

Filmrutan Essay On Shards and Contrasts

Text by Sara Broos

After her breakthrough with "For You Naked" (2012), about the artist Lars Lerin, and the autobiographical "Reflections" (2016), Sara Broos explores her own and the world's darkness in "Shards", a film about searching for context in a fragmented reality. Here, she writes about her process.

On Shards and Contrasts | Essay | Filmrutan The most common questions I get as a filmmaker are: "How did you get the idea?", "How long did it take to make the film?" and "What is it about?". It sounds so simple, but it's almost impossible to answer.

We often want to be able to understand and summarize, package, make something comprehensible. But with "Skärvor", it was only when I let go of control and embraced the chaos and the seemingly fragmented, that the film revealed itself to me.

The film begins in darkness. In a sterile room in the psychiatric emergency. I have been there myself, seen people come and go. Some with concrete reasons, severe traumas from war or a shattered childhood. Others without answers when someone wonders what they are doing there. Even though, outwardly, they have all the conditions to live a good life. A doctor told me that I must try to slow down, to still the speed inside my head. That I lack a filter.

I came home to my house in the countryside in Värmland and suddenly there was unbroken time. I sorted through old hard drives and thought back to a time when life was not so regimented. When I, as a teenager, roamed on trains, mostly in Eastern Europe and especially the Balkans where I felt most at home. The late '90s, barely any money. But with a borrowed Hi-8 camera, as an excuse to contact people and overcome my shyness. Without any thought of showing the material I filmed to anyone.

I was full of life and longing for the world. Often slept on the luggage racks on night trains. The structure in *Shards* is more shaped by the dramaturgy of the journey than by a clear narrative. I wanted to use the raw energy that exists in that unconscious, the open gaze, without intentions to package the lived and observed into a story. Instead; a free flow of images with a seemingly disorganized order, but still perhaps with some kind of invisible logic. I decided to try to remind myself of the child's gaze and filming became a way to slowly come out of my own darkness and start seeing the world in a new way again. From being enclosed in a glass dome where everything around is a backdrop, to being present and experiencing reality with all my senses.

The process became partly a journey into my unmanageable private archive. Thoughts about childhood, the lost paradise. The feeling I wanted to capture. Like in the film's poster image, a painting by my mother based on a Super-8 film with me as a child. I am maybe four years old, early '80s. A small child, with dirt on my cheeks. Completely absorbed by the flower she is holding and pressing to her nose. I still think I remember the scent of the flower, the feeling of total presence. That moment of wonder or being completely filled with something. That which so easily disappears in a world where everything must be explained, made efficient, and where my own life had turned into a journey on a highway at too high a speed, without knowing where I was really going, with endless fires to extinguish. And then suddenly an exit and the car stops and everything is still and there is time and space to think and feel.

For several years, I had started countless versions, approaches, and paths for the film. Tried to depict the feeling of doom in the face of the war-torn world and make a film that would feel relevant right now. In a time of so much darkness and hopelessness. But still with streaks of light and hope.

I sought out people who had gone through difficulties in life, from those who had been forcibly admitted to the psychiatric ward and treated with electroshock, to those who had fled wars where they experienced torture, or those who had been abused by someone they love. Created storylines with development curves and tried to merge stories that could complement each other, worked with orchestration. But I soon realized that I was trying to force the film into a form where it didn't want to be. It demanded a different kind of dramaturgy beyond what can be pitched concisely or analyzed based on some well-known method. Where the very shards and fragments could exist in their own right. They perhaps didn't need to be melted together into a coherent story but could exist as standalone entities. I tried to free myself from everything I already know and can about traditional dramaturgy. Read Camus' notebooks, loose fragments and impressions, read Jamaica Kincaid's "At the Bottom of the River" with its flowing associative metaphors and childhood memories. Thought about stream of consciousness. About Marcel Proust. And about how life and time are not a clear story with a beginning, middle, and end.



I watched lots of experimental film and art film and began a creative process together with avant-garde filmmaker Gunvor Nelson. We made a film together; "View From A Window" (2023), which is filmed through a window overlooking Kronobergsparken over the course of a year, and was shown at a joint exhibition at Kulturhuset Stadsteatern 2023 ("Personal Films"). Gunvor, with her sensitivity and free exploratory film language, reminded me that there are no rules or templates to follow. That each film demands its own form.

It's so easy to feel completely unsuccessful and full of doubt when everything is pure chaos and nothing seems to fit together. When you repeatedly get lost. Because I am so alone in my work and do so much myself, deeply involved in every part, from script to photo to editing, it is absolutely crucial to surround myself with people who can both give me resistance and be brutally honest, but who also feel full trust. My friend and mentor Stefan Jarl has always walked by my side and followed my process. He never tries to steer me but he has an ability to sense what it is I want to depict and reminds me when I am off track. Emelie Persson, then project manager at SVT's "K Special"; Juan Pablo Libossart, former film consultant, and

Jenny Örnborn from the Swedish Film Institute, encouraged me when I doubted the most to dare to go into the abstract, to trust the visual, not to be overly explicit. Challenge myself, give things time. That trust is absolutely crucial for me to dare to venture into the unknown.

I grew up with artist parents in the countryside outside Hagfors in Värmland. We lived in an old mansion at the end of a gravel road, on the edge of a mountain with endless forests and bogs spreading out behind the house. I think more and more about how those first years shaped me. The feeling of being different, not fitting in. The forest was my second home, full of secret corners, old car wrecks, uprooted trees, and abandoned badger burrows. The forest was endless and it was easy to get lost. Despite the idyll; the widespread flower meadows with large oaks where we children built huts, the sheep pastures, the flock of Icelandic horses; darkness and something threatening were constantly present. At night, the sounds of animals' death struggles could be heard. The shadows. My first years in life were marked by strong contrasts, sharp shifts between light and dark that made a strong impression on me. Experiences and memories that have influenced my filmmaking. Everything from the memory of my sister Emma who never even got to start her life but died during childbirth, an event I depict in the film *Reflections*. I was two years old and did not understand how someone who had just been born was instead dead. The changing room at the swimming spot, a dark timbered house with lots of graffiti on the walls. A warm summer day in July, a neighbor had hanged himself in there.

My parents invited all the refugees at the facility outside Hagfors. Most from Iran and Iraq. Many with horrifying stories of torture and persecution. We got to know the Iranian poet Jila Mossaed from Tehran. She became a close friend and my second mother. She called me her second daughter. And she is still like a mother to me and someone I feel a strong kinship with. Especially through her poetry. Something unspoken that can never be exactly captured. That has nothing to do with how well you know each other or how close you have come. In the same way that you can recognize something in a passing stranger's gaze. Or how, as a teenager, I felt a stronger belonging and naturalness in Sarajevo than in Sunne, which was my hometown. That is the power of art – that it can unite and travel across borders, that background or ethnicity loses its significance when something touches the heart and we are united in a deeply universal human experience. Impossible to define or analyze.

I refer in *Shards* to the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa who believed that "we are not just one but many". But when everything goes too fast, we are often quick to judge and the impression of someone easily becomes sketchy and categorical. Pessoa wrote under nearly a hundred different pseudonyms (heteronyms), because he did not want to define himself but be free to dream of being everything. Different voices that were all part of himself.

How does one get the idea for a film? When does something begin? The older I get, the more I think back to my childhood. My godfather Lars Lerin, who was part of the family. A person I cared for deeply but who carried a darkness I did not understand. Deep in his addiction to alcohol and pills and with a strong self-loathing, he would dress up as a woman or Michael Jackson while my father filmed. In my first feature film *För dig naken*, I wanted to explore that darkness, and how one can let in and allow oneself to be loved when carrying such intense self-hatred.

In *Skärvor*, I return to the first years of my life. The connection with nature, the contrasts between light and dark, Edvard Munch's painting "The Sick Child" that hung in my bedroom as a child and still hangs on my wall. The Greek myths I read. How one can be in a limited

place on earth, out in the rural Värmland, but how the outside world is still so present. The countryside also contains so many contrasts, and it is easy for an outsider to quickly judge. To associate everything outside the city buzz and vast offerings with periphery and stagnation.

When I returned to Värmland after many years in cities, and friends warned that I would lose all context and feel excluded, I instead built my own center. I started a scriptwriting course at Alma Löv Museum and thought that one must also take responsibility for setting things in motion, creating the context one wants to be in. The countryside is as intense and alive to me as a metropolis, both through the intense presence and life of nature, but also through the microcosm that all the diverse life stories and different worlds represent. I live in a village with residents from Syria, Poland, Ukraine, Morocco, with farmers and artists, old hippies and business leaders. There are no suburbs or segregation here. All children gather in the same schools.

I do not think I could have made *Shards* if I had not been here in this specific place. I cannot explain it in words. The landscape, the atmosphere, the same sky but never the same. My dog that can run freely in endless forests, my secret tarn in the woods that hardly anyone knows about. Nature as a healing force. Every morning I see animals down in the field. Foxes, wild geese, or a herd of red deer. This winter, they shot the wolf pack that lived up in the mountains. What I wish with my films is that the audience will pause, go out into the world, and feel more alive and more present. But I also had to be in that state myself to make a film that feels true. To zoom in on a small shard and there discover an entire microcosm. To fix one's gaze. To be in the moment.