Chapter 8
Poetry Film as Political Activism: A Language for the Experience of War and Exile in Ghayath Almadhoun and Marie Silkeberg's *Your Memory Is My Freedom* (2014)

Marie Silkeberg poses for the camera on a black-and-white photograph, leaning nonchalantly against a brick wall with a cigarette in her hand. She is positioned to the left-hand side of the photograph, with her eyes fixed on the camera. In the background is an alley from a city with rubbish bins, fire escape stairs, air conditioning systems and downspouts that run vertically along the sides of buildings. The photograph is aesthetic and serves as a classic staging of the modern artist and writer, as a modern version of Gisèle Freund's portraits of Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, Paul Valéry, Walter Benjamin, James Joyce and others who also posed with a cigarette in their hands.[1]

The photograph is the background image on Silkeberg's website. On her website, Silkeberg presents herself, her works and the works of other poets. Here, excerpts from Silkeberg's poetry are made available. The website contains information about Silkeberg's poems, books, translations and essayistic works, as well as photographs, audio files, poetry films, a selection of interviews and conversations in which Silkeberg has participated available for downloading. The phenomenon of an author's website is, of course, not new, although it is probably more common today for authors to present and manage their authorship on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram. Silkeberg also uses social media platforms where some of the information from her website also appears. Additionally, as previous chapters in this book suggest, it has become more or less expected that poets use the potential of digital media to distribute poetry, although there are also those poets who consciously and actively try to keep their paths free of digital media and social media platforms. Silkeberg's website serves several functions. It serves as a contact surface, as a platform among many in the network of digital media and as a digital archive for some of her publications. Furthermore, the website is a platform for distributing various types of texts, representing a way for Silkeberg to stage herself and her writing.

Silkeberg made her debut in 1990 with the collection of poems *Komma och gå* (*To Come and Go*). She has since published nine books of poetry, the last of which, *Revolution House*, was published in 2021. Silkeberg is a professor of creative writing

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1 https://www.mariesilkeberg.com/ (15 December 2022).

at the University of Gothenburg. She has published essays, translations of poetry and essays by other poets and has contributed with significant essays on other poets, including the Danish modernist Inger Christensen. In this sense, it is worth mentioning the extensive edited collection *Verden ønsker at se sig selv* (*The World Wants to See Itself*) from 2018, containing Inger Christensen's unpublished and lesser-known poems, manuscripts, prose poems and sketches, collected and published by Silkeberg and Peter Borum. It is a work that confirms Silkeberg's commitment to poetic thinking and the poetic wor(l)d and suggests the possible impact of Christensen's poetry on Silkeberg's own poetic work. Silkeberg is also a filmmaker. In collaboration with the Palestinian-Syrian poet Ghayath Almadhoun – who lives in exile in Sweden – Silkeberg has made a number of poetry films. These poetry films are part of Almadhoun and Silkeberg's project exploring poetic language as politically engaged language. The poetry films can be regarded as both independent from and complementary to other publications by the two poets as individuals and collaborators. These poetry films are sometimes included in Silkeberg's poetry readings. Therefore, just as much as the poetry films can be approached as single, independent works, they are also intermedial works included in an ecology of poetry by Almadhoun and Silkeberg. This ecology is constituted by single poems, poetry readings with and without video materials and poetry films. The poetry films are available on Silkeberg's website, YouTube and Vimeo.

This chapter discusses the poetic art form of poetry film as it is situated in digital culture. Moreover, I show how this art form in the computational network environment seems to have gained new significance. Poetry film is another example of how poets relate to digital media and how digital media impact and alter established poetic art forms and practices. The practice in question is poetic activism. In the computational network environment, poetry film has moved out of museums and festivals for experimental film. It has become part of a digital culture on websites and social media platforms. Poetry film travels across analog and digital platforms. Thus, poetry film's social impact has the potential of increasing further due to the distribution networks of digital media. Sarah Tremett makes the same point in her significant and voluminous study of poetry film and its sub-genres, *The Poetics of Poetry Film* (2021), highlighting the potential of poetry film on social media to share subjectivity and political positions widely and to perform activist poetry (Tremlett 2021, xxiv). As in many of the previous chapters of this book, I will discuss poetry film by focusing on one work. Here, a media-sensitive close reading constitutes the preferred method of approach. In the approach to digital poetry film, one can discuss the extent to which remediation entails an intensification or an imitation (see Chapter 7) and to what extent digitalization of poetry film contributes to changing the art form. In addition to examining poetry film in digital culture, I will argue for how poetry film is a form

of political activism, exemplified here by Almadhoun and Silkeberg's poetry films and, in particular, the poetry film *Your Memory Is My Freedom* (2012). *Your Memory Is My Freedom* is, as I will show, a media-specific way of representing war and oppression, of exploring a poetic language of exile and of providing a form of poetry of witness through the use of language, sound and video. This poetry film is one out of several collaborative projects between Almadhoun and Silkeberg. Still, because this poetry film was based on a poem written by Silkeberg, and because the poetry film reflects a poetics that is recognizable in much of Silkeberg's work, the presentation and analysis in this chapter will focus more on Silkeberg than Almadhoun.

Poetry film

Poetry film is a verbal-visual art form in which the different media involved engage in a mutually dependent intermedial interaction centered on poetry in film. Similiarly, Tremlett defines poetry film as

> a genre of short film, usually combining the three main elements of the poem as: verbal message – voice-over or on-screen narration – or subtitles (repeating or replacing voice), and as visual text-on-screen; the moving film image (and diegetic sounds); and additional nondiegetic sounds/music to create soundscape. The often complex interweaving of the elements could be said to give poetry films their uniquely associative character. (Tremlett 2021, xxi)

Poetry film includes a poem that is performed and made visual or audible for an audience. This makes poetry film different from the film poem, which does not contain verbal language (see Ieropoulos 2019, n.p.). Poetry film is comprised by an encounter between a poem, a video performance and, most often, sound. The goal, one might say, is to create a synthesis between the media or modes involved so that sensations and experiences, imagination and connotation, cannot be traced back to the verbal, visual or sonic but is the result of a unique interplay.

Poetry film developed from experimentation with film in the early twentieth century, particularly the French film impressionism of Germaine Dulac and Louis Delluc and later by such visual artists as Man Ray (Emmanuel Radnitzky) and Hans Richter. Man Ray set an early example with the experimental combination of film and poetry. The 1928 film *L'Étoile de mer* contains poems by Robert Desnos appearing in combination with visual images by Man Ray. The film is an attempt to translate Desnos' poems into a visual language.[2] Another, somewhat more recent example, is

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2 Another term for this kind of experimentation is "cinepoem" (see Wall-Romana 2012), a French term for cinepoetry, where one explores the different relationship between poetry and film.

Ian Hugo's film *Bells of Atlantis* from 1952. This pioneering film is an adaptation of Anaïs Nin's fictional surrealist work *House of Incest* from 1936. The film includes written text and has a narrator who reads parts of Nin's 72-page book. *Bells of Atlantis* is an abstract poetry film that, because of its artistic experimentation, can be associated with the avant-garde.

As an art form, poetry film became more present in the 1960s and 1970s, especially in the US with Beat poets like Herman Berlandt, Lawrence Ferlingetti and Allan Ginsberg and such festivals as the Poetry-Film Festival in Bolinas, California, held for the first time in 1975 (see Tremlett 2021, 8). According to Fil Ieropoulos, the increase of poetry festivals in the 1990s had a significant impact on the distribution of poetry films. Ieropoulos writes that "[i]n the UK, poetry films became an almost popular genre (for art film standards) [. . .]. Literary poetry societies soon got interested and the 1990s saw the publication of *Film Poem. Poem Film*, a periodical brochure of the South London Poem Film Society." (Ieropoulos 2019, n.p.) A similar development also has taken place in Scandinavia. In Norway, Sweden and Denmark, festivals devoted to literature in general and to poetry in particular have increased extensively in number over the last three decades. Poetry films are included in events as part of significant festivals like Oslo Poetry Film Festival, Nordic Poetry Festival | The Rolf Jacobsen Days, Sommertid – Copenhagen International Poetry Festival and Textival in Gothenburg.

The purpose of the experimental movement was to develop a poetic film language, where the films transformed a poetic verbal language into a visual language. In other words, this movement created an art form – the film poem – that was "pure" and which developed its own language. As Ieropoulos points out, "it struggles to work within the specifics of its own language." (Ieropoulos 2019, n.p.) According to Ieropoulos, the development of film poems meant that "poetics should be incorporated into the very visual nature of the film. [. . .] [T]hey believed that verbal languages should be redundant in modern film." (Ieropoulos 2019, n.p.) In this respect, the film poem can be read within the same high modernist thinking as Paul Valéry's conception of realistic literature. With the invention and development of photography, Valéry argued that literature, and especially the novel, would be better prepared to meet the "new" medium if it intensified the peculiarities of literary language rather than try to compete with photography in the presentation of reality (Valéry 1980, 193).

As this short presentation shows, poetry film is historically situated in and has developed from poetic and artistic movements whose similarities in the use of media are striking. For this reason, with his *Videopoetry: A Manifesto* (2011), Tom Konyves aims to distinguish "videopoetry from poetry films, film poetry, poemvideos, poetry videos, cyber-poetry, cine-poetry, kinetic poetry, digital poetry, poetronica, filming of poetry and other unwieldy neologism." (Konyves 2011, n.p.)

In opposition to film poems, Ieropoulos points out, that the different media involved in poetry film are explicitly present. Therefore, while a film poem is a pure visual expression, the verbal-poetic language is explicitly expressed in poetry film, where it is combined with visuals and sounds. Furthermore, while the definition of the film poem is clear, Konyves argues for videopoetry as the end of an evolution of a long period of experimentation with poetry and video: "from poetry film to film poems to poetry videos to *videopoetry.*" (Konyves 2011, n.p.) Poetry film is an art form whose borders to related art forms or, for that matter, media art or digital poetry are not transparent. The distinction between poetry film and similar art forms are porous and will not, in this chapter, be made to sharp.

William Wees, one of the pioneers in the exploration of poetry film, explains precisely that the hybridity of poetry film challenges attempts to link it to a specific institutional and academic field of research. Therefore, Wees points out that the field of literary studies has long shown little interest in poetry film. He writes that in contrast to the genre of film poems, which has been recognized as important in the avant-garde film movement, "poetry-films have received little special attention [. . .] because poetry-films are a kind of hybrid art form and, therefore, seem less 'pure', less essentially cinematic, in the high modernist sense." (Wees 2005, n.p.) In this regard, Tremett's recent study, *The Poetics of Poetry*, is a significant exception. Poetry film is partly a verbal expression and should, for this reason, be treated as literature and more precisely as poetry, as I do in this chapter. Still, because of the visual dimension of poetry film, it should also be an object of study for visual studies, film studies and media studies. Moreover, it is often approached as visual art, although it also often contains sound. In this sense, it is also fair to explore poetry film in the context of the broader history and development of media art.

Poetry film as digital poetry

Research on media art typically emphasizes media aspects and the temporal and spatial organization of this art form. For example, Julia Noordegraaf defines media art as "[t]ime-based artworks that rely on media technologies for their creation and exhibition such as slide-based installations, film, video, and computer-based artworks, and net art." (Noordegraaf 2013, 11; here from Benthien 2019, 11) Noordegraaf's definition emphasizes the presence of media in media art. However, her definition does not count for the various functions that media might have, nor how they affect the understanding of media art as art. She therefore runs the risk of regarding media technology as a tool rather than as a creative agent in the making of art. Claudia Benthien, Jordis Lau and Maraike M. Marxsen give a broader and more applicable definition. The authors write that they "use 'media art' as an

umbrella term for audiovisual time-based artworks that rely on analog and digital media technologies for their creation and exhibition, and that make palpable the cultural practices surrounding and the communicative contexts enabled by these technologies." (Benthien, Lau and Marxsen 2018, 12) This broad definition denotes that they include experimental film, video art, video performance, video installation, multimedia installations and poetry films. Still, even an inclusive definition where "media art" functions as an umbrella term for art forms that are similar in form, necessitates attention to the specific art form in question. The term "poetry film," in contrast to "media art," represents an emphasis on the significance of poetry, that is, the significant role that verbal language, written or oral, plays in the tradition of poetry film.

Poetry film can be regarded as a kind of digital poetry. More specifically, it can be integrated in the generation of multimedia digital poetry. Moreover, the art form as such is considered by many to be an important precursor to the development of screen-based digital poetry (Funkhouser 2007, 164; Bootz 2012). Philip Bootz describes the French scene for experimental literature and highlights how phonetic and visual poetry on the screen, such as poetry films, more or less naturally slipped into arenas of digital poetry in France (Bootz 2012, n.p.). Today, all film can of course be considered digital. As Manovich describes, film has developed from being an analog medium where data is organized in a continuum, in a continuous process, to being one in which information is represented as numeric codes (Manovich 2001, 28). Needless to say, digital media technology dominates the production, distribution and presentation of films, including poetry films. This development of poetry films blurs the distinction between poetry in digital media that contains moving images and poetry films that contain written poems. When I, nevertheless, maintain a distinction between poetry film and other poetry in digital media, it is because poetry films are structured in terms of film as a medium and because poetry films emphasize and relay on moving images to a greater extent than poetry in digital media, such as the poetry I have otherwise dealt with in this book. We might even say that while verbal language is the primary medium for the progression, or lack of progression, in digital poetry, in poetry film, moving images, words and sound collaborate as primary vehicles for the poetic expression.

I mentioned earlier that poetry film belongs to the multimedia generation of digital poetry. Given that many poetry films are distributed though social media networks and are presented on social media platforms, one could argue that poetry films can be regarded as both multimodal poetry and as social media poetry. Digital platforms like Vimeo and social media platforms like YouTube have become a place where poetry films are exhibited and distributed. Even though poetry film in digital media is not necessarily interactive or distinctive from non-digital poetry in other ways, digital media technology has put its mark on the art form and poetic

practice. It has both made it easier to create poetry film and made poetry film more accessible due to the distribution possibilities of networked media. Further, and more important for the computational network environment perspective, poetry films are often included in the media ecological environment where they interact with print poetry, poetry readings and other medializations of poetry. Therefore, it has become more visible and accessible, and it can be more easily included in activist poetry. Just think of the Media City Film Festival, first held in 1994, where exhibitions have been prolonged as digital exhibitions. Likewise, Radical Acts of Care, curated by Greg de Cuir Jr., includes digital exhibitions of poetry films that explore vulnerability, illness and care in society. Among the material in Radical Acts of Care is the Iranian poet Forugh Farrokhzad's 1962 poetry film *The House Is Black*, which portrays people who suffer from various physical illnesses. This and other classic and contemporary poetry films are made available for a wide audience. Therefore, the computational network environment has also strengthened the potential political effect of poetry films. This is also the case for the poetry films by Almadhoun and Silkeberg, which I will focus on later in this chapter.

In this chapter, I demonstrate an open approach to poetry film. This openness reflects an interest in the function of poetry film in digital media and in Almadhoun and Silkeberg's poetry film in particular. With respect to contemporary digital works, moreover, we could classify them as media art or as digital poetry, since they appear as cross-over works. This is due as much to the nature of the works as to the nature of the computational network environment. Here, poetry films change in function and also in form, depending on the media in which the works are distributed and displayed. In this environment, these works travel across institutional borders and contexts. The same poetry film can be displayed at a museum, at an art or poetry festival or on a digital platform, be it a digital exhibition place or on a social media platform.

Three examples of Scandinavian poetry film as digital poetry

In *Crystal World* (2006), inspired by the novel of the same name by J.G. Ballard, the Norwegian-Danish artist Ann Lislegaard explores a future apocalyptic world using text, animation, photography, video, sound and digital technology. Similar to the world in Johannes Heldén's *Astroecology* (see Chapter 4), the explorative point of view in Lislegaard's work is a laboratory abandoned by humans. The work consists of two large screens, one with animation and one with text. The work also includes sound. On one of the screens, a destabilized and slowly changing world is depicted as white crystals develop and create new patterns. On the other screen, the text, which is descriptive, narrative and poetic, heightens moments of

metamorphosis in the world depicted on the first screen. It reads: "everywhere the process of crystallization is advancing", "trees are covered in white frost" and "the empty buildings from a labyrinth of crystal caves / as if the exterior world is losing its existence." *Crystal World* has been performed at the twenty-seventh Bienal de São Paulo in 2006, the National Gallery in Copenhagen in 2007, MOCAD – Museum of Contemporary Art in Detroit in 2009, Kyoto Art Center in 2015 and Aaros in Aarhus in 2022. In addition to the media art installation, it was also published as a print version in 2022. *Crystal World* is an installation and work of media art. Moreover, with respect to the verbal language, one can also approach it as poetry and poetry film in the digital age. It is one example of how poetry film, or media art, works in the computational network environment, in which media, art forms and modalities complement each other in an ecology of intermediations.

While Lislegaard is well known for her visual art, another example from the Scandinavian scene of contemporary experimental poetry film is Ottar Ormstad, usually known for his conceptual poetry. Ormstad's poetry film "Når" ("When") from 2009 combines video and music with conceptual poems, utilizing the dual aspect of letters as both visual and verbal, to explore the possible ways conceptual poetry can interact with other media expressions. Here, the question of which expression is the primary one, or the most important, is subject to the effect and potential of meaning-making that lies in the encounter between video, music and language. "Når" is a collaborative project between Ormstad, the German documentary filmmaker Ina Pillat and the musicians and music producers Hallvard W. Hagen and Jens P. Nilsen. The poetry film explores the organic entwining of nature and culture. It depicts misplaced old rusty car wrecks that are left in nature, which already has begun to transform the car wrecks into objects that are neither culture nor nature but something in between. The images are disturbing and warn us about an environmental disaster that has already taken place. Along with dramatic and gloomy music, they create a dystopian atmosphere. In contrast, the verbal text constitutes a web of phrases that appear playfully on the screen in yellow, a color that is characteristic for Ormstad's work and performances.

The poetry film thematizes nature in the age of Anthropocene and highlights different conceptions of time. Everlasting nature is juxtaposed with impermanent, human-made objects that represent the industrial revolution, modernism and, possibly, civilization. Moreover, within the nature-culture motif layers of medializations are engaged to explore and to add conceptions of time. The video is made of photographs, on which the camera with its focal point pans vertically and horizontally. Little by little, each photograph is exposed, as if the panning imitates an investigating gaze of a viewer. The movements supply the photographs with a temporality that they otherwise would not have. As such, the poetry film highlights photography as both a punctual medium and a medium with temporal

aspects in the event of perception. Likewise, the conceptual poems on the screen are spatial and temporal as words and letters become events due to Ormstad's animations.

The importance of the materiality of language is embraced more explicitly in Cia Rinne's poetry films. Rinne had her poetic breakthrough with *Zaroum* in 2001, a multilingual poetry book that combines visual poetry, sound poetry and sound symbolism. In 2008, *Zaroum* was made into an online work, *Archives Zaroum* with animations and interactive elements.[3] The term "zaroum" refers to the artificial language zaum, developed by the Russian futurists. In these and later works by Rinne, the combination, mix and materiality of languages, often referred to as translingualism, constitute the core of exploration. Through continuous displacements of words, sounds and typography, new meanings appear. As with several of the poets I have mentioned in this book, Rinne also makes use of different media and materialities for her poetry. For instance, *Zaroum* is a print book; *Archives Zaroum* is digital poetry and media art; *Indices*, first shown in 2003, is an installation; *The Roma Journeys* (2007) is a documentary photobook in collaboration with Joakim Eskildsen; *Sounds of Soloists* (2013) is an exhibition with sound, text and visual material; and *L'usage du mot* (2020) and *Sorry Future* (2021) are poetry films.

L'usage du mot is a nearly eight-minute-long poetry film, depicting the artist as she performs in a white neutral exhibition room. The installation *A Slightly Curving Place* at Haus der Kulturen Welt in Berlin serves as a creative and performative space. The poetry film is a visual performance that includes dance. Language is represented in Rinne's reading of one of her poems in a voice over, in letters written on papers in one of the filmic sequences and in translations into dance. The poetry film begins by simulating the situation of writing. A woman sits behind a desk with a pencil in her hand and white piece of paper in front of her. Rather than writing, she seems to be drawing to the voice of Rinne reading a poem. Then the sequence changes to Rinne performing a modern dance. The dance illustrates how the performing body translates the poem that is being read and hence both transforms and expands the poetic language. Language is made present in its absence or as intermedial translations into dance. In print, the poems, 16 in total, are organized with titles. In the poetry film, the poems become one continuous event as they are read. Here, titles that appear in the print book, such as "sent a letter" or "bonjour lettriste," do not appear. The final poem, "épilogue" also is not featured in the film. Instead, one might argue that the poetry film includes an epilogue of its own.

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3 See http://www.afsnitp.dk/galleri/archiveszaroum/ (5 December 2022).

Admittedly, Ormstad's film reflects an aesthetic we might associate with late modernism. Still, poetry films can no longer be regarded as (neo) avant-garde. Rather, as both Lislegaard's and Rinne's works demonstrate, poetry film has developed into a widespread aesthetic practice among poets and artists in and outside of Scandinavia. Furthermore, poetry film is an art form that destabilizes the borders between visual art, media art and poetry: it has become more and more common to include poetry film both at poetry and film festivals, as well as on social media and poets' websites.

Poetry films as political activism

In the poetry films by Almadhoun and Silkeberg, poetry is a form of poetic and political activism. The two poets have collaborated on several poetry films, of which six are presented on Silkeberg's website: *Destruction III* (2008), *Ödeläggelse* (*Destruction*, 2009), *Your Memory Is My Freedom* (2012), *The City* (2012), *The Celebration* (2014) and *Snow* (2015). Several of these are available on YouTube and Vimeo. They are intermedial parts developed from or in interaction with print poems collected in the collaborative poetry book *Till Damaskus* (*To Damascus*) (Almadhoun and Silkeberg 2014).[4] This is a collection of poems about the experience of war, oppression and exile, with the war in Syria as a recurring point of reference. The book is in itself an intermedial work with color and black and white photographs of the city of Damascus and with poems that have wandered across media. They have been staged as a radio piece for Swedish radio, some poems have been included in multimedia readings by Silkeberg and some have made it into the digital environment as poetry films.

The poetry films are political: they thematize war, oppression and destruction through image, sound and language. For instance, the film *Snow* juxtaposes moving images of people in need with artistic images of trees and a sky filled with falling snowflakes, while a female voice reads a poem in Swedish and a male poet reads in Arabic.[5] In addition, the poem appears in both English and Arabic on the screen. The moving images that are juxtaposed turn the film into a collage of realistic and contemplative expressions that give way to (self-)reflection. In this respect, the moving images function both as anchor and relay for the poem. They direct our attention towards specific contexts for the poem, and they

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4 The title refers to *The New Testament* story about the conversion of Paul, which took place on the road to Damascus and is also a reference to August Strindberg's play of the same name.
5 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vnfPLnExwBw (13 December 2022).

supply the poem with new meaning as the two collaborate in presenting sensations and experiences of war and suffering. Lines like "the hand movements / as he described / how they filled a truck full of rockets / that failed to explode on impact" are accompanied by moving images of snowflakes falling in the dark.[6] "Images of snow" is read in Swedish and Arabic while the film shows a little girl in the snow in what most likely is a refugee camp. The lines "a collection of snow figures to mourn the dead / the dead in the snow" is followed by images of an installation with snow figures representing a funeral.

The poem, the moving images, the combination of images and words, the rhythm that is made out of the alternation of images and multilingual expressions create a performance and an experience that are specific for poetry film as an art form, demonstrating the poetic-political potential of poetry film.[7] Likewise, the poetry film *The Celebration* shows pictures of cities that have been bombed during a war, while a voice reads in Arabic with English subtitles: "I was exploring the difference between revolution and war | when a bullet passed through my body".[8] Almadhoun and Silkeberg collaborated in directing the poetry film. The poem, however, is by Almadhoun and is titled "The Details." Almadhoun also reads the poem. The last line in the quote from the poem could refer to a real, individual experience or an imagined experience. It could also be read as a metaphor: experiences from the war zones create a particularly bodily experience that is conveyed in the semantics, syntax and phonetics of language. The former interpretation renders the poet a victim, a witness and a survivor, while the latter indicates that the body in question is not only the speaker's but also a collective body, since the speaker expresses a feeling on behalf of the many victims of war and persecution. It is worth observing the title of the poetry film: an obvious response would be that there is nothing about war that is worth celebrating. Likewise, the music from Chopin's *Nocturne*, opus no. 9 that is played throughout most of the film, immediately seems as a bizarre aestheticization of war or misplaced as it contrasts the images of bombed cities.

The poem and the poetry film thematize war and destruction and include a metapoetic dimension. The speaker is an Arabic poet who discovers the beauty of war: "It was the most beautiful war | I've been in in my life | full of metaphors and poetic images." The poem is an epideictic speech where the speaker encourages listeners to leave everything they know to take part in the war:

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6 Each clause appears one by one on the screen, creating a sense of line breaks. These deviate from the line breaks in the print poem.

7 Tremlett elaborates on the function of rhythm in poetry film (see Tremlett 2021, in particular Part One).

8 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QLm_MyOSj1A (15 December 2022).

> come let's give up poetry | [. . .] | leave behind | Rumi | Averroes | Hegel | and bring along | Machiavelli | and Huntington | and Fukuyama | for we need them now | leave behind your laughter | your blue shirt | and warm bed | and bring your teeth, and nails | and hunting knife || and come

The poem could be either an ironic gesture or a short manifesto for a revolution. More than this, though, the poem and poetry film are structured around opposing expressions, images and concepts in order to highlight the destruction and non-rationality of war and to show that rather than poetic and artistic representations of war – perhaps because representing war is impossible – war and the experience of it must represent themselves. As we hear in the poem: "bring on the real Guernica | with its smell of fresh blood". These real things, the sensations and materializations of war, are necessary to turn the world, readers and viewers as well as poets' attention to war and the deep historical interconnection between humans across cultures.

Almadhoun and Silkeberg's poetry films exsist and perform in the computational network environment that strengthens their potential to reach a wide audience and to be included in different situations it can be used. According to Evelina Stenbeck, political and activist poetry demonstrates the "power of literature." (Stenbeck 2017, 13)[9] The term "power" captures the effect that literature might have outside of the literary text and its medium. It makes us imagine and experience what literature can do when it is used. According to Stenbeck, the power of literature contains "both the political forces of society and the ability that poetry has to create new spaces, actions and paths of thought." (Stenbeck 2017, 13)[10] As political poetry films in the computational network environment, the films by Almadhoun and Silkeberg give new legitimacy to arguments about the political potential of culture. Poetry film can create opportunities to say or make visible something that has not previously been possible to say: it can function as part of the starting point for new opportunities. We might even argue, with careful reference to Hannah Arendt, that poetry film is an important supporter of political activism. Arendt points out that political action and activism require places where they can appear, where revolution can take place (Arendt 1963). Such places include streets, squares and music venues; they could also include books, the benefits of which lie in the combination of distribution, mobility and archiving; they could also be digital platforms for the creation, distribution, exhibition and discussion of political poetry films.

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9 My translation. In Swedish the quote reads: "litteraturens verkanskraft."
10 My translation. In Swedish the quote reads: "både samhällets politiska krafter och poesins förmåga att skapa nya rum, handlingar och tankebanor."

In the argument above, Arendt is not a randomly chosen philosopher. In the poetry book *Till Damaskus*, the opening epigraph includes two quotations from Arendt's O*n Revolution* (1963). One of the two cites Plato: "For the beginning, because it contains its own principle, is also a god who, as long as he dwells among men, as long as he inspires their deeds, saves everything." The second epigraph is a quote from the Greek historian Polybios: "The beginning is not merely half of the whole but reaches out towards the end." (Almadhoun and Silkeberg 2014, 8) Both quotations draw attention to the concept of beginning and are both politically contextualized. According to Arendt, a beginning contains both opportunities and challenges (Arendt 1990, 20). In Arendt's philosophy, the idea of beginnings contains humanity's ability to create changes or to give way for something new to take place. At the same time, there will always be a possibility that beginnings limit the possibility of creating change and revolution in the future. The complexity of a revolution philosophically consists in, among other things, giving it integrity so that the beginning does not bring about an outcome that is only for the good of some or that holds back future revolutions. In other words, the beginning of a revolution can lead to democracy, justice and a society where everyone has the opportunity to participate. The question or challenge is how this can be done. The epigraphs in *Till Damaskus* from Arendt function as statements about poetry and poetic language and suggest that poetry can offer or be part of a beginning.

Stenbeck claims that the poetics of activism implies transgression on several levels. One form of transgression that is particularly relevant for this chapter, is poetry's transgression of media and institutions. Stenbeck writes that "[p]oems call for activism by seeking ways out of the pages of the books and the literary public in a narrow sense." (2017, 11)[11] In this sense, books are perceived as a medium included in literary institutions that potentially might restrain the effect of political poetry. Therefore, in order to make poetry matter in specific situations, the poet can create poetry that is not only adaptable for print but also available in another media in ways we have seen in previous chapters in this book. This is also a way to make poetry accessible in different public situations in which poems can reach out to people and be used.

The resolution of national and geographical borders in the network of programmable media gives new opportunities for contemporary poetry like poetry films to reach a broad audience, to be used as activist poetry and to demonstrate the political power of poetry. Still, as claimed by Alexander Halavais (2000), even though social media can be seen as international media, one might argue for the

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11 My translation. In Swedish, the quote reads: "[d]ikten manar till aktivism genom att söka vägar ut från boksidan och den i strikt mening litterära offentligheten."

existence of social structures and practices on websites that underline traditional national borders. In addition, some countries do practice censorship of social media platforms and social media content. Still, most poetry films distributed online are, due to networked media and media ecological structures, available for anyone with online connection and knowledge about the languages in question.

Almadhoun and Silkeberg's poetry films reflect a strong political commitment, which in their performativity is directed outwards and which both demands and creates a space of appearance. In this way, political poetry films generally demonstrate how contemporary poetry in the computational network environment can serve as activism even when, or perhaps because, it is entwined in symbiotic relationships with digital technology. Their poetry films reflect an international engagement that also involves a deep interconnection between humans on the planet, regardless of religious, cultural and national differences. All except one of the titles of their poetry films are in English. Furthermore, the poems that are included in the poetry films are multilingual: there are poems in Swedish, English and Arabic. What is more, the poetry films are distributed, seen and potentially discussed on social media platforms, giving weight to the political and activist potential of the art form. Anita Harris, for instance, writes that the movement for young and marginalized women was among the early political groups that established themselves as an activist "online culture" and that utilized the potential of digital technologies for political performances (Harris 2012, 214–216). Likewise, as I describe in Chapter 5 and 6, poetry on Instagram and Facebook is a more recent example of how poets use social media in poetic activism. Through connectivity, users' networks and algorithms, social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube and TikTok ensure the rapid distribution of poetry films to many, connect many to many and, in so doing, contribute to the awareness of crisis in the world, hence maintaining, mobilizing and establishing activist network communities.

Montages and the experience of war

One significant technique used by Almadhoun and Silkeberg is montage. Collected images, music and voices are combined to present a dense image of war, intensifying the experience of war. The moving images in many of Almadhoun and Silkeberg's poetry films are selected and organized in a poetic system. They do not follow a pre-conceived chronology or narrative structure. Rather, the classic structure of selection and combination, outlined by Roman Jakobson as a "projection of the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection on to the axis of combination" (Jakobson 2014, 240) is applied to the poetry films. The images are composed of material from different sources, as segments taken out of narrative and documentary contexts

and combined on the syntagmatic level of the film. They may include images from a specific war, in a specific time and place, combined using the principle of resemblance and difference. In some poetry films, the material used is from one war-torn city, such as in *The Celebration* where film clips from Berlin on 2 July 1945 are combined with music from Chopin's *Nocturne*. In *The City*, the principle of combination is resemblance. This poetry film is a montage of images, poems, music fragments and voices. Silkeberg's poem "What Gas", read by male voices, is combined with Almadhoun's poem "The City", read by female voices. Randomly chosen people from the street of Stockholm read both of the poems. Furthermore, the poetry film depicts buildings that collapse, accompanied by music, poetry reading and the visualization of the poem in English on the screen. In these and other poetry films, the montage has several possible functions. One is that the repetition of shocking images reinforces the representation of war at the same time as it draws attention to poetry film as an art form and media for the representation of war. Rather than a chronological representation of war, war and destruction are represented through a global imagination that emerges because of the montages and the applied principle of equality that is projected onto the principle of proximity, combinations that are engaged on the syntagmatic level of the poetry films.

As I pointed out with regard to *Celebration*, the poetry film problematizes poetry's (and literature's) representation of war. Presenting war, distress and the pain of the other are always challenging, as Susan Sontag famously reminds us (Sontag 2003). Fredric Jameson goes further, arguing that a holistic narrative representation of war is impossible. According to Jameson, any literary attempt to present or thematize war ends with "various forms of the impossible attempt to represent it [war] may have taken." (Jameson 2009, 1533) He suggests that literature that depicts war must be read as a laboratory for exploring other aspects of the human being and the world, such as anxiety, class struggle, solidarity, politics, etc. His main target is literature that has the ambition of representing war entirely. Therefore, Jameson writes: "It is not to be imagined, however, that we can return to some earlier state of wholeness, in which, as in Homer, individual hand-to-hand combat would at one and the same time somehow epitomize the totality." (Jameson 2009, 1536) Jameson concludes: "War is one among such collective realities, which exceed representation fully." (Jameson 2009, 1547) The complexity of war and, we might add, of poetry make Jameson emphasize collage, fragmentation and decentralized perspective as more adequate for representing war than narrative and holistic attempts.

In the poetry film *Your Memory Is My Freedom,* Almadhoun and Silkeberg utilize the technique of montage and cross-cutting in order to avoid the problem of representation outlined by Jameson. Moreover, they seek to create a poetry film that presents the experience of war and exile. In the poetry film, images are dramatic and somewhat aggressive or provocative, and they are combined in a

confrontational style, probably to create an effect of shock. The poem that is materialized in written and oral form is without emotional engagement, as if it represents the poets' restrained mode. This implies that the poetry film is neither propagandistic, nor resigned. Rather than compelling viewers to go out into the streets to protest, the film informs, shocks, problematizes and alienates. Through a particularly poetic and cinematic language, it seeks an adequate way of portraying others' pain as well as the experience of war and exile.

Your Memory Is My Freedom

The poetry film *Your Memory Is My Freedom* includes video clips from Stockholm and Damascus. Its duration is 5 minutes and 40 seconds and begins with a prologue of 55 seconds in which Silkeberg reads from one of her print poems in *Till Damaskus* (2014). During the prologue, the screen is black and the sound of a heavy and somewhat mechanical breath accompanies Silkeberg's reading. The prologue is followed by the main part of the film, which is introduced with the title "Your Memory Is My Freedom" that appears on the screen to Arabic music. The main part of the poetry film shows videos of the streets of Stockholm from a first-person viewer perspective. These images are juxtaposed with others from the streets of Damascus. The film presents an unpleasant encounter between the peaceful everyday life of Stockholm and war zone that is Damascus. Silkeberg lends her voice to the poem, though the sound of heavy breathing continues. These sounds are then combined with someone's footsteps, as if he or she is running or walking fast. The sound of the breathing and the footsteps reflect a bodily presence of a subject. Because of the filming, the heavy breathing and the fast footsteps, this subject seems misplaced and defamiliarized in the surroundings of harmonious and safe Stockholm. At the same time, the breathing, the footsteps and Silkeberg's voice, which carries the poem across the shifting images of the two cities and situations, join to create a sense of continuity. The striking contrast between the images and the two situations in question is tuned down and the individual subject's embodied experiences are foregrounded.

The cross-cutting of images positions the two places and situations in dialogue with one another, creating a condensation of time and space. The form of the poetry film correlates with the poem that Silkeberg reads, which is also dialectic and temporally and spatially dense (see Fig. 14). It presents the voice of a speaker who appears as privileged and safe despite the war and a "he", whose voice represents the oppressed and persecuted. The poem corresponds with one of the longer print poems in the book *Till Damaskus*. This print poem is untitled and appears in a section called "Your memory Is My Freedom." The section contains a number of poems: some are

single-lined poems, while others are longer poems. They deal with war, mostly in Damascus, with the oppression and persecution of certain ethnic groups in Palestine and Syria and with the experience of exile.

now the killing will start, he says. when i ask him about the veto. about what will happen now. looks at the clock. only five. he shows me his passport. they see it here, he says, and points at nationality stateless. i look at his palestinian passport, a photo of him as much younger. can hardly recognize him. so long ago i say, is it a long ago. see that it's almost six. we must go i say. will you accompany me to the bus. no. he replies. will you help me with the suitcase. no he replies. takes it from me. moves towards the bus. an experience of violence. an insight into it. to bear the memory of it. nakba sadness. he says they call it. that the men died from it. that nobody could explain why. no sickness in the body. like the africans, the native americans. the people in australia. i read in lindqvists book. but not the parallel. the similarity. they floated. were floating. in the library. the leaves that swirled. their presence. light. reflection. clear lucid colors. running water. long before the frozen. to reflect oneself in the foreign. find one's picture. some picture. skin. to take the world in through. opening the eyes. turning the head. the signal. the siren. an emergency. a need. what would the next step be. some words out of the night. or giving the word to the night. or taking it. risking the word. i saw my hand when I tried to imagine my face in the mirror. the devastation. to be broken down. into parts. to let the parts speak. or. or. I couldn't pronounce his name. without feeling it was an abyss I moved over. when the languages fell silent. the foreign ones. the shared. a reaching out. in so many directions. if the massacre in hama 1982. if the world had condemned in time. not kept silent. it wouldn't be repeated now. maybe. if the west was the eastern state dissident's hope. what then was the hope in Syria? did one hope anything? where did the impulse come from? the demand for justice, freedom? one generation to forget. the killing. the outrageous. grief. loss. silencing. the disappeared in prisons. the hope that they were still alive. would come back. they who managed to leave the country. how long the pressure remains. the fear. we weren't allowed to say that the bread was bad, nothing. each morning we were forced to rattle off a homage to the president. the truth a function of the power. of the economy. I thought about the whisper in the child's ear. when it is born. to have the dream still. make reality of it when possible. if it becomes possible. live for it. to whisper in the child's ear. that god is great, greater. to be put in touch with the relatives. the generations. the father's names in a long row, far back in history. to be in revolt against the world. is that a universal truth, that revolt. a deeply human movement. deep inside. dark wedding. homelessness. don't laugh he said. I'm not laughing. the language of exile. of poetry. maybe. to accept. bare it. know. to see. to have seen. that skin. the hand mark against the inner wall

Marie Silkeberg. From *Till Damaskus* 2014

Translation: Agneta Falk-Hirschmann

Fig. 14: The poem in question, published on Marie Silkeberg's website in an English translation.[12]

In the print poem in question, both the left and the right margin are straight, providing the poem with the shape of a black square, as if it is a poem's visual-verbal reply to Kazimir Malevich's *Black Square* (1950) or to the photographs of the city

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of Damascus in the book. The photographs show Damascus from a distance. The houses are positioned close to each other, similar to the poem that is without blank spaces. The poem is written without capital letters and the use of punctuation, other than full stops. The words in the poem are placed close together, making the poem appear visually dense. The visual and syntactic density of the poem reflects the poem's theme. There are no visual pauses, as if the poet does not want to give readers a break from the words that tell about war, continuous oppression and other dramatic events. The poem is intense and reflects visually and semantically entwined sensations and memories belonging to subjects who have been there.

Still, the material in the poetry film and in the book differs. There is no prologue in the print poem. There is no indication of a change or turn, a line break or an enjambment between "går mot bussen" ("walk towards the bus"), which is the last line of the prologue in the poetry film and "en erfarenhet av våld" ("an experience of violence"), which is the first line in the main part of the film. Furthermore, most of the visual material is different, even though it also contains photographs of Damascus that is similar to the photographs in the book. What is more, the poem is performed in Silkeberg's voice as it simultaneously appears visually in the form of single lines on the screen, not in the form of a square as in the print version. Here, the interplay is between words and images and between Silkeberg's voice and the video images in first-person viewer perspective. Indeed, the poetry film contains layers of voices, events and experiences that are presented in the print poem, but the poetry film is in itself a process of layering that heightens the opacity of the work.

Both the print poem and the poetry film can be regarded as independent works, even though the print poem appears in the poetry film, both in oral (read by Silkeberg) and visual form. Still, they are part of an intermedial and media ecological environment, connected through layers of media, motif, theme and poetic language that transcend differences in media and art forms. As I outline in the following, both are attempts to develop a language for the experience of war in exile.

Layers of media and memory

In *Your Memory Is My Freedom*, the images from Damascus represent memories from war and persecution. Likewise, the heavy breathing, most likely from a male subject, represents a bodily response to the memories that reappear. These affective responses imply that the experiences of war and persecution are present as flashbacks and body memories. They are, as the poem says, "en erfarenhet av våld. en insikt i det. att bära minnet av det" ("an experience of violence. an insight into it. to bear the memory of it"). Likewise, the film alternates between presenting what the

haunted subject sees and hears, as he runs or walks quickly through the streets of Stockholm, and showing short glimpses of what haunts him in his memory. It is a palimpsestic layering of past and present – an analogy that potentially shows how traumatic memories work. Traumatic memory is, according to Jonathan Shay, "not narrative. Rather, it is experiences that reoccur, either as full sensory replay of traumatic events in dreams or flashbacks, with all things seen, heard, smelled, and felt intact, or as disconnected fragments." (Shay 1994, 172; see Brison 1999, 42–43) In the poetry film, the experiences of war are presented in a layered montage of images. Actually, the layering technique in the poetry film is informed by the traumatic memories and past experiences that become part of the subject's present.

The process of layering is a much-used technique in media art and poetry film. Tremlett points at how the use of laying techniques in poetry film foreground a mnemonic space, thereby showing how the past haunts the present (Tremlett 2021, 95, 135). In media art, Benthien, Lau and Marxsen write, layering techniques provide works with "a form of semantic as well as aesthetic layering, resulting in a heightening degree of opacity." (Benthien, Lau and Marxsen 2018, 218) Integrated in the process of layering is the intermedial layering of video, the written poem and the oral performance of the poem. In this respect, the act of reading and the visualization of the poem on the screen are of sensational and semantic significance, not least because the film foregrounds embodied experiences, languages and the poem in question. In so doing, the poetry film reflects upon itself as a literary work.

The technique of layering is an intermedial phenomenon that takes place on different levels in the poetry film. In this way, layering strengthens the thematization of traumatic memories of war. One level of layering is the engagement with different media aesthetics, which takes the form of intermedial references. Irina O. Rajewsky writes that intermedial references are used "to refer to a specific medial subsystem (such as a certain film genre) or to another medium qua system (Systemreferenz, "system reference")." (Rajewsky 2005, 53) In the poetry film, the first-person viewer perspective is both a way of exploring trauma, a point supported by the claim made by Susan Brison, and an intermedial reference. In order to explore an individual's trauma and the presence of past experiences of war in exile, the film reproduces the perspective from the genre of first person documentary film. Nevertheless, this intermedial reference is not a linear one-way reference since the chosen perspective is a well-developed aesthetic from computer games. However, this first-person viewer perspective imitates the situation where one engages in the dramatic world, even though the viewer is not able to move about on his or her own in the mediated environment. The poetry film positions a subject in the two situations and provides a perspective that presents the world as if it is perceived directly through the eyes and breathe of this subject. The moving gaze,

breath and footsteps all reflect bodily presence and embodied experiences of war and exile. In this regard, the first-person viewer perspective is an attempt to position the reader-viewer as an observer, as one who sees what the subject sees and remembers and one who hears the subject's embodied responses to a situation in which the past is part of the present, where memories of war are present in exile.

The cross-cutting, layering and fragmentation absorb and reinforce Silkeberg's fragmented poetic language. This is a language for the literary (re)presentation of war and trauma. Therefore, the poetry film, including Silkeberg's poem, can be read as an implicit response to Jameson's claim regarding the impossibility of representing war. The individual parts are allowed to speak; in the words of one of the poems in *Till Damaskus*: "att vara nedbruten. i delar. att låta delarna tala. eller. eller." ("to be broken down. in parts. to let the parts speak. or. or.") (Almadhoun and Silkeberg 2014, 16).[13] Neither the poetry film nor the poetry book *Till Damaskus* are attempts to create a holistic narrative presentation or to develop a coherent language for the experience of war. Rather, the poetry film contains layers and fragments from different places and of different voices, underlining that the poetry film is itself a rupture. In this respect, it is a rupture that corresponds with ruptures created by the experience of war and exile.

"exilens språk" ("the language of exile")

To thematize the experience of war and exile, the poetry film reflects a search for a poetic-cinematic language that is adequate to these experiences. *Your Memory Is My Freedom* is structured in terms of a "now." This now is made dense: it is filled with traumatic memories of war and persecution. The combination of these two aspects – i.e. the present, represented by the poem and the poetry film as an event, and the past, represented by memories – join to make the poetry film a powerful poetic statement and event.

The opening line of the poem establishes a dramatic situation: "Now the killing will start". This statement corresponds with images from Damascus that depict corpses among other things. In addition to referring to something that has happened and that the video shows, it provides the poem and the poetry film with a nowness. It gives the impression that the killing is happening now. Moreover, because of the present tense, the poem is an account of what happens repeatedly, as unfinished events. This aspect, one could argue, is what makes the poetry film so

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13 Here, the poem in Swedish is quoted from the print poem in the book *Till Damaskus*. The English version is how the poem appears in the poetry film.

powerful. Here, event and enunciation coincide. This "now" makes the poetry film an event in the present, rather than a representation of past events.

The opaque "now" replaces a chronological presentation of events, constituting a temporal space, a container that comprises "en erfarenhet av våld" ("an experience of violence"). This experience, in turn, is represented through memories that are both individual and collective: "att bära minnet av det" ("to bear the memory of it"). In this sense, the black background of the poetry film's prologue is a visualization of such a space, the black screen as a visualization of repressed memories. This background seems to demonstrate Jameson's point that there are no ways to represent war in a holistic way. As an alternative, the poetry film follows poetic principles that we can identify in what Silkeberg herself calls "the language of exile."

The poetry film is composed in the language of exile. This is a language of embodied experiences of a world torn asunder. For the traumatized subject in exile, this world appears as non-coherent. As argued in my analysis so far, this language of exile is a non-narrative, verbal-poetic language. Furthermore, it is a language of activism that posits an alternative to the prosaic language of everyday life. The poem and the poetry film are in search of a non-quotidian language. This is no peacetime language but one adequate to rupture. It is as if the poem and film say: it is a paradox that the same language used for everyday situations should be used for experiences that are anything but ordinary. In other words, the poem and poetry film are in search of a poetic-cinematic language that could more fully serve a referential function for the exceptional, for the experience of war and exile.

Lines like "exilens språk. diktens. kanske. att acceptera. stå ut. veta. att se. att ha sett. den huden. handavtrycket mot den inre muren" ("the language of exile. the poem's. maybe. to accept. stand out. know. to see. to have seen. the skin. the handprint against the inner wall") reflect possible connections between poetic language and a language for certain experiences. Simultaneously, the poetry film is an attempt to develop a poetic language that expresses the vulnerability of both the privileged and exposed subject, how the privileged subject is affected by what she has seen, from the inside. It is an attempt to touch and engage the audience though words, sentences, images and sounds that represent memories and experiences of violence.

To explore a language for the exiled is about more than trying to bridge the distance between language, what one sees and has experienced and the other's memories and experience. Here, we can recall Sontag's words in *Regarding the Pain of Others*: "(T)here are many uses of the innumerable opportunities a modern life supplies for regarding – at a distance, through the medium of photography – other people's pain." (Sontag, 2003 11) Sontag is concerned with how representations of war and the other's pain in photography and film turn humans into objects. Among others, she refers to Simone Weil who in her essay "The Iliad, or The Poem of Force" writes that "violence turns anybody subjected to it into things." (Weil 1965, 6)

Later in her book, Sontag returns to this issue: "(T)he scale of war's murderousness destroys what identifies people as individuals, even as human beings. This, of course, is how war looks when it is seen from afar, as an image." (Sontag 2003, 49) The distance in space, the imagination and the medializations, whether in words, photographs or videos, turns subjects into dead objects or things.

In Almadhoun and Silkeberg's poetry film, language as both sign and action has been supplied with a verbal-cinematic language that is specific to certain experiences. It might be that Almadhoun and Silkeberg, through a poetic verbal-cinematic language, are trying to create a connection between worlds and experiences with the aim of connecting with "the other" and the unknown. However, the challenge is not only a representational one. It is also a poetic one, related to the poetic language and to Silkeberg's other concerns. In an essay on Inger Christensen, Silkeberg writes that poetic language expresses a sense of belonging and that language is grounded in the world (Silkeberg 2005, 11). Likewise, the poetry film is an attempt to develop a language that is connected to the world and poetic language as an extension of the world and other. Words like "belonging," "connection" and "extension" serve as bridges. What is more, they also work to measure the distance between language and the world, the speaker and the addressee, the "I" and "the other." Silkeberg explains elsewhere that poetic language measures the distance to the other, the unknown, simultaneously as it stretches out towards the world "as a sensitive instrument of approaching." (Silkeberg 2005, 248) In this respect, the poetic language serves a double function. The reflection is at once poetic and ethical. In this case, we find an ethic not disconnected from poetic language but which is part of a poetic language that makes visible a divergent world with, as Silkeberg writes, "differences, conflicts, displaced languages, interest, unwritten history." (Silkeberg 2005, 12)

The poetry film both develops and demonstrates a language of exile, "exilens språk," which becomes a language of exception that disperses a given order and that brings forward a new beginning. War, oppression and vulnerability are presented in a fragmentary visual and verbal language in which the grammar of verbal language and the linear temporality of the film are broken. The spatial and temporal continuity is exceeded in favor of fragments, repetitions, displacements and the environmental combination of images from two cities, Stockholm and Damascus, one as the representation of a privileged place, the other depicting a war zone. Likewise, the poem is remnants of dysfunctional dialogues, sometimes in an introverted style and often paradoxical. Early in the poetry film, for example, it says: "följer du mig till bussen. no svarar han. hjälper du mig med väskan. no svarar han. tar den från mig. går mot bussen." ("do you follow me to the bus. no he answers. will you help me with the bag. no he answers. take it from me. goes towards the bus"). This is how the poetry film shows the language of exile as a beautiful but broken and

paradoxical language. It is a language affected by the logic of war; "now the killing will start", it says in the beginning of the poem. Further, it is a language that is exposed to violence, appropriate to the experiences of violence that the poetry film conveys. In this way, the poetry film reflects the state of exception that is the governing logic of war and destruction.

Furthermore, the language of exile is the language of the misplaced subject. This traumatized subject in exile may be situated in a time and place distant from war and oppression, but the experience of war and oppression are continually present through memories and flashbacks. With the language of the poem and the poetry film, the gap between language and these experiences is not bridged but measured: it is the only way, according to the poem and the poetry film, that one can be engaged with the other's experience. Both the poem and the poetry film allow us to be in an opaque moment, a spatial and temporal now with sensations, experiences, memories, repetitions and shifts. Therefore, rather than the chronology of a narrative, the poetry film provides an opportunity to be in a mood and in a dwelling over time, as a standstill, without turning the poetic language into a narrative language where the events are organized in a linear and causal order that involves a development and a change. In the poetry film, there is no change, no future or horizon, as it often is in linearly structured narratives.

Voice, body, witness

Your Memory Is My Freedom is an event made out of a poetic-cinematic language of exile, a language that in the film is presented by different subjects. The poem and the first-person viewer perspective in the poetry film represent two different perspectives and functions. The speaker in the poem is privileged, one who is not persecuted, in opposition to the "he", who is the persecuted. In the poetry film, the perspective that is represented in images is from the traumatized other and, as mentioned, probably one who is in exile in Stockholm. The first-person viewer perspective, the breathing and the footsteps all create continuity in the crosscutting of images from Damascus into the sequences of images from the streets of Stockholm. In Stockholm, he is haunted by his memories of war and persecution in Damascus. Here, the images from Damascus represent memories and documentation of war and the pain of the other.

The two perspectives, the perspective of the speaker in the poem and the perspective of the subject in the poetry film, contrast and complement each other. These again are juxtaposed with the presence of Silkeberg who lends her voice to the poem. A significant contrast occurs between the thematization, carried forward by the dramatic images and sounds, and Silkeberg's voice, who reads the poem in a

way that is controlled and unaffected by what takes place on the screen and what the poem is about. Silkeberg reads the poem with a restrained and almost mechanical voice that appears as distant from and unaffected by the situation, the images, the sounds and the appearance of embodied experiences. Silkeberg's voice and way of reading offer a different form of empathy and immersion than the video images and the sounds. With regard to the way Silkeberg reads, we can say more generally that it invites an aesthetic contemplation that is often associated with her poetry readings (see Mønster, Rustad and Schmith 2022, 54). This is a poetry reading that puts its attention on an in-depth immersion into the voice's material qualities and the poem's phonetic and semantic dimensions. While the poetry film with its many layers might call for hyper attention, the poetry readings, isolated, invite contemplative deep attention.

Poetry, including poetry films, can, as a form of activism, uncover memories, experiences and voices that are not otherwise seen and heard. These genres offer forms other than conventional or narrative representations in order to explore the topics of war, oppression and exile. Here, the poem and poetry film position the subjects in two different roles as witnesses. One is an individual and direct witness of war and suffering, which in the poetry film is represented though memories and embodied experiences from "the other," the "he" in exile. The other position is the one taken by the poets who, whether as direct eyewitness or not, can make the poem and the poetry film become a witness. These two functions, which are not necessarily mutually exclusive, are reflected in the title of the poetry film. The one's memory becomes the other's freedom to create. Carolyn Forsché argues for a similar expansion of the understanding of the function of witness. In *Poetry of Witness: The Tradition in English 1500–2001* (2014) she writes that "[i]n the poetry of witness, the poem makes present to us the experience of the other, the poem is the experience, rather than the symbolic representation." (Forsché 2014, 26) It is worth noting that Forsché writes "experience". In this way, she emphasizes a contextual discourse and avoids confusing witnessing with valuations of whether something said is true or false.

It is precisely this type of understanding of the function of witness and activism that *Your Memory Is My Freedom* performs. It provides other ways and a different language to convey experiences and memories of war, oppression and exile. Almadhoun and Silkeberg show video clips from Stockholm and Damascus, clips that emphasize the subject who is running or walking fast through the cities with the camera. This implies that the subject with necessity must have been there and that the video images convey how it was at the exact time when this person ran through the streets. The testimony of the poetry film is precisely the combination of images, sounds and poetic texts that make up the world of the poetry film and that are put together without ignoring the differences. Nevertheless,

because the poetry film is not a narrative, a retelling of an event but a poetic performance, these images and sensations are turned into events which create the sense of concurrency, that they take place simultaneously as the poetry film is shown on the screen. More than a witnessing of events that has taken place, the poetry film, as poetry, is a witness and a presentation of something as if it is happening in the present. The poetry film is structured in accordance with a now, giving us the impression that this takes place in the present and that these events continue to take place.

The poetry film demonstrates that the experience of violence and the language of exile and witness testimony are not only reflected in verbal language. They are also acts of materialized voices and bodies. This is a specification of Stenbeck's argument that activist poetry is performative and bodily. Moreover, these embodied experiences are one side of a double logic of the poetry film as a witness. Whether as a witness or as a victim, it is impossible not to be affected by acts of war. Still, as a witness and victim it is necessary to establish a distance from what one sees and hears, perhaps as a survival strategy, to bear what one has seen and experienced and to bring these forward. In this sense, the untouched and mechanical voice of Silkeberg as she reads, reflects a necessary position for the speaking subject to take. It is a way of surviving, of being able to be a witness and of being able to talk about what one sees or imagines through the other's memory. Likewise, the sound of breathing is a vehicle of continuity in the film, as it appears almost throughout the whole film. It is stable and controlled and indicates that it comes from a body that is in control, despite what he sees and remembers. The breathing is detached both from the action of running and the content of the poem. As with Silkeberg's reading, the breathing does not change in character throughout the film. Rather, it can be perceived as a mechanically and physically-emotionally disconnected event. The running or the fast walking in the touristic area of Stockholm or among dead bodies in Damascus or lines like "Now the killing will start" do not affect the body that breathes or the body that reads.

"[A]n experience of violence. An insight into it. To bear the memory of it," it says in Silkeberg's poem. This insight requires the other's survival and experience. Likewise, in order to present this experience and insight as not one's own but as belonging to the other, she needs to maintain a distant voice and to lend her voice to these experiences and insights without engaging herself emotionally. In this way, she avoids turning the poem and the poetry reading in the film into her own experience of and insight into the other's experience and insight.

Poetry film in the computational network environment

Your Memory Is My Freedom is a digital poetry film, distributed on YouTube, among other channels. The social media platform functions primarily as a distribution channel. The viewers' opportunities to comment on and discuss the film have been turned off and the number of likes, dislikes and sharing are not available. The available paratextual information tells us that the video was uploaded on 1 September 2015, that is, approximately three years after it was produced, and that it had 265 views before the registration for number of views was turned off or stopped working. This implies that the poets and the poetry film make little use of the opportunities that the platform provides for interaction and sharing. Some of the media technological features for social media, among others defined by José van Dijck and Thomas Poell (2013), are nevertheless operational (see Chapter 5). The algorithms and network organization can still affect the distribution of the poetry film. It is still possible for viewers to like, possibly dislike, as well as to share the poetry film via other platforms. This means that the number of viewers who have made use of one or more of these features is available to programmers and algorithms and that popularity can be measured, even if this information is not available to the average viewer.

The fact that some of YouTube's default settings have been turned off, may in itself be a display of activism. If these are choices made by Almadhoun and Silkeberg, it implies that the two poets do not want the poetry film to be part of a like economy controlled by social media. It suggests that they want the poetry film to be distributed, seen and discussed on the premises of poetry and poetry film. It may also be that the field for commenting is made unavailable due to unwanted comments. A consequence of this is, for whatever reason, that the opportunity for discussions on the theme of the poetry film and the opportunity to continue a conversation about war, oppression and exile on the platform have not been realized.

In addition to the platform with its facilities, network organization and algorithms provide some opportunities for political and activist poetry films like *Your Memory Is My Freedom*. These features remind us that a literary text rarely makes political changes by itself. Rather, it gains its power and effectiveness in a media ecology with other texts, other bodies and other media. Poetic-political activism is thus a collaboration between (re)medializations and (re)materializations. This necessity of collaborations to gain a political effect can for some works become even clearer in the digital culture. Poetry film is multimedia, intermedial social media poetry, and in the digital environment in which it and other digital poetry films are inserted, their power to make changes is also determined by the media's network organization and distribution capabilities.

Poetry film and its aesthetic practice in the computational network environment emphasize that there is no competition between the various medializations and materializations, in this case the poetry film produced in 2012 and the poem published in 2014. Rather, they are part of and exploit some of the opportunities that lie in digital culture. They do so in order to reach out in a poetic language that explores the experience of war and exile. Here we find an attempt to touch readers and viewers on a social media platform. The poetry film thus demonstrates Bolter and Grusin's claim that rather than competition, remediations help to make a medium, a genre, a theme and a poetic language accessible to more and more senses (Bolter and Grusin 1999, 68). *Your Memory Is My Freedom* it not a total work of art but rather a poetry film that exists simultaneously with, sometimes independent of and other times in collaboration with, the print poems in *Till Damaskus* and poetry readings from the section "Your Memory Is My Freedom."