

RUBIANE MAIA

IN SEARCH OF DARKNESS

Film Installation, live performance

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SCRIPT [Film voice over]

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This text corresponds to the full voice-over narration used in the film. It was written and recorded as part of the artistic project titled 'In Search of Darkness'. The narrative is intended to be heard in synchrony with moving images, but is reproduced here in its complete textual form for accessibility and archival purposes.

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In the cosmology of Dagara, a people from West Africa, mourning is a ritual of rebalancing between worlds, where the living, the dead, the ancestors, and the unborn inhabit a continuum of interdependent existence.

It has a sacred function in the community, it is a spiritual work that takes place collectively, essential for restoring harmony between the visible and invisible.

Grief has a beginning, but no end.

It is not just an emotional response to death, but an encounter with the irreversible.

A portal that makes us realise that life is deeply intertwined with death, and that to exist means to accept being cohabited by absences.

When grief arrives, it does not ask our permission, it only forces us to look at our own vulnerability, to look at the holes.

It is a state of suspension in which the body is called upon to process both the loss of the other and the loss of yourself.

The earth, the underground, the shadows, the night, places where the digestion of pain can operate slowly, outside the realm of control or denial.

I need darkness to emit the sounds of decomposition, which cannot exist on the surface, in the light.

Bodies, territories, histories, interrupted pasts and futures that will not be fulfilled as we imagined.

I let go of the worlds that fall, the plans that fail, the dreams that are no longer possible.

Grief inhabits me like a ray of sunshine, a humid breeze, a sudden sting, an event of a sensitive, almost atmospheric order, a slow breath that confirms that between what we call life and death, there lies the unspeakable, which manifests itself as silence, anger, pain, tears, cracks, tremors, murmurs, screams and songs.

I speak from my bones.

From the echoes of my Afro-diasporic origins, from what is sacred in me, and from what has survived in me among those whose bodies were stolen from their own land.

I speak from my bones, which preserve the ancestral energy that some call lineage.

Learning to relate to bones involves listening to what pulses beyond the skin or flesh.

It is in the depths of the body that mineral memory dwells, the same memory that rests between the surface and the depths of the earth.

We are made of the same dust that forms stones, mountains, sediments. The same matter that sustains the world's relief composes our internal structure.

There is basalt in our gestures, granite in our resistance, limestone in the folds of memory.

The minerals that inhabit us never cease to remind us that we are temporary bodies of ancient matter, fragments of a geology that breathes, moves, and crumbles.

When we walk, we do not just step on the ground, we are part of it.

We are the persistence of the mountain, the delicacy of dust, the rigidity of rocks, the vertigo of abysses, the distant rumbling of tectonic plates, the flow of rivers. We are bodies in erosion.

Bones are living stones. By caring for bones, I care for memory.

I have become responsible for memories that refuse to be archived, but which demand to be acknowledged.

Memories that have been denied, or that long to be reinvented.

Memories embedded in the soil, in stones, in the tree trunks, in bones, in strands of hair, in the dried salt that remains after the sea recedes.

Memories that vibrate in subterranean rhythms that never completely belonged to us.

More-than-human memories that survive in the shadows or in blackness.

I have tried to allow memories to find me, without demanding them to remain.

There are memories that come and go, or that play. There are memories of pain that yearn for recognition.

Not all memories offer themselves to consciousness; they refuse our desire for control or linearity.

These are the ones that destabilise us the most, corrode us from within, silently disorganise us until some transformation takes place.

When I give in, when I become less solid, I allow the most difficult memories to find me so that I can receive this wild force in transit.

When this happens, we discover that it was never about archiving, but about crossings.

In antiquity, ceramic beads found alongside female bodies served as talismans, indicators of identity, and transmitters of memory.

Some beads also held cures or messages intended for the dead, acting as silent vessels of remembrance and protection.

There is a primal fear that awakens when the body accepts being buried.

Partly it is the fear of death, partly it is the terror of losing form, of witnessing what cannot be controlled.

The weight of the soil, the dampness, the worms, the suffocation of the senses, the darkness, the cold, and the inability to move.

This extreme gesture demands surrender.

I allow the soil to read me, undo me, and return me in another form.

I recognise the body I have was never completely mine as all bodies belong to the soil.

I have chosen to begin my process of decomposition before my physical death, so that I may become accustomed to the rough touch of the earth that does not distinguish flesh from root.

I can reconcile myself with the mineral destiny of my body, with the disappearance of language as I recognise it.

I also would like to get used to the idea of being ground, learning to filter not only air, but also time.

The air down here has never been so rarefied and precious.

Inside the hole, breathing becomes the only possible rhythm, mediated by a thin tube that carries not only oxygen, but traces of the underground world, rumours.

It is by this thread that we remain in between.

We are practising dying slowly, and collectively, channeling the ruin of some worlds, the exhaustion of automatic gestures, the ancestral lament that still reverberates in our bones.

I recognise the soil as an ancestral and welcoming entity, capable of slowly digesting what has been broken, abandoned, and lost.

In the darkness of the subsoil, everything that breaks finds shelter, sinks and slowly dissolves, until it returns to compose the same formation that once welcomed it.

It is a secret, gestational work, in which nothing is wasted, but diluted and transformed into fragments.

Bones, dust, pigment, nail, hair, ceramics, teeth, pollen, blood, charcoal, rust, ashes, stones, dry leaves, tools, saliva, ropes, flesh, feathers.

Particles that will continue to emit signals, even when inaccessible.

Celebrating darkness is establishing a pact with the invisible, where light is no longer the only measure of truth, and where what cannot be seen also sustains the world.

It is darkness that teaches us about our own finitude and continuity.

Rituals connect communities to their territories, to the lineages that preceded them, establishing a continuity.

Rituals assume the interdependence in all beings.

Everything that exists participates in the processes of healing, of passage, of communication, of birth, and death.

Each symbolic gesture informs the responsibility we have towards each other and the world.

Every ritual is a device for transformation that promotes collective restoration, allowing new modes of existence to be imagined.