human being in extremity but rather an alien marauder who has been an indomitable foe.’\(^48\) It is possible to suggest that it is as if the spectator imitates the doctor, and in that s/he relates to the spectacle with a similar attitude and the same indifference.

Imagine the doctor’s training. The first encounter with death starts with the very first corpse waiting to be dissected and cut into pieces: a prototypically routine exercise for the doctor to be. Just like the very first encounter of the individual: (recalling Sontag’s quote\(^49\)) the encounter will reveal itself within its impossibility, leaving its viewer with a certain negative epiphany, soon not to be seen, and to be avoided (until one confronts the reality as a first hand experience). Technical detachment is learnt and the doctor is taught how to manage the encounter with diseases, how to conceptualise and stare at Death ‘objectively.’ The spectator almost in much the same way, I can argue, learns by confronting the images of horror, and detaching her/himself by becoming the ‘voyeurs of the suffering of others’ very much like a ‘tourist amidst their landscapes of anguish,’\(^50\) with such a remote approach that that would replicate that of a doctor.

The spectator performs in need of safety as a means of escape from the ambivalent reality; the escape is meant to obtain survival values, yet it does not bear thinking (or acting) when it comes to the images of death and the representation. The representation, the spectacle and the modern way of living offer a life-strategy that will act upon the desire to feel free from its constraints: the Houdini like escape today constructs the features of escape. The spectator’s attitude is aimed at the escape or the annihilation of the others in the images of death, dying and suffering because the spectacle demands attention only for the sake of daily-life practices and strategies but without any bargain or

\(^{48}\) ibid. p. 193

\(^{49}\) see footnote 19

\(^{50}\) S.M. Gilbert (2006) *Death’s Door, Modern Dying and the Ways We Grieve*, London, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, p. 224. Gilbert cites Barbie Zelizer: ‘With Barbie Zelizer we might worry too that photography “may function most directly to achieve what it ought to have stifled-atrocity’s normalisation,” since images of horror may make us “voyeurs of the suffering of others, tourists amidst their landscapes of anguish.”’
deal, here there is no effort to empathise, understand or compromise; rather the spectator emerges ‘unaffected and unscathed’ to use Bauman’s words.

Bauman draws this mode of escape as a much broader concept. He argues that the new contemporary attitude as the result of fluid modernity which has no function for the eternal duration: until further notice, it is to be left alone for the sake of safety, announcing its disengagement, ambiguity, superficial escape and hopeless pursuit. He furthermore states that ‘the present day uncertainty is, however, a strikingly novel kind. The feared disasters which may play havoc with one’s livelihood and its prospects are not of the sort of which could be repelled or at least fought against and mitigated through joining forces, standing united and jointly debated, agreed and enforced measures.’ Because the unpredictability and the uncertainty draw a hazy shadow where ‘the most dreadful disasters now strike at random, picking their victims with a most bizarre logic or no visible logic at all, scattering their blows capriciously so that there is no way to anticipate who is doomed and who will be saved.’ The logic of disappearance creates the fluidity of [post]modernity upon the individuals by detachment, separateness and uncertainty, which then becomes a ‘powerful individualising force.’ As a result ‘it divides instead of uniting, and since there is no telling who will wake up the next day division, the idea of “common interests” grows ever more nebulous and loses all pragmatic value.’

In the face of representation the spectator’s stunt is made, short-lived and given as a task as if within the logic of disappearance, the ‘common interest’ would claim only knowing but not thinking, only attaching but not committing: ‘in favour of carpe diem’ establishing its apathetical attitude. The logic has been replaced by the ephemeral seduction of symbolic reproduction and simulation, and the active stance by procrastination. Bauman sees the individual of capitalism and fluid modernity as a pilgrimage and his /her stance as the procrastination, which he defines, as his/her ‘active stance.’

52 Ibid. p. 148
53 Ibid. pages 156-157
Here procrastination becomes a bliss for the individual, no more certain, no more predictable or protective in the long term, instead vulnerable and problematic but still performed as an act of self-protection. I may suggest - echoing Bauman - that the features of contemporary life conditions have generated the perfect procrastination for the sake of a false consolation and reconciliation which is unsettling and unpredictable within the spectacle.

Alternatively, it is also possible to analyse the spectator’s stance with a different approach: by illustrating the attitude towards the witness - mourner in contemporary society. The society has started to glamorise the images of death while placing the witness - mourner in distance, claiming its indecency in Western civilisation. The witness - mourner is already proscribed by the modern society not to display any emotion in the face of suffering and death, because grief seems to offend and create shame when it tries to articulate itself. The denial of death has started to conquer more and more public sphere and moved mourning to private space, either to the impersonal corridors of the hospital or to the quiet rooms of deathbeds at home. The social function of mourning changed, and altered the attitude towards death radically, by separating and placing the terminally ill to hospital rooms for the close relatives. Aries remarks the British anthropologist Geoffrey Gorer’s personal experiences in his article *Encounter*, in which Gorer states that death had turn out to be appalling and become a taboo as sex was in the Victorian era. Gorer’s investigations on mourning have illustrated the new attitude towards death; he observed that

> At present, death and mourning are treated with much the same prudery as the sexual impulses were a century ago. Today it would seem to be believed, quite sincerely, that sensible, rational men and women can keep their mourning under complete control by strength of will and character, so that it need to be given no public expression, and indulged, if at all, in private, as furtively as if it were an analogue of masturbation.

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54 Sandra Gilbert states that ‘although such behaviour is considered proper in many cultures, most American and British mourners struggle to repress it; in our society, such loss of control is often seen as a source of shame beyond even the guilt of survival.’ S.M. Gilbert (2006) *Death’s Door, Modern Dying and the Ways We Grieve*, London, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, p. 264

55 P. Aries (1981) *The Hour of Our Death*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, pages 575-79, Gorer’s observations on mourning and death were based on his experiences [him losing his father in 1915, then his brother in 1961.]

56 Cited from P. Aries p. 579 G. Gorer, *The Pornography of Death*
In Western culture where the loss has become an embarrassment, claiming mentally secure characters (that of presumably strength of will and character), banishes more and more sadness and mourning from the society. The mourner has been disquieted, shut down, and forced to quiet screams behind the closed doors. Mourning need not be public but private dispelling our attachment to the reality of death; it has become detached even from the dead by forbidding emotional display in public. If the witness - mourner is not allowed to show/share openly her/his loss one must, then, ask how the spectator is expected to make some noise.

The spectator’s stance is not only a result of separateness that is created by the representation but also the result of the attitude towards death in the contemporary society that has put the mourning behind closed doors. Capitalism and the spectacle reinventing its own purposes in the contemporary society putting death on display, keeps on refusing and falsifying grief, while attempting to tame the shock of loss, the brutality of wars, and the premonitions of catastrophe, as if it has its own will under its own control. The spectator’s role in judging, subsequently, does not allow a new consciousness to emerge, let alone the need to reflect upon it. For that reason the spectator will grow more apathetical towards the representation, and is bound to wear his/her own mask and to pretend to look at the world around while seeing but not engaging, while engaging but not committing herself/himself. The uncertainty leaves him or her totally unattached to the reality; condemning him/her to a certain attitude towards representation by becoming representational himself/herself. The spectator stares at the display of death, dying and suffering as if watching Kafka’s Fasting Artist in his cage in a big circus.

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57 P. Aries (1994) *Western Attitudes toward Death from the Middle Ages to the Present*, London: Marion Boyars, p. 102 ‘One does not have the right to become emotional other than in private, that is to say, secretly.’ p. 88
58 Bauman also confirms Aries’ analysis on how the mourning disappeared to private space and repressed. ‘Illnesses are individual, and so is the therapy; worries are private, and so are the means to fight them off.’ Z. Bauman (2000) *Liquid Modernity*, Cambridge: Polity Press, p. 65
59 Bauman says ‘if in the pre-modern era death was “tamed”- now, in the wake of the destructive job performed by modernity, it is immortality that has been “tamed.”’ Z. Bauman (1992) *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies*, Cambridge: Polity Press, p.169
60 F. Kafka (1995) *Franz Kafka Stories 1904-1924*, (translated by J.A. Underwood,) London: Abacus, pages 242-252 ‘A Fasting Artist’ Kafka writes about the fasting artist who intentionally forbade the least little thing even to chew for the sake of the dignity of his art, dozing a little from time to time, he would stay in his cage for 40 days while the public at the beginning admired him. The pleasure-seeking public, while watching him in his
How is the spectator supposed to put her/himself in the positions of the victims even though s/he constantly tries to engage in a Houdini-like escapism? Adam Phillips explores the art of escape in his book *Houdini’s Box*. He argues from a psychoanalytic perspective that the wish to escape from something brings the reality of fear of that thing, and represents a ‘spectacular reality’ while fear always confers ‘power on its object.’

With the consciousness of risk, there is the threat of not being able to escape, yet the social imperatives of fluid modernity shape the features of escape and create the opportunity for the escape-act. Given the spectator’s stance, the thought is liberated from the real, from the fear of unknown and non-experience so that the escape is possible. The spectator will not really be able to see her/himself in the position of the victims, not only because it is outside of her or his realm but also because s/he cannot really imagine the reality that the victims go through unless she is to be a witness or a victim. While the spectacle creates its own vindictive power, the spectator is bound to construct his or her own autonomous real from an ‘infinitely self-referential perspective.’

If there is no reconciliation of the reality with the representation of death, the spectator, even if s/he wants to create empathy, conceals this under the Houdini-like act.

The individual rationale is (likely) to articulate itself, when one is a witness and when one wishes to transcend the anguish within consciousness. Yet self-conscious reflection introduces the agony of human existence. In the face of death’s display, the witness’s attitude is bound to recreate consciousness of anguish and reassemble itself in future visions, undergoing a self-reflective process in order to terminate the unbearable, and create the necessary departure from its reality. The spectator, however, will act on the desire to flee from the reality, because the rational choice, as Bauman would
cage, did not really see him that he was attempting to a deferred suicide but rather he was there for the sake of entertainment. Yet, the theatrical spectacle was ‘entertaining’ only for a while for the pleasure-seeking viewer when the fasting artist lived so many years in this way, and when he died in his cage, there was no one watching.

61 Houdini himself implied once writes Adam Phillips, that ‘to attract a crowd, and to be attractive to a crowd, death has to be on the menu.’ To read more about the ‘escape-artist’ Houdini pls see Phillips book on Houdini. A. Phillips (2001) *Houdini’s Box, On the Arts of Escape*, London: Faber and Faber, p. 16
63 Baudrillard in his article *The Perfect Crime* describes the socially constructed order where the events adapt to theories rather than vice versa. The reality he says ‘has broken down under pressure from gigantic technical and mental simulation, to be replaced by an autonomy of the virtual, henceforth liberated from the real, and a simultaneous autonomy of the real which we see functioning on its own account in demented- that is, infinitely self-referential –perspective.’ J. Baudrillard (2004) *Selected Writings*, Cambridge: Polity Press, p. 268
argue means now to seek gratification ‘while avoiding the consequences.’ The indifference of the spectator is a result of the logic of disappearance in the contemporary society; like an instant nightmare that would obliterate itself once it is consumed. The representation of reality interrupts all the essential acknowledgment towards its actuality and leaves the viewer with certain defiance, because the images are bound to bring into the imagination (either the experienced or the non-experience) of the abyss.

Living in a world of dreadful images which are consequences of inexcusable human behaviour I would like to draw attention to - before concluding - John Keane’s study of effects of the images in order to compare the analysis I have described in regard to the spectator’s attitude and the logic of spectacle. John Keane’s political and ethical implications of violence in relation to democracy would no doubt lead to another chapter, yet my intention and emphasis have been on the function of the representation and spectator’s attitude. What interests me is Keane’s analysis of the effects of the images and how he summarizes their effect on contemporary consciousness; how I could reassess my own assumptions in relation to his study. According to John Keane - he calls the images of disaster and death - 'public spheres of controversy' - public spheres have four effects:

1. ‘They help keep alive memories of time when terrible things were done to people.’

Memories of time, here, can be said to be the ones that awaken the negative epiphany, the righteous indignation, the problematic burden that all prompt the wish to escape from its reality: Houdini-act in charge.

2. ‘They heighten awareness of current cruelty.’

The tendency to identify with the dangers of current cruelty is only bound to heighten the awareness when the personal security is at stake. Yes, they are able to heighten the awareness but there is no call for reflection for the spectator; the anticipated response to the modern uncertainty will put the others

(that are living their own predicaments) in a distance. The awareness of the fluid modernity and light
capitalism stimulates the functional consciousness without a soul that of a doctor.\textsuperscript{66}

3- ‘They canvass and circulate judgements about whether violence is justified.’
As we have seen in case of Saddam’s sons pictures of before and after, the justification is more or less
like a wild animal that declares its power upon the society and its inhabitants: the power being its only
justification. Its only justification is an insult to the mind calling the ambivalence into being while
seeking the wittiest way to ‘rationalize’ its cruel acts.

4- ‘They encourage people to find remedies for savagery.’
The only remedy seems to capture and rehearse the techniques of escapism: the lighter and more
superficial, the less likely to damage (as Bauman would argue.) While the witness - mourner is
discouraged to articulate the grief and sorrow, the only encouragement that the spectator would
receive is that of detached curiosity, superficial control of the situation: the callous treatment as its
only remedy for the sake of survival.

The patient is dehumanised by the machine. The reality is depersonalised by the representation. The
witness - mourner is forced to grieve privately. As a result, the spectator moves between the
experiences in the world of appearances without the need to reflect upon them; craving for safety
within the ephemeral forms of association. The practical involvement of the spectator is that of
survival strategy which is unsettling to the very roots of being, creating and trying to identify its own
rules and duties in the face of representation where the aspect of liberation is the very apathy. Thus
apathy becomes the social destiny of the spectator.

\textsuperscript{66} Bauman says ‘efforts to keep the ‘other’, the different, the strange and the foreign at a distance, the decision to
preclude the need for communication, negotiation and mutual commitment, is not the only conceivable, but the
expectable response to the existential uncertainty rooted in the new fragility or fluidity of social bonds. That
decision, to be sure, fits well with out contemporary obsessive concern with pollution and purification, with our
tendency to identify dangers to personal safety with the invasion of ‘foreign bodies’ and to identify safety
unthreatened and secure with purity. The acutely apprehensive attention to the substances entering the body
through mouth or nostrils, and to the foreigners leaking surreptitiously into the neighborhood of the body, is
accommodated side by side in the same cognitive frame. Both prompt a similar wish to ‘get it (them) out of my
THE EYES OF DEATH

CHAPTER FOUR
THE EYES OF DEATH  

CHAPTER 4

The rationale for the research trajectory in the first three chapters and the attendant three films, along with the intellectual tether between them, has been to probe the challenges of the witness through reflective and reflexive approaches as opposed to the spectator. The theoretical arc of the thesis has followed an existential as well as cultural and social reasoning to the ways to investigate the witness and the spectator in the face of death, dying and suffering whereas the visual proposition within the films evoked ‘the unmediated I’\(^1\) in the process of seeing and expressing grief, anxiety and anguish. In that sense not only did a difference emerge between the spectator and the witness’s approach to what is seen but also the difference between the visual and the theoretical paradigm. At the commencement of this research, there has been a discursive dance between ‘the mediated I’ and ‘the unmediated I’ – the ‘scholarly I’ and the ‘filmic eye’ - which configure boundaries between the expressive, emotional and autobiographical self and the reflective self which is guided by the writers particularly Maurice Blanchot, Georges Bataille, J.P. Sartre and Franz Kafka within the analysis. These writers and theorists have not only generated and prompted a reflective process of thought within consciousness but also for the visual side of this project they have triggered a creative mediation on death within the films.

\(^1\) Some writers already mention and focus on the ‘unmediated I’ in their writings as to how the modes of understanding an image moves forward not only the knowledge but also the perception of ‘seeing’ in terms of what it makes us to feel, to notice, and to think. Roland Barthes in his *Camera Lucida* (London: Vintage, 2000) reflects on the photographs that *wound* him. Similarly Susan Sontag explores in *Regarding The Pain of Others* (London: Hamish Hamilton – Penguin Books, 2003) the usage of the images, particularly the disturbing ones in media and from history in order to investigate the responses of the viewer. The reader would also find different modes of reading of the image and the exploration of the ‘unmediated I’ in Maurice Blanchot’s reflections on some of the writers and artists’ work in terms of what arrests the eye and what communicates within the language and the image through ‘the unmediated I’ in his *The Space of Literature*, (translated by A. Smock, London: University of Nebraska, 1989), and in his *The Work of Fire* (California: Stanford University Press, 1995)
Deploying the writers such as Jean Paul Sartre, Maurice Blanchot, Franz Kafka, Georges Bataille, Zygmunt Bauman, Susan Sontag, Adam Phillips gave rise to a multi-disciplinary, critical and creative study into the ways of exploring the articulation of the witness in the process of self-reflecting. The power of deduction from an existential point of view evoked Apathy as the witness’s unrecognised necessity of freedom in the face of anguish. A Sartrean approach brought forward the logical and rational affinity of the witness to determine a decision within consciousness. By way of self-reflection in order to address how the witness takes responsibility as the perceiving subject and makes a choice to create counter-anguish as a means of apathy have strengthened the possibility of an involuntary solution. Blanchot guided the processes of the witness in the face of the Other and disaster, triggering the necessary gap between the subject and the object, between the witness and the world, between ‘the I’ and the Other. Analysing how the witness handles the troubling encounter as the perceived object and how s/he constructs a connection to what is seen structured the necessities of an invention of one’s own Other. In order to investigate the spectator’s attitude the research followed a social and cultural methodology with the theories deployed by Zygmunt Bauman, Jean Baudrillard, Susan Sontag and Sandra Gilbert. The comparative analysis allowed us to understand anguish was the distinguishing element between the witness

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2 Chapter One particularly focused on Sartre’s configuration of anguish in *Being and Nothingness* (London: Routledge, 2000) while making use of his reflections on *Existentialism and Humanism* (London: Methuen, 1973) and his *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions* (London: Routledge, 1994.)

3 Chapter Two assembled and deployed Blanchot’s ontological questions on disaster, the Other and death predominantly from his *The Writing of Disaster* (London: University of Nebraska, 1995) and *The Instant of My Death* (California: Stanford University, 2000) while making use of his critical essays and stories from The Space of Literature (translated by A. Smock, London: University of Nebraska, 1989), *The Work of Fire* (California: Stanford University Press, 1995) and Blanchot Reader, Fiction and Literary Essays (New York: Station Hill, 1999)

4 In Chapter Three the focus was on Bauman’s *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992) and *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000) in order to clarify the spectator’s short-lived attention towards the spectacle, and the attitude towards death in society.

5 Baudrillard’s diagnoses helped us to understand the manipulation and the power of representation, employing his theories and thoughts from his *Selected Writings* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004)

6 Sontag’s *Regarding the Pain of the Others* (London: Hamish-Hamilton, Penguin Books, 2003) informed the reader in regard to the visual representation of wars and atrocities while offering different modes of readings of these photos.

7 Gilbert’s study on grief and mourning in *Death’s Door, Modern Dying and the Ways We Grieve*, (London, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006) not only brought forward the difference between the witness and the spectator but also guided us to elucidate on the spectator’s tendency towards death, dying and suffering.
and the spectator. What was self-referential for the witness did not hold a similar status for the spectator and there was no call for reflection on the part of the spectator when the individual attachment with the spectacle unveiled with Zygmunt Bauman’s phrase *the callous treatment* towards the reality of representation in the third chapter.

As this thesis loops from apathy to death, it is important to investigate the distinction between ‘the visual I’ and ‘the theoretical I’ in order to understand how the expression of visuality in grief conveyed within the images and how the films move the study about death, and viewing death. While the visual tries to disclose what is encountered emotionally, the theoretical has constructed a trajectory of precedence, rigour, logic and rationality to map the scholarly approaches to death, dying, grief and its mediations. The attempts in this thesis to forge the link have activated a cycle of reflection to ‘manage’ or negotiate the passage between anguish and anxiety, between consciousness and the sight.

This current project - the creative doctorate - is inspired by an existential, critical and creative consciousness of the witness as the film-maker. The researcher can be considered to depend upon constructing a doctoral study where the visual and the theoretical mesh with one another. The research has framed not only the theoretical but also the visual reflection of ‘the I’ of the witness and the spectator. The difference between the incisive gaze of the witness and the imperceptive eye of the spectator revealed the compelling nature of consciousness of ‘the I’ within the theoretical framework from which the creative practice derived and reflected upon. The films (*Apathy, Disaster*, and *The Other*) demonstrated the conceptions of the

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9 The research followed the reasoning and the articulation of the witness in the encounter of Coma within consciousness from an existential point of view which activated a self-reflective process of thought. In order to generate the process it chose to employ a Sartrean and a Blanchotian configuration. Sartre’s approach in *Being and Nothingness* (London: Routledge, 2000) gave rise to the responsibilities and choices whereas Blanchot’s text in *The Writing of Disaster* (London: University of Nebraska, 1995) and his testimony *The Instant of My Death* (California: Stanford University, 2000) guided the possible negotiations and meditations of death in the face of anguish. The thesis in that sense did bring a new insight to the ways of dealing with anguish instead of psychoanalytically exploring the mourning and the grief. It pursued a connection between the ‘mediated I’ and the ‘unmediated I’ which tempted both consciousness and the sight.
Opening the death’s door, one eye fixed to the Other’s image and the other eye focused on the representation of death in media, the first three films enunciated themselves at the level of implication and allusion to S’ image of coma, disaster, and unsettling representation of death by displaying the fear, anguish, denial and affliction. The last film *O’Death* is a way of closing this door in order to complete the cycle of reflection of both ‘the mediated and the unmediated I.’ Problems arising from the researcher/film-maker’s own challenges as a witness facing her aunt in coma are articulated both in the theoretical and visual practice. Now this chapter which opens up to a new recognition with her death raises questions on the role of the films and the relationship between the theory and practice within the research.

This chapter presents a detailed analysis that reveals the distinguishing elements between the theoretical and the filmic configurations of the witness as a film-maker and the researcher. I probe how these two functions and roles operate within the research and how the research completes the cycle of reflection with *O’Death*. Thus far, the study prioritised an existential and a cultural approach to the ways to investigate the difference between the witness and the spectator; bridging and constructing the space between ‘the visual I and the theoretical I’, between the film-maker and the viewer, between consciousness and the sight. The Eyes of Death now navigate the process of the creative practice as to how the film-lead research is to function and work within the theoretical material that has been presented. Can there be any strategy for developing the viewers’ experience through a completed cycle within the films? If ‘the I’ of the witness would challenge to go to the end of every emotion or thought either visually or theoretically would there be an achievement of a consolation for the viewer and the reader? Or rather can we talk of an achievement when the subject is death?

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10 S.M. Gilbert (2006) *Death’s Door, Modern Dying and the Ways We Grieve*, London, New York: W.W. Norton & Company. Gilbert as a poet and a critic observed how a door opens between the person who has died and someone who was close to him/her. Her evocative study on death offers both autobiographical and academic voice based on her own witnessing of the death of her husband and collective trauma that is shared in the face of death, dying and grief.
This part of the thesis forges a connection between the reader and the writer as well as between the viewer and the film-maker by attempting to demonstrate the strategy behind the order of the films and the chapters. Through its fortification of solution and completion, the research introduces the necessary space and distance to reflect, to analyse, to contemplate, to investigate the possibility of achievement not only for the reader and the viewer but also for the researcher and the film-maker when the finality of death takes place.

**O’Death**

**S is no more.**

The body, long after consciousness abandoned her, consumed all its functions and capitulated itself to the unshakable mortality. For three years and six months S was confined to bed and tethered to machines; eyes open but not there, body lying down but not reacting except to occasional attacks with catatonic appearances; gradually was disappearing into more and more unrecognisable state of being in front of the very eyes of the witnesses. This state has now ceased. She is no more. S died. We lost her. Death arrived. It swallowed greedily the (unusual) life out of her. Yet now feeding the worms six feet under, ‘the I’ feels rather at ease because S was not living all those years. S was in a coma. The witness was starting to rely on the supposed order of this life and death’s incessant motion to take place when there was a body lying broken and unconscious. Once the denial left itself to an acceptance, embracing or even hoping the end to come closer quietly without hurting more there was no room left for predictability, and mutability became even meaningless. But the gift (or rather the triumph) of death brought a peace to her. That is the only wish of the witness. This was Death’s favour to S. There was despair in *the hopelessness of not even being able* to die when such a state of being was to exist in an unknown place, as if frozen in between life and death – lifeless and deathless. Was she free from suffering all that time? The familial witness, the film-maker, the theorist, the doctoral researcher – through multiple paradigmatic possibilities of scholarship – cannot know the emotional and physical state of this expired corporeality. But she was neither
there nor conscious to tell. No method or research strategy can reach into the body to reveal truth, ideology or experience. The witness - soon followed by the film-maker and the researcher – is left with a recognition that the finality of death offers challenges to the living scholar trying to remember and carry forward a shard of the life that has been lived.

‘The I’ of the witness and the film-maker must tackle the new state of S as being dead. The experience of the witness visually expressed and composed within the first three films - Apathy, Disaster and The Other - were all constructed by the critical reflections as well as the reflexive modes of ‘the I’. The fourth film O’Death completes the cycle of this reflective and conceptual rationale by displaying the triumph of Death. Perhaps this is the crucial and critical reflection upon what the witnesses have come to accept as the final act of Death. The film-lead research has operated by creating the necessary space and the distance between the film-maker and the audience in order to declare the tension of consciousness. In the first chapter the distance has become the necessary exercise in order to be able to self-reflect as the perceiving subject. Sartre in that sense opened up to an existential and philosophical process that brought the questions on choice and responsibility in the face of anguish. In the second chapter with Blanchot’s distinctive language I have explored the gap11 between ‘the I’ and the Other, between the witness and the world in order to establish a connection and relation to the perceived object. This distancing offered in turn the essential space that the witness as both a researcher and a film-maker needed. The perceptions of the distance explored within the theoretical material with the help of Sartre and Blanchot construct and move forward the visual proposition into a concluding statement. Affirmation of the practical work lies in the fact that it has also become communicable through the theory presented. What communicates is the reconciliation as a means of understanding of the film-maker as a witness. O’Death in that regard can be viewed as a visual affirmation of what I have explored within the research

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11 I have applied Blanchot’s interval to the idea and notion of the gap. Blanchot observes this interval that takes place in between the witness and the encounter, by creating the interruption in time and engaging this interval in ‘between no longer and not yet.’ Please see Chapter Two and M. Blanchot (1995) The Writing of Disaster, London; University of Nebraska Press, p.26
in terms of the existential encounter of the witness. The role of this film is to constitute a connection between the witness (the researcher / film maker) and the viewer, and to complete a cycle that has started with the encounter of the Other in coma. O’Death represents the acknowledgment and the recognition of what is negatively-certain and of what is mockingly staring back at the witness - with this new state of S – as the absolute certainty. The cycle is completed.

The absence of presence (or rather the presence of the absence) prompted this doctoral thesis to reach to and for an understanding between consciousness and the sight of the perceiving subject as not only the witness but also a film maker and the researcher. The analysis attempted to formulate solutions, of a possibility of escape, denial and eventually reaching Apathy. Should, now, the witness expect a release from agony and anguish while seducing the oblivion? Agony and anguish were a struggle, still are; creating a conflict between life and death stepping into the abysmal nothingness every time Death occurs. As E.M. Cioran confirms, ‘in every true agony there is triumph of death.’ He describes in *On the Heights of Despair* the dramatic moments in the battle between life and death as agonic:

> when the presence of death is experienced consciously and painfully. True agony occurs when you pass into nothingness through death, when a feeling of weariness consumes you irrevocably and death wins. In every true agony there is triumph of death, even though you may continue to live after those moments of weariness. There is nothing imaginary in this turmoil. Every agony bears a conclusive stamp. Is not agony similar to incurable sickness which torments us intermittently? Agonic moments chart the progress of death in life, revealing a drama in our consciousness caused by the disruption of the balance between life and death.

‘There is nothing imaginary in this turmoil.’ Conversely, it is the unimaginable, persistent reality that reinforces the negative certainty of life while threatening reason and raison d’être.

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12 There have been artists, film-makers who all explored the battle and the cycle between life and death in their filmic and artistic configurations. One example of this can be Bill Viola’s 1991 video work *The Passing* which is a personal response to the experiences of a birth and death in the family. The film is dedicated to his mother who is seen throughout the film in her death-bed. Viola films his mother lying motionless in her last hours as well as filming his son’s birth nine months after his mother’s death. Combining these experiences in an-hour long black and white video, he brings the cycle of life together with death. His 1992 *Nantes Triptych* installation displays a young woman giving birth, an old woman dying and in central panel we see a man underwater as if drowning. [http://www.billviola.com/](http://www.billviola.com/)

Such experiences of the witness leave their venom - that conclusive stamp - inside, and consciousness becomes the wound in the heart of everything trying to turn the unbearable into something bearable and tolerable in order to abide its impossibility in the face of suffering. Within the theoretical framework, I have emphasised that this mode of suffering belongs to and is unique only to the witness and the victim. Cioran draws our attention to the monopoly of suffering - in his essay with the same title - that the most interesting aspect of suffering ‘is the sufferer’s belief in its absoluteness.’\(^{14}\) Do I think I alone suffer, I alone have the right to suffer, ‘although I realise that there are modalities of suffering more terrible than mine, pieces of flesh falling from the bones, the body crumbling under one’s very eyes, monstrous, criminal, shameful sufferings?’\(^{15}\) According to Cioran, a sufferer is separated and detached from the world to agonic interiorisation and acquires consciousness of the separation from the objective world. I unquestionably - as a witness - am not alone in my suffering, yet I imagine the monopoly of suffering that Cioran describes is ‘the reflective I’ taking responsibility in the face of itself, giving rise to solitary confinement of the self alone and taking refuge in reflection which was elaborated within consciousness in the first and second chapters.

‘The reflective I’ can also be said to imprison what the eye captures when looking outside, recording the encounters with their horrendous appearances. The creative practice conveyed within the three films has demonstrated these appearances – corresponding to the force of the impossible encounters. The witness while perceiving and trying to give meaning to what is seen is compelled to convert the unsettling images to a more bearable abstractions. Like a Freudian repression, no matter how the images are stuck in the mind of the witness ‘the (creative and analytical) I’ responds to the frustration by attempting to create not only its own resolution but also its own composition to reach to an understanding of freedom from what

\(^{14}\) ibid. p. 54
\(^{15}\) ibid.
disturbs\textsuperscript{16}. This freedom, however as explored in the first chapter while analysing the anguish of the witness with a Sartrean approach, lies in the reflective consciousness that also brings the notions of ‘discovery, authenticity, independence, artistic creation, escape, bliss, uniqueness, irony, will, power, self-indulgence, fantasy, transgression, perversion, comedy, desire, genius, the call of the wild and the search for strange.’\textsuperscript{17} How can these notions be used with respect to consolation in the face of death, dying and suffering - if there needs to be a consolation?

Within the thesis, the theoretical analysis has given rise to Apathy which has not only become the safe but an involuntary shelter for the witness in the face of anguish as a means of consolation but also for the spectator in the face of the representation of death. This apathy (reluctantly) manifests itself in the last film \textit{O'Death} by portraying the identity of the deceased as disappearing to an anonymous image of the skull.\textsuperscript{18} The researcher followed by a film-maker confronted with the ultimate absence of S submits directly and metaphorically - with this film - to a creative practice in order to deduce Apathy which stems from the existential analysis presented in the theoretical structure.

\textit{O'Death}, in that sense, provides a \textit{conclusive stamp} by recognising the necessary apathetical attitude that the researcher has prescribed for the witness and the spectator. The researcher while reasoning the anguish of the witness in the face of coma has arrived at Apathy as an involuntary antidote of consciousness. The appeal (unspoken or obvious) for the obliteration

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{16} We have seen in the first and second chapters how writers like Franz Kafka, Maurice Blanchot, C.S. Lewis, Borges, Georges Bataille, Jean Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir; artists like Ingmar Bergman, Orlan, and Diamanda Galas creatively and analytically in the search of expressing what torments them.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Z. Marar (2003) \textit{The Happiness Paradox}, London: Reaktion Books, p. 38
\item \textsuperscript{18} The third film \textit{The Other} portrayed S in coma, the viewer is confronted with her unsettling image confined to bed with her expressionless eyes, staring at something that is beyond every witness or the viewer.
\end{itemize}
of anguish has emerged as a means of resolution within the theoretical framework while the creative practice concerned with the frustration of meaning towards the unsettling appearances of dying. Now with the certainty and occurrence of death, it completes its own abolition by expressing and therefore affirming the disappearance of the identity of the victim with O'Death. Nevertheless, never reaching stability or forgetting the anguish, the visual proposition offers a conflict and operates as an exploration into the mediations of death. The account of the witness as both a researcher and a film maker in search of an intimate acknowledgement of the meaning of death, dying and suffering and how visually and theoretically it is to be mediated within the doctoral research has brought forward interpretative strategies. These strategies develop between the visual and theoretical approach which has both offered in turn multiple negotiations of death.

In the film, Diamanda Galás’ arrangement secures the attitude of the film-maker, researcher and the viewer, and replaces it with a kind of rebellious stance towards what is seen as a means of negotiation with death. There are two elements and two approaches to the editing pace. One is the play and task of the skeleton that confronts the viewer almost in a humorous and satirical manner; the viewer is mocked by the hidden whispers of the skeleton and the gaze of Death. The other is the gruesome imagery of atrocities that suddenly break the sequences and might force the audience to pull up their own chairs or scream out loud with Galas. The viewer is most likely to empathise with Galás’ expression where she sings ‘oh death, please consider my age, please do not take me at this stage’ while ‘the I’ is threatened by the images of documented events from the history that of genocidal relics or the depressing and unforgettable image of the Indiana lynching.

O'Death illustrates a sense of implicit intensity of the images; that of from the beginning of 15th century woodcuts to the recent bloodshed photography. The inescapable becomes the indigestible within the arrangement of the images. In this film, different from the other films,
the viewer is no longer implicated. Rather s/he is bound to draw herself/himself back hesitantly in silence. The unspeakable now compels the viewer (and the witness) to the ultimate manifestation of death. *O'Death* aggressively seeks to expose the triumph of Death in anticipation for the absolutely irrevocable. The film gradually might disturb the viewer’s recognition of the work of Death as personified and animated in its shape and form. Dreaming of rebellion or rage against Death’s act is out of the question rather what the viewer is most likely to feel might be nothing other than immanent sense of doom – hanging over every witness. In effect, viewer and the film-maker might no more suspend their need for identification with Death.

The film demonstrates Death within its conventional image that of macabre figure associated with skull imagery; vanity of the skeleton as *halv winged angel or halv sardonically laughing devil*. The clean dry skeleton is with his insect eyes, his mouth open, ‘his face is split in a grin of satisfaction’ with ‘the gleaming shadows in his empty eye sockets’ having his own ‘indefinable world’ where he is ‘the principal indeed the only actor.’ The film exploits this image in the role of a memento-mori as if declaring mortality. By taking the stand of Death as personified, the personality of the deceased is to disappear; what remains is the vanity of the skeleton. One of the skull images used in the film is an eighteenth century medallion (second image on the left in the above extract from the film) where two skeletons the husband and the wife hold each other affectionately in fear. Aries describes:

> Skeletons have clearly taken the place of the dead, but in the anonymous bones there is nothing left to render the people recognisable; their individuality has disappeared. Allegory of a couple; two spouses leaning toward each other, clinging so as to yield as one of the movement that is sweeping them away. The husband embraces his wife, who claps her hands in front of him in a gesture of both prayer and protection. It is an isolated scene in a depersonalised dance of death where all the distinctive features of the dancers have been effaced. In this dance of bones we detect a sentiment that is characteristic of the late Middle Ages; the agony of losing everything.

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19 P. Aries (1985) *The Images of Man and Death*, (translated by J. Lloyd) London: Harvard University Press, p. 188 Aries in his analysis of the macabre figure of death describing the personified and animated Death’s image as the skeleton.
20 ibid. pages 176-184
The macabre images, where the skeleton had come to conquer death’s task, changed the meaning of death beginning from the Middle Ages by not only juxtaposing nothingness and mortality together but also altering the identity of the deceased by replacing it with the cold bony structure of a familiar anonymous body. Yet the image of skeleton has become familiar since that time.\textsuperscript{22} Even though it is associated with shock or fright, the skeleton, however ironically, can be said to be glamorised in Western culture by now where modern day bloodshed photography, death’s showcase in media and on paper, or the fear of dying alone in hospital or rather being killed by a bomb have all become more frightening than the image of the sardonically laughing devil. Aries observed in the 1970s that ‘death of the patient in the hospital, covered with tubes’ is now ‘a popular image, more terrifying than the transi or the skeleton of macabre rhetoric.’\textsuperscript{23} Behind this change is the violence and the representation of violence into which the individual is thrown, which was analysed in the third chapter in regard to the spectator’s attitude.

The film inscribes much of its macabre imagery within the conventions of the skeleton’s expression that of nothingness. The properties of mise-en-scène to which the attention is drawn and directed reverberate with a symbolic significance associated with death and nothingness.

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\textsuperscript{22} Recently the skull has become quite a fashionable image for not only popular culture but also in the art world, especially with Damien Hirst’s diamond-encrusted human skull which was sold $99 million. Adbusters in its 73\textsuperscript{rd} issue writes him as ‘the glamorous shock artist.’ Adbusters, \textit{Journal of The Mental Environment}, issue 73, (2007) Vancouver: Published bimonthly by: Adbusters Media Foundation, Quad Graphics \url{http://www.adbusters.org}

This image of death which depersonalises the deceased or rather obliterates the identity of the departed offers consolation and reassurance as well as overpowering and annihilating ‘the I’ of the witness but also ‘the I’ of the dead. In the film the witness, the film maker, the researcher and the viewer, instantly, are confronted with the reality only through the gleaming shadows in the eyes of death. The editing pace veers from this personified character of death to the gruesome imagery of homicides, genocide and murder. Death’s showcase has come to desensitise the viewer, new realism sinks in - that of logic of disappearance and separateness.

This film, however, does not intend to shock or desensitise the viewer. On the contrary, by drawing upon the documented events and by borrowing from the historiographical elements that held sway the attitude towards death significantly, the film attempts to identify with the effect and the impact that lie beneath the representation and appearances. In that sense, the sound which is performed and arranged by Diamanda Galás makes the viewer endure Death by not surrendering to its inexhaustible principle. While skeleton’s labour and the disturbing images might disarm the viewer Galás’ screams mask every emotion and strike back almost teasing Death. Nevertheless, realising that Galás’ screams expose and construct a space in which ‘the I’ is ready to join, still the instantaneous comprehension of the negative-certainty of life grins with its rather sardonic laugh. The effect is uncanny.

Through O’Death, both the viewer and the film-maker might be drawn in to discover death and nothingness in their subjectivity when the ‘separation from the world steadily and painfully increases’ as Cioran would say. He, on the brink of suffering, reflects upon this subjectivity and reminds us of our own. For him, consciousness appears as agony and death as the imminent nothingness that we are thrown into:

> The feeling of the irreversible and the irrevocable, which always accompanies the awareness of agony, can achieve a painful acceptance mixed with fear, but there is no such a thing as love or sympathy for death. The art of dying cannot be learned, because there is no technique, there are no rules. The irrevocability of agony is experienced by each individual alone, through infinite and intense suffering. Most

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people are unaware of the slow agony within themselves. For them there is only one kind of agony, the one immediately preceding the fall into absolute nothingness. Only such moments of agony bring about important existential revelations in consciousness.25

It is a truism that there is little love or sympathy for death. The witnesses of S died sympathetically with her. Against all odds, death was welcomed in her case, as if agony and anguish were reduced to something manageable only with death’s favour. Yet the witness as the researcher attempted to formulate the existential revelations in consciousness for the sake of response and responsibility to the reality’s imperative - within the theoretical framework. Now, her absolute absence poses nothing in regard to her intimate image in coma, instead as Blanchot would say ‘the dear departed is conveyed into another place.’26 This idea of another place does manifest the fall into absolute nothingness more than ever.27 It invites ‘the I’ to the incomprehensible ‘nowhere’; claiming its presence only through the macabre images of death in the film O’Death. There is intensity within the film, intentionally seeking to demonstrate to the viewer the power of nightmares that the witness (the film-maker) confronts. This intensity can be told to re-establish the distance between the film-maker and the viewer. It raises questions on how the film-maker can effectively position the viewer at a distance and what purpose it serves both for the film-maker and the viewer within this research. In order to be able to answer to these questions there is a need to analyse the relationship between the theory and practice.

The visual and the theoretical:

The relationship between ‘the visual I’ and ‘the theoretical I’ within the research has been one which is now reaching resolution as the doctoral research manifests into its conclusion. I have addressed the difference above between these two approaches. The way the text and the research operate in the context of films has not been one of justification but rather a

25 ibid. p. 27
27 This thesis posits a secular approach to the idea of Death, in that sense the author does not indulge in the thoughts and perception of life after death.
reflection. How do ‘the visual I’ and ‘the theoretical I’ differ from each other and what they tell us in regard to the witness and the spectator’s mind-set in the face of death, dying, coma and suffering?

My aim in turning this subject matter into an academic study has been to bring together two different perceptions: visual and theoretical practice. These two conceptual terms have offered in turn different ways of handling the unsettling encounter from not only a witness’ point of view but also from the researcher and the film-maker's point of view. The concepts and theories underpinning this project are the basis of the circumstances (of witnessing) that contributed to the creative practice. Encompassing both ‘the mediated and the unmediated I’ in a distinctive study of the traumatic experiences of the witness has produced multiple mediations of death, that of the analytical and the creative. While the creative practice tends to manifest the encounters of the witness which connects the viewer - as well as the film-maker - to the outside world, the theory has internalised the external struggle in consciousness by undertaking an existential mission. Theory, in that sense, has created its own distinct logic and rational understanding as if bargaining for a resolution or a consolation in the face of anguish while generating a conclusive analysis to the witness’s predicament. It can be understood as an internal conflict that seeks to determine a decision which evaluates within an existential view of human consciousness. The visual propositions, however, have anchored anguish, fear and grief within the films in the process of struggle. Therefore, the films can be said to declare the exterior struggle of ‘the visual I.’ That is where necessity (to create/express visually) and impossibility (of the encounter) attempt to overcome their mutual antagonism without reaching to or offering a consolation. This difference between the theory and practice brings forward an important and crucial elucidation to the purpose and the goal of this doctoral study. It is fundamental for this project to state that the creative practice does not claim a resolution and does not tend to prove a possibility of an achievement. Rather it defines and describes, in filmic configurations, a responsibility and a response to what is
encountered whereas theory proceeds to conquer, to defeat what torments and to structure the responsibility and response within consciousness.

The relationship between the visual and theoretical can be described if we try to distinguish the difference between language and silence. As Susan Sontag describes in her essay on The Aesthetics of Silence, language is reduced to the principle of the event that takes place in time and it signifies ‘a voice speaking which points to the ‘before’ and to what comes ‘after’ an utterance:’ which she defines as ‘silence’ that can be thought as the aftermath of the event. She continues: ‘Silence, then, is both the precondition of speech, and the result or aim properly directed speech.’ It takes its clue from language, under the influence of the event. It is the language of the event that leads to silence, condemning it to reluctance to articulate. It is as if what language constitutes, silence withdraws. ‘The I’ mediated by the language is ‘the theoretical I’ that speaks of the encounter and gives birth to the subject. Silence which appeals to ‘the visual I’ can be thought to give birth to the object. Object’s essential aspect and imposing ambiguity (the disquieting encounter) as an image introduces the silence that creates the suspension at a distance. What arrests the sight becomes at the same time what interrupts within its silence. This silence exposes the one who is witnessing to a loss of presence. In an attempt to recover itself language takes over to grasp it from its claws. Blanchot sees silence as analogous to a voiceless cry ‘which breaks with all utterances’ and which ‘tends to exceed all language, even if it lends itself to recuperation as language effect.’ He would observe both the suddenness and the patience of this cry; within this silence there is the interminable torment which always-already makes itself known. The meaning is not at stake here because

\[29\] ibid
it is ‘infinitely suspended, decried, decipherable - indecipherable.’³¹ It is reduced to an interpretative uncertainty, not anchored in stable meaning, yet it affirms its intensity by determining its place and never failing to compromise what is not.

Consider the films of Ingmar Bergman, the dying sister Agnes tortured by cancer in *Cries and Whispers* the viewer is left to suffocating silences, or Ester’s *voiceless cries* and Johan’s curious silences in *The Silence*. Bergman was revealing an imperative insight and intuition over intellect and understanding by posing deeper and more provoking tensions within the silence in his films. Similarly Andrei Tarkovsky³² reflecting the intimate struggles of the human condition, in *Stalker* for instance, the main character listens to his inner voice trying to find the right path in life. Tarkovsky’s incredibly long pauses and exceptional cinematic style move the viewer to another level where the language becomes the secretive internal silences that seek to create the necessary space for freedom. Surpassing the language, silence intends to provoke the space in between ‘the I’ and the world. Sontag comments on its termination as ‘a zone of meditation, preparation for spiritual ripening, an ordeal which ends up in gaining the right to speak.’³³ Surely, language comes afterwards in order to reflect, to repair, to formulate, to construct and to consider a possibility of consolation, but silence in that sense will always try to invent its own secret manifestation in order to initially listen to itself.³⁴

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³¹ ibid I find it necessary to quote his remark on silence wholly. He writes: ‘Silence is perhaps a word, a paradoxical word, the silence of the word *silence*, yet surely we feel that it is linked to the cry, the voiceless cry, which breaks with all utterances, which is addressed to no one and which no one receives, the that lapses and decries. Like writing (and in the same way that the quick of life has always already exceeded life), the cry tends to exceed all language, even if it lends itself to recuperation as language effect. It is both sudden and patient; it has the suddenness of the interminable torment which is always over already. The patience of the cry: it does not simply come to a halt, reduced to nonsense, yet it does remain outside of sense – a meaning infinitely suspended, decried, decipherable – indecipherable.’

³² It is possible to find so many examples in literature, poetry, and art that would arrest the eye and the mind within their (sometimes disturbing, unsettling other times wounding language/image of) silence and provoke us to think, to reflect and to question. From Goya to Gottfried Helnwein, from Samuel Beckett, Franz Kafka, Maurice Blanchot, J.L. Borges to Emile Cioran, Sylvia Plath, Rene Char, Paul Celan – only some of them.

³³ ibid

³⁴ Blanchot would say ‘one has to silence if one wants, at least, to be heard.’ M. Blanchot (1989) *The Space of Literature*, (translated by A. Smock) London: University of Nebraska, p. 48 Blanchot talks of the ‘poetic word’ which ‘has art in its origin’ when he remarks Mallarme’s language as offering the
Sontag brings to our attention another aspect of silence where it does not declare or intend persuasion but rather it is ‘a metaphor for a cleansed, noninterfering vision.’ Language then seeks to resolve the ‘situation,’ the troubling event, the unsettling encounter, the unknown while silence is not in search of consolation or persuasion. In the necessity of language there is a condition of reflection and interpretation which demand a resolution. This difference between language and silence is relevant to the distinguishing elements between ‘the visual and the theoretical I’ within the research. ‘Visual I’ is what sees, perceives, conditions and positions an expression similar to silence when accepts distance and removes words. Here the images created, composed and arranged within the four films (*Apathy, Disaster, The Other* and *O’Death*) demonstrate the necessary silence. They do not intend to persuade the viewer that the resolution is possible or rather any consolation could be achieved.

The ‘unmediated I’ traps the perceived object, starting with the image of S in coma as the unrecognised apprehension of fear, creating the *sovereign moment*, deploying Bataille’s phrase which structured the emotional reaction. In the first chapter the reader followed a self-reflective thought process with the theories deployed by Bataille and Sartre to analyse fear and anguish of the perceiving subject, reaching to an apathetical decision in order to turn the unbearable appearance to a bearable one. Language of the witness that is captured with the help of Blanchot in the second chapter to analyse the Other who was struck by disaster, generated one’s own Other. While investigating the witness’s mind-set in the face of death, dying, coma and suffering in the first two chapters, the language positioned by Bataille, Sartre and Blanchot have reproduced inventive and original contribution to knowledge within ‘the mediated I’. The demand, however, of ‘the visual I’ or ‘the unmediated I’ to what is language of the imaginary ‘which speaks itself’ inasmuch as Rilke’s, Kafka’s, Ponge’s or the language of Giocometti’s sculptures.

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35 ibid
encountered cannot be merely found in how the witness can use it or what the witness can do with it. Nor it is, rigorously speaking, about what the unsettling encounter triggers. Rather, it concerns a crisis between what the witness (as the film-maker) can do and what is done to the witness that threatens the battle between life and death. It opens, thereby, into an uncertain and vital artistic experience which operates in the context of films and the thesis’ statement and objective.

The image witnessed transforms the subject into an object which creates the difference between the visual and the theoretical. I would like to bring the attention of the reader the image’s power in order to clarify how ‘the visual and theoretical I’ stimulate both a creative and analytical dominion of its processes. Blanchot talks of a ‘contact’\(^{37}\) that is to be achieved when seeing. **Yet this is not an active contact but rather it is given to us at a distance by the image.** What is important for him is the silent fascination of the image that attracts the gaze and triggers ‘an immobile movement and depthless deep.’\(^{38}\) By twisting its implication upon the viewer it creates an interruption in time and doesn’t allow escaping from it. Rather it arrests and discloses the unspeakable subject through its image. It avoids a clarification but demands a relation. ‘A dead gaze’ in his terms that entertains the absence of the subject connects the viewer with an immediate proximity\(^{39}\) even though it completes itself by distancing. The image when offers a contact, touches and draws ‘the I’ at a distance. He remarks ‘fascination is the relation the gaze entertains - with sightless, shapeless depth, the absence one sees because it is blinding.’\(^{40}\) To imagine ‘the I’ of the witness here, the gaze is blinded by what it confronts - the Other in coma – which creates the distance. I have covered the necessity of the distance theoretically that has prompted taking refuge in reflection within the language. For the witness the starting point is the encounter of the image of the Other (and the event) where ‘the I’ is drawn to stare and tempted to go too close, and stand in the

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38 ibid.
39 ibid.
40 ibid.
presence of the Other as though intimacy could maintain separate from the Other and as though ‘the I’ is not in the process, completely lost and infinitely distant. The witness, then, is to turn this encounter to an image at a distance to activate an analysis and an investigation upon its meaning. In that sense ‘the visual I’ generates the tension of thought as it comes to struggle with its conditions and formulates ‘the theoretical I’ whose implication is inescapable in the witnessing.\textsuperscript{41} Within the thesis ‘the visual I’ contributes to ‘the theoretical I’ by substituting the image - the encounter - into a subject while the image remains ‘to be the absence of the object.’\textsuperscript{42}

The \textit{contact} that is mediated by the image is intimate; ‘for it’, according to Blanchot ‘makes of our intimacy an exterior power which we suffer passively.’\textsuperscript{43} What interests me in his speculations is that he talks of different levels of ambiguity of the image. At times, Blanchot would argue, the image invites the fascination that the gaze is struck by, which leads thought to act upon its powerful \textit{contact}\textsuperscript{44}. At other times it creates ‘the passion of indifference’\textsuperscript{45} because it has no significant or effective value that would influence an act upon its meaning. From here it is also possible to recall the difference between the witness and the spectator’s attitude towards the images of death and dying which I have probed in the third chapter. The spectator treats the image within its representation with a detached curiosity when it is not

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\textsuperscript{41} Paul Celan says that nobody bears witness for the one witnessing which reminds us of the subjectivity of the witness and the monopoly of suffering that Cioran was describing above. To state overtly; the thesis presented the subjective experiences of the witness to which \textit{no one can bear witness} but rather empathise with and to recognize the anguish. What is inescapable here for the witness who is a researcher and a film-maker is the fact that there occurs a need to formulate and placate the anguish and the disturbing encounter of coma. What Celan states remains as the reality of the witness in the face of a troubling encounter. Witnessing his parents’ death and Holocaust, \textit{the anguish, the darkness and the shadow of death} define the driving forces in his poetry and in his language. see P. Celan (1996) \textit{Selected Poems}, (translated with an introduction by M. Hamburger), London: Penguin Books

\textsuperscript{42} M. Blanchot (1989) \textit{The Space of Literature}, London: University of Nebraska press, p.47

\textsuperscript{43} ibid. p. 262

\textsuperscript{44} Blanchot’s ‘contact’ is synergetic with Roland Barthes’ \textit{punctum}. Barthes’ reflections on photography in \textit{Camera Lucida} describe the same kind of effect that Blanchot talks of. He defines the photographs’ appeal to the spectator which does not offer a special insight as \textit{studium}, whereas what he calls \textit{punctum} is what triggers, provokes, touches, attracts when looking at the image. In the reading of the \textit{punctum} Barthes writes that ‘the effect is certain but unlocatable, it does not find its sign, its name; it is sharp and yet, lands in a vague zone of myself; it is acute, yet muffled, it cries out in silence.’ R. Barthes (2000) \textit{Camera Lucida}, London: Vintage, p. 53

\textsuperscript{45} M. Blanchot (1989) \textit{The Space of Literature}, London: University of Nebraska press, p. 263
self-referential. As a consequence the image for the spectator can be said to create what Blanchot calls the passion of indifference while for the witness the contact invites both ‘the creative and analytical’ at a distance in order to give meaning to what is encountered.

Even though I have elucidated the research and filmic praxis within the chapters, there is a need to recognise and clarify how the films complement the written text and are instructed by the theory that is presented. The structure and the order of the films represent a cycle that completes itself in stages – if to rationalise and reason. First exploring the witness’s immediate metaphors while questioning the apathetical tendency towards the reality of the encounter, and what the gaze orchestrates. Second stage challenged by the impossible experience of the disaster and Other’s negatively-absent certainty and presented the gesture of the witness in abeyance. Third stage was to stare at the encounter unequivocally/undisguised and to expose this negativity, the presence of the absence, the open-eye unconsciousness while affliction demanding its own radical silence. The last stage has become the absolute absence, ironically declaring what was initially denied and reflected (or rather what was imposed within the research: Apathy as being the witness’s existential destiny in the face of death, dying and suffering from a wished-for-freedom point of view - now revealing itself): as if a parody of the obliteration, the oblivion and the void.

The first film Apathy explored the metaphors within the created mise-en-scène while compiling disturbing film footage from documentaries like The War We Never Saw46, Coma47 or from Reservoir Dogs48 and American Psycho49. It was based on thinking the conventional

46 Documentary The War We Never Saw – an alternative view on Iraq War - broadcasted on 5th of June 2003 in Channel 4, showing a disturbing collage of the censored images of Iraq war, interviewing the journalists.
47 Documentary Coma – The man who slept for 19 years broadcasted January 2005 in Channel 4, by Dr. Martin Brookes. http://www.channel4.com/science/microsites/S/science/body/coma.html The viewers were struck with the coma patients whom were waking up after years and trying to adapt to their new reality.
48 DVD Release March 2003, Lions Gate. Reservoir Dogs is directed by Quentin Tarantino in 1992. The violence is glamorised as part of the popular culture.
usage of the word apathy; how the word itself associates with the metaphors and how the witness is also the spectator in the face of representation. Yet not without an empathetic affinity, the witness - as I have probed within the theoretical framework in the first chapter – remembers the practiced anguish when it comes to view the existing footage that disturbs the eye, disarms its viewer and creates hesitation and aloofness towards its reality. By applying not only Bataille’s sovereign moment which predominated the notion and articulation of the witness’s fear but also Sartre’s configuration of anguish within ‘the theoretical I’ in the first chapter gave rise to the film Apathy as a means of reflection and recognition of the tension that generated the space between the encounter and the film-maker as much as between the film-maker and the viewer. The sound that juxtaposes Anton Webern’s two pieces (pieces 6 for orchestra op. 6: no 4 and 5) has created the pressure and conflict while at times might compell the viewer to complete silence and other times intensify the apprehension of witnessing the eyes of victims in the film.

The second film Disaster evoked Blanchot’s idea of disaster where the purpose of the video work was to display the renunciation of what was primarily disturbing in regard to the encounter. The theoretical (and fragmentary) knowledge (and reflections) that emerged from Blanchot’s notion of disaster, and writing on disaster framed the film’s essential gesture. His remark where he says ‘we feel that there cannot be any experience of the disaster, even if we were to understand disaster to be the ultimate experience’ was what the film attempted to convey. The viewer of this film could apprehend the appearance of neither the disaster nor the victim but rather was implicated in the representation of the witness in denial. Identification with the gesture of the witness affirmed the impossible experience and emotional reaction to the Other who was struck by the disaster. Even though the witness (the film-maker and the researcher) is not capable of dissimulation when reflecting and analysing, in the video work

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the viewer is to catch a glimpse of the perpetual flight from the reality within the act of the old woman who is covering her eyes constantly to not see. By demonstrating the weakness, and the absence of power the film implied human reality in the face of disaster and the Other while Diamanda Galás’ screams demonstrated the necessary struggle against this gesture as a means of refusal to accept the denial.

The third film portraying S in coma as The Other might be the only film that would not demand an explicit description, and maybe brings the radical passivity within its silence. Because it exposes the encounter with all its vulnerable appearances, by (reluctantly and at the same time consciously responsible) documenting the unsettling reality. Does the sense of the irreversible coma represent the ambiguities of a claim whose only purpose can be silence (or rather to silence the anguish, grief and agony)? The artist, the film-maker or the photographer who all documented similar events and images are bound to attempt to explain what is inexplicable. Jim Goldberg when given in 1980 the commission to photograph the nursing home in Cambridge, Massachusetts⁵¹, was, at the same time, to confront his own father’s death and later to photograph him in the dying process as well as all the others in the hospice. He emphasizes what had guided him was the ‘trust and intimacy.’⁵² Another recent example is Annie Leibovitz’s photographs of (her partner) Susan Sontag in her death-bed, and in the open casket which were published in A Photographer’s Life: 1990-2005⁵³ which were

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⁵¹ Exhibited in Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., organised by the National Hospice Organisation and later published as a catalogue under the title Hospice: A Photographic Inquiry (1996), Boston; Bulfinch Press. His family at the time Goldberg was offered this commission also supported him to do this work as well as to photograph his father in the dying process. It was a decision made by all the members of the Goldberg family. We hear him saying that ‘...My family thought it was a good idea because they felt this project could help people, and they wanted to help people. So I spent a year photographing my father in the dying process.’ Please see http://seeingthedifference.berkeley.edu/

⁵² Jim Goldberg was one of the participants and talkers of Seeing the Difference: Conversations on Death and Dying conference – which took place on 01-02 June.2000 in Townsend Center for The Humanities in University of California, Berkeley; addressing the questions from the images of death and the different modes of reading these images, to the medical, social and cultural settings of ‘seeing’ death and dying in present culture. To read the documented conference please go to http://seeingthedifference.berkeley.edu/

⁵³ Also published in The Guardian, Weekend Magazine on 07.October.2006 which triggered different readings from the viewers. The Weekend Magazine following week on 14 October 2006 published reader letters: a reader was commenting on Leibovitz’s decision to publish such intimate photos as
to challenge the unprepared eye. She was to comment on the book later saying that it ‘came out of grief.’

Poet and funeral director Thomas Lynch observes in his experience with the grieving families that ‘seeing is the hardest and most helpful part. The truth, even when it hurts, has a healing in it, better than fiction or fantasy. When someone dies it is not them we fear seeing, it is them dead. It is death. We fear that seeing will be believing.’ The artists who document the personal lives and the sufferings of the loved ones attempt to bring another kind of negotiation to anguish and agony by bearing the conditions and circumstances that they witness and by disclosing what they witness to the audience. Lynch remarks that when we are faced with the deaths of the ones we love, we are caught in between ‘the will to do everything, anything and nothing at all.’ The rhetorical question is what is the reasonable expression of grief and anguish? The response (either in Goldberg’s or Leibovitz’s or in The Other) in this subjective - both internalised and externalised - mode is not an abstract principle of life and death. Every individual loses their loved ones and attempts to create and analyse the loss to overcome its impossibility. To share this suffering with an audience – no matter how controversial it has become in Western culture with a demand of no display of emotions, by banishing sadness and mourning from the society with Aries’ words – is a way to negotiate and meditate on what torments and interrupts. The artist (the witness) who chooses to document the horrendous appearances of a dying process seeks to remember the

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‘distasteful’ whereas another reader – a follower of both Sontag and Leibovitz’s work – was celebrating The Guardian’s choice to publish these photos.

54 Interview by Emma Brockes, October 7, 2006 Guardian Unlimited, titled ‘My Time with Susan.’
http://books.guardian.co.uk/departments/artsandentertainment/story/0,,1888256,00.html#article_contin

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55 T. Lynch (2001) Bodies in Motion and At Rest, London; Vintage, p. 70

56 ibid. p. 63

57 P. Aries (1994) Western Attitudes toward Death from the Middle Ages to the Present, London: Marion Boyars, p. 102 ‘One does not have the right to become emotional other than in private, that is to say, secretly.’ p. 88 I have analysed this attitude in Chapter Three while analysing the spectator’s stunt and concluded that the pressures of the society claiming its mentally stable characters in the face of suffering, death, and dying place the witness-mourner in a difficult situation where s/he is not allowed to show/share her/his loss in public. S/he is forced to privatise her/his grief behind the closed doors. Please see Chapter Three on Representation and the Spectator.
anguish and sadness as well as the good memories of a shared life with the loved one. Here, the persistent expression of the artist is more often experienced rather than fantasised. The uncompromising appearance of the dying or dead compels the artist to authenticate the experience of witnessing in order to escape from the language; both seeking to free herself/himself and seeking to belong to the reality. This kind of negotiation, meditation and reflection upon the grim reality brings liberation and annihilation, escape and captivity in the face of anguish. The absent becomes present; the unrepresentable becomes presentable, implicated in the representation which surpasses and overpowers itself.

There are no secrets within the representation and the depiction. Rather it declares its (instructive) sovereignty – would be that it is both the inescapable and irrecoverable. Perhaps, it is the very expressions of one’s own Other creating the necessary gap in between the artist and the audience as well as in between the witness and the witnessed. It is not that the artist desires to turn the encounter into pathology, pity or a controversy but rather invites empathy between herself/himself and the dying/dead as well as the audience. It would be true to state that the artist is not inventive or creative in her/his manifestation but possibly attempting to aesthetisize death and suffering, yet failing miserably. Cioran wrote in *On The Heights of Despair* that death, suffering and sadness nullify aesthetics. It brings to our attention the distinguishing elements between sadness and melancholy. I believe this will highlight the difference between the works of witness (as a film-maker, photographer) and the others. He writes:

Sadness accompanies all those events in which life expends itself. Its intensity is equal to its loss. This death causes the greatest sadness. That one can never speak of a funeral as ‘melancholy’ shows an important difference between sadness and melancholy. Also, the aesthetic aspect of melancholy is entirely absent from sadness. It is worthwhile noticing how the domain of aesthetics narrows gradually as it

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58 Chapter Two brought forward the invention of one’s own Other in the face of disaster and the absent Other as a means of connection in order to conceptually handle the experience. One’s own Other is formulated out of experience in order to provide the distance to stare and address our relationship with the dying and dead.
approaches serious reality and crucial life events. Death, suffering and sadness negate aesthetics.59

There is no doubt that what communicates within the works of witness as an artist is one we can never speak of as melancholic. Because before being an artist, s/he is a witness expressing her/his sadness with the encounter of dying, suffering, coma and death. Before its aesthetic value, its moral and ethical value troubles both the artist and the audience. The individual who dares to reveal/display and to share their personal sufferings with an audience is not only challenging herself/himself towards an approach to establish with death a relation of freedom and consolation but also challenging the audience to empathise with his/her decision. The question that strikes both the artist and the audience must be: are these works making death, dying and suffering bearable, manageable or rather possible?60 It is difficult and problematic to find a direct response to this question. Within the ‘theoretical I’ I have tried to answer this question yet I as a film-maker will not be able to declare that I have an immediate and instant answer. The Other (as Goldberg would acknowledge) brings both trust and intimacy (or Leibovitz would say) comes out grief and anguish in order not only to handle the impossible experience but also to find a way to negotiate and meditate upon its negative certainty. The film complemented the theories presented in Chapter Three, by opposing the socially determined attitude towards the witness-mourner in the society as well as the spectator’s apathetical position. The Other, in that sense creates a confrontation both to/for the spectator and the attitude towards the witness/mourner in Western culture.

I have tried to probe the difference between language and silence above in order to elaborate the relationship between ‘the theoretical I’ and ‘the visual I’ within this doctoral project.

60 Blanchot would comment on Heidegger, Hegel and Nietzsche as whom ‘all attempt to account for this decision’ and therefore ‘seem to shed the greatest light on the destiny of man’ at making death possible. M. Blanchot (1989) The Space of Literature, London: University of Nebraska press, p. 96 It is important that we ask this question for the artist too in order to understand the purpose behind the subjective expression of their art work. Yet that question stands as a rhetorical one which will never find its direct, overt response easily.
Silence, with the help of Blanchot and Sontag, has given rise to the zone of meditation; to the metaphor suspended; to a tormenting vision; to the voiceless cry that is determining its agony by nullifying the (necessity for) language. Silence reclaims the relation at a distance and creates a symbolic annihilation of the language, as a means of deferral and abeyance towards the grim reality. Not being able to escape, changing direction between sincerity and self-deception, The Other exposed S in her most defenceless condition which compelled both the film-maker and the viewer to silence. There is a disturbing certainty that haunts all the witnesses and claims its meaning either within the voiceless cries or within the language in order to reach to a possibility of a consolation. But the silence remains wounded and does not authorize a choice or a precise justification.

The last film O’Death - as I have tried to describe at the beginning of this chapter - invited both the film-maker and the viewer to close the door that opened with the encounter of Coma, and acknowledge the finality of death by displacing the identity of the victim with the sardonic laughing devil. While working towards a conclusion within this doctoral project, O’Death has reconciled an approach towards S’ death attempting to accomplish this under the cover of art (film) in the search of a final responsibility, response and remembrance. The filmic configurations which operated within the context and conceptual appropriations of the theoretical framework designated the necessary space between the encounter and the witness as much as between the viewer and the film-maker in order to negotiate multiple meditations on death, dying, coma and suffering. The dialogue between both language and silence, both ‘the theoretical - mediated I’ and ‘the visual - unmediated I’ has revealed and manifested the necessities, constraints, weaknesses, strengths, challenges and possible consolations of the witness for this creative doctoral thesis.
CONCLUSION

Suffering is a monster with many faces, staring back at itself on the heights of personal catastrophes and traumas, echoing absence. In the battle between life and death for the witness there is compulsion to give meaning to what is encountered. In the process of self-reproach the witness tries to articulate - where there is plenty room for one’s own interpretations. ‘The reflective I’ suffers ‘of not being able to suffer enough’\(^1\) or ‘despairingly’ experiences ‘a transgression…without being responsible for it’\(^2\) while anguish takes over all the decisions until it invents a counter-anguish as a means of apathy. ‘The I’ can never expiate or endure the cruel paradox and the impossibility\(^3\) in the face of itself - while not only self-reflecting but also perceiving the other in dying. Drawing on the personal experiences of the witnesses and the testimony of writers like C.S. Lewis, Simone de Beauvoir, Maurice Blanchot; identifying with the expression of the impossible in Franz Kafka, Samuel Beckett, J.L. Borges, Emile Cioran and M. Blanchot’s stories and fragments; borrowing from theories of Georges Bataille, Zygmunt Bauman, J.P. Sartre and Adam Phillips and in visual terms recognizing Orlan, Ingrid Bergman, Andrey Tarkovsky and Diamanda Galas’ reflective apprehension of the self in anguish have made it possible to reach to an understanding of the (articulation of) suffering.

With a hidden affirmation, do I remind myself of the fact that all these writers, artists, film-makers and witnesses of traumas need(ed) to articulate their suffering one way or another in order to deal with the impossible encounter of death and dying? Perhaps the testimony is necessary; the intense emptiness that displaces us and deprives us of ourselves is essential to come to terms with the suffering. So it should be possible for the witness to speak of it; that is

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1 C.S. Lewis (1966) *A Grief Observed*, London; Faber and Faber, p. 10
in its own language. Or rather, is it perhaps through the articulation and expression of the
impossibility that ‘the I’ best acknowledges and gives meaning to anguish? This effort could
be, then, described in a sense as discoveries – inventions of the witness in the face of
suffering. E.M. Cioran suggests in his essay Thinking Against Oneself that ‘almost all our
discoveries are due to our violences, to the exacerbation of our instability.’¹⁴ What disturbs,
troubles, and upsets ‘the I’; what interrupts the thought and gives rise to agonic⁵ reflection are
all causes of crisis as well as inventions and discoveries. Nothing other than meaning is at
stake. Here, language and silence look for their own expression, their own solution. How does
a writer, film-maker and researcher ‘manage’ suffering? Identification with the very
movement of conceptual and existential undertaking which is essential to human
consciousness in order to elaborate suffering’s logic has been imperative – for this doctoral
thesis. The witness is bound to think that there is no logic. In the narratives of anguish and
suffering, either in C. S. Lewis’ or S. de Beauvoir’s or even in S. Gilbert’s, the articulation
allows identifying the puzzle of troubles rather than solving the puzzle. Yet still, the witness
attempts to come to terms with the traumas of the Other while hunting for an agreement with
not only one’s own monsters but also with all the external struggles to discover and invent
his/her own interpretation and testimony.

The intention and the purpose of the (doctoral thesis) testimony has not been one of
justification of a particular mode of film-making or analytical critique. Instead the loops and
cycles between the films and exegesis have created a space and model to render the
difficulties of the self-reflective process of thought of the witness. Because as Cioran observes
there can be ‘no justification in suffering.’¹⁶ So I return to the idea of apathy as a solution after
discursive and rigorous analysis; apathy as the counter-anguish, as the anti-choice, as the

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Chicago Press, p. 33
⁵ We have seen in the last chapter Cioran was to describe the dramatic moment in the battle between
life and death as agonic. E.M. Cioran (1992) On the Heights of Despair, (translated by I.Zaripopol-
⁶ ibid. p.54
unspoken understanding of consciousness. The analysis revealed the bitter unacceptable purpose of the self-reflective process. Apathy occurred as the existential destiny of the witness in the face of an event ‘whose absolute darkness is also absolute clarity’7 as Blanchot would say in his essay on *The Ease of Dying*. What he calls a *naked event* is the one from which the demand (to recognise its reality) formulates its own solution by means of the inexplicable as soon as it recognizes to think against thought, and gives way to a deficiency which is synergetic with apathy, appealing to passivity. The event that the witness is not participating but perceiving triggers the impossibility of language (and silence) while seeking a way to come to grips with its reality. In an attempt to recover itself ‘the reflective I’ accepts apathy involuntarily when the absence strikes, and when fear and anguish trouble the state of being. To describe apathy as a solution is a matter of turning the impossible into a violent promise of discontinuity as a means of affirmation, and to draw another kind of insight to the ways in which the witness handles the reality of death, dying and suffering. Apathy in this context can be thought as the most reflexive decision and at all times determined by a confirmation more incurable, habitual and chronic than expected and more necessary from which ‘the I’ wouldn’t be able to hide even if it would like to escape. Within consciousness implying its accomplishment is only through a self-reflective process: by looking into oneself and creating the counter-anguish as a means of apathy. For that the necessity of distance mediated by the event and the image (of the coma), has revealed the space for thinking and reflecting. Therefore that is where ‘the I’ is allowed to accomplish the unspeakable and disturbing passage from perceiving to facing up to it and eventually submitting to apathy as an anti-choice. As soon as this unrecognised necessity of consciousness makes itself known apathy could be seen and interpreted as a wish-for-freedom. The reader of the first chapter witnessed a kind of metamorphosis - if you like - introducing its play from fear to anguish and from anguish to apathy. An existential approach gave rise to fixing attention on the necessity of counter-anguish to formulate a decision about its impossibility.

Chapter One implicated the challenges of the witness as the perceiving subject in the process of self-reflecting; undertaking an existential mission in order to describe the thought process in consciousness. In my exploration of fear as sovereign moment, I turn to Bataille’s notion to elaborate the emotional reaction, and then I draw some aspects of fear as the cul-de-sac of the modern world to discuss that it is also the suspension of thought and unreflective apprehension to use Sartre’s phrase. This leads me to the thought that fear – the sovereign moment eventually generates anguish to recognise its inability to act and turn this lack of ability into the reflective apprehension of the self in the mode of not-being. This is the point where Sartre’s configuration of anguish in the past and in the future helps me to distinguish the responsibility and the choices in order to reach a crucial and decisive moment which demands counter-anguish. Hoping to unravel what passes through the witness’s mind when confronted with the impossibility of meaning and to conceptually and theoretically enhance the process of thought with the help of Sartre’s approach to anguish have revealed apathy as the enervated - involuntary condition of the witness. By way of reflection - self-reflection that evokes the suspension, the anguish in the hope of dispelling the impossible experience – the witness attempts to claim what torments her/him. This can be thought as confessional and a mode of exorcism as well as meditative invention of consciousness. The greatest challenge lies in the attempt to claim apathy as the solution; it is the existential undertaking and ‘the reflective I’ that discover and create apathy in order to overcome the anguish and to remake the self in Sartre’s phrase.

Apathy’s critical aspect and dramatic ambiguity introduces a brilliant lie for the witness. It surely is a splendid lie that annihilates itself in order to defeat the impossible encounter. We

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9 J.P. Sartre (2000) Being and Nothingness, London: Routledge (In order to follow the process, please see the first chapter.)
10 ibid.
could imagine that Freud’s *task of detachment*\(^{11}\) turns out to be - existentially - the very apathy that the witness embraces gradually. But the word ‘lie’ does not suffice. Rather ‘the I’ is aware of the fact that apathy can be interpreted as the acceptance of the conditional and almost unspeakable tendency of the witness. All that ‘the I’ can know is that the witness occupies the thought of apathy - reluctantly - as consciousness’ bitter discovery. Only in silence and in writing ‘the I’ of the witness could subscribe to apathy as a solution to see it as freedom from impossibility. Its silenced reality that is shared by all other witnesses - hardly pronounced out loud - achieved through reason’s battle, opposition and cruelty.

Responsibility lies first with the critical reflection to take the witness seriously in an academic context and attempt to elaborate the impossible expression in the process of self-reproach as well as self-awareness while the witness develops ways as to how to handle and to articulate the encounter as the perceiving subject. In that sense, Chapter One investigates the challenges of the witness while self-reflecting - ‘the reflective I’ - aims to determine apathy as the transcended anguish in consciousness (please see the diagram). Here, existential approach suggests a different insight than one of psychoanalysis; the compelling nature of consciousness in the exercise of ‘the reflective I’ demands to rationalise what is encountered within its impossibility. This is not to say how things ‘ought to be’ but how they ‘could be’ when reflecting in consciousness. The exegesis has prepared the process of thought taking its course to efface what frustrates in the face of death, dying and suffering in the task of articulating the self-conscious reflection.

Chapter One suggests that apathy occurs out of necessity, and despite its conventional usage - that of indifference and lack of concern – this chapter invents it as part of the reflexive mode of understanding only by reaching its wished-for-freedom state after rigorous analysis on

\(^{11}\) S. Freud (1917) *Mourning and Melancholia*, (translated by Joan Riviere,) General Psychological Theory Ed. New York: Collier
Figure 1 – Stages of self-reflective process
self-conscious manifestation. Aiming to develop apathy as the existential destiny of the witness is an original contribution to knowledge and a new insight into complex and analogous encounters of the witness. In the visual proposition, however, the images reflect upon the anguish and fear, the viewer cannot capture apathy. Only its unspeakable sense and the metaphors that are associated with are depicted within the created mise-en-scène. The film *Apathy* complements the written text - chapter one - by mirroring the disturbing and unsettling scenes that are simultaneous with fear and anguish. In that sense the viewer cannot witness apathy but only grasps its hidden impression. As I emphasised in the last chapter in detail *Apathy* as the very first filmic proposition displayed the immediate metaphors adopting its form and expression from the theories attached to fear and anguish (derived from Bataille and Sartre) as well as the instantaneous responses to the visual representations of the bloodshed imagery used in films and media. This first film which is to be considered as an artistic response and exercise to the first chapter, prompts the identification with the metaphors and direct encounters of the witness as the beginning of a cycle. The filmic eye of the witness, in that sense, enhances the ideas presented in the first chapter by visualising the reflexive and impulsive reaction to fear, anguish and the external struggles. The creative-practice has furthered the knowledge that emerged in the theoretical framework of the first chapter by utilising the theories deployed and reflecting visually the processes of ‘the unmediated I’.

The images play a big role in the consciousness of the witness while creating a sort of deferral when they are dazzling. Death, dying and suffering are never compromised or reconciled within the image. The image declares the distance from its object and ‘the I’ abandons itself to what is seen. I - as a witness - was haunted when perceiving the image of coma because it did neither offer me any meaning nor any knowledge of what it represented - if not its invading and obscure presence. In Chapter One I have configured a rendering of anguish and the perceiving subject, and apathy was the only deduction of the self-reflective consciousness. Yet when ‘the reflective I’ turns to the perceived object and tries to comprehend what
happened when the disaster did strike nothing suffices in regard to its appearance. Chapter Two has taken up the challenge to address this difficulty by critically assessing the relationship between the perceived object and the witness (the perceiving subject,) and the apprehension of disaster. Since this thesis’s conception is to analyse and investigate the witness’s existential encounter in the face of death, dying and suffering, there is a need to acknowledge and recognise the difficulties of the challenges that are confronted when witnessing the Other in her or his unusual appearance and how the knowledge of disaster is articulated. That is why ‘the I’ turns to the Other in her disquieting presence and attempts to identify with the Other and the disaster that took place.

That leads me to consider what ‘the I’ perceives as a witness; the image of S in her present absence that haunted all the witnesses. The image of coma had nothing to resemble, resisting my grasp and escaping me to the point where ‘the I’ suffers passively which was appealing to Blanchot-ian passivity in the face of disaster. Just like apathy except without a possible deduction in consciousness towards a relation between me and the Other, between me and the world. Apathy can be said to apply to the individual who has chosen to be sovereign.12 When viewing the image of the Other, the encounter claims its own sovereignty, authorising no choice whatsoever for the viewer. So it is impossible to reach an apathetical point of view when attempting to give meaning to what is perceived. Yet ambiguity of the image (of coma) reveals to me the patience of passivity, as well as the Persecutor that demands my responsibility for its measureless charges. These terms distinctly correspond with what Blanchot evaluates, and have guided me, in the second chapter, to articulate ‘the reflective I’ in the process of understanding the knowledge of personal catastrophe in the face of the Other and disaster.

12 I have cited at the beginning of the second chapter. He says ‘Apathy is the spirit of denial applied to the man who has elected to be sovereign.’ cited from G. Bataille (1986) Eroticism, Death and Sensuality, San Francisco: City Lights Books, p. 172
As an original contribution to knowledge, Chapter Two develops a unique configuration of
the witness’s approach to the Other and disaster and suggests that s/he, in order to construct a
relation to what is perceived, creates her/his own Other within the gap. Blanchot tracks this
chapter’s call for an emphasis on the impossible experience and helps me - as a witness - to
reach for a possibility of insight to the ways in which the witness handles the experience of
disaster and the Other. Fixing attention on the image of the Other here, and searching for
theoretical possibilities that might offer a conceptual appropriation to the relation (that waits
to be constructed for the sake of reality) between the Other and the witness has become
possible with Blanchot’s reflection on the indescribable experiences in the encounter of death,
disaster and suffering. His stance has never been one of grief or mourning but rather
identification with the experience of death which claims (learns) to think with pain. What he
comments on Kafka can easily be applied to him and his own writing too: ‘the writer, then, is
one who writes in order to be able to die, and he is whose power to write comes from an
anticipated relation with death.’13 What the reader detects (feels, experiences) in his writings
is the very feeling of meditation on death that moulds the experiences of the witness (and the
victim) so the suffering can still be seen. His starting point can be imagined to be instructed
by the image and the encounter of death by facing the death squad in June 1944 - both as a
victim and a witness.

Throughout Chapter Two, I investigated the impossible experience with the help of
Blanchot’s narrative; by reflecting upon his testimony and his thoughts on disaster and the
Other. Particularly his testimony The Instant of My Death, and The Writing of the Disaster
demonstrate the unbearable encounter and the meditation with exposure in the task of writing
to overcome the terror. He not only contemplates the unsettling impressions that are lying
hidden in the witness’s (and the victim’s) mind but also challenges questions on the absent
Other which also manifests itself in his fictions such as Thomas the Obscure, Death Sentence

13 M. Blanchot (1989) The Space of Literature, (translated by A. Smock) London: University of
Nebraska, p. 93
and When the Time Comes. He contends in his testimony The Instant of my Death that the arrival of the inescapable is the sovereign elation of death which remains not-experienced as well as always-already there as ‘the encounter of death with death.’ To confront the radical experience plunges him into the darkest experience while the feeling of lightness opens up itself to the persistent gap in time to speak of its own language within the impersonal voice. In The Writing of the Disaster written earlier - almost ten years ago - he defines the inexperience of dying as the ‘generosity of disaster.’ This can be said to depict ‘the feeling of lightness (that is death itself)’ in The Instant of my Death. From this lightness the reader discovers the impersonal voice that speaks of the encounter which I have probed in the second chapter by reflecting upon the interruption in time as a means of the gap. This gap allows the witness to invent her/his own Other.

When I return to the question of what ties me to the Other and disaster as a means of concern and responsibility, and what occurs while I try to construct my relation to the Other I as a witness apprehend this gap in ‘between no longer and not yet’ that ‘the reflective I’ occupies endlessly in order to achieve a relation to the Other. This chapter suggests that this interval - in Blanchot’s phrase - formulates one’s own Other, and exposes the separation and the interruption by obliterating ‘the I.’ What is revealed is the Other in place of me according to Blanchot. Do I become aware that his language has modified my own witnessing and led me to discover one’s own Other within the gap. The uncomfortable level of exposure in the face of the Other and disaster causes the witness to create her/his own Other within the gap in order to handle the experience. The affliction that ‘the I’ feels necessitates my relation to the Other and to the actuality of events for the sake of grim reality.

What answer is there to the individual who can no longer construct a concern for the Other?

14 see Blanchot Reader, Fiction and Literary Essays (1999) New York: Station Hill
18 M. Blanchot (1995) The Writing of Disaster, London; University of Nebraska Press (please see Chapter Two on Disaster and the Other to follow the process of thought)
19 ibid. p.26
Developing a critical approach to the Other through Blanchotian enquiry revealed two different relations; my relation to the Other and the Other’s relation to me. Chapter Two probes both relations and suggests that in my relation to the Other there is no possibility of an easy formulation whereas in the Other’s relation to me, the Other becomes the Persecutor. Both of these relations are bound to trigger a kind of passivity that ‘the I’ can no longer claim what taunts her/him unless to create her/his own Other within the gap. Because what ‘the I’ perceives is no more familiar and does not resemble the person. It can no longer guide. ‘The reflective I’ is exposed to what is encountered. Here, the image, as Blanchot would confirm ‘tends to withdraw the object from understanding by maintaining it in the immobility of resemblance which has nothing to resemble.’ The gap and one’s own Other, in that sense, disclose the unspeakable by distancing the image. The knowledge of disaster which is only mediated by the image reverses all the relations and limits my power to deliver its own meaning while it escapes and nullifies ‘the I.’ What escapes the logic all together is the inescapable. Blanchot states, ‘what no one can grasp is the inescapable’ when we are haunted by something inaccessible to us from which we cannot avoid either. This is clear in the case of corpses when the corpse becomes the image for him:

The cadaver is its own image. It no longer entertains any relation with this world, where it still appears, except that of an image, an obscure possibility, a shadow ever present behind the living form which now, far from separating itself from this form, transforms it entirely into shadow. The corpse is a reflection becoming the master of life it reflects – absorbing it, identifying substantively with it by moving it from its value and from its truth value to something incredible – something neutral which there is no getting used to.23

Highlighting this resemblance which is also applicable to the image of coma is essential. S’ image presented a corpse like stance, separated from her identity, as if imitating her. There was no negotiation with the unrecognisable body if not the affirmation of her absence. The witness experienced the image of the Other as uncertain, inaccessible. It was as if the world collapsed with that single image whose appearance used to be familiar but in that state no

20 ibid. pages. 19-25
22 ibid. p. 259
23 ibid. p.260
more recognisable to anything known. Here, the Other’s image claims a relation not only to itself but to the world. The experience that Blanchot describes recurs in the face of the (every) Other whose absence needs meaning, whose image resembles that of a corpse. That is where this chapter argues that the witness in the face of such an encounter invents one’s own Other within the gap in order to determine a relation to the Other and to the disaster as a means of concern and responsibility. This is not to say a resolution is possible with what is seen but rather one’s own Other reduces this experience to something manageable even though the image is/will never be familiar. I wonder whether Blanchot would respond to this ambiguity of one’s own Other as ‘at times a marvel of authenticity, at other times a hoax or pretense?’

Perhaps this is another invention of a perfect lie for the witness; to accept this fascination of the gap and submit to one’s own Other in order to create the space for not only thinking but also establishing a relation to the Other and disaster. Nevertheless, the witness, unable to recognise herself/himself in the face-to-face with the Other (or vice versa); incapable of constructing the necessary relation to the world and to the reality, is compelled to invent this *hoax or pretence, or a marvel of authenticity* in order to reach to a possibility of concern. One’s own Other can be thought as ready and always-already present to generate a response to the impossibility. As if waiting to make itself known with every encounter to emanate concern for the Other. It is there whether I identify with it or not; providing that impersonal, neutral and buried meditation with exposure.

Chapter Two is propelled by Blanchot’s response to the Other and disaster in both its philosophical and critical manifestations as a means of meditation that reveals itself only in

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24 M. Blanchot (1997) *Friendship*, (translated by E. Rottenberg) Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, p.126 In his essay *Idle Speech* he contends Bataille’s *Le Bavard* as speaking its own language without an identity, without responsibility. Speaking without speaking, a relation without relation ‘to nullify the moment by reducing it to the memory of a derisory incident – a memory that, in order to better destroy itself, passes itself off as something invented, suspended and ruined by invention.’ P. 128 Which is synergetic with - I suggest - what one’s own Other is able to claim. And at some point Blanchot condemns this speech as *at times marvel of authenticity, other times a hoax or pretense.*
writing. However, in the visual proposition I also tried to utilise his ideas within the images by introducing the impossible expression of the witness. The film *Disaster* has demonstrated the ways in which the witness attempts to *not-see* what is taking place around her. The viewer is confronted with the mutable gesture of the witness. In that sense the film complements on second chapter by depicting the very direct reaction to the Other and disaster where the reality of the event escapes and annuls ‘the I’. There can be neither a narrative nor a reflection to be captured within that escape. What communicates within the images is the very cruelty of witnessing. This second film conveys the tendency of the denial of the witness. As opposed to the first film – *Apathy - Disaster* now compels the viewer to turn inward and obtain a distance and capture the passivity of ‘the I’ that is ready to escape from the reality. The filmic proposition emphasises the knowledge of passivity that has been presented with the theories deployed from Blanchot’s notion of disaster.

When probing the images that ‘the I’ confronts in daily-life within the visual representation of death, there occurs a difference between the spectator and the witness to the extent that the representation triggers a desensitising impression upon its viewer. This doctoral thesis’ goal has been to bring a comparison between the witness and the spectator while drawing attention to the ‘visual I’ and the ‘theoretical I’ of the witness as a film-maker and a researcher. Subsequent to the witness’s challenges that have been investigated within the first two chapters, Chapter Three develops a cultural and social approach to the spectator’s attitude in order to capture and analyse the differences between the spectator and the witness’s mind-set. It is necessary to investigate and comprehend what distinguishes the witness from the spectator and how the spectator is expected to show empathy in the face of representation that disarms its viewer.

Exploring the spectator’s attitude in Western Culture has required probing the impact of the images of death, dying and suffering in media as well as the spectacle that creates the logic of
disappearance and *separateness* - in Debord’s words – by alienating the individual from the reality within the representation. The logic of disappearance has derived from, in Zygmunt Bauman’s estimation, ‘the ones who rules the airwaves, [who] rules the lived world [and] decides its shape and contents’ while nobody forces the spectator to ‘attend the spectacle.’

Or it, in Baudrillard’s diagnosis, has created the devoid of meaning by its ideological control and, in Guy Debord’s evaluation, has constructed *the abused gaze and false consciousness* which all have framed the curse and the annihilation of the spectacle and of the representation for the spectator. Chapter Three has formed a critical and cultural inquiry by first analysing the function and the modes of reading death’s display and secondly by investigating the spectator’s stunt and mind-set towards the visual representation of death and dying. The chapter has demonstrated the alteration in attitude towards death to describe the *tamed* and the new-untamed effect that generated the separation between the spectator and the spectator as well as the witness-mourner. With Susan Sontag’s study on Regarding the Pain of Others it has challenged to reach to an understanding of the usage and function of the images of death. To exemplify it has analysed Saddam’s sons *before* and *after* images that were published in July 2003 in media, showing the brutal reality and justifying the act within their *after* photos that of masked and cleaned. The representation unlike reality could be manipulated, *masked* - as Jean Baudrillard would argue - and whoever was responsible of the cruelty could be concealed or rather could be justified by turning the destructive act of judgement into an affirmative act. While asking the questions with Sontag whether we will get used to these images or whether they teach us anything or not, this part of the study has suggested that there is no self-reflective approach on the part of the spectator. On the contrary the spectator has remained adaptive and accustomed to death’s display to such an extent that s/he is not forced to acknowledge the actuality of events.

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28 P. Aries (1994) *Western Attitudes toward Death from the Middle Ages to the Present*, London: Marion Boyars, pages. 1-24
30 J. Baudrillard (1983) *Simulations*, New York: Semiotext(e)
Chapter Three has addressed the spectator’s tendency to create the necessary distance in
between her/him and the representation by demonstrating her/his approach similar to a
doctor’s. In order to evaluate, it has made use of Sandra Gilbert’s elaboration on the hospice
treatments and the doctor’s gaze at the dying patient as ‘an alien marauder who has been an
indomitable foe.’\(^{31}\) Such distance and detachment has encouraged not action but passivity on
the part of the spectator as opposed to a doctor. As elaborated in the third chapter, the task of
the spectator – rather similar to a doctor’s - intends to look at and stare at the representation
(the patient) with a disconnected curiosity in order not to be implicated in any sort of
apprehension; no bearing on the anguish because ‘it is happening to the unfamiliar Other’ and
‘don’t worry it might not happen to you’ - as the traditional saying declares and comforts.
Could it be perceived without fear; the comforting feeling of not belonging to that reality, the
spectator performing his/her duty objectively in order to normalise the situation with a rather
functional consciousness without reflection. To highlight Bauman’s candidly contemplated
identification with the efforts of the individual (similar to the spectator) of Liquid Modernity,
we see the same pattern provoking a parallel wish. He states:

> Efforts to keep the ‘other,’ the different, the strange and the foreign at a distance, the
decision to preclude the need for communication, negotiation and mutual
commitment, is not the only conceivable, but the expectable response to the
existential uncertainty rooted in the new fragility or fluidity of social bonds. That
decision, to be sure, fits well with our contemporary obsessive concern with pollution
and purification, with our tendency to identify danger to personal safety with the
invasion of foreign bodies, and to identify safety unthreatened and secure with purity.
The acutely apprehensive attention to the substances entering the body through mouth
or nostrils, and to the foreigners leaking surreptitiously into the neighbourhood of the
body, is accommodated side by side in the same cognitive frame. Both prompt a
similar wish to ‘get it (them) out of my (ours) system’.\(^{32}\)

Bauman’s liquefied and flowing picture of modernity shapes the individual’s short-lived
attention, creating a disappearing act as good as Houdini’s\(^{33}\), making the uncertainty lighter
and superficial ‘so that it is less likely to damage,’\(^{34}\) and keeping all the troubles and anguish
at a distance (as long as it is not self-referential and not touching directly). His study in Liquid

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\(^{31}\) S.M. Gilbert (2006) *Death’s Door, Modern Dying and the Ways We Grieve*, London, New York:
W.W. Norton & Company, p. 193


\(^{33}\) ibid. p. 151

\(^{34}\) ibid. p. 163
Modernity traces all the aspects of the human condition not only in community, in social network, in work but also in time and space, and existentially. It all stands to deduce and redescribe the spectator’s position, conditional interest and existential insecurity in the face of an unsettling spectacle. Bauman, intimates that the present day men and women, that of liquid modernity, hunts for gratification\textsuperscript{35} and elsewhere he points out escape is the new game in town.\textsuperscript{36} Chapter Three has adopted his configuration of the individual of this new modernity which is all valid and analogous to the spectator’s approach in the face of representation. As probed in Chapter Three, given the spectator’s attitude, existential insecurity would favour escapism that of a Houdini-like act by barring terror, anguish and fear that threaten in the encounter of portrayal of death, dying and suffering. The chapter, in order to clarify this tendency to Houdini-like escapism, has deployed Adam Phillips’ study\textsuperscript{37} on the art of escape; demonstrating that the spectator, with the consciousness of risk, will not be able to see herself/himself in the place of victims. Rather s/he will act on the desire to feel from the reality, because the defensive act is bound to function to disengage and to break free from the disturbing reality without reflection.

Alternatively, Chapter Three also suggests that the spectator’s attitude is not only a product of separateness that is created by the representation, or the liquefied exercise but also the result of the attitude towards death in contemporary society that has put the mourning behind closed doors, and declared its mentally stable characters. Early as 1960s we read Geoffrey Gorer’s study on Death, Grief and Mourning in Contemporary Britain; a thorough analysis with 359 men and women who had suffered a loss and were in mourning. The study shows and confirms the withdrawal of the witness-mourner from the society and the fear of the display of emotions; hiding grief.\textsuperscript{38} He, in his conclusion, states that ‘giving way to grief is stigmatised as morbid, unhealthy, demoralising’ and ‘mourning is treated as if it were a

\textsuperscript{35} ibid. 128
\textsuperscript{37} A. Phillips (2001) \textit{Houdini’s Box, On the Arts of Escape}, London: Faber and Faber
\textsuperscript{38} G. Gorer (1965) Death, Grief and Mourning in Contemporary Britain, London: The Camelot Press
weakness, a self-indulgence, a reprehensible bad habit instead of a psychological necessity’ when ‘public denial of mourning is a great increase in public callousness.’\textsuperscript{39} To capture the same mode of argument of callous treatment\textsuperscript{40} in Bauman’s fluid modernity after forty years provides us with a relevant diagnosis to position the spectator’s and the witness-mourner’s attitude in the face death, dying and suffering in society. Therefore - with Chapter Three - it becomes possible to lay bare the distinguishing elements between the spectator and the witness. To state overtly what has been implied within the first three chapters as to the witness and the spectator’s mind-set:

The witness is the experiencing subject; encountering death as personal and as a threat into reality. This is when Anguish occurs in the face of absent meaning as the aftermath of the sovereign moment when there can be no frames of reference for action in the face of the familial (victim) Other. The witness takes refuge in reflection as the perceiving subject and claims identification with what torments. S/he holds the monopoly of suffering; discovers death in his/her subjectivity; meditates on death, dying and suffering. Therefore, s/he determines the choices to take responsibility and to handle the impossible experience for the sake of tolerance to its agonising appearance, attempting to remove and distance herself/himself from the experience by self-reflecting in consciousness as well as by transforming the experience into another medium which can have art in its origin. S/he may reach to an understanding of the freedom which comprises not only responsibility but the notions of discovery, authenticity, independence, artistic creation, escape, bliss, uniqueness, irony, will, power, self-indulgence, fantasy, transgression, the call of the wild and the search for strange. S/he struggles for a level of apathy (the task of detachment in Freudian sense) in order to handle and overcome the impossible state that s/he encounters while capturing Apathy in self-conscious reflection as a means of transcended/counter anguish from a wished-for-freedom point of view. The witness, also attempts to express the

\textsuperscript{39} ibid. 113
uncertainty/impossibility in the face of the Other and disaster as necessarily formulating her own Other within the gap to be able to speak of the encounter and to construct a relation to the Other and to disaster.

The spectator is the non-experiencing subject; encountering death as impersonal and not as a threat into his/her reality. Anguish will not occur since it is not self-referential and personal. There is no call for self-reflection as the perceiving subject nor claim for identification with the traumas and anguish of the Other and Outside. S/he resists the (unfamiliar) Other’s predicament in order to protect himself/herself and would not meditate on death, dying and suffering. Therefore, there will be no determination on the choices to take responsibility and to handle the impossible experience and agonising appearances of the representation because it does not touch. S/he, instead, attempts to remove herself/himself from the experience by escaping and disengaging; reaches to an understanding of freedom which comprises only the wish to get it out from her/his system while striving for a level of apathy in order to create the impersonal stance with a perfect detached, abstract and ‘objective’ devoid-of-emotion similar to a doctor’s. There is an attempt to short-live the uncertainty/impossibility at a distance where the spectator remains adaptive and accustomed to death’s display to such an extent that there is no effort to empathise, understand or compromise. S/he emerges as impassive and untouched which calls for no reconciliation of the reality with the representation of death even if s/he wants to create empathy, conceals this under the Houdini-like act. The spectator in that way secures Apathy as the very defensive act and in need of safety to obtain survival values.

A straightforward comparison allows the reader to see not only the differences but also the similarities between the witness and the spectator. While the main distinguishing element between these two becomes anguish, the similarity would simulate the desire for survival (freedom and security) as its only wish. Anguish could be seen as an impossible feeling when ‘hope turns in fear against time which drags it forward’ as Blanchot’s Thomas would describe. He witnessing Anne in her deathbed contends that ‘all feelings gush out of
themselves and come together, destroyed, abolished, in this feeling which moulds me, makes me and unmakes me, causes me to feel, hideously, in a total absence of feeling, my reality in the shape of nothingness. A feeling which has to be given a name and which Thomas calls it anguish. The witness and the spectator are evidently dissimilar when it comes to anguish. The spectator will not be implicated in this impossible feeling that causes ‘the I’ to feel the dreadful nothingness which draws the witness into itself. Yet there is a possibility of becoming one another. To state the obvious; the witness would become eventually a spectator by recognising the decision of the reality (when there is nothing s/he can do to change the Other’s condition) and struggle to tolerate its impossibility in anguish whereas the spectator can become the witness when a horrifying disaster can strike at random and pick him/her as a victim or a witness. Noticeably they are affected by different feelings which comprise distinct life (and death) experiences and encounters while they occupy the same world and the same predicaments as a human being. Nevertheless in the spectator’s attitude, the apathy we capture develops into a preferred and favoured social destiny as a means of escape. In the witness’s case, this apathy becomes the anti-choice, an involuntary response and responsibility in consciousness as a means of freedom which I suggested occurring as the existential destiny of the witness. Consciousness, in that sense, has produced understanding, response and responsibility and a search for freedom from its impossibility as its focus. The research has established a distinctive study to the witness’s existential predicament, and the spectator’s social impasse by engaging consciousness in the process of thought and by provoking the need to formulate a solution and a consolation to the multiple negotiations of anguish inasmuch as to the negotiations of the visual representation of death, dying and suffering. The third filmic practice The Other that accompanies this chapter, deliberately attempts to put the viewer into a difficult position by displaying the aunt in coma. Implicated in the representation of the disturbing appearance of coma, the familial witness will empathise while the imperceptive eye of the spectator would be challenged to the extent that might bring

41 AUTHOR, Blanchot Reader, Fiction and Literary Essays (1999) New York: Station Hill, Thomas the Obscure, p.120
the questions of reflection and thought towards its reality. The film, in that sense, moves the knowledge that emerged from the scrutiny of the spectator further by defying the very analysis of her/his attitude towards such images. It also turns to the very encounter that concerns the familial witness who is the film-maker in order to make the viewer and the reader become acquainted with the encounter.

In the last chapter, different from the others, the research manifests and facilitates its focus from the creative practice which completes a cycle (that has started with the film *Apathy*) by premeditating on the death of S within the last film *O'Death*. This chapter informs the reader and the viewer that the image of coma disappeared to the image of death with the absolute finality of S’ existence. Compelled to intervene in order to ensure an acceptance and recognition of the triumph of death, the film *O'Death* announces the appearance and the arrival of the final stage of a human being. Using macabre imagery and drawing upon the documented events like genocide while signifying the disturbing conceptions of nothingness and oblivion towards S’ being demonstrate to the viewer the necessity of identification with mortality. In effect, the only initiation becomes an apathetical tendency to mask the reality of loss as well as the identity of the deceased by making it disappear to the anonymous image of the skull. There occurs an ironic appropriation to the conceptual analysis of the self-reflective process. In the first chapter, I have covered and reached to an understanding of a possible counter-anguish as a means of Apathy. Now with this last filmic proposition it is possible to capture the inclination of an apathetical attitude towards S’ death. This doctoral thesis has started with the very encounter with coma in search for multiple negotiations and possible meditation to the anguish of the witness, arriving at apathy as a result of a self-conscious reflection after rigorous analysis. The urge to investigate has declared the necessary space and distance for not only contemplating but also reflecting both visually and theoretically now attempts to close *death’s door*[^42] with the occurrence of the irrecoverable within this last film.

What distinguishes this doctoral study is the fact that it does not only bring a new insight to
the witness and the spectator’s approach to the reality of death and dying but also within the
research, theory and practice co-exist and facilitate the requirements of (a unique) PhD by
using the creative-practice as part of the research. In the last chapter, which opens up with the
intensity of S’ death, the function of theory and practice, and the purpose of ‘the visual I’ and
‘the theoretical I’ have been clarified. In order to frame their relationship within this thesis, I
have chosen to show their form of manifestation within the concept of language and silence as
to what kind of dialogue is bound to be created between ‘the visual I’ and ‘the theoretical I’.

Language and silence appropriation has revealed the intention and the necessity of these two
different modes of expression to accomplish both a critical and creative study. This
conceptual pursuit has allowed a dialogue between the exegesis and the films to the extent
that the researcher and the film-maker could instruct the viewer and the reader by creating the
space and the distance for reflection, negotiation and meditation not only in theory but also in
visuality. The film-maker has been able to convey the effects of cultural, historical and
personal encounters as a witness while the researcher has attempted to investigate a
possibility of a consolation and freedom existentially. As the creative-practice has disclosed
the exterior struggle that ‘the visual I’ perceives / notices / identifies and interprets in an
artistic proposition, the theoretical framework has derived from the logical and rational
evaluation of the available information that of subjective experiences of the witnesses and its
objective causes.

Focusing on the theory and practice within the doctoral thesis has made accessible the
conversation between ‘the mediated I’ and ‘the unmediated I’ with an original view and
contribution to knowledge to modify the challenges and difficulties of the witness as a film-
maker and a researcher. It posits that the complexities that are encountered by the witness
necessitate an attention on the emotional, expressive, creative and autobiographical discourse
as well as on the reflective, realistic, rational and analytical discussion. The critical
explanation and analysis has framed the research in the context of literature from Georges
Bataille, Jean Paul Sartre, Maurice Blanchot, Franz Kafka, Susan Sontag, Jean Baudrillard, Guy Debord, Sandra Gilbert, Adam Phillips, and Zygmunt Bauman as pertinent to the subject matter with their theories and conceptual positions. The exegesis has included a range from philosophical discourses to novels, poems and witness accounts as well as social and cultural conditional stance of the witness and the spectator. The films have exposed a way to come to terms with what is encountered and allowed to endure artistically the ideas and theories that are presented within the exegesis. Therefore, the doctoral research gave rise to the necessary not only analytical but also creative meditation of the witness.

The doctoral project has offered multiple dimensions both visual and theoretical, and multidisciplinary and creative approach to the witness’ predicament. It has opened discussions about reflective modes of negotiation and meditation on the reality of death and dying in consciousness and in visuality. Using the researcher’s account as a witness inasmuch as a case study in order to critically enforce an analysis, and the film-maker’s artistic notion as experiential as well as experimental practice to creatively emphasize the foundations of the experience - directly and metaphorically - have produced a unique study. What could not be banished from sight for the witness as a film-maker has exposed the discovery of the absence of a consolation within the filmic propositions whereas theory has performed its protective purpose by reaching its conclusive analysis. Extending beyond the parameters of this research are further investigations into the creative practices of both the witness and the spectator which shape the literature and critical reflections.

To bring this doctoral thesis to a close, I return to Kafka who writes: ‘For all things outside of the physical world language can be employed only as a sort of adumbration, but never with even approximate exactitude, since in accordance with the physical world it treats only of possessions and its connotations.’\(^{43}\) The writer and film-maker of this doctoral thesis employs

the language of *adumbration*, encouraging an existential and creative approach that attempts to identify with the possible negotiations that emerge confronted by death, dying and suffering. What has been implied could be thought as the *possessions and connotations*, of being a witness under the cover of theory and artistic vision. While death and dying will remain as an insolvable puzzle - *never* offering the *approximate exactitude* - the witness as the researcher, film-maker, artist and theorist will make an attempt to identify with the puzzle itself in order to reach an understanding.
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