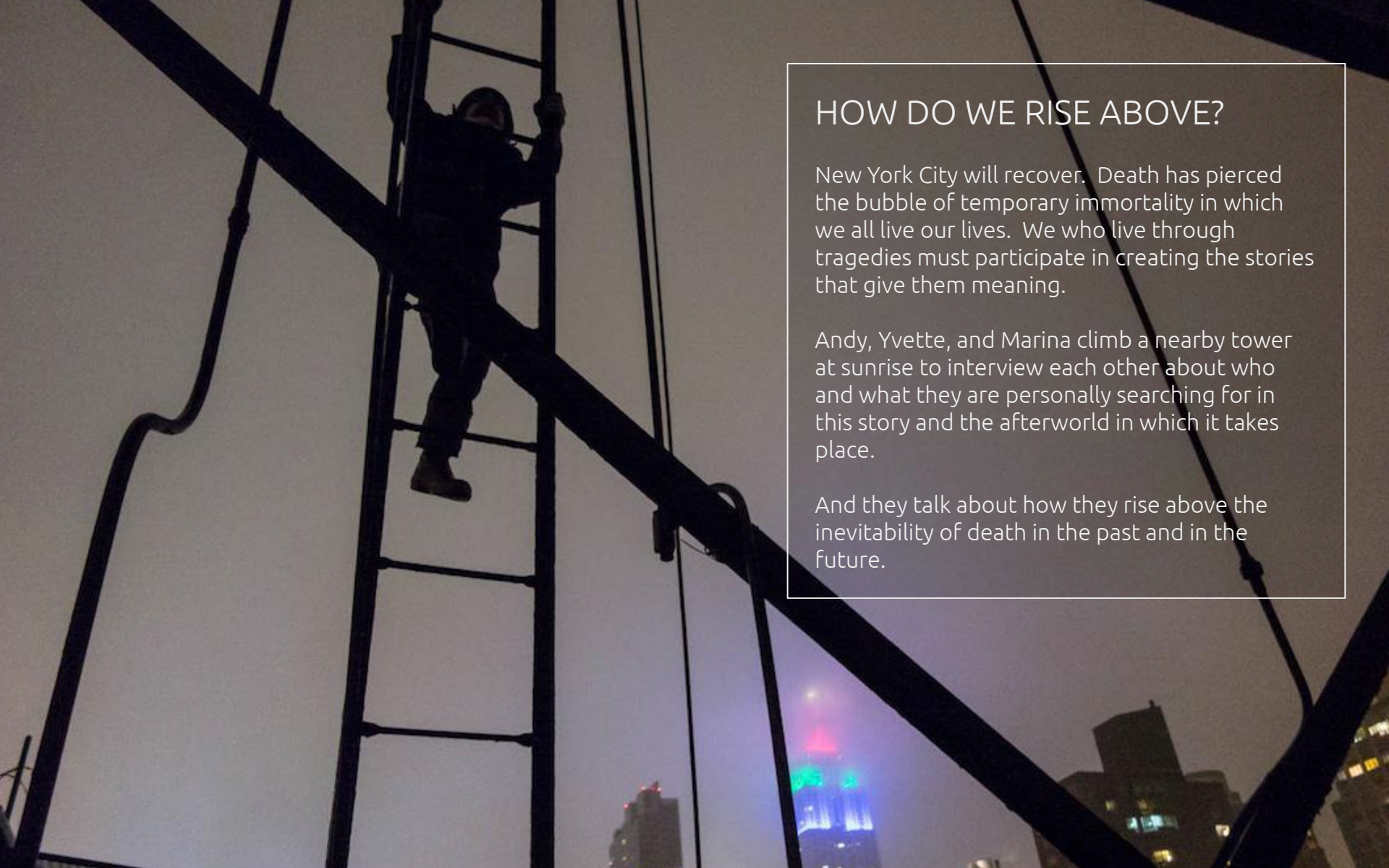




BOOK 3: ABOVE THE STARS

Above the Stars is a film opera that reimagines the tunnels beneath New York as a mythical afterworld through which all departed souls must find their way. Stark and lavish. Music and motion. Performed and filmed underground without permission in the deepest hours of many sleepless nights. This book assumes that we have regained some normality by the time we are shooting. Otherwise, we will still find a way.



HOW DO WE RISE ABOVE?

New York City will recover. Death has pierced the bubble of temporary immortality in which we all live our lives. We who live through tragedies must participate in creating the stories that give them meaning.

Andy, Yvette, and Marina climb a nearby tower at sunrise to interview each other about who and what they are personally searching for in this story and the afterworld in which it takes place.

And they talk about how they rise above the inevitability of death in the past and in the future.

Everybody knows. There are dead people down there.

It's a true story. Every few years, a body is discovered on top of a moving NYC subway train. And nobody knows how long it's been on its journey through these labyrinths in the dark.

Imagine that The NYC Subway System, the dark and crumbling necropolis beneath our feet, plays a role in the common dark of all our deaths, a maze to navigate or remain trapped in. Secret rooms. Lost maps. Luminous souls.

No matter how bright the day above, it's always night in the rumbling Hades beneath our feet. It haunts the dreams of most of us who live here. Perhaps sometimes you see the transient souls, down there, if only fleetingly.





THE COMMON DARK

Above the Stars — a Book of the Dead is an otherworldly modern opera performed and filmed in the deepest of the night on empty platforms and tunnels and train cars of the New York City subway system.

In the witching hour, without permission, we descend underground with dancers, musicians, cameras, special musical instruments, and shadow projectors — to transform the most haunted parts of the subway system — to reveal the secret world just beyond sight.

We join a recently departed soul as she discovers vivid characters and secret stories while searching for her lover and her future in the underworld maze.

Sumptuous costumes. Unforgettable music written just for these cavernous echoes. Sets made only of light and shadow. The familiar made strange.

And the truth of the trials that await us all.

All of us in this city.



WELCOME TO MOLOCH

Our working name for our new underworld is Moloch – the fire-filled Canaanite god who demanded human sacrifices be placed in the stone chambers inside his body. There, they were roasted until they all became ash.

Moloch is immortalized in Allen Ginsberg's poem Howl as the representation of the invisible prison around him and within him.

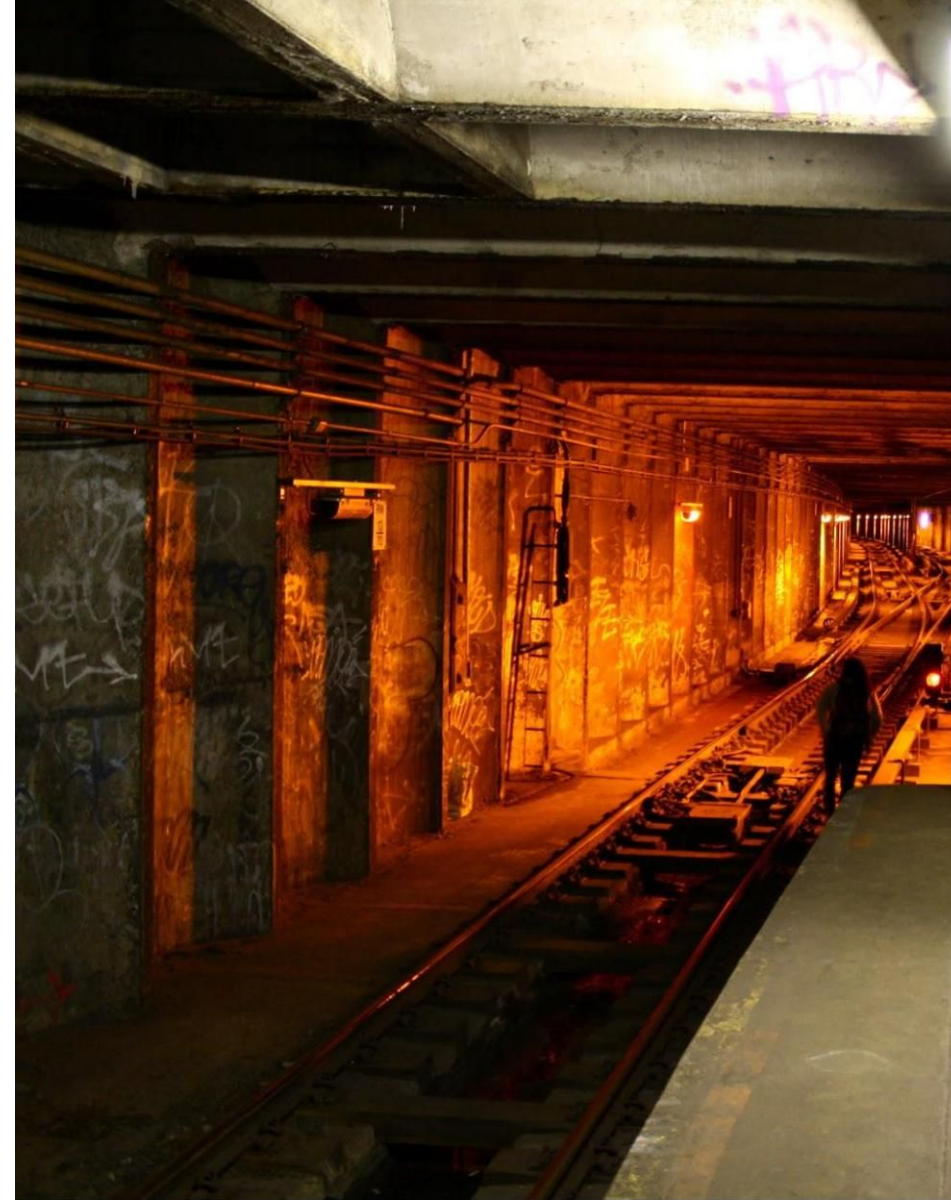
...
*Moloch the incomprehensible prison! Moloch the crossbone
soulless jailhouse and Congress of sorrows! Moloch whose
buildings are judgment! Moloch the vast stone of war!
Moloch the stunned governments!
Moloch whose mind is pure machinery! Moloch whose
blood is running money!*

...
*Moloch whose eyes are a thousand blind windows! Moloch
whose skyscrapers stand in the long streets like endless
Jehovahs! Moloch whose factories dream and croak in the
fog! Moloch whose smoke-stacks and antennae crown the
cities!
Moloch in whom I sit lonely! Moloch in whom I dream
Angels! Crazy in Moloch! Cocksucker in Moloch! Lacklove
and manless in Moloch!*

...



MOLOCH



EXPLORING MOLOCH

The crew spends a week of nights underground, exploring and mapping stations, tunnels, secret places, and track rhythms.

They are accompanied by conductor Daniel Patrick Stewart, an opera singer, and a graffiti artist as a guide to this underworld.

In their wide-ranging nighttime explorations, they record sounds and echoes, they take measurements and photos, they search for lost souls and the secret meanings of these spaces.





MAPPING MOLOCH

On one night of their explorations, Marina plays a dangerous game — skateboarding on a train as it accelerates while Danny improvises an anxious score on his viola.

Through a maze of different trains and confused directions and a hand-drawn map, the crew meet up with singers Black Sea Hotel and a Russian oktavist, all dressed dramatically in black. Together, they fill an empty station with the sounds of their voices like a flood of water.

Music and architecture. Standing waves and reverberation. Just the right pitches.

How to tell the story? Danny demonstrates special acoustics with his viola.





THE LONG DOWN UNDERGROUND

The adventures diverge in many directions.

Yvette absconds with the graffiti artist to interview her at 2am in the whispering gallery in Grand Central Station. Yvette asks about their secret knowledge of the subway system. The secret places. The sacred places. The haunted places. Do graffiti writers have their own myths about the underground world?

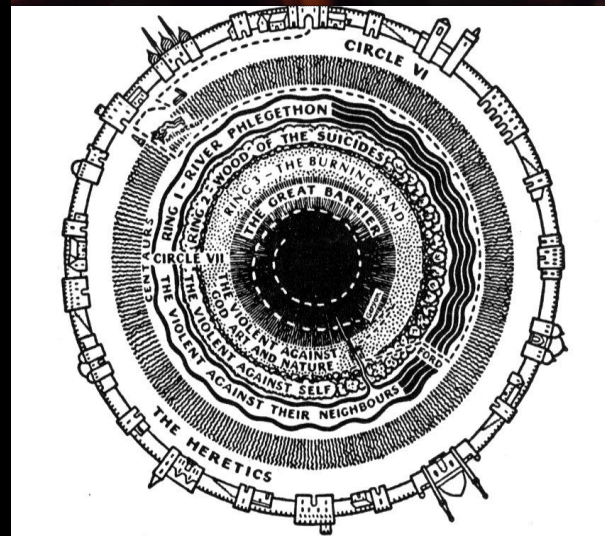
MAPMAKER, MAPMAKER

Back at the studio, Marina's talented eyes and hands create an extensive map of the world below, annotated for musical, artistic, and cinematic possibilities. This is translucent and laid out beautifully on the light table.

She also creates a second map, a re-arranging of the real-world map into our mythical afterworld.

We now know this new world. Its sounds and secret places and unnameable feelings.

The crew works late around a table, dissecting why our books of the dead carry so much charge. We don't want our story to be a synthesis of tropes from myths. We want our own New York underworld to give rise to a new and unique myth as resonant and numinous as the ones we already share.



SETS OF LIGHT AND SHADOW

In Moloch, all is light & shadow, flesh transformed, and music.

The crew will use light and shadow to transform the tunnels and platforms into the phantasmagorical and richly populated world after.



MUSIC & INSTRUMENTS

Music fills a corner of the workshop. Joining the distant cacophony of dancers and toiling robots and the many people engineering and designing.

The whole crew is inventing new sounds and instruments for the possibilities in the underground world. Echoes. Track rhythms. Huge bows to play I-beams like violins.

We join in the process of composing and rehearsing. We meet the musicians and their excitements and challenges, their alliances and frictions. Compositions and arrangements are tried, discarded, honed.

As each piece comes together, they hold a small public performance in the studio. We invite composers and musicians. Neighborhood folks. Friends and lovers.

As the music and relationships evolve, each successive performance is different. And each is documented intimately.





DANCE & MOTION

Moloch is a surprisingly fleshy and physical afterworld. Body contact. Body transformations. Expressive movement amid the music and lights and shadows.

Choreographer Wynn Holmes will work with the performers and storytellers to evolve the movements of these characters.

Dance rehearsals in the studio will be just another of the growing distractions.





COSTUMES & COUTURE

The costumes transform our performers into giant wolves, blindingly luminous sprites, The eight-legged Queen, and Moloch himself. Designed by Iris van Herpen, they range from the theatrical to the sublime.

The story of the costumes contains many stories. The designs and inspirations. The costume tests in the studio and out in the world. The fashion house we partner with. The skilled artists who create to costumes. The performers and their challenges and stories.





STORMING MOLOCH

The stories of the actual furtive and frantic preparation and performances and filming will be a whole microcosm of dramas. It may make sense to break these stories into their own natural chapters.


For a week of nights, we are all between the worlds, creating something magical. Performers in full, phantasmagorical costumes swarm down the subway steps and swipe into the tunnels, somewhere between the world after and the prosaic subway system and its police, gawkers, and unexpected hassles. The musicians swipe in with their instruments. Prop teams, techs, costume people, film crews all carry their equipment into the system every night.

From many parts of the city, we ride through the tunnels to converge at tonight's location. An abandoned station. A secret room. An echoing underground chasm. An empty train banging and rattling over a section of track that makes just the right rhythms for one of the pieces of music.

Much of what will happen will be unpredictable and spontaneous. Constant emergencies and improvisations. Acrimony and kindness. Arising from underground before dawn and perhaps converging at the same 24-hour diner for breakfast, still in costume.

The story of shooting the film is as good as the film itself.





THE FINAL FILM

The final film is an episode unto itself. A story within a story within a story.

The premier will be a glamorous affair (well, glamorous for us), hosted at a fashion house, art museum, or at Metrograph.

The final episode includes the premier, the film itself, and highlights of closing interviews with everyone involved. Stories of lessons learned, favorite mishaps, worst nights, and who we suspect has become romantically entwined with whom.

