

## The girl in the flowered dress.

I think we have to start with ourselves.

How, and in relation to what, would I like someone else to expose my life and my story? What can I then tell from other people's stories? Where is the border between private and public? When do we violate the integrity of the other?

When I was in Morocco in January, these questions came to me all the time. Me, as a western traveler (although I was there to work on a project), I can afford to take the taxi, go to restaurants - even if my money also has a limit. I take photographs. Everything is exotic to me. The woman with the veil, the man with sandals and a long shirt. The houses are breaking apart and behind the ruins you can imagine a beautiful mosaic. The poor children are playing in the square, or, are they poor? In my imagination they are, at least they are for our part of the world, compared with the school where I studied, where my son goes to school, how I and most of my friends live. I take photos, and at the same time I think instinctively, "I can't! I don't want to!

I can't walk around and take photos. For who? This isn't mine. It isn't my reality. It doesn't belong to *us*, it belongs to *them*."

The woman in the hammam scrubs me, splashes water on my son and plays with him. She lays her hands on my partner's back and kneads.

Suddenly, I think the best pictures are those we never take. Those we have in our memories. The best story is the one we tell ourselves from our own personal history or point of view, not from the other's.

But, don't we need to tell the stories of others then?

Don't we need to show what it looks like in the "Orient", even if it becomes a cliché? Don't we need to show the terrible war in Syria, in Congo, in Vietnam, for those who can't read or who aren't able to go there, so they can find out themselves?

*Them and us.*

The first black man, who came to Sweden during the reign of King Gustav III (1757). The first Jewish assembly, also permitted by King Gustav III. Allowing Aron Isac to live in Stockholm with his family. The Gypsies. The Muslims.

I think we have to ask ourselves, "Who am I for *them*? Who are they for *us*?"

It is like a puzzle. The first piece of a puzzle needs to fit the other piece, but that piece also needs to fit the first piece.

In Sweden we have an expression for when we have guests: "Tonight we are having *strangers* over for dinner." Foreigners. The unknown. Could it even be dangerous?

Of course not, it opens us up, gives us new contacts. The foreigners are bringing the world outside to *us*, and hopefully, we are giving something to *them*.

In order to be able to tell our story and our contemporary history honestly, we must be able to peel away what we regard, what we experience. Peel away the clothes from the Bedouin, take away the ruins of the columns in the background of the photo studio, open up the doors to the studio and let people walk in and out, in and out.

I'm thinking of "Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil" by Hanna Arendt (1961). She tells us about Eichmann as if he were one of us. He only did his duty. Flawlessly. He even had Jewish friends, or had had earlier on.

Perhaps the evil was just in his way of acting, his way of following orders. He was not Hitler, he just took orders and carried them out, just like any other careful and conscientious worker would have done. Like all these people do, except the main characters, the couple Otto and

Elise Hampel that you meet in the book “Every Man Dies Alone”, by Hans Fallada (1947). What Hanna Arendt does is to take off Eichmann’s clothes. He is just like any one of *us*. Any of *us* could be the perpetrator, like any of *them*. Can we even understand him? Can we even understand the evil? Maybe it is the only way to eliminate the evil, if it were possible. To understand its function, the underlying needs which make all these horrifying and terrible things happen in our world, both in the past and in our time.



“The girl in the flowered dress” screenprint on wallpaper, gouache, ©Johanna Schartau

In this picture, “The girl in the floral dress”, the red girl, one of *us*, is suddenly, for some reason, with *them*. I don’t know if she knows what is happening around here. What she thinks. Or the small boy with the white shirt and black braces who seems to be looking at something outside the frame of the picture.

I found the original photograph among the many photographs my father kept in his boxes. He was an amateur photographer and loved taking photos. He had hidden these photos from me all my life, also from my siblings and my mother. My mother was Jewish and my dad was probably ashamed of this, given that he and his family sided with Germany in the 30’s and in the early days of WWII.

How to describe and talk about genocides that have existed and still exist?

Is it possible to depict the unrepresentable, even when the traces of the traces have been eliminated?

The film “Shoah”, by Claude Lanzmann (1985), describes and tells the story of the Holocaust and the extermination camps without showing the horror, without showing pictures of dead bodies, corpses, mass graves. You just see the empty meadow and the river 40 years later, with the man singing in the same place where he had been forced by the Nazis to sing for German soldiers as a young boy.

I love the film’s forms of expression. I also love the length of the film. 566 minutes.

The film has an urgency to it, a necessity.

But how do we reach people who do not manage to watch a film like this?

These people need to see this film (everyone does). They need to learn about our history, these people who are just used to fast movie clips, killing, and blood. The problem is of course not the film, but how to achieve this.

Can we describe the world, our contemporary world, without naming *us and them*?  
How do we do it without exploiting, without taking advantage?

I think we must ask ourselves this every day, over and over again. What pictures do we want to see? What do we want to read in the newspaper, on social media? What do we want to watch on television? How will we tell our story for the next generation in an honest and ethical way without excluding the horrifying events of our time? Honestly. How do we do it?

Which photos and texts do we share, and can we share, with others on social media? I never share someone else's pictures on public sites myself. Facebook is a good example of a place where images, articles and different opinions easily spread out and circulate. Where does the source come from? Who has taken the photo? What was the real purpose of the image or text? All of this has been lost and I think that one day we will have to pay for our negligence against words, pictures, the original, the truth.

Thanks to the internet, a variety of opinion corridors are created. There is no longer one fraction, there are thousands, especially in countries at war. There are thousands of small groups with different opinions created on the internet, all with their own agenda. There are many groups opposed to the leader of a country, but also many opposed to each other. In one way internet is fantastic. The *Arabic spring*, even *Metoo*, wouldn't be possible without social media, without Facebook, Twitter, Instagram. In a way, we can say that *us and them* are equal on the internet, a place where everyone can write, think, share, have power, have his or her own agenda, her own group. But there is also a flip side. It divides instead of healing.

As a western European woman in a country like Sweden, our view of the world builds on *us and them*. "We" have written the history. We have written our history of art, our history of film, history of literature, history of politics, of science, of colonization. We read about the history of the art of the other from our thoughts, not theirs. We are cataloging, sorting, sharing. We put our "isms" on art from Africa, India, the Middle East, Australia, China and so on. I think we must turn this perspective inside out and move on. We have to rewrite history and form the future and let everyone be represented and humbled.

Johanna Schartau, April 2018