



HDK-VALAND – ACADEMY OF ART AND DESIGN

WANDER AROUND WITH GOSSAGE AND THOREAU LOOKING FOR SCHMIDT

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ABSTRACT – Wander around with Gossage and Thoreau looking for Schmidt

I was looking for a monument but instead I found an anonymous patch of grass in a cemetery in Berlin which marked the grave of photographer Michel Schmidt. In an attempt to understand I had to go backward into my own history to find reasons why I was standing there. With this essay I will try to identify certain key places, figures and occurrence that have formed me as a photographer in an attempt answer my own questions.

My point of departure is a conversation, or more correctly a shouting, I had with Lewis Baltz in a noise intersection surrounded by cars in 1996. This was the first time I heard about John Gossage and his book *The Pond*. When I finally got hold of a copy (this was pre- internet as of today when you just google everything) and looked at the pictures and tried to follow Gossage steps into the bushes, around the Pond and back to civilization. I connected Gossage`s book with Henry David Thoreau and his work *Walden* from 1854. (You didn`t need to be a rocket scientist because Gossage had ripped a page from Thoreau`s book as his last image – *The Pond*)

I have been reading Thoreau from time to time the last 30 years or so. I`m in no means an expert but, *Walden; or Life in the Woods* has an ability to create an *imaginary room* from where I can fantasize and daydream. The cabin he built overlooking the pond *Walden* has a real sense of place. This is what I`m looking or trying to achieve in photography, to have a first-hand experience and capture the spirit of place. The Norwegian architect Christian Norberg-Schulz introduced the term *Genius Loci – Spirit of Place* in his book *Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture* from 1980 where he tries to “investigate the psychic implications of architecture rather than its practical side”. For me, some places have more meaning and interest than others. In photography I`m trying to make images of this *meaning*, or as in this essay find *meaning* inside text and artworks in relation to my own experience.

KEY WORD

Genius Loci, The Spirit of Place, phenomenology, architecture, analogue photography, darkroom, film, visualization, imaginary space, space, place, Sara Ahmed, Lewis Baltz, John Gossage, Edmund Husserl, Christian Norberg-Schulz, Michael Schmid, Henry David Thoreau, Virginia Woolf,

**WANDER AROUND WITH GOSSAGE AND THOREAU
LOOKING FOR SCHMIDT**



PATRIK ELGSTRÖM

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INTRODUCTION

I found myself standing in front of an anonymous patch of grass, trivial flowers and a small sign with the text MICHAEL SCHMIDT. I don't know why I didn't go there earlier. Was it some sort of denial? Was it because I did not want to realize how things really were, like accepting reality and going on with life. For one year I have been in this kind of limbo, knowing he was dead, but still having this ongoing conversation with him silently within myself. During my time in Berlin I have visited many graves. Walked along history. Through the past and back to present. Trying to make images in a city laden with its own history.

I went to Berlin 2014 as I wanted to meet him. I applied for a scholarship for one year at Künstlerhaus Bethanien through the Sweden Art Grant Committee IASPIS. Schmidt died a month or so before I got there. Towards the end of the residency I went to the place where he was buried. Dorotheenstädtischer Friedhof in Mitte located along the Chausseestrasse, right next to the Brecht house. The cemetery is old, where many important people from history are buried. I'm looking and asking for his grave at the cemetery. Caretakers and some old ladies are engaged to find it.

I was looking for a monument, because for me he represents a monument in my life. He chose, or someone else, to be represented with a small patch of grass with some flowers on top of him. We build and arrange things not just as a matter of practicality. Buildings that are large enough to *just* give us shelter and warmth. Graves *just* big enough to fit a person. We build things as a representation for and over ourselves and in a way we are giving form and shape to our own life. Someone has said, *Architecture is built images of our time*, for me personally I believe it is so and it has formed my artistic practice right from the start. By understanding or clarifying what I mean by suggesting architecture as *image* I could use the writer Walter Benjamin and his magnum opus *Das Passagenwerk* or in English *the Arcades Project*, Benjamin's unfinished book about the rise of modern European urban culture seen through the lens of the arcades in Paris. Or for that matter use an over-excessive example nearby, if we turn to our own image-producing culture by looking at the residences Sweden's prime minister chooses to live in. Per Albin Hansson, the father of the Swedish Folkhem, lived in an ultramodern progressive *International Style* house (Swedish Funkis). Olof Palme lived like an ordinary Swedish blue-collar man in the newly built suburb Vällingby and today our prime minister Stefan Löfven is living in a palace, *Sagerska Palace*. What thoughts and

ideas, what kind of *image* do these three examples of residences give us? I have since long formulated and presented me in my artistic statement and to quote myself, “I photograph architecture as a surface to project narrative, philosophy, politics, ideology and psychological expression.”

In this essay I will try to explain how and when. I will have to go back in history and identify certain key places, figures and occurrence that have formed me as a photographer.

As I remember it we drove a SAAB Lewis Baltz and I. We were going to a place just outside the southern entry of the Tingstad tunneln at Gullbergsvass. Outside the car windows the landscape was nestled in a grey February light with no hope. We drove on roads that link and connect places. Hisingen with city. Gothenburg with Oslo. Stockholm or Malmö. Roads that all have meaning and benefit. Efficiency and productivity. Bridges that take us over water and tunnels that take us under. We travel in the direction along the river. At the speed of the car we pass houses and buildings that together form the city of Gothenburg. None of that interested us then, we were on our way to something outside of all this.

Lewis Baltz was short and heavily built almost like a tank. Wore a dark overcoat with his hands in his pockets. The air was moist and raw, a cold that slowly eats into the body whether you like it or not. His French wife or girlfriend was there. The sunglasses revealed something international. He spoke a language I did not understand, traveling between cities like Paris, Berlin and Los Angeles, accustomed to a world so much greater than the place we were at. He was and acted as natural part of the photographic canon.

When we stopped the car next to the road, we are met by the roar and noise of hundreds of cars on their way to somewhere but not here. The sound fills the space between us and it is difficult to hear what we are saying. We move between road and vegetation, the border area between nature and culture, a non-place without any obvious meaning. Smaller trees, birch and sly grow without structure. The area is not large, surrounded by roads to all sides.

– Terrain Vague... I could perceive and hear Baltz say through the rumble, of his French with American accent. I did not know what it was.

– John Gossage.

– The Pond. Very good book, difficult to get hold of. Printed in a few copies. Good photographer.

Shyly I thought about what kind of book it was. Fantasized about a well, one with a crank that you take up water with.

Twenty years later after this field-study with Baltz, which I did in connection with my education at (the first in Sweden) Master program at Högskolan för Fotografi now Valand

Academy, I found myself in front of the green grass in Berlin. Baltz evoked some fantasy about John Gossage that later on led me to Michael Schmidt. I never asked Baltz about Gossage, I was too afraid and did not want to lose my face or show that I did not know.

If I could go back I would ask Baltz about the artistic exchange between Germany and the USA. How *Werkstadt für Fotografie*, led by Michael Schmidt, invited American photographers to teach and exhibit at the school situated close to Checkpoint Charley in Berlin during the cold war. I would ask about his idea and thoughts concerning place and space.

New Topographic, how was it? And that word *Terrain Vague* what is that? I know he would argue about the fact that I am still using an analogue technique, silver based photography. – *It's over and old*. But for me it is familiar, so I can focus on the things that are important for me, walking, experience, finding and trying to capture something that I didn't know I was looking for.



PLACE

During the Corona Pandemic 2020 where many works remotely in front of the computer, obvious to everyone, the difference between place and place. How we try to create and build an office-like environment in front of our dining tables or in the bedroom, in what is called Telework or in Swedish digitalt-medierat-distansarbete. Staring on a flat glaring screen doesn't suit everyone definitely not me. I am thinking of the work environment that the artist has and in my case the photographer has. What conditions are needed to carry out the work? For me in my practice, the place is central and by that I mean, the place I photograph, the place where I do my darkroom work and finally the place where I show my photography. When I think about this, I do it based on an analogue-photographic-reality, a reality I can see and touch, something that I experience with all my senses.

During my studies in the late -80s at Önnestad Folkhögskola where I went to read my grades, dreaming of becoming an architect or psychologist. Between the walks in endless corridors, I suddenly found a door leading down to the basement. I enter a dark room lit by red lights. The water is bubbling. Warm. Soft. Embraced. Someone explains, I look in an orange folder marked AGFA. Mixes liquids. RODINAL. Pour in the liquid in a developing tank. AGITATE. I follow a pattern, a story back in time. RINSING. I open the developing tank. Expose the film to light. Afraid. Surprise. Pictures. I have aimed the camera at something and this something has stuck on film. The water is bubbling. The dim light is now gone. White that shines and lights up everything. The black plastic strip is hung up by means of clothespins on a string. Confused, I go out and up the stairs. Out in the hallway where I'm going to learn, but I understand that I've already found something. A language.

For me, this is a primeval scene, something I constantly try to return to in my photography, where I try to reawaken this strong feeling of finding home. "This is where I would like to live..."¹ as Barthes exclaims in *Camera Lucida* over Charles Clifford's 1845 photograph *Alhambra*, the desire hits Barthes hard. He continues later and quotes Freud about the mother's body, "There is no other place about which one can say with the same certainty that one has already been there". There is something, *a being* as Barthes says, something that is *heimlich*. Maybe that's how I felt, a return to the mother's body, that I found what is *heimlich* to me. I know it was a life-changing event. For me, photography is somewhere there, between architecture and psychology or for that matter between dream and reality.

¹ Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida*. 1980, chapter 16

GENIUS LOCI

I don't know when I heard about the expression Genius Loci for the first time, my interest in architecture has always been part of my practice, and probably I read something somewhere. I know that I saw the exhibition *Spirit of Place* at Artipelag in Stockholm 2012. It was the inaugural exhibition for the newly opened and newly build museum in the archipelago just outside Stockholm. Bo Nilsson, Gallery director at the time, wrote in the afterword to the accompany catalogue "The spirit of the place is a cliché often used when you feel that a location is special, ... It is in the dialogue between the original concept of *genius loci* and its contemporary application that the exhibition alternates between past and present."² The catalogue is divided in section; On location, The Modern City, The Room and The Landscape and finally Rome. In the preface to the catalogue, *A few notes on the spirit of the place* Nilsson writes and explains "The spirit of the place is a concept with roots in the ancient Roman belief system, of the "genius loci" witch denoted a protective spirit that comprised more or less all living creatures, but also more abstract phenomena like places."³

If we would apply the concept of Genius Loci could it explain why I was standing in front of the green grass in Berlin? Could it give us reason and knowledge together with understanding of my own process? I will present it as a proposal, an offer.

With professor of political science Isabel Schierenbeck I initiated collaboration between Art and the Academic text sometimes during 2018. The idea was simple, we travel to the same place and look through our own praxis and a third view will come up, hopefully. Before our first trip I found and bought two copies of the book *Genius Loci Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture* by the Norwegian architect and theorist Christian Norberg-Schultz. He is the founder of the concept of Genius Loci in relation to architecture and the book that Artipelag used as point of departure and source of inspiration for their first exhibition.

In the book Norberg-Schultz states, "The place is obviously an integral part of existence."⁴ It is part of our existence to orientate ourselves in the place and identify with the surroundings. The place consists of a series of material things and each place itself consists of a number of different places. But the place also consists of everything we see, experience and feel when

² Spirit of Place Platsens Sjä, Artipelag exhibition catalog nr 1 p. 235 (my italics)

³ Spirit of Place Platsens Sjä, Artipelag exhibition catalog nr 1 p. 15

⁴ Norberg-Schultz, Christian. *Genius Loci Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture* p.6

we move on the place, visit it, dream about it. The place is timeless at the same time as it is firmly anchored for a certain time, in a certain moment. It is of great existential importance that man finds a sufficiently good relationship or attitude to the place he inhabits. In many respects, this is directly crucial for people to feel good both in a physical and mental sense. It may therefore seem important to dwell on the relationship between man and the place where he lives. Only when man can "live does the world become an "interior" (Norberg-Schulz 1980/1991). To grasp the *genius loci - the spirit of place* - we need to open up to all these aspects in our study of the place.



Two phenomena that are central to Norberg-Schulz's practice and can be summarized in the concepts of *orientation* and *identification*. In order to gain an existential foothold, man must be able to *orient himself*, she must know where she is. But she must also be able to *identify* with her surroundings, that is, know how she is in a certain place. How she relates to the

place. Different concrete structures in architecture can enable and facilitate spatial orientation in a place. A good image of one's surroundings can thus lead to a "feeling of security", a bad one can generate intensified fear and anxiety and a feeling of exclusion / alienation. It can be quite enough not to feel at home, and you can feel at home by just being able to have a good orientation on the spot. But a good orientation can never be fully sufficient for a person to feel at home in a place, and thus experience that she inhabits the place and that it is a part of her. To feel that one belongs to the place, that it is an essential part of oneself, an identification is required. In Norberg-Schulz, identification includes that one becomes "in harmony" with the place, that one appreciates what others, may not appreciate, because it arouses emotions within man. To identify with a place thus means to feel belonging - to experience that one as a human being belongs to a concrete place.

It also means that places can be inhabited only in the mind. With the help of pictures and personal stories, a person can orient himself and identify with a place that is shared with others, even though the place in real life is not the same. The shape and colour of the place, the feeling and atmosphere of the place are conveyed through your own gaze. It is thus the individual's - or the state, but we return to it - connection to the place that shapes our ability to orient and identify with the place, but also our ability to develop a sense of context and meaning in relation to a locality.



PLACE AND ATTACHMENT

In psychoanalysis, the House has a decisive place and in attachment theory the primary objects are in focus but also the place for where the attachment takes place. In this way, the child connects to the primary place. It is not uncommon for us to have a strong connection to the house we grew up in, but also seemingly unassuming places like a meadow, a football pitch, a street. These childhood places have settled in us. The child has become accustomed to these environments and places and develops an ability to identify with both universal structures but also more locally determined structures. When man leaves childhood and its places, he takes these "inner places" out into the world and forms a reference point, a childhood starting point, which helps us to orient ourselves but also eventually identify ourselves with the new place "*The place is obviously an integral part of existence.*" "*To dwell in a house therefore means to inhabit the world*" to quote Norberg-Schulz⁵.

But the significance of the place goes deeper than that. Freud writes in *The Symbolism of Dreams* that "the only typical, that is, recurring, symbolism the position of man as a whole is

⁵ Norberg-Schulz, Christian. *Genius Loci Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture* p.5-6

the house”. In psychoanalysis, the house represents the person himself. How he or she perceives himself or herself. The different rooms in the house describe the human inner life in more detail or the different floors different layers in the human unconscious. Many windows in a house can be interpreted as... Cooper (1974) describes how people who move often get a feeling of not belonging in the beginning, in the new house, but with time we start to establish ourselves in the house, seize that, and eventually we start to feel at home. When we furnish the house, put up pictures, organize the different rooms and surfaces in the house, it represents both how we look at ourselves but also who we want to be, who we want others to perceive us as. The house becomes a symbol of the self.

COFFEE AND BREAK

On our recent trip to Tel Aviv, one of the last days, we did as we usually do, have strolling conversations about our work where we talk about our thoughts and findings. We had walked the distance from Tel Aviv to Jaffa along the Mediterranean Sea. Jaffa is the historical port mentioned in the Bible and the gateway to the rest of the world. I had shown the Swedish art gallery Magasin 3 branch in the old part of Jaffa. Isabell had analysed the choice of music at the Bulgarian lunch restaurant as extremely right-wing nationalist, but as she said – the food was wonderful. We really only had one thing left, look at the small museum Liebling Haus. It is a villa built in typical Bauhaus style in the centre of White City, old Tel Aviv. Built by architects educated in Dessau Germany and as a result of the rise of the Nazi movement fled to Israel. The museum is a mixture of archive, history and contemporary art. Some rooms at the museum were left as they were, original from early 30s. Behind dark wooden shutters, they lived as if they never left the high-class life they had fled from, denying the scorching sun outside.

The basic idea for Norberg-Schulz is that architecture has lost its meaning, what is the meaning of the place and how do we build a meaningful environment? “*The task of the architect is to create meaningful places, whereby he helps man to dwell*”. Norberg-Schulz was active during the expansive phase after World War II. He studied architecture in the 50s and 60s and then taught at the School of Architecture and Design in Oslo, at the same time as Sweden built Miljonprogrammet, (the Social Democratic party decided to build 100 000 new houses every year between 1965-74, in total 1 000 000 new housings over a 10year period, hence the name Miljonprogrammet or in English The Million program). One could say that he lived in a technological era, when engineering and rational thinking would take us to new heights and of course prosperity. Christian Norberg-Schulz uses a concept with roots in the imaginary world of antiquity, an ancient Roman concept with protective spirit, *Genius*.

According to the faith, the spirit gave life to places and people and followed them for life. The Spirit gave an explanation of what a place, house or person was or wants to be, The Spirit of Place – Genius Loci.

COFFEE

At some point during the work on the essay, I invited my classmate Anna Jernryd to the studio. I was stuck. We talked, drank coffee and ate Anna's husband homemade muffins. Anna, a little distracted, flips through Norberg-Schulz's book while I tried to explain my idea and subject for my essay, – that some places are more important than others, so much so that I want to photograph them.

Then Anna suddenly says.

– But it is full of pictures, some I think are really good.

– I thought it would just be text...

It struck me, something that is right in front of my eyes that I have never seen. Of course I reflect on the pictures, I also think many are good and in a way help me understand. But if I take it as a concrete starting point, can one see a relationship between Genius Loci and photography? The vagueness that is built into the photograph is it also reflected in architecture and then specifically in our case with Norberg-Schulz and his concept Genius Loci? Steve Edwards writes in his book *Photography – A Very Short Introduction*⁶, among other things, how, "We put the image in a narrative context", that we simply contextualize our photographs in a book, magazine or exhibition, headline or text, which helps the viewer with an explanation of the image, its meaning and significance. He also talks about how there is a "semantic vagueness"⁷ in photography, what we choose to see and interpret in photography is, as we all know, an open question.

The ambiguity or semantic vagueness also exists as a critique directed at Norberg-Schulz's concept of Genius Loci. *"The problem arises from the fact that something (architecture), besides 'being something' can also 'mean something' - to someone. The same piece of architecture can even mean something to someone - and something else to someone else. The problem is semiotic - not language semiotics (as in linguistics), but architectural semiotics."*⁸

⁶ Edwards, Steve. *Photography – A Very Short Introduction*, maybe the chapter *Apparatus and its images* explains it best, he uses Barthes, Szarkowski, Baldassari, Sultan among others.

⁷ Edwards, Steve. *Photography – A Very Short Introduction* p.154

⁸ Møystad, Ole. *The spirit of place in a multicultural society*
<https://architecturenorway.no/questions/identity/moystad-on-cns/>

This is what Professor Ole Møystad writes in the text, *The spirit of place in a multicultural society*. The architecture we surround ourselves with is not just something produced as a function or protection, a factory or a home. Architecture creates meaning, it produces us as group and individuals. We as Göteborgare will get the Karla Tower⁹, something we all have to relate to in one way or another. The significance for Gothenburg and Serneke (the builder) is obvious, power, prestige and hopes for the future mixed with brand-building gentrification for the City. (Hopefully we have another builder on the other side of the river, Petter Stordalen, who will compete with SERNEK in a manly dogfight about the longest building.



Avrahm Soskin *Houses from the Sand* 1909

FINDING HOME

The myth about Tel Aviv in Israel is that it was built on desert dunes. The name comes from Theodor Herzl, the father to state of Israel, and his book *Altneuland* (Old New Land) that in the Hebrew translation becomes the title Tel Aviv. In this old new land just north of Jaffa the

⁹ <https://www.sernekebostad.se/hitta-bostad/vara-omraden/karlastaden-goteborg/karlatornet/>

¹⁰ Soskin, Avrahm. (1881-1963) Pioneer photographer in Israel, open the first studio and documented major event in the foundation of the State of Israel. This is the lottery with seashells, the first settlement.

capital was built and planed. The legend tells that through a lottery with seashells, sixty plots of land was distributed to sixty families which settled and started built in the neighbourhood known as Ahuzat Bait. In his book *White City Black City* Sharon Rotbard¹¹ gives a detailed explanation of the narrative about Tel Aviv. How the virgin dunes were levelled to provide space, foundation and colour for the modernist houses that formed White City, the part of the city built by architects and city planners trained at the Bauhaus school in Dessau Germany during the 1920s and 30s. As part of the growing global tourism industry and marketing of cities around the world Tel Aviv and White City managed to become part of UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2003¹². That the establishment of Tel Aviv as a city was not as virgin as the official history claims is another story, the land was more or less cultivated and filled with orchards. "*All it did was to turn wilderness into bloom*"¹³ as the saying is in Israel.



¹¹ Rotbard, Sharon. *White City Black City*, p.43

¹² <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1096/>

¹³ Rotbard, Sharon. *White City Black City*, p.50

Norberg-Schulz says in the introductory pages of *Genius Loci* that events "take place"¹⁴. He further writes that everyday life consists of all kinds of concrete phenomena such as people, animals and flowers, stones, earth and water, sky and air, night and day. But also other things that are difficult to explain, such as emotions. Ole Møystad writes in *Cognition and the Built Environment* "*The problem with this construction of language is that it implies that whoever is the master of, or in control of a place, is also in control of meaning*"¹⁵. If we replace *language* with *photography*, we maybe get a reason why we as photographers lift the camera in an attempt to capture and re-present our environment. It gives us meaning and a sense of control, were we place our camera, thru our editing process and presentation, which images to show, is usually all under our own control. One can also get a possible explanation or understanding why the wife of Lieblings Haus in Tel Aviv chose to live her life behind the brown blinds, as a way to maintain control and meaning in her everyday life. But if she had looked out, in a figurative sense, does the world look like this today? Globalism in the form of people and trade. War and refugees, pauses while waiting for life to resurface, if it ever does. Is it possible to even think of something like *Genius Loci* – The spirit of place? Alternatively, is this exactly what we should be thinking about?

Silence filled the room in the Liebling Haus. Isabell and I both realized that this would take time. The walls were filled. The house had several floors. Café to fill our dry throats. We read the story along the timeline. Follows tempo markings with events and dates. Suddenly a familiar voice, but from a long time ago. Broken English. Åsa Franck. Teacher at the School of Photography once upon a time. She came to look back. She came to seek her home.

¹⁴ Norberg-Schulz, Christian. *Genius Loci Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture* p.6

¹⁵ Møystad, Ole. *Cognition and the Built Environment* p.48



IMAGINARY SPACES

After going to the library writing daily for a period, trying to work my way in to this essay a break is needed. I'm going to develop film, the studio has been the same since 1993. I bring my computer into the darkroom, writing while the film is rinsing. The water ripples like a mountain stream. It is a place where thought and action are intimately connected which makes it difficult to distinguish what comes first, to do or to think. I know this place is very important in my artistic practice. It's the place on earth I feel safe, It's the one place where I know that when I close the door to the room I am completely alone in the whole universe and no one is allowed to open more than me

The darkroom is very small, barely 2x2m (2020x2270mm). I have two enlargers, industrial grey Durst 1200 with diffuse light and condenser lenses respectively. A stainless steel wet bench on my right side. To my left is a narrow cabinet for drying film and a shelf next to it. KODAK, AGFA, ILFORD, KENTMER, FOMA only fiber paper. Development tank, spirals, film clips, vessels, hoses and a siphon. My computer that I am currently writing on is under the enlarger with condenser light, the right of my two. In front of me I have two 8"x10" cassettes from the brand Toyo the same brand as my two large format cameras 4x5 and 8x10

inch respectively, with which I do most of my photography. There are two timers, one of which is from the old photography school, Y-FOTO TIMER. Frame for photo paper in sizes up to 50x60cm, SAUNDERS. MICROSIGHT, acriscope that I bought in New York in 1992. Thick glass when I make contacts. ILFORD MULTIGRADE filter. On a shelf under my magnifiers I have more developing spirals, TETENAL EUKOBROM, MOERSCH KODAK SELENIUM TONER and a cutting device ROTATRIM. The upper cabinets above the wet bench are filled with magnifying optics, paper, two COMBIPLAN developing boxes. KODAK PROFESSIONAL HC-110 1liter, the same film developer I have used throughout my photographic life. Old TECHNOL LIQUID. On top of the cabinets are bowls 18x24, 24x30, 30x40, 40x50 and 50x60. Behind me where I now sit is an EKVALL archive rinse 50x60 with a dedicated bench on legs, on the floor I have two 30x40 and in the wet bench is a transparent CALUMET 30x40 rinse. When I develop film and stand in front of the bench on the wall to the left is a darkroom clock by the brand JUNGHANS, mechanical which I have to manual turn up, another one is in the cupboard. When I turn off the whitelight and turn on the darkroomlight, it spreads through filtered glass ILFORD 902, an amber red light. Two speakers are mounted very close to the ceiling, I never play music, my universe is quiet.

As I write this, the film has been rinsing. Whatever I photographed is transformed from latent into a manifest image. Light energy in the form of photon has hit silver halides and via the developer's reducing ability converted it into manifest silver, something you can see with the naked eye, how it all happens is still not completely clear. But for me, I connect the process to the universe that is outside.

DREAMING TOGETHER WITH BALTZ

Thoughts come in mysterious ways. Was it the artist Agnes Martin or a poet I meet in Vermont, I don't know? Who talk about ideas that travel by the wind, it was just a matter of rise your arm (at the right moment) and grab them. The darkroom work and in relation to my work with this essay, I started to think and dream about the photograph of Lewis Baltz and me. As I remember it, Peter Öhlander master-class-friend, arranged and photographed us together at the mouth of the Tingstad tunnel in Gothenburg. I think he used a ROLEIFLEX, but I am unsure. For many years the photograph has been gone. I knew it was somewhere in the studio, it existed as an *imaginary-image*, something I could fantasize about and use as fuel for other images. From time to time I wonder where it is, this time I started looking.



Somewhere in piles of work, experiences and memories of saved spaces and places, attempts and efforts to capture what I want to express with photography. I found the picture. Baryt Paper, silver gelatine photography in size 24x30cm. If I would speculate, I assume the brand is AGFA judging of the feel and surface holding the photograph in my hand. A portrait format with a square image placed above the centre with a lot of white all around. The paper has warm grey tones and if I guess, knowing Peter, probably toned in selenium for protection. Hole for a pin to attach to a wall. Text in capital letters stamped on the photograph with ink, THE ART SCENE IN FEB 96 GOTHENBURG. SWEDEN.

I notice the hat. I remember buying it the year before in 1995 in New York, where many wore it I thought it looked cool. Then, I did not know what I know today, today when you via some form of imaginary knowledge can surf the Internet and pretty soon find out the origin of the X. One story would be how film director Spike Lee enters into an agreement with a clothing

company to license the production of clothes marked with an X, perhaps as part of the marketing of his film *Malcolm X* in 1992¹⁶. I bought it because I wanted to stand out, to be noticed and be seen and of course it was freezing cold in New York February 1995.



I stopped using and wearing the hat shortly after the photograph was taken, I felt embarrassed. Maybe because the story Baltz told us about his commission to make an image linked to the exhibition at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) 1992, *Rule Without Exception*¹⁷. It was a story about representation and power, how images could provoke and make a difference and even start a riot.

From his balcony in the suburb of Lake View Terrace, George Holliday overlooks the intersection of Foothill Boulevard and Osborne Street. The sudden sound of helicopters and sirens causes him to lift his newly purchased video camera. When the film images began to spread on TV news channels in the spring of 1991¹⁸, where Rodney King was brutally beaten by a number of police officers at the Los Angeles Police Department. Lewis Baltz shortly after the TV images went to the scene of the crime. From a similarly distant position he took a picture, overlooking the road and place where everything happened. When presented in the exhibition he chose to make the image in the proportions similar to that of cinema film. *11777 Foothill Boulevard, Los Angeles*¹⁹ is now part of the LACMA collection. The reviewer

¹⁶ The X factor: <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1992-05-22-vw-159-story.html>

¹⁷ https://www.galeriezander.com/en/artist/lewis_baltz/exhibitions

¹⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o1HOalToMtg>

¹⁹ <https://collections.lacma.org/node/194519>

William Wilson wrote in Los Angeles Time about the exhibition and the picture "It's just a kind of urban void in which nothing good can thrive"²⁰ The month after the review in the newspaper, the four accused police officers were released and it was the starting point for one of the worst violent riots in Los Angeles April-May 1992²¹.



Lewis Baltz 11777 Foothill Boulevard, Los Angeles 1991

SEEING THE UNSEEN

The resemblance is of course striking with today's Black Lives Matter, it is like we have not learned anything. Maybe it is understandable, how I could stand so unconsciously in an attempt to be tough in some form of cultural appropriation. In order to understand what is happening in the Black Lives movement, I read a Swedish anthology with texts by Sara Ahmed's "The Hegemony of Whiteness" and can to some extent forgive myself when I read the approach Ahmed have with the essay, *I want to consider whiteness as a category of experience that disappears as a category through experience, and how this disappearance makes whiteness 'worldly'*²². My whiteness, and for that matter even the fact that I am a man, is a part of my world which for me is very difficult to ignore, I need just to be conscious about it.

²⁰ <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1992-03-31-ca-67-story.html>

²¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1992_Los_Angeles_riots

²² Sara Ahmed *A phenomenology of whiteness* Feminist Theory 2007, p.150



I find another passage in Sara Ahmed's text that interest me and in relation to this essay and the idea of Genius Loci. The chapter where Ahmed look and analyse Edmund Husserl's workplace, or really how Husserl himself describes it in the second volume of Ideas. *“For me real objects are there, definite, more or less familiar, agreeing with what is actually perceived without being themselves perceived or even intuitively present. I can let my attention wander from the writing-table I have just seen or observed, through the unseen portions of the room behind my back to the veranda into the garden, to the children in the summer house, and so forth, to all the objects concerning which I precisely 'know' that they are there and yonder in my immediate co-perceived surroundings. (1969: 101)”*²³ One of the starting points for

²³ Ahmed, Sara. *A phenomenology of whiteness* Feminist Theory 2007, p.151

Ahmed's (just like Norberg-Schulz) reading of Husserl's text is "*orientation*". How the philosopher's body orients itself towards the desk and gives it attention. How this attention wanders from the well known to the familiar. Indicates a direction by talking about "the unseen portions of the room behind my back" where family and children are and forms a background to the desk that exists presence in front, an imaginary spatiality that enables Husserl's writing. One here and one there in terms of time but also in terms of distance, near my body is the desk and beyond that is my family, which then serves as relative expressions for distance, from one point to another. The zero point of orientation, "*the point from which the world expands*" as Husserl writes and forms the beginning of the text, or story for that matter.

Another imaginary space perhaps the most well known, Virginia Woolf *A Room of One's Own*, based on two lectures for the Arts Society at Newnham and Girton Women's College in Cambridge in 1928. Already in the first lines of her book she sits down at the "*beach of a river*" later we learn that it is in "*beautiful October weather, lost in thought*". What Woolf is thinking about is an invitation to talk about *Women and Fiction*. – *A woman must have money and her own room if she is to be able to write fiction*, she states from the beginning. In the story, she wanders in fictional Oxbridge. The narrator self treads lawns only intended for associate professors and researchers, she should walk on the gravel path, she understands from the gestured man, *the gravel is the place for me*. She continues her journey around Oxbridge, looking for solutions and clues in the literature, and soon she is in front of the door to the library where she intends to "*take a look at the manuscript*". She is immediately rejected by a gentleman who explains "*women only have access to the library if they are in the company of a university teacher*". Through her fictional spatiality, Woolf builds her reasoning that forms into her argument for her *own space*, where she can produce her *own* story and give her *own* answers.



The imaginary room that Husserl and Woolf build in their *Study room* respectively *Oxbridge I* want to compare with my *Wetbench* in the darkroom. Just as they use spatiality to solve problems and shape themes, the imaginary space gives a photographer the opportunity for visualization, dreams and fantasies. We can look at the historical photographer reference Ansel Adams, who coined the term *visualization* and *pre-visualization*. In a series of three books *The Camera*, *The Negative* and *The Print*²⁴, which he wrote with a pedagogical purpose for those who *study and practice photography*. The important Adams gives visualization can be read from the placement, the first chapter of the first book *The Camera*, where he writes, "*The term visualization refers to the entire emotional-mental process of creating a photograph*"²⁵. By understanding it in broader terms, visualization is about building mental spaces or rooms from where photography, writing other cultural and creative expressions

²⁴ Adams, Ansel. *The Camera, The Negative and The Print*, 1980 Little, Brown and Company

²⁵ Adams, Ansel. *The Camera* p.1

forms a place from where one can think and pursue one's own practice, a form of *zero point of orientation*, to use Edward Husserl. For me that space can appear or to be used in analogue photography – when you photograph – when you develop and see the negative for the first time – when you do your printing and creating a story.

HOW TO – KNOW HOW

When photographing analogue film, there is a practice about pre-visualizing, meaning that you create an understanding of what you have in front of the camera and how it could look like as finished image. Before taking the picture, you create an image in your mind, minds-eye as Ansel Adams says, how the subject is translated in terms of grey tones to the finished black and white photo. Another aspect of visualization in the analogue world is the difficulty of knowing what one has photographed. By that I mean that there is no feedback on what you actually do, if your *imaginary-image* will end up on your film or not, if we compare it to the constant looking at the display on the digital camera, chimping. When photographing during a long trip or project without receiving any feedback or confirmation in the form of develops negative, a large *imaginary-room* is required. The element of chance and luck may play a role, but as it is usually called – the more often I do it the more luck I have.

When you get your feedback in the form of a negative, the moment you turn on the white light in the darkroom, the process starts over once again. What have I photographed? Did I get what I was thinking? Typical questions that arise when I stand and hold the wet delicate negatives in my hand dreaming and fantasizing of success and future possibilities. Translating or reading the negative into a positive one is difficult, the image is in a no man's land, somewhere on the road to become something.

When I print in the darkroom I always start with a negative chosen based on desire and curiosity. How does it look like a print? What size should it be? Which paper? *What does it want to be?* To paraphrase Louis Kahn and his brick²⁶. When I print and work with the image I have selected, I notice or perhaps make my selves aware of interest from another possible candidate. The negative calls for my attention – *I think we belong together – I think we could shape a story together*. The process starts again but never from the same place.

²⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZaUtcKqdL5E>



I fill the table with images. In our studio we have an old classic STIGA table tennis and on it I arrange my images, to see what I actually have done. Much like the writing process Stephen King describes in his book *On Writing. A Memoir of the Craft*. That you do not really know from the beginning how a person or event develops. That it is something that you discover along the way through the process of writing. That I don't really know for sure what is on the table in my studio I see as good sign, as a point of departure for creating a story. To be standing on the ladder we have in the studio looking down on my images, feeling some kind of vertigo, not because of the height but rather because of the story that unfolds in front of my eyes.

WANDER AROUND WITH THOREAU AND GOSSAGE

Early 90's I had a student discount for the daily newspaper Dagens Nyheter, do we still have it? I read an essay about an expedition of two people going up a river. The text talked about nature, reflecting your inner self on the outside. Adventure and camaraderie. This was the first time I read about Thoreau. I think I still have the newspaper clip, I wont try to find it. It was through Baltz I heard about Gossage, Gossage who also found inspiration from Thoreau.

Henry David Thoreau spent two years, two months and two days in self-imposed exile in the small house at Walden Pond. He had moved out to create distance. Society, as he experienced it, was more focused on consumption and material things. The emerging industrialism, photography everything that came to categorize the modern was just round the corner. He had borrowed a piece of land just outside Concord, Massachusetts, from the Emerson family. There he built his simple timbered cottage of recycled wood large enough to hold a bed, a table and three chairs, not much more. He grew simple crops for self-catering while he at the same time took his laundry to Mother in the nearby village. The day he chose to move out was no coincidence, July 4, 1845, National Day for United States of America.

The place he chose to settle was right on the shores of the pond Walden. From the edge of the forest, Thoreau could look out over the water, follow the seasons, weather and wind, see the shifts in the light that is reflected on its surface. The lake came to symbolize much in Thoreau's writing. He tangibly measured its depth and built up a map of its bottom terrain, it was not bottomless as it was claimed, 33m at most. Its inflow and flow of water puzzled Thoreau, where did the water come from and how did it get here? At its western shore, the railway pulled forward and telegraph poles followed. The modern society associated with it was Thoreau's main criticism. Human intervention in nature gave false hope that our happiness laid in the rapid transport of people and package. Unlike walking for yourself and follow your own lust and desires. His thinking and philosophy are associated with nature, civil disobedience, anarchism and the sovereignty of his own person in relation to the state.

The walks through nature where he mixes observations of his surrounding forest, plants and animals with reflections from the outside world form the material in the book *Walden; or, Life in the Woods* that was published in 1854.

Someone that found Thoreau's writing inspiring was John Gossage. When he sometime in the 80's on his commute between home Washington D.C. and Queenstown Maryland suddenly did the unexpected. He turned off the road and stopped, opened the door and stepped out. He did not know why but it was the beginning of his first photo book, *The Pond*

He wanders into the landscape that exists next to the highway just outside the City, the borderland of non-nature with bushes and trees without meaning and direction. A landscape without belonging, a no-man's land between nature and culture, a non-site or as Lewis Baltz

said outside Tingstadstunneln in Gothenburg, *Terrain Vague*²⁷. In the book we follow Gossage walk into the setting. Thru a wall of branches and bushes we find a small path that's leads us deeper in to the scenery. We see traces and tracks, notice things that Gossage want us to see. Water forms the Pond, something that we walk round heading back to reality. On the other side of the wall we find us in a typical American suburb with houses and streets. A bird on a wire. Suddenly we are inside a house, like we have done a burglary, the safety chain is off.



It was as Baltz said – *difficult to get hold of*, impossible until Aperture Foundation decided to publish a twenty-fifth anniversary edition in 2010. I bought the book immediately it landed in my bookstore. It was a re-issue of the book in connection to a large exhibition of *The Pond* at Smithsonian American Art Museum in 2010. There I can read Toby Jurovics (Curator of Photography SAAM) preface about how Gossage never had the intension of presenting *The Pond* as an exhibition it was always intended as a book, and Jurovic continues, “...*the first time the complete sequence has appeared on a museum wall*”. “*Only four sets of print exist*, –

²⁷ Ignasi Solà-Morales Rubió coined the term
<https://www.atributosurbanos.es/en/terms/terrain-vague/>

in a public collection". He continues in the preface quoting Gossage talking about his book, "In literature, landscape inevitably becomes the setting, the background to the story". "It isn't easy to do with language—landscape just isn't a literary mode. But it is a natural photographic mode—in photography, landscape can be primary subject." Gossage closed his book, as the last image, a ripped page from Henry David Thoreau's book with the chapter named *The Pond*.

What do I find so fascinating of both Thoreau and Gossage? Is it Thoreau's anarchism, his self imposed exile? Where he is outside looking in. Gossage trust in images, that they are able to communicate and tell a story without the need of text. I don't know, and for me, that is a great way of making me and keeping my interest high. I think curiosity is a key point for both, what will happened around next bend, from top of that hill what will I see. Intuition plays a major roll that in the end forms a story that is deeply human.

There is an interesting passage in Maurice Merleau-Ponty book, *Phenomenology of Perception*²⁸, where he talks about *a stick*, and how the *tactile world moves backwards*. The world doesn't start from the *skin of the palm* but instead of the *end of the stick*. We could see the Camera, or in Thoreau's case Pencil, as the end of the stick and as part of Gossage and Thoreau's body, and a way of *reading* or absorb the surrounding landscape, to have something in-between themselves and the real world, (whatever a *real world* is...).

²⁸ Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Phénoménologie de la perception, Phenomenology of Perception* 1945 p. 118 (in the Swedish translation)

SUMMARY/CONCLUSION

My essay begins with me standing in front of a green patch of grass. The text that follows reflecting how I turned up at the cemetery, trying to find reason and argument why. Slowly walking back in my own footsteps. I was looking for a monument, my preconceived ideas said it should be there. Michael Schmidt or some close to him decided to be more anonyms, low profile. Over the years I have interviewed people that had connection to him and gathering from those bits and pieces I would say that he was difficult to deal with, to say the least. It puzzles me.

I don't know if Genius Loci exist at the cemetery? But I tried to explain and applying the concept in different situations in a effort to sort out why I lift my camera and try to make an image of certain specific places. Maybe it is old Barthes that once again has the right answer for me. "*This is where I would like to live...*" as he exclaimed in *Camera Lucida* when he sees Charles Clifford's 1845 photograph *Alhambra*. He connect the image with *Mother* something that's *Heimlich* referring to Freud. I say why not! Whatever makes you pick up your camera in the first place is a god thing.

I would never be standing in Berlin if it weren't for Lewis Baltz, he re-emerge while writing this essay. Today I am thinking of questions that I never dared to ask or even knew they existed. When I hade the opportunity I had no experience and too much pride and not enough humbleness. That we had Baltz as a mentor in one year of the master's program at the University of Photography seems dreamlike and almost as I don't trust my own memory, the photograph exists so I can *re present* him. I remember the comment from Baltz about my hat I was wearing at the time. I remember his critic of my photographs – *we stopped making those in the nineteenth century*, haven't made a portrait since then. I remember that I was trying to open up a new door in my artistic practice and I failed to explain or find words for it, maybe I didn't know it at the time.

I would love to have a conversation about Michael Schmidt and the relationship between German and American photography. Schmidt who founded Werkstatt für Photography 1976 in Berlin Kreuzberg²⁹ and as Gerry Badger wrights in his essay in John Gossage's *The Pond*, "*when American photography, and specifically New Topographics, met German photography*

²⁹ Werkstatt für Photographie 1976-1986 p.13 Koenig Books 2017

and greatly influenced the course of the medium in Europe at the end of the twentieth century"³⁰. If I had been another person I would have asked him – *Why do you think we never saw this kind of photography in Sweden? – Will you do an exhibition in Sweden and have you talked with Modern Art Museum in Stockholm?* I think we would have had a totally different scene for photography if this were the case.

I believe that progress (or no) of society drives photography rather than photography in itself, meaning, my main concern or interest is in society, state, politic more so then photography. At the moment society (in Sweden) have no interest in photography more then as amusement, photographers turn inward and produces photo books that they trade with each other, photography have no real meaning today outside the academia. There are so many untold stories, the state could initiate project like *New Deale* under the Roosevelt era in the US, were the use of culture as a force for looking beyond the horizon of today. Where will our history go if we only rely on some global-multinational-internet-company to project our present time and do we trust them when they save images inside some “cloud”, later on we might have to pay to be able to get access to our own history.

Photography is just one tool, of many, to tell the story of man. I'm going to places where I can tell its story and in a way creating my own meaning. Architectural theorist Christian Norberg-Schulz writes in his book *Genius Loci Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*, "*It is meaningless to imagine any happening without reference to a locality*"³¹. *Werkstatt für Fotografie* got energy from being right next to Checkpoint Charlie in Berlin“ *In the midst of the Cold War, the Werkstatt initated an artistic “airlift” to the United States, a democratic field of experimentation beyond the realm of traditional vocational and political-institutional terms of reference*"³². Soon Valand Academy will move to new premises near Näckrosen Gothenburg, what energy will they find there, what will happens then?

Leif Karlén former prefect at Valand Academy asked 2007 if I could be responsible for the course *Analogue Photographic Processes*. Of course I said yes, don't want to miss the opportunity to spread the gospel, and did so until 2018. Around that time the interest for darkroom work was very low, among teachers. – *It's enough with a computer and a projector*

³⁰ Gossage, John, *The Pond* essay Gerry Badger Aperture Foundation 2010

³¹Norberg-Schulz, Christian. *Genius Loci Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*. p.6

³² *Werkstatt für Photographie 1976–1986* p.13 Koenig Books 2017

for teaching photography, that's all I need, as one said. I think this is a mistake not to acknowledge the importance of photography's *Own Room* as part of images making process and in that sense connect to the history of photography so we know where we coming from and making our steps in to the future so much more surefooted.

I think photography is much more complicated than it first seems.

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