A LONGING / EN LÄNGTAN

PROJECT PORTFOLIO, MASTER DEGREE PROJECT: ASTRID LINNÉA ANDERSSON

MASTER OF FINE ART IN DESIGN INDIVIDUAL SPECIALIZATION

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ABSTRACT

What relationship do we have with nature, what does it represent to us? It is something foreign, far away. The cloudy mountains in the distance, and the close quiet embrace of the forest. It is an idea of simpler times, of getting lost and being found, right here – feet on the ground. To look up across the sky is to fly.

In my master degree project I wanted to investigate and portray the relationship we have with nature today. Nature as a symbol, as representing something.

A *longing* is a project in illustration presented as exhibition. The image is a flat surface able of creating space and depth, and in the form of exhibition the pictures and the paper they are printed on help create another kind of space. A room of its own.



LIST OF CONTENT

1	BACKGROUND - Nature	
2	BACKGROUND - The image	
2	Personal aspirations	
3	Purpose	
4	PROCESS - Input / research / method	
6	PROCESS - Conclusions from research	
9	PROCESS - Output / finding direction	
11	RESULT	
15	REFLECTION - Design issue	
16	REFLECTION - Relevance	
17	REFLECTION - Sustainability	
18	REFLECTION - Process	
20	References	20+

BACKGROUND -Nature

In Sweden, and Scandinavia in general, we have a long history of, not only living close and of our surrounding nature, but also using it for recreational pleasure. We are proud of our nature, we nurture it and we try to protect it. We use it. But we, and this does not apply exclusively to Scandinavia, are also living in a society and an age where we continously distance ourself from it, whether we want to or not. It is my belief that nature as a whole, Nature with a capital N, has a great importance to us, represents and symbolises something. Perhaps the symbolism is even enhanced by our distance to it, of it being foreign to us. Nature is also something which we feel (for) on another, perhaps more grounded level. It is good to us, relaxes us, gives us fresh air and peace of mind.

We are interested in how it works and like to watch documentaries about it or study it in museums. There are many large and important institutions with the purpose of educating or preserving nature. Most institutions which talk about nature do so with a pedagogical, educational purpose. We are given facts, numbers and latin names. But what about the rest of it? I believe that a relationship is formed by experiencing something, by emotion. And when viewing nature as something which we have an emotional connection to I also do not see only the vast countryside with deep forests and cloudy mountains as the only place where it is possible to meet it. I believe we have small but meaningful encounters in our daily lives.

Even in the larger cities there is a sky somewhere above us. And to look up across the sky is to fly. To meet nature is to be grounded, to find peace right here and now. But it is also to see that sky up above, that horizon in the distance - to see a dream of something. In my degree project I was interested in investigating this other side of looking upon nature, the one I felt is not so well represented or talked about.

The concept of "Naturum" interests me. Naturum is a special kind of exhibition-venues often situated near nature-reserves. It is a kind of visitor centre, aimed at acting as an informative guide, a gateway into the area. These exhibition venues interests me both as they are often examples of the certain way of communicating nature that seems to be the ruling one, but the idea of a nature room or room for nature, and what that could mean fascinates me and served as a starting point for this project.

BACKGROUND -The image

I am an illustrator with a strong belief in the image's ability to communicate and convey emotion. The image as medium is special in that while it (usually) is a very two-dimensional, flat surface in physicality, it can speak of so many things, hold unexpected depth all the same. When successful, the image is in that sense a kind of portal. The image is also capable of communicating in a completely different manner than words, it is a different language altogether. And this language has an alphabet so rich that it can speak of such complicated, fleeting occurrences as for example emotions. It is also a medium which we trust. The illustrated image is always a representation of something, light and shadow, colour and texture. It does not lie, does not pretend to be something else. Perhaps this is why we allow ourselves to read an image so openly. We fill in the blanks ourselves. When taken seriously an image is an image is an endless thing.

PERSONAL ASPIRATIONS

In my degree project I wanted to take the opportunity to further challenge and develop my narrative skills as an illustrator. I wanted to fine-tune and allow the process of practically as well as theoretically researching a theme rule the visual form-giving and gestaltung. I also wanted to take the opportunity to work spatial if possible. I was interested in combining the curatorial approach of communicating of the publication with the exhibition format's ability to communicate in a room.

PURPOSE

> To investigate the relationship we have with nature, to speak about the emotional, more philosophical aspect of what nature means to us today.

> To take the notion, the idea of a *natur-rum*, a space for nature, and create my own version of that. To interpret what this is and could be. To bring this *other* kind of language into a context where one is talking about nature.

> To investigate this as an illustrator and graphic designer. To do this by using the image and the image-making as both method and tool.





PROCESS -INPUT / RESEARCH / METHOD

As I wanted the practical illustration and image-making to rule the outcome and lead me forward in this project, I started working practical with pen to paper at a very early stage. Simultaneously I began looking for possible sources of input, paths to lead me into the theme of the project and to help me find direction. Another thing I did early on was to put up a process-blog¹ for the project. I wanted to use the blog both as a place to collect sources and inspiration as well as a tool to document my own thoughts process.

A great source of input for me in this project turned out to be the archives of Sveriges Radio², where by using *nature* or *forest* as keywords I have been able to find a lot of inspirational material. Often I listened to these programs while drawing simultaneously. Radio programs like *Tendens* are especially valuable because they allow one to come close to and hear personal view-points and voices around a subject. I have also been reading H.D Thoreau's *Walden*³ throughout the project, as it seemed an obvious go-to-source when dealing with man and nature, and nature romanticism. Besides from radio and literature I also went to the field of film, both fiction and documentary. So *what relationship with nature do we have? What does it represent to us?* This is what I found out and chose to deal with and portray:

> Nature is a source for recreation, health, peace and quiet. A place for grounding and reflection. In some ways a source for spirituality of sorts.

Nature is something which is increasingly distant from us in our daily lives.
A geographical and psychological distance.

Nature with a capital N is a strong symbol. Of something lost, or of something ideal.

http://ettannatrum.tumblr.com

³Thoreau, H, D, *Walden*, (1854) Natur och Kultur (2009)

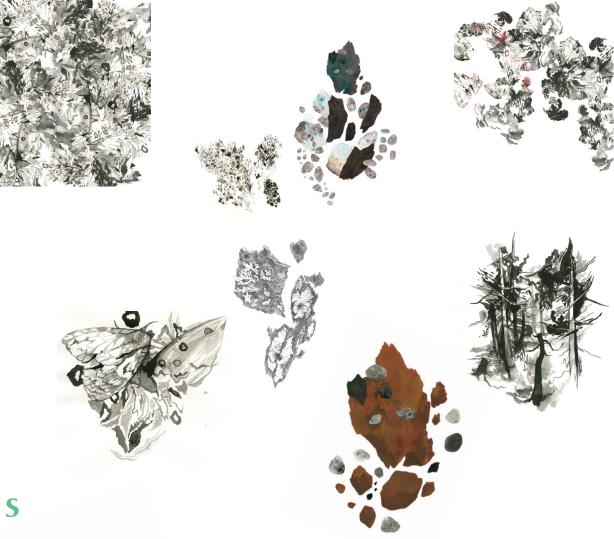


PROCESS – CONCLUSIONS FROM RESEARCH

A reoccurring theme in my sources of input was nature as a kind of serene place or occurrence. Something which we long for or try to reach. A romantic way of looking at nature, often combined with some sort of critique against (modern) society. In the film ⁴*Man Tänker Sitt*, a Swedish drama, a group of people living in the same neighbourhood bordering the forest is portrayed. In the film I sense a kind of criticism or commentary on the way we live our lives under a strict set system or rules in society. The film opens by a young boy, one of the main characters, reading a quote by Thoreau, and especially some scenes with a young father without much control over his life are emotionally moving as he escapes with his small child into the forest. As if that is the only place he can find peace and shelter his child.

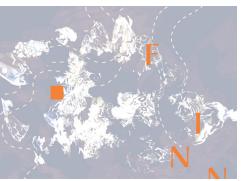
Another film which also quotes Thoreau and in a more direct way involves a main character escaping into the wilderness is ⁵Into the Wild from 2007. The film, which is based on the factual person Jon Krakauer who, tired of societal convention sought to find an alternative way of living, outside of civilization. A wish for a simpler perhaps more meaningful existence. In 6Robinson No Niwa/Robinson's Garden a young woman living an urban lifestyle in Tokyo by accident finds a large abandoned industrial lot with adjoining park. On a whim she moves in and begins cultivating the garden. In the film the modern city is portrayed almost dystopic, as if falling apart. The main character distances herself from this and develops a special bond with her garden. The mood in the film is dreamlike and suggestive, and it's clear that the nature has a life of it's own. Peter Weir's classic ⁷Picnic at Hanging Rock from 1975 is a masterpiece in visualizing nature as a mystical place, surreal and hypnotic. This neo-romantic idea of nature as representing some kind of original, serene way of life, as well as something to almost escape into combined with the dream-like or suggestive qualities, which one could argue is not far from spirituality, interested me.

⁶ Yamamoto, M (1987) Robinson No Niwa [Film] Japan









The idea of *the sublime* was an important thought during the romantic period, and as my project developed I could see it was relevant to the direction my work was taking. Friedrich Schiller writes about the notion of the sublime⁸:

The feeling of the sublime is a mixed feeling. It is a combination of woefulness, which expresses itself in its highest degree as a shudder, and of joyfulness, which can rise up to enrapture, and, although it is not properly pleasure, is yet widely preferred to every pleasure by fine souls. This union of two contradictory sentiments in a single feeling proves our moral independence in an irrefutable manner. (...) We therefore experience through the feeling of the sublime, that the state of our mind does not necessarily conform to the state of the senses, that the laws of nature are not necessarily also those of ours, and that we have in us an independent principle, which is independent of all sensuous emotions.

And further on about how the sublime corresponds to and could be understood by our meeting with nature;

(...) The wild masses of nature round about him begin to speak to his heart an entirely different language; and the relative greatness outside of him is the mirror, wherein he perceives the absolute greatness within himself.(...)The view of unlimited distance and incalculable heights, the wide ocean at his feet and the greater ocean above him, snatch his mind away from the narrow sphere of the real and the oppressive imprisonment of physical life. A greater measure of estimation is held before him by the simple majesty of nature, and, surrounded by its great forms, he no longer endures the small in his way of thinking.

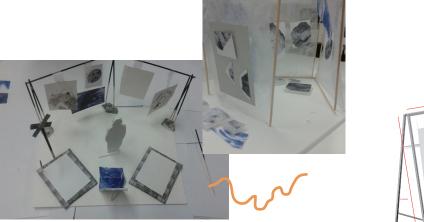
The way Schiller explains this it is clear to me that this notion of the sublime relates a lot to that kind of fleeting feeling the experience or idea of nature can provide. It is also possible to see connections with what I have chosen to call a spirituality in nature. The idea that experiencing nature opens up our minds and thoughts, thereby making us not only greater in thought but also firmly rooted on the ground as well, all in once. PROCESS -OUTPUT / FINDING DIRECTION

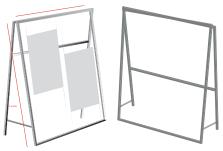
After having worked more or less aimlessly in my drawings up until the mid-presentations in week 11, I began seeing which direction I wanted to take; I had circled in on a certain mood, of nature as a symbol and of something we long for, seek meaning in. A feeling of the sublime. Up until that point I had been unsure about which format to choose for my end result; at the mid presentation I was thinking about some kind of publication - but decided now that what I needed to do was to go back to the first, core idea in my project. And this was idea of an alternative naturum.

I decided to follow this through, to create this space. Not only portray it in images, but to actually work spatially. I began sketching on spatial structures, trying to find a good way to create space while allowing the images to speak for themselves. While searching for a spatial form I also finished up and added illustrations to fit the final form. To make my "story" complete.

I wanted an exhibition which properly displayed my theme and thoughts around it, a collection of images and an expression which set the mood I sought after. I tried to capture nature both in it's strong physical presence by portraying textures and mass, but also to describe the opening up of the mind by talking about space and the longing for far away mountains, pathways, and of being enclosed in something larger than oneself.

Long in the process I struggled with the idea of having text as part of the end result, I could not make up my mind whether to take bits and pieces from other sources or to write the text myself. I knew I wanted something as to guide the audience or underline the theme. Quite late in the process I finally found a short text, a quote which in itself managed to en-capsule many of the thoughts I had and wanted to express. I decided this was the only text I needed.









RESULT

The result of my degree project is called *A longing* and it is illustration presented as exhibition. It is it's own alternative naturum and space. This space is dual: within the images themselves there is a spatial quality, of surface and depth, and the physical structure of the installation creates space as well. The structure could bee seen as simplistic but has qualities of being illustration in itself. The structure consists of two large wooden standalone frames, two metres high, painted white and black. Combined with these are two smaller wooden stands as well as a black felt-material. This gathering, while flexible in that it can be adjusted in placement according to where it is exhibited, is supposed to create a space where the images are given room to speak. It is also supposed to create a concentrated space, and in that it is using both a low floor-level and higher one, create a whole space. The sky, and the ground. Part of the installation is a cross placed at the floor and covered in paper almost like a three-dimensional drawing. The cross is to function as a symbol of the marking on a map, to give the sense of direction and place.

The images are portraying a nature which is something one can enter, get swept in by. Something intangible. A longing. It is the concrete and the abstract all at once, a symbol of something greater than us, or us as greater. Something which widens horizons and a projection surface, something close by and out of reach. It is an inner kind of room and a physical place for contemplation and peace of mind.

The only text in the installation is a quote by Lord Byron⁹ and while it is to serve as a guidance of sorts for the viewer and further enhance the theme, it is poetic in tone. The text is placed at the same level as the images, almost as a layout. This is to give text and image the same kind of value, to communicate that they are both different parts of a whole. PROJECT PORTFOLIO

Lord Byron ur Childe Harold's Pilgrimage

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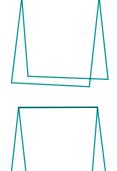
There is a pleasure in the pathless woods There is a rapture on the lonely shore There is society, where none intrudes By the deep sea, and music in

its roar:

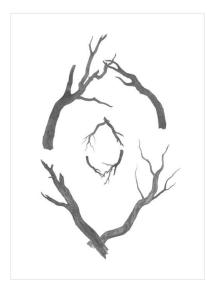
l love not man the less, but nature more

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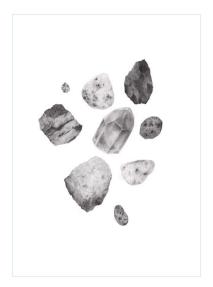










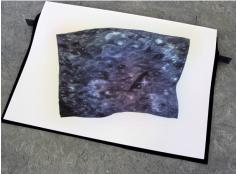


PROJECT PORTFOLIO













REFLECTION - DESIGN ISSUE

When it comes to the relevance to the field of design in my project I think the aspect of working from the illustration as main medium is interesting. Especially in that I have tried to give this illustration a presentation format which allows for it to speak freely and from centre stage. The images are not secondary to another medium, and while there is a three-dimensional structure involved, this is more of a support-structure or extension of the illustration itself.

In my illustration-work I have tried to further challenge myself when aiming for a high artistic, craftsmanship quality in the image-making. I believe that especially the hand-drawn can bring a certain sensitivity into an image, and one of my aspirations in this project was to take this way of communicating in to a nature-context. My work in this project definitely places itself in a poetic kind of visual language. It is a language which allows it's audience to interpret openly, but it is also demanding at the same time. When successful, I believe that this demand of time and concentration functions as giving meaning and connection to a piece of work. It is my hope that this is what happens in the meeting between the audience and my installation. One could say I have this quality and poetic language in the images themselves, but it is also enhanced in that I have attempted to create a place for this meeting to happen within the actual spatial presence of the installation.

To not exclude the potential audience I have tried to arrange the different pieces within the installation in order to guide the viewer in and around it. The larger wooden frames together with the long rolls of paper are eye-catching from a distance, and the different sizes and heights of the contents of the installation are communicating on different levels. There is a large, colourful deep blue waterfall which, while intricate up close, speaks well from a distance. On the opposite side there is a text which is also the only text in the installation, and should serve as a guidance although a poetic one, once one have entered into the installation.

REFLECTION - RELEVANCE

In terms of context I believe the most obvious one for my piece of work would be an art-context. However my intention has been to produce a piece that could be placed in other venues of exhibition as well. For instance, an actual Naturum. While I believe *A Longing* is independent in that it could (or at least should) be able to be placed in almost any surrounding and still function as it's own storyteller of sorts; I do believe though that the aspect of using this kind of poetic visual language would be especially successful in contrasting the conventional manner of how and from which angle the subject of nature is usually communicated. This quality of possibly adding this other angle upon the subject of nature and what it means to us I believe is adding in relevance to my work. But placed in another perhaps more purely art - oriented context perhaps that aspect of the theme would be completely lost. It would still tell a story, but it might be interpreted slightly different.

In the design and art context itself, as an illustrator I would also like to say that the chosen format of illustration as self reliant end product is interesting and adding value.

The subject in itself of nature and how we look upon it holds great relevance in contemporary society. Not only because nature really is something very important to a lot of people but in the greater picture also is connected to such issues we face in contemporary society such as environmental destruction. My project does not touch upon these issues directly, but it offers a commentary on our relationship with nature and the role and meaning it can fill for us in our daily lives. And I believe our emotional connection with nature in some ways is a foundation for valuing it.

REFLECTION - SUSTAINABILITY

> Social sustainability: This is where my project is most easily placed I would say. The core subject of what is portrayed in my piece of work is revolving around soft issues such as human emotion and culture. It is also touching upon aspects of well being, for example nature as recreation and a place for spirituality. My project could be said to highlight this, or at least comment upon it by portraying it, thereby opening up to discussion.

> Ecological sustainability: While yes, my project is obviously about nature and, yes I do believe a strong emotional connection to nature does make you deepen your valuation of it; my project does not have the intention of saving the environment as main issue. It might be there as a secondary aspect somewhere, but not as main aim.

Theme and subject of the installation aside, It is a piece of work which is not a product in the sense that it is supposed to be mass-produced and therefore the ecologically sustainability aspects of the actual production is not something I have put a lot emphasis on. It is interesting to note though that while being made of wood, paper linen thread, paint and screw it is a structure that could both last long and also be easily replicated again. It can be taken apart without much effort, and it is mobile. Perhaps the quality of paper of the two longer rolls could be increased in order to give a more lasting life to those. I did not however find an economically sustainable alternative to produce them for me personally at this point, and decided to settle for this paper which might have a slightly cheap feel to it. Also, to print the two rolls on textile might be an alternative to take under consideration, although it would change the appearance of the whole installation to add a material other than paper.

> Economical sustainability: I may have touched upon this in the above section, as the economical and ecological aspects of sustainability are closely linked when it comes to production. Other than the production issues I do not have a lot to add under this section and will therefore leave it out.

REFLECTION - PROCESS

Thinking back at my time with this project I cannot really see a particular time where I felt stuck. Surprisingly enough this feels as one of the more calmer processes I've had in recent projects. Somehow I must have managed to keep it under control. Don't get me wrong though, there have been plenty of doubt and searching, just no real dead ends or brick walls. I have come to understand that my process in this kind of more or less self-initiated and self-driven projects are nothing more but doubt. The trick is just to keep working and keep busy. And so I believe actually starting from almost day one to work practical, to draw even though the thing you draw so early on are almost so much lacking direction that it can hardly be called sketches of something, just doing that helps. Because in illustration image making is a language and by drawing you find your words.

I made no real time schedule but simply a good overview of the time period and important dates and decided that up until the mid-presentation searching openly would be OK. This worked. Yes I was doubting and thinking about what could this possibly become and stressing about tying it all together, but it did work to allow myself to be unsure. After the mid-presentation I tried to go back and see the core idea of the naturum and the possibility to work spatial and me *daring* to commit to that idea - to the exhibition format was crucial I think. And then I simply tried to carry it out the best way I could.

In the end part of the project while working on the spatial form I somehow managed to tie it together with the images I chose, I added some quite late in the process but mostly I somehow found myself having what I needed. When I found the Byron-quote and felt satisfied with using that as the only textual part it felt like adding the finishing piece of a puzzle. I do find it difficult describing my process in general because it is an intuitive one, where it easily feels like I am simply just working, working, working (and doubting) until it's suddenly time to present and the result is there. This is not the whole story of course, and I do think I could benefit from being more self aware in the actual moment. My main struggle is usually as was it in this project, to formulate or find a direction or vision of where I wanted to take my images (and in the end also spatial form). My process-blog proved a good tool to keep track on thoughts, ideas and progression and also helped me structure myself from time to time. What I personally like about my process in this project was that I do feel like I did manage to really tie it all together in the end and also spend time with the finishing of it. I think this is due to a combination of setting small deadlines for myself such as early printing dates for the images leaving time to work on the physical structure and having to decide to be finished drawing. But also the fact that I managed to keep a somewhat clear vision of where I wanted to go with the project in mind.

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ATTACHMENT: PROJECT PLAN: FINAL VERSION, UPDATED 2013-04-14

Back-drop

In my exam work I want to deal with and investigate the emotional aspect of our relationship to nature. I want to do this by the use of illustration as my main medium. I believe that the image holds a certain language capable of expressing and evoking emotion.

There is all kinds of research dealing with how nature and spending time in nature is good for us, for our physical health as well as our mental well being. Sweden is also a country which has a long history of viewing nature as something valuable. We have large and important institutions dealing with nature-preservation and education. There are museums and national-parks, nature reserves, and popular nature-documentaries on television. Most institutions which talks about nature does so with a pedagogical, educational purpose. We are given facts, numbers and latin-names. But what about the rest of it? I believe that a relationship is formed by experiencing something, by emotion. I also believe that while we as a culture might live our lives increasingly separated from nature. Nature still (or maybe even as a direct result of this) holds a lot of meaning to us. Nature with a capital N represents something to us, and it is this which I would like to portray in my exam-project.

We also, yes still to this day, meet nature in different forms daily. Nature is not just the vast mountains or deep forests, it is almost always close at hand. In the city there is a sky above, birds circling the rooftops and water flowing through, or dripping down upon us. I believe these smaller meetings give room for something large and important. To look up across the sky is to fly. These meetings gives us air and a sense of here and now. But at the same time they broaden our horizon.

I am interested in the concept of "Naturum" a special kind of exhibition-venues often situated near nature-reserves. It is a kind of visitor centre- aimed at acting as an informative guide, a gateway into the area. If a "room for nature" were to be communicated in another manner - not educational or dryly pedagogical - how would/could it look like? Can I take the idea of a Naturum and create my own version? What could something like that be and look like?

I am also interested in investigating how I as an illustrator and graphic designer can work towards the spatial. As I do not at this early stage know exactly in what way I actually want to relate to the idea of Naturum, I also cannot say with certainty that my end result will be something spatial. But one of my personal goals in this is to somehow "work with the room". Though it may very well end up to be something other than a physical room.

Personal goals

As an illustrator I want to use this project to further strengthen my skills of using the image as storytelling language, of creating a narrative. To somehow work with a spatial format is also a minor goal for me. I would like to make use of the curated way of telling a story which is a publication- and combine this with the exhibition format's way of telling a story within a space. Could it be possible to make a spatial publication? Do a drawing one could walk into?

My work-tool as an illustrator (and graphic designer) is the image. And I believe in, and also make use of, the images special quality which is it's ability of being loaded with emotion. This otherness, which you cannot express in another language than the visual one. The image can also favourably be used for expressing or communicating in a personal tone. We have an understanding with the image, a signed contract that the image is just that- an image - the image does not aspire to be something other than an image. While figurative or even semi-realistic, it continues to be "just" an image. I believe it is somehow this understanding which allows for the image's special ability of communicating something more, than for example often a photograph can convey. These qualities I want to bring into, and make use of on a context where one is talking about nature.

Method of working

Since the subject of my project mainly revolves around some kind of nature-romanticism, it this there I will try to go for inspiration and material/input. For example I would like to read fiction as well as other kinds of literature on the subject, listen to and watch films or other kind of media which seem to relate to this and might fuel my process. If I will actually end up using other peoples material such as texts, I do not wish to decide upon in this early stage, however.

I want to use and investigative approach, in exploring my theme as well as in finding ways of portraying it. One could say I want to investigate by doing, to let the practical process with pen and paper be a way of research. To make my documentation easier and to collect links, thoughts and images in one and the same spot - I have created a process-blog: http://ettannatrum.tumblr.com. I want to use the blog as a log as well as a digital moodboard of sorts.

In the practical work of making images I would like to be more selective in my choices of reference-material. Because I want to allow the process to form the outcome of my project, I have tried to give space in my time-planning for "free practical research". This means I would like to start with the actual doing very early in the process, and that I should feel OK by not making any decisions up until the mid-presentation. After that, however I should be able to see a direction in where this is going.

3

I have attached a loose time schedule. My idea with this schedule is simply to create an overview of the protect period and its most important points, and that I can create a weekly planning as I go along.

Questions (mostly for myself)

How is the relationship between "man"-nature usually portrayed? Where? For whom?

If what is communicated is not with an educational purpose- how could it take form then? In what way do I wish to relate to an existing outside player in this? Naturum?

In what ways can I as an illustrator and graphic designer find ways for working spatially?

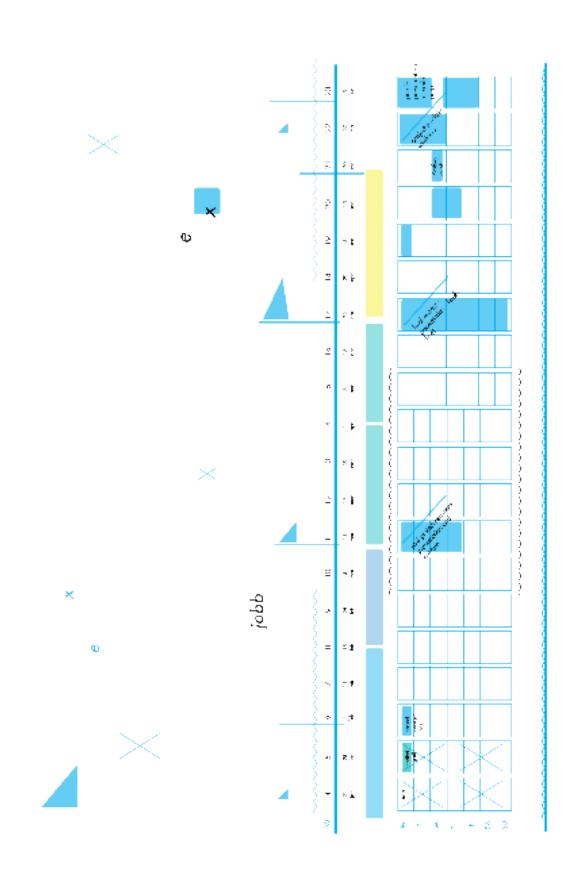
Which nature am I talking about, do I need to specify? Which "we?" Which room?

To read/listen/watch:

Walden - Henry David Thoreau Robinson's Island - Masashi Yamamoto (film) Trädälskaren - Jonas Selberg Augustsén (film) Man tänker sitt - Henrik Hellström, Fredrik Wenzel (film) Into the wild - Sean Penn (film) Ett vildmarksrike - Jan Lindblad (film) Sveriges Radio P1, Kropp och Själ - Den läkande skogen, 2012 Sveriges Radio P1, Tendens - Skogen och människan, 2012 + Tendens hela serie om skogen http://www.naturvardsverket.se/Documents/publikationer/620-5376-0.pdf (Flickan (film) Farväl Falkenberg (film) Picnic at Haning Rock (film) (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecopsychology https://gupea.ub.gu.se/handle/2077/10166 - "Hagen i Staden - betydelsen av den "vilda" naturen runt knuten" http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2760412/ - Biophilia: Does Visual Contact with Nature Impact on Health and Well-Being?)

Final version of project plan, submitted 2013-04-14

ATTACHED TIME SCHEDULE/OVERVIEW



X