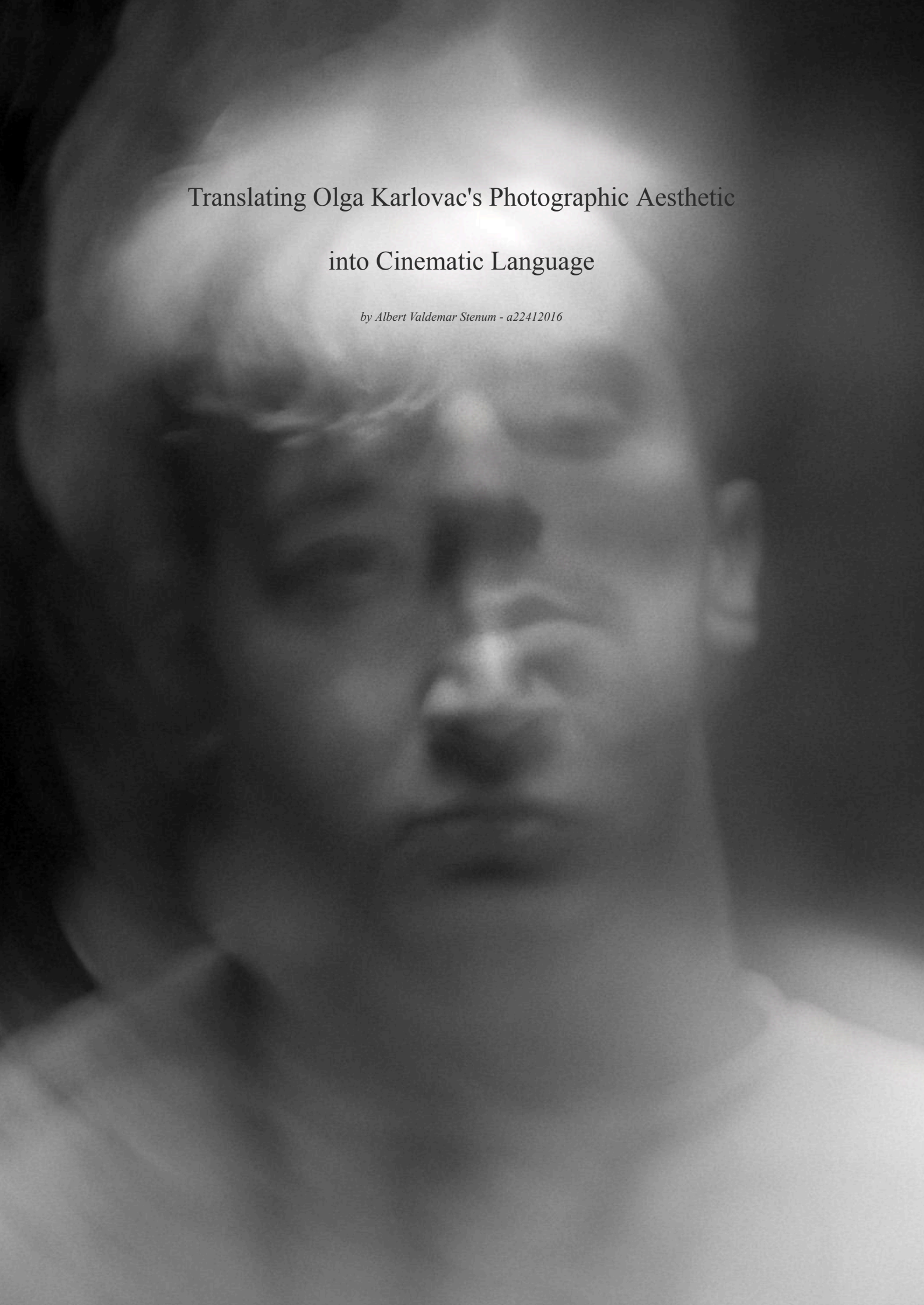

Translating Olga Karlovac's Photographic Aesthetic into Cinematic Language

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Abstract

This essay explores how the photographic aesthetic of Olga Karlovac, characterized by abstraction, motion blur, double exposures, and high contrast, can be translated into cinematic storytelling. The research question guiding this study is:

How can Olga Karlovac's photographic techniques be applied in filmmaking to evoke memory and emotion?

The methodology involved a practice-based approach culminating in a short experimental film created through double exposure on a Sony FX6 using a Nikon 3G Lensbaby lens.

The aesthetic was shaped using accessible tools: a piece of wet, textured glass placed between the camera and the subject, soft lighting from a DMG panel fitted with a softbox and grid, and a dark studio environment to shape the light. The findings suggest that this hands-on approach helped evoke Karlovac's themes of emotional depth.

The film was composed in a 1:1 aspect ratio, matching Karlovac's square-format photos and creating a sense of closeness and emotional focus.

Keywords: Olga Karlovac, double exposure, experimental film, memory, abstraction, motion blur, practice-based research, cinematography, photographic translation

TABLE OF CONTENT

Introduction

Photography and film are usually separated by movement and time. However, in Olga Karlovac's work, her still photos suggest motion, emotional states, and fragmented memory. This essay looks at how her unique style, using blur, layering, and high contrast, can be turned into a film through a creative, hands-on process. The result is a short experimental film that uses similar techniques to create strong emotional responses in the viewer.

Research Question:

How can Olga Karlovac's photographic techniques be applied in filmmaking to evoke memory and emotion?

Methodology

The research was done through a practice-based approach. First, Karlovac's books (*Before winter*, 2015; *The disarray*, 2017) were studied along with reviews and interviews (Kranjc, 2022; Ljubičić, 2021). In order to better understand the texture and emotional resonance of her style, her visual themes were tested using still photography. A roll of Kodak Tri-X 400 black and white film was shot on a medium format (120mm) camera. This format was chosen for its ability to capture rich grain, subtle gradients, and a square 6x6 frame, like Karlovac's own preference for square compositions. The results of this test shoot revealed that layering, motion blur, and high contrast worked best when the subject was partially obscured either by fog, glass, or motion. These insights were essential in shaping the aesthetic and technical choices of the moving image work that followed.

The final film was shot using a Sony FX6 digital cinema camera with a Nikon 3G Lensbaby lens. This lens creates soft, dreamlike images with blurring around the edges, similar to Karlovac's photography.

Double Exposures

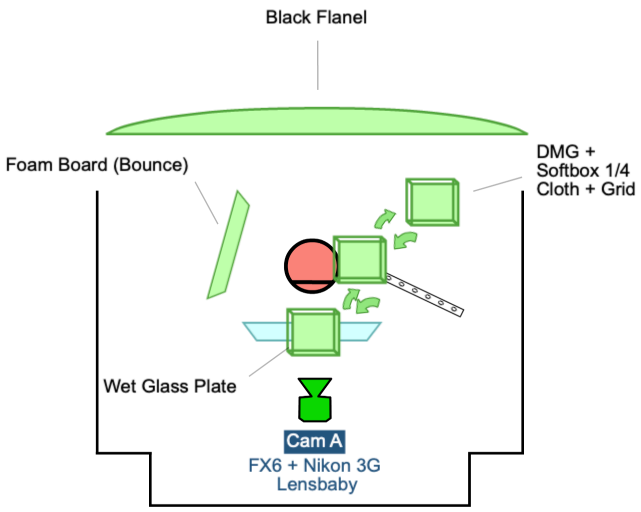
To create the double exposure effect, a wet and slightly wavy glass plate was placed between the camera and the subject. This caused reflections and distortions that layered the image naturally, like in Karlovac's work.

The film was framed in a square 1:1 aspect ratio, which is unusual for movies but common in Karlovac's photography. This framing creates a more focused and personal viewing experience. Instead of the usual wide cinematic frame, the square format draws attention to the center and helps keep the viewer closely connected to the image.

Figure 1 - 120mm Film

Figure 2 - Fx9 + Lensbaby

Lighting was done with a DMG soft light panel, this is a flexible LED light used in film production. It was softened using a fabric softbox and grid to shape the direction of the light. The panel was attached to a Giraffe boom arm, a type of long, movable support that allows the light to be positioned and rotated from above. This setup let the light move slowly during shooting, adding dynamic shadows and a sense of motion. The shoot took place in a darkened studio (Studio Q) with a black background and a white foam board to bounce the light. *(Figure 3 & 4)*



Post Production

In post-production, the effect was built further in DaVinci Resolve by placing frames on top of one another in the timeline. The footage was color graded to reduce color and increase contrast. Because of the Lensbaby's optical quirks, the edges of the image could be softened even more. A digital "deflicker" effect helped smooth out choppy motion from the slower shutter. This layering and color work gave the film a blurry, emotional feel.

(Figure 5)

Analysis

Karlovac's art

Karlovac's images often feel like pieces of a fading memory. The film followed this feeling by using non-linear editing and overlapping images. This makes the viewer feel like they're drifting between moments, rather than watching a straight story.

Inspired by Hollis Frampton's experimental film *(nostalgia)* (1971), the film treats time as a broken sequence. Frampton's focus on memory and the way things fade influenced how this film used aging, repeated shots, and slow transitions. From Christopher Doyle, the cinematographer of *In the Mood for Love* (2000), the inspiration came from using slow shutter speeds to blur motion in a beautiful, controlled way. Doyle's camera feels soft and poetic, and this project aimed to follow that same idea.

Wet glass plate and the aesthetics of softness

The wet glass acted like a filter, both physically and symbolically, making the picture unclear and layered, like trying to remember something important but fuzzy. In the final film, shadows split apart, people blur in and out, and light flickers like a thought. These effects support Karlovac's idea that images are about feelings more than facts.

The Lensbaby lens added softness to the picture, which removed the sharpness that usually comes with digital filming. This visual softness invited viewers to think more deeply about what they were seeing, rather than just watching for plot or action. It connects with Roland Barthes' idea of the *punctum*, a small part of an image that hits you emotionally.

This technique supports the idea that visuals can create emotional depth. The choice to blur and layer the image was meant to pull the viewer away from just watching and instead feel immersed in the image and its emotions.

Conclusion

This project shows that Olga Karlovac's photography techniques can work in film if they are translated through careful experimentation. The use of double exposure, wet glass, special lenses, and soft, moving light helped recreate her visual style in motion.

The film explores themes like fading memories, confusion, and emotional shifts. It tries to capture the feeling of not fully remembering something but still being moved by it. The square aspect ratio and abstract visuals helped focus on feeling rather than story.

This research proves that still image aesthetics can bring new tools and ideas into film. Documentation like lighting diagrams and production stills show how the process developed. These materials are included in the appendix (Figures 1–5) and should be viewed as part of the project's reflection on its making.

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Link to the film: https://vimeo.com/1084061288?share=copy

Appendix

120mm film still (Figure 1)

Frame grab/still (Figure 2)

Behind-the-scenes photos: wet glass plate & lighting setup (Figure 3)

Lighting floor plan (Figure 4)

Post production timeline & Node tree in Davinci Resolve (Figure 5)