



Images courtesy of the artist



Top: Klara Paulin-Rosell, *Elisabeth och Alma (Elisabeth and Alma)*, 2025. 16 mm film transferred to 2K, 3:19 min

Bottom: Klara Paulin-Rosell, *263 sidor (263 pages)*, 2025. a room, a door, a door frame, sound

Echoes of a Room Klara Paulin-Rosell

I want to construct this text like a house. A house with several rooms and corridors. One of the rooms is inaccessible. The door is closed, if there even is a door. From within the room come the sounds of someone or something, which the reader encounters from outside the room. One room acts as a memory of a room. Or as an echo of a room. Another is fictitious. Some rooms are blind spots, some rooms are warmer, and some are cold. Through this essay, I'll enter and exit different rooms, real and fictional. Often something is left out, something that you who are reading this will never find out, perhaps because the only thing I remember about the room is precisely that one little detail, a feeling, something buzzing, or a look.

A Language that Doesn't Hurt to Speak

In my practice I often use characters, myths, and other people's fiction, as well as earlier works of my own and others. It's a kind of investigation into how something is told and by whom. Sometimes I use characters that are close to me, where the line between me and them is thin. It becomes a way to put myself in another body, to approach something, something that might otherwise hurt too much to talk about.

Certain excerpts from other people's texts will appear in this essay. These excerpts have served as mantras for me in recent years, but when I repeat them to myself, I change some words and the sentences become different and change over time, so I'll write them down as I remember them.

"The word, the message: the cut in the silence of thing and animal. The wound that opens their lives to something other than themselves."

An Ambivalence of the Double of Lived Experience²

"Any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another. The notion of intertextuality replaces that of intersubjectivity, and poetic language is read as at least double."³

In "Word, Dialogue and Novel," the linguist and philosopher Julia Kristeva coins the term "intertextuality." The concept is based on philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of dialogism. She draws on these theories to describe three dimensions of dialogue: *the writing subject*, meaning what the writer addresses; *the addressee*, which identifies the reader being addressed; and *exterior texts*, which describes how all written text

is a result of what the writer has previously read or in some way consumed. In turn, these dimensions are grouped along a horizontal axis and a vertical axis. The horizontal axis is the subject and the addressee, and the vertical axis is the text and the context of the text, which both coincide with each other. This means that each word (text) is a mixture of words (texts), in which at least one other word (or text) can be read. Bakhtin calls these axes "dialogue" and "ambivalence," which are overlapping. This also leads to what Kristeva describes as "reading-writing," that is, writing based on a correlation of all other previous texts. A text also functions as a response to or an absorption of previous texts.⁴

Kristeva further describes how poetic language cannot be formalised through rational scientific language without becoming distorted. One way to capture poetic language is through dialogism, which describes a poetic language in which multiple voices and structures can coexist alongside and inside one another. Logical, causal connections are not necessarily present in poetic language. And this in turn forces a different way of thinking.⁵ My rooms can be read in this way. I try, both through this text and through my visual work, to shape a poetic language, a language in which several voices can be heard at the same time, a language that is allowed to be contradictory.

The Room with the Yellow Wallpaper

I enter the first room on the left from the hall. It's claustrophobic. The walls are covered in a yellow wallpaper that evokes disgust. It feels as if, even at night, the room does not shut its eyelids. I first entered this room seven years ago. This room is a short story, and the short story utterly consumed me. A few years after I first read it, I began researching the narrator and the room in which the story is set, which later became part of me and my work. The work I did based on "The Yellow Wallpaper"⁶ was the first room I created—perhaps it has become the room that the other rooms I create come from?

"The Yellow Wallpaper" is a short story by Charlotte Perkins Gilman written in 1892. After giving birth, the unnamed narrator is diagnosed with "temporary nervous depression" by her physician husband. This was a common diagnosis for women at the time, and they were often "treated" with a so-called "rest cure" to rid them of their "hysterical tendencies." Although all she wants to do is write, the narrator is not allowed to engage in any kind of intellectual work. She, her husband, and the newborn baby go to a mansion for the summer. The room in which she has been confined to

rest is decorated with yellow wallpaper. She devotes many diary entries to describing the wallpaper: its sickly colour and yellow smell, its bizarre and unpleasant patterns. The longer she spends in the room, the more the wallpaper seems to change. After a while, she catches sight of a woman behind the wallpaper. She becomes increasingly obsessed with the wallpaper as the rest of her surroundings fade. She starts to think about how to help the woman get out, and eventually she tears off the wallpaper piece by piece. The narrator's madness can be read as a result of suppressing creativity and the desire to write, denying it an outlet, with one's perception of reality being constantly disregarded and declared to be an illness. Rereading the story several years later, I still can't help but ask myself: *What's really behind the wallpaper?*

In Ingmar Bergman's film *Through a Glass Darkly* (1961), one of the main characters, Karin, who suffers from schizophrenia, hears voices from behind the wallpaper of a room in the house she is staying in for the summer. At a reading by the artist Meriç Algün at Lunds konsthall in late October 2024, I learned that the working title of Bergman's film was "The Wallpaper." Algün asks herself: Is the wallpaper in fact the *mirror* in "The Yellow Wallpaper"?

Francesca Woodman is an artist whose images come to mind when I read Gilman's short story. Her photographs often depict women, including herself, whose bodies are partially hidden behind wallpaper, blurred by the light streaming through windows, or blocked by mirrors. The mirrors reflect different surfaces, rooms, and faces that are outside the image. It seems that Woodman referred to her images as "ghost pictures,"⁹ which feels appropriate because the bodies are often blurred. This is an effect of the body's movement and the long exposure time she often used. When I look at Woodman's pictures, it feels like she's staging a kind of escape or a way out of the camera's gaze and definition of her. Or perhaps it is more an escape from the male gaze. At the same time, she is the one in control of the camera and the staging, and is in this way taking over the male gaze she has experienced upon her body. Her body is in direct interaction with the interiors that surround it. In one image, the weight of the artist's body is put in relation to a door. In another, her body is partially hidden behind a sheet of wallpaper she has sort of moulded her form to, and in a third image, her arms are swinging in the air, partially clad in bark that takes on the shape of the birch trees in the background, effectively disappearing into them. It's as if the body is mirroring the settings and their surroundings, or maybe it reflects an inner state. Perhaps it's trying to tear itself off. I think Woodman's images visualise what Gilman is expressing in her short story: *the constant interplay of a dual identity*.

In *Den tänkande kroppen* (The thinking body), psychoanalyst Iréne Matthijs writes about the imagined body and the actual body. She likens the gestures of hysteria, the twentieth century's female disease, to "a fragment that has lost its function." She writes:

The body represents the presence of an absence. It gives signs, not of what has been lost, but of the absence itself. The materiality of the body is thus used by the hysterical not to create a symbolic expression of something else but to stage the loss. The pantomime is the model for the hysterical's embodiment of a conflict. ... One could say that the body provides a stage onto which a "movement" walks and performs something as if it were "the somatic." The movement, the performance of the pantomime, has the same status in hysteria as the manifest material of a dream and must be analysed in the same way: not as a natural movement of the body but as a fragment that has lost its function. It could also be said that the hysterical representation gives an incomplete, distorted, or interrupted idea of something that continues to remain incomplete in the hysterical body.¹⁰

The gestures of the hysterical interest me. These gestures are movements that try to express nothingness or emptiness itself. They are empty gestures that do not extend beyond that to which they refer, or, to borrow Matthijs's words, that act like a *fragment that has lost its function*. In "The Yellow Wallpaper," the narrator's repetitive gesture of tearing off the wallpaper can be explained in this way—the gesture becomes images of a wordless language for what cannot be expressed. Emptiness itself is expressed through her movements. In my works, I try in various ways to approach a language of the inexpressible and an emptiness. Often by attempting to follow a structure, only to then break it apart. Letting the image, the gesture, the text, the space, and the language collapse in the transfer so as to make room for something else. *Letting the inside become the outside*.

In "Of Other Spaces," philosopher Michel Foucault describes the term "heterotopia," which is a concept that describes ambivalent places that can be located in several ways at the same time and where several layers of time can exist at once. These spaces can be both open and closed. Isolated and permeable. Present and absent. They are spaces constructed by contradictions. Foucault begins the essay by defining the term "utopia," which is a place that has no real place. The mirror, he says, is a placeless place. It is simultaneously a utopia and a heterotopia. He writes:

In the mirror, I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface; I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent.¹⁰

I wonder if I can use Foucault's theory of these ambiguous places to explain the rooms I'm creating, which are both contradictory and ambivalent. Rooms that function as stages where multiple narratives and layers of time are allowed to play out and exist all at once. They are memories of rooms or echoes of rooms where the boundary between the body, memory, fiction, and reality is played out.

The artist Hreinn Friðfinnsson made a piece, *First House*, that became the first in a series called *House Project* (1974–),¹¹ which spanned almost his entire career. The work is a house he built inside out and placed in the Icelandic landscape. The outside of the house has been shrunk into a closed space consisting of only the walls and roof. The rest is made up of the inside—the house contains the whole world except for the house itself. *Second House* (2008) is an inverted version of the first house. This house now includes itself, with wallpaper on the inside, and the outside points out into the world. Photographs of *First House* are on the inside of *Second House*, which can be seen through the windows. While these first and second iterations were built with typical building materials, such as wood and metal, and have a door, windows with curtains, and wallpaper, the third was constructed as a three-dimensional drawing of the house in the form of a steel frame. From the inside of the house being outside and the outside inside, and vice versa, the boundaries have now been blurred, creating ambivalence. You can see and be in both places at the same time. *Third House* (2011) was placed on the same site in Iceland as *First House*, thus becoming an echo of it. *Fourth House* (2017) is made of stainless steel and virtually blends in with its surroundings. The house's reflective frame emerges and the space takes shape each time a viewer encounters the work. A mirrored reality is reflected and structured by its own form. All four houses reflect each other and contain the whole world while also shutting it out.

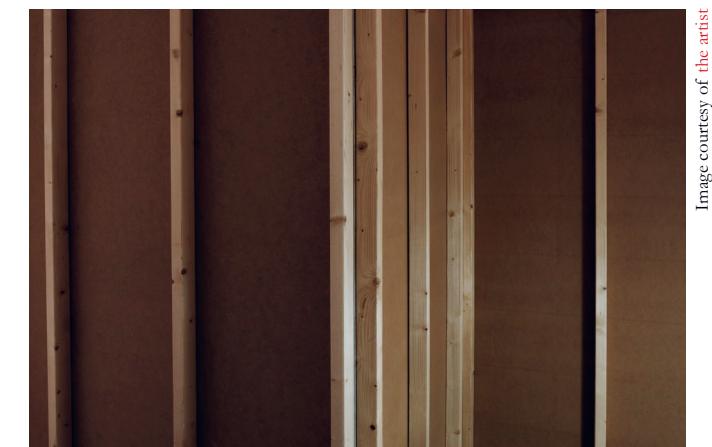
The Memory Room

At the top of the house is an attic. It is my grandmother's attic. The room is like a map of her consciousness, without beginning or end. She saved everything. When she passed away, I wanted to save every last thing too. I found her cut-off braided hair in a box, let-

ters, photos, calendars, newspaper clippings, bags of fabric with little handwritten notes explaining where the scraps of fabric came from. Every little thing bore (literally) at least one sentence. I found an old notebook in which I wrote about this. I think the reason I wanted to save all her things was because I wanted to be able to enter her home. I thought the objects would help me do that, but I didn't have enough space to save it all. So if I were to rebuild her home as I remembered it, it would be full of blind spots, empty spaces.

One film that comes to mind when I walk around my grandmother's attic is *The Souvenir* (2019) by Joanna Hogg. In the film, she reconstructs the memory of the apartment she lived in when she was in film school. The movie is about a complicated love affair with a man and is built on her memory of the relationship. The relationship with the man remains mysterious, as it is based solely on her experience. The unknown remains unknown. Julie, the main character (who acts as Hogg's alter ego) was instructed, without a script, by the director's diaries, photos, and memories. The sequel, *The Souvenir: Part II* (2021), is about making the first movie. It follows the protagonist's work on the first film and the frustrated actors who are instructed by Hogg's memories and the emotions that emerge during the film's making. The work on these two films feels like one long exercise in remembering.

I'm drawn to the fragmentary form. This can be anything from diaries, lists, and indexes to letters or a sentence from a conversation or a movie. Similarly, I am drawn to reading other artists' and writers' notes and diaries, and looking through old sketchbooks. I've long been engrossed by Emily Dickinson's fragments; in the book *The Gorgeous Nothings*, her fragments are collected at their true scale. The poet wrote on whatever piece of paper was available to her at the moment she wanted to write something down. These were torn envelopes and other scraps, which she tore



Klara Paulin-Rosell, *263 sidor* (263 pages), 2025. Detail

Image courtesy of the artist



Klara Paulin-Rosell, *Vittnen (Witnesses)*, 2025. Video projection: 16 mm transferred to 2K, 6:17 min

Image courtesy of the artist

into new shapes and crumpled up and then smoothed out again. The fragments are often difficult to decipher, because the writing can be loose, and often the letters' lines overlap. Sometimes it seems as if they were written in the dark. The fragments yield a different kind of reading, as if something else is being revealed, beyond what has been written. Something the reader would not otherwise have access to. Something that reveals where the poet was, how she felt, whether she was in a hurry, or if she perhaps had difficulty finding a solid surface on which to write. The fragments open up a mental landscape, where something otherwise inaccessible unfolds.

A Closed Room

The door to one of the rooms on the second floor cannot be opened. From inside the room you can hear the sound of someone writing. This sound of intense writing slowly subsides. Suddenly there is a pause. The outside of one room is often the inside of another room, but this room does not function as an inside for any other room.

The sound of writing returns.

Writing doesn't have to be anything other than exactly what it is. It is alive, and it refers to something else, to *something beyond the text itself*.

To write is to use *nothing* as material. I am rereading *Writing* by novelist and filmmaker Marguerite Duras. I might be able to find something of use in her short essay. She writes:

Finding yourself in a hole, at the bottom of a hole, in almost total solitude, and discovering that only writing can save you. To be without the slightest subject for a book, the slightest idea for a book, is to find yourself, once again, before a book. A vast emptiness. A possible book.¹²

When I read Duras's words, I imagine a room from which the writing comes. I've tried to cast that space. Or, rather, I have tried to cast the act of writing, which became a closed room. An artist who works with materialising the immaterial is Rachel Whiteread. She creates rooms that you cannot enter and doors that cannot be opened. Her sculptures are the insides of objects and architecture from everyday environments, moulded in plaster and concrete. In the work *House* (1993), she gives shape to the entire inside of a house.¹³ The inside of the house creates a ghostly presence of an absence.

I stand there listening to the scene unfolding within the closed room, thinking: *Writing is also screaming*.

"As if the camera shutter had closed for good (or the heart of the image had stopped beating)." 14

I see my art as a form of collecting stories and places from other people's works, both real people and imaginary characters. Together, they create a new fiction. Art becomes a means to step into another role, to see through someone else's eyes. Sometimes I use elements from previous works, and other times I use someone else's text and put it into a new context to explore its meaning. I often come back to Duras's books and films, and how she allows characters to jump around and have a place in a later work, where they may even become someone else. It's a method I also use. I feel like I'm trying to break apart writing, creation, the room, the image, and through this create meaning.

Duras's *L'Homme Atlantique* (The Atlantic man, 1981) is a film that is mostly all black, a darkness that is at times interrupted by images from one of her earlier films, *Agatha et les lectures Illimitées* (Agatha and the limitless readings, 1981). Through the black image, the focus shifts to the sound. The soundtrack consists only of the sea coming and going and the calm voice of Duras recounting a love story that has ended, a loss, something dying. The voice consists of several layers; it speaks of a loss, perhaps the loss of a lover, but also of time and life disappearing into the blackness before our eyes. The image shifts between blackness and footage of Yann Andréa, the filmmaker's lover, to whom the voice also gives instructions. She speaks to him through a *you* and the viewer becomes *them*. It's as if the camera is turned towards the viewer. The instructions are about how Andréa should relate to the camera. The voice also comments on the film and the spectators watching the film. In a way, Duras's love affair with the medium of film also ends with this black film, which would be her last film.

Every time I see *L'Homme Atlantique*, new worlds open up. The black image creates a void, a void that generates an infinite number of films. Duras called it cinematic writing,¹⁵ which in many ways can be compared with writer and theorist Hélène Cixous's concept of *l'écriture féminine*,¹⁶ which was formulated around the same time. *L'écriture féminine* translates as "female writing" and can be explained as writing that breaks with linear time to instead move in a circular time that tries to capture the corporeal and the momentary. It is writing that follows its own inner seeking as it tries to get at *something* or an *it*, around which the search circles and which the writing materialises. It becomes a way of trying to depict a language before or beyond the rational.

"The meaning shifts, changes and eludes you, but you continue to long to pursue it, as if it were the beloved itself." 17

Witnesses

The gaze circles slowly around a room and is met by chairs upholstered in red velvet, then by a round table with a half-eaten breakfast and some apples on it, an oversized kettle on a small stove, and an empty space next to a bed. It is quiet. The room urges us to navigate our own silence and reconsider what we see.

The film *La Chambre* (The room, 1989) by Chantal Akerman exists somewhere between a self-portrait and a portrait of a place. Because it progresses slowly, the film's relationship to still images reverberates. It is slow enough to make the viewer pause at each frame and allow the eye to follow the composition as in a photograph or a painting, and in the moment you forget that this is a moving image, a new frame reveals more of the room, causing the previous composition to echo within the walls of the new one.

In another part of the room, a spotlight illuminates some objects. It feels as if these objects are waiting for something or someone. Or, rather, it's as if they're looking at someone. It seems to be a scene that we don't have access to. One of the witnesses is a chair with a dressing gown on it, another is a cutting of a porcelain flower in a brown vase, a third, a rock that bears the marks of time. They are looking back at you.

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Note:

In recent weeks I have begun to make sketches of the house.

Images courtesy of the artist



Klara Paulin-Rosell, *Vittnen (Witnesses)*, 2025. Video projection: 16 mm transferred to 2K, 6:17 min



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- 2 Julia Kristeva, "Word, Dialogue and Novel," in *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice A. Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 89.
- 3 Kristeva, "Word, Dialogue and Novel," 66.
- 4 Kristeva, "Word, Dialogue and Novel," 64–66.
- 5 Kristeva, "Word, Dialogue and Novel," 69–70.
- 6 Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "The Yellow Wallpaper," in *The Yellow Wallpaper and Other Stories* (New York: Dover Thrift Editions, 1997).
- 7 Meriç Algün, *Patienten gråter* [The patient cries], exhibition and reading at Lunds Konsthall, 19 October 2024.
- 8 Maria Stepanova, *Minnen av minnet* [In Memory of Memory] (Stockholm: Nirstedt/Litteratur, 2021), 234.
- 9 Iréne Mattis, *Den tänkande kroppen* [The Thinking Body] (Borås, Sweden: Natur och Kultur, 1997), 93.
- 10 Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias," trans Jay Miskowiec, *Architecture/Mouvement/Continuité* (October 1984): 4. <http://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/foucault1.pdf>.
- 11 See Hreinn Friðfinnsson, *House Project: First House, Second House, Third House*, ed. Olof K. Sigurdardottir (Reykjavík: Forlagið, 2012).
- 12 Marguerite Duras, *Writing*, trans. Mark Polizzotti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 8.
- 13 See Rachel Whiteread, *House*, ed. James Lingwood (London: Phaidon, 1995).
- 14 *L'homme Atlantique* [The Atlantic man], feature film, directed by Marguerite Duras (France: Des Femmes Filment, Institut National de l'Audiovisuel, Les Productions Berthement, 1981).
- 15 Marguerite Duras, *My Cinema*, trans Daniella Shreir (London: Another Gaze Editions, 2023).
- 16 Hélène Cixous, *Medusas skratt* [The Laugh of the Medusa], trans. Sara Gordan and Kerstin Munck (Stockholm: Modernista, 2015), 5–31.
- 17 Anne Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet* (Dallas: Dalkey Archive Press, 2014), 95.