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Addendum
A short background

My father Harald had no real relationship to my grandfather Sigurd. He worked as a teacher and his parenting was at best absent — his father in turn, my great-grandfather Oscar, had been a famous poet from Värmland, who had died of syphilis when his son was very young. His wife Ulla was a nurse and worked a lot. Sigurd didn’t talk too much to his son Harald.

One time, when little Harald sat playing at home, Sigurd came home unexpectedly early from his work. Harald looked up at his father and they both stared at each other in silence. At last Sigurd turned away his eyes, cleared his throat and went into his study and closed the door. Harald continued playing.

After a while Sigurd came out from his study with a piece of paper in his hand. Harald saw that it was a map. His father laid the map out on a table and said:

- Come here and see, Harald: This is a map of Uruguay.

Harald looked at the map. Sigurd continued:

- I have given this map to my students for homework. Their task is to fill in all the big cities and rivers on the map.

Harald looked quizzically at his father.

- And you may do the same, if you would like.

Sigurd went back into his study and closed the door. Harald looked at the map.

A few years later Sigurd had a nervous breakdown and was admitted to a psychiatric hospital.

Alone, my grandmother Ulla took care of Harald and his younger brother Peter. The map had one city filled in:

“Montevideo”

Ulla decided that they would go on holiday. The broken family traveled to the Netherlands and the seaside resort of Egmont aan Zee. When they arrived in Amsterdam, Peter became ill and they had to stay cooped up in the small hotel room for several days. Harald was very bored while Peter was sweating in the heat and from the fever. Finally Ulla had enough and roared at Harald, who promptly had to leave and play in the street.

He was 8 years old and was wandering alone in an unknown city. He walked across the canals of the Jordaan and further into the city centre and the infamous Red Light District. Nothing that he saw made him particularly frightened. He went to a few bars and looked at the old men playing billiards, he even got to play a little himself.

When he came back to the hotel room late at night both his mother and brother were sleeping. Harald decided there was more to see and went back out.

A few days later they went by train to the ocean.

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A few weeks after they came back home to Sollentuna, Sigurd Stjerne committed suicide in his cell at the psychiatric hospital. Ulla later told Harald and Peter that their father had been afraid of going insane. Harald thought that sounded crazy.
He picked up the map of Uruguay again and started to fill in the blanks, cities, big and small, rivers, mountains. He had stopped when there was no more room for ink on the paper. Since then my father has been obsessed with filling in the blanks.

1. Artist Statement

I work with video and sculpture, and in installations I let these two fields meet. My work is about perception, history and how systems are assembled and how they break down. The context the work appears in is in relation to the location that is the source of the story.

My process often begins in my own experience of a landscape. The word landscape is the part of nature that mankind has subordinated, which we have power over and which becomes part of our history. I want to explore the events and structures that have created the landscape we see today, a place with layers and layers of history.

I feel that the contemporary need for instant representation, in photography, video or virtual worlds, has ignored the thrill to experience on-site. Historical layers and alternative views are flattened into a consensus that seem to say: what you see is what you get! Representations define the reality, which does not seem to exist until it has been registered in the cloud; a condition that is neither good or evil, but has consequences. I know that most of my influences I have seen in photographs or in a movie. When I take off a pair of VR-goggles, I have a strange sensation of actually having been in another place.

In my work, this is reflected in interactions between sculptural objects and video projections that blur the boundaries and create an ambiguous relationship between material objects and intangible images. The context and content together create a framework for the installation, a world that has its own laws: For example, concrete can be subordinate to textiles, and projections are rendered as physical objects.

We have tools available to understand, appreciate and relate to other people and places, but we have too short of a time to see in a longer perspective, so it's in the borderlands between time shortage and the desire to experience as much as we can, where we find ourselves. This limitation is my starting point.

2. Introduction and questions

There is an almost intuitive understanding of what the relationship between photography and sculpture is. Sculpture has volume as well as form, it can be touched, it exists in the present. Photography is a representation of the form, it has no volume, the representation cannot be touched and it represents something in the past. It can be compared and compiled with other representations and texts to purposely define the sculpture, but it may also not be.

In this essay my aim is to understand the machinations of the action of taking a photograph and putting it in circulation, and what the role of a sculpture becomes in a world where this is possible.

In a general sense, how does instant representation through photography activate sculpture? Can sculpture change photography, or is the connection a one-way feed? Can it be that this connection determines our lives to such an extent that the success of one medium informs the strength of the other?
3. The idealist vs the pragmatist: Flashes of ingenuity from the Netherlands

My friend Nicola called and asked me one day if I knew anybody who had a car. She was stressed because she wanted to see the summer solstice align with Robert Morris’ Observatory in Lelystad. This would take place at around twenty minutes after five in the morning, and at that hour there were no trains leaving from Amsterdam. I told her I didn’t have a car and that I didn’t know anybody with a car. She asked if I wanted to join if they did manage to find a car. We would have to leave around 3AM. Ouch. That was way too early in the morning for me. I asked if maybe Nicola could take a picture for me?

When I woke up the next morning and received a picture of the sun peeking through the V-shaped wedge of the sculpture on my phone, I felt a combination of battling emotions. I was happy for Nicola that she had managed, and the photograph was rather awe-inspiring, even on my small screen, but at the same time, I felt relieved. In some way, Nicola’s idealism paved the way for me as well. In a way, I was taking part in her experience at the site. Reaffirming thoughts flashed through my head: ‘The world is at my fingertips, and think of all the carbon footprints I avoided making by staying at home’. My pragmatism can always compromise.

In his 2016 lecture, Hans Aarsman, explains why he doesn’t travel anywhere: he thinks it’s a waste of time and that technology has proven him right. Aarsman has worked with photographs his whole life and regularly writes and talks about photographs in newspapers and lectures. In this particular lecture he takes the audience on a vacation in Google Earth. The world, or a representation of it, made up from millions of photographs, is indeed at his fingertips. And that’s how he likes it.

I on the other hand, as time went by, kept feeling like I missed out on something special. I looked at the photograph Nicola sent me again. It portrayed the rising sun perfectly aligned with Morris’ Observatorium. With some additional photographs I found online, I could see the whole structure and I could appreciate the effect (or at least, how it worked).

But I still felt left out, betrayed by myself.

I had missed the act of seeing, first-hand, with my own eyes, a time-sensitive work. I had missed the planning of the trip, the stress and the trekking, and I missed it due to laziness. A Pragmatist turned Procrastinist. Was I losing my way? I had been a champion of ‘getting your fingers dirty and putting your boots on the ground’ for a long time.

Nicola was part of a workshop I organised a few years earlier. The concept was to take my classmates and some alumni from Gerrit Rietveld Academie to the island of Gotland. We investigated the conversion of bunkers to holiday homes, that was being done on a small peninsula, formerly operated by the Swedish military. I had laid out the plans and scheduled the weeks prior to the workshop, trying to imagine what would be important to do and what might go wrong. At the site a lot of my planning changed, and instead of doing research we all felt compelled to make works of art, which in hindsight maybe should have been the plan from the start.

I think that being able to see something for myself, be it a sculpture or a landscape, a movie in it’s original intended state, is of great value, even important. But it’s not the world we live in. The world we live in does have affordable, even cheap, charter flights to the whole world, depending on where you start, but photographs informs our travels and choice of destination.
4. The Hinge of it All

Among the first things to be photographed, sculpture lent itself very well to the practice, because of the long exposure times needed. Photographers arguably based their photographs on artistic conventions. Framing and composition are tools from paintings, and choosing the optimal angle - taking a photograph of the front of the sculpture, not the back; all this informed photography and does to this day. It is why the convention is not to photograph the parking lot next to the Grand Canyon.

When early practitioners started photographing sculptures, they took them out of their spatial and temporal context and put them into an index of images. André Malraux called it a Musée Imaginaire. The act of photography took art out of the museum and made it possible for everyone to own a collection. In an imaginary museum anyone is free to put a photograph of Michelangelo’s David next to the Taj Mahal. It was revolutionary. Is this what photography means, that through representation it creates a displacement of ownership from one to many, or does the medium in itself provide something other mediums cannot?

Roland Barthes called it punctum, the thing that makes a photograph interesting. Barthes explains that he only ever found a handful of photos interesting. The punctum is the thing that irritates, that makes the photograph say something new, rather than reproduce a moment in time. This hinge that the photographic medium hangs on, is so precise that it hits Barthes like a sledgehammer, it is instantaneous. It’s always a different thing, according to Barthes it cannot be planned. It is such a subjective opinion that it’s hard for anyone to understand, but that adds to the mystery of photography, that what is special about the medium is unquantifiable.

Obviously, photography owns distribution and stands above sculpture, even if 3D-printing is on the rise, it is nowhere as fast as seeing a photograph of a sculpture and making up ones mind about the spatial properties of said sculpture. It must be said, even though a photograph is flat, it is not something that people in general mind (save Barthes).

Most sculptures and installations, be they site-specific or not, are not permanent. They spend their allotted time in an exhibition, in a gallery or on a site, and are then moved away from the public eye. What we can hope to have left is the documentation. Arguably even permanent sculpture will disappear, through new city planning, vandalisation, erosion, natural disaster, erosion again; they are only permanent or timeless in our brief perspective. In the not so distant future, the fact that they were once art can also change, and an art work can gain a function, that the artist could never have considered. The documentation can lend another sense of timelessness to the sculpture.

Footnote: This hinges on the way we document. The Dead Sea scrolls lasted for a long time, but documentation has since transcended into the cloud, a system that is supposed to be the ultimate fail-safe for information - thousands of copies insures nothing will ever disappear. Perhaps in a few years it will be considered as out-dated as the floppy-disk, mini-disc, cd-rom or dvd? /Footnote

Right now, our broad knowledge of sculpture comes from photographs. Art history is shaped by photographic indexes. In a micro perspective documentation of art and sculpture has it’s own life, sent as application for grants, to boards for review and then circulated on the internet, on blogs or mislabeled as a strange occurrence, appropriated into another artist’ practice.
5. The world at your fingertips

There is a scene in All That Heaven Allows (Douglas Sirk, 1955) where Jane Wyman’s Cary Scott is surprised and offended by her children’s concern for her well-being. Cary is in love with a much younger man, played by Rock Hudson, much to the disapproval of everyone. To soothe the inappropriate and immoral longings of their ageing mother, her grown children have bought her a television set. The son declares while handing her a remote, that with this, you get to have all the experiences you could ever dream of, and right from the comfort of your own home! The son proudly and ignorantly exclaims: “You have the world at your fingertips!”

Of course the viewer can relate to the feeling of dread Cary has, and the disbelief that her own children hate that she loves a man, deeming a television a more appropriate companion, but the eerie realisation of “The world at your fingertips” applies to you, the viewer, is just as strong. The aptly named television show Black Mirror (our screens are like black mirrors when they are turned off) is all about these realisations and questions to do with technology and reality.

What used to mean having a one-way access to the world, by means of the remote control, turning a black mirror into a gateway to peer through, today has many more implications. Perhaps we can remake All That Heaven Allows (it has been remade several times, most successfully dealing with racism in Werner Fassbinders’ Fear Eats the Soul) for a generation of live-at-home neckbeards, defiantly in love with the digital girl from their dating-simulator, to the horror of their parents, who fail to see that the world is changing to the dance of fingertips.

6. Good-bye deep fakes

To say that tech companies and universities are pushing artificial intelligence is something of an understatement. Google, Facebook and MIT work independently in a race to what could be the next step in evolution or just a helpful tool, depending on who you ask. While the goal of a general AI, an intelligence indistinguishable from, or greater than that of a human mind may be far off, the specialised AI is already here.

Machine learning or artificial neural networks (or AAN) mimic a human brain to learn for itself tasks that would take much longer to program. A recent example in the art world is Hito Steyerl’s HELL YEAH FUCK DIE from the 2017 Skulptur Project Münster, showing films where robots from Boston Dynamics are being taught physical tasks while violently being pushed or pulled by engineers (to force the robots to adjust their balance). A common joke when videos like these are released is that our machine overlords of the future will not look kindly on them.

This process of teaching machines and apps to do the work for themselves is also called deep learning because it, like real neural networks in the brain, works in several layers, independently of each other: one node of the AAN working out what a curve in an image is or looks like, while another works with color. A complex program has now been created by an AI that can conjure believable image manipulation in real time and the programming input has been minimal.

Apps created through deep learning immediately find real world usage and have reached the point where anyone can push a button (or hold a camera) to transfer a face from one person to another in a surprisingly convincing way - combine this with a voice simulator that generates a believable imitation of the person in question, and the Russian troll farms can create fake news in an incredibly fast pace. No surprise then, that before long, a reddit sub emerged called r/deepfakes where faces of celebrities had been body-swapped, sometimes for comedic purposes, but mostly for pornography.
As troubling as this sounds, deep learning apps also lay groundwork for innovation in image manipulation and creation in new ways. Scribble a green line on your screen, an app interprets this as a field of grass. Draw a pointed curve on the upper part of the image and a mountain appears. Add some white stuff, the mountain is covered in snow. The image is composited in real time from a syntax of photos, and it's stunning to watch, it's a visual representation of how an AI perceives the physical world.

The ability to examine critically what we view on our screens is more important than ever, to develop apps that deconstruct the images from r/deepfakes, or at least lets us evaluate what we see. The new book by Jack Werner, “Ja skiter i att det är fejk det är förjävligt ändå” (I don’t give a damn that it’s fake, it’s terrible anyway), is about the tendency to overreact on social media. A girl gets detention because her phone is adorned with the Swedish flag. But the news is fake. When a man learns it’s fake news he gets upset all the same and writes on Facebook: “I don’t give a damn that it’s fake, it’s terrible anyway.”

Perhaps the age of enlightenment gave rise to the age of confusion. It is somehow inescapable that the liberal, democratic society will cause as many lies as the totalitarian. Perhaps they even become more difficult to spot. A dictatorship has but one narrative. A society where everything is allowed has too many to count.

7. LALALA

The duration between the instant a photograph is taken and when someone sees it was up until only recently a question about time. When John Berger and Susan Sontag see a photograph they see an instance of time that’s been frozen. This was enhanced by the mechanisms of the age, that did not offer an instantaneous representation of the object on a screen for the photographer to immediately look at, discard or send.

Roland Barthes claimed that he only ever appreciated 10 photographs in his life. Barthes is writing from a severely different distributional landscape than we are reading in. In fact, the sending of the photograph is what has changed the reading of photography or rather the image culture complex as a whole, and introduced a new type of spatial dimension. Then, it was about where and when the photograph was taken. Now, the recipient is involved in the process. The photograph is sent and uploaded moments after it’s taken, and is either buried in an avalanche of similar pictures, or because of that similarity, brought to the top of your feed due to the likes (and thousands of other factors). Circulation before representation.

8. Image as meme - The relativity of time in a virtual space

How do we experience time? When I was in my last year of upper secondary school, it was obligatory to do a group project on a subject which we were free to choose. The project was a major part of the curriculum, and we had 6 months to do it. Me and some classmates decided after some arguing that we would make a project about time perception. The subject we chose, and the way we worked on it informed each other in a loop, and it describes procrastination more than anything else.

The first 5 months, every meeting we had was spent playing video games together at my friend's house and the last month was a furious struggle to make up for the time lost. We came up with a “scientific experiment” that “would allow us to measure an individuals perception of time” and create a “statistical analysis” based on the data we registered. So far so good. What we did was to hook up an oscilloscope to a pair of headphones and play a sequence of sinus tones of different lengths to the subject of the experiment. We involved around 30 people in the trial, and we compiled each individuals appreciation of the length of every sinus tone on a data sheet (there was no hypothesis behind this experiment, and we weren’t at all sure what we were measuring). We presented the
outcome of this experiment together with “background information” and personal musings around the concept of time perception. We received the highest mark.

How do we experience time? In the digital age, the internet age (now perhaps “the experience age”) we live in a digital now that is not quite the present, says Abha Dawesar. We experience time through the moment, and the moment as part of a string of moments that together create the past and the present, which sets up our actions for the future.

When we receive knowledge or entertainment through our digital devices, it is at such a high speed that what used to take minutes (walking to the post office), hours (developing a photograph), days, months or years (travelling the world), now takes seconds or appears to be instantaneous.

Every digital landmark is an invitation to drop what you are doing and click yourself further down a rabbit hole of hyperlinks. It is an urge to be omniscient or passively entertained whilst not bothered by the present moment or placing an experience in the larger perception of time that make up our individual histories. To Abha Dawesar it was never more clear than during hurricane Sandy where half of New York City was blacked out, with no electricity. Many people were looking for outlets to charge their digital devices rather than looking for food. A commodity that only took off 20 years ago has rearranged our most basic priorities.

How do we experience time? Say a being, an artificial intelligence or an uploaded brain would live in the purely digital realm, interacting with the human world through our collected history of images, videos, writings. Occasionally, a biological human would interact with it, ask it a question or change a parameter that would allow for faster processing of information. The AI could be said to be all-knowing, maybe even able to predict the future to some extent, because it can partake in everything the living world does or makes, but it never does or makes anything itself. It is a passive receptor of knowledge, that designs faster ways to spread this knowledge.

The artificial intelligence is a real person experiencing the world through a device. The only thing the internet does is relay information faster, but this has fundamentally changed us. Images in the digital now are circulated, it’s not even necessary to say they are replicated, due to fast fiber and broadband connections the loss in quality is imperceivable to the eye or largely ignored by the masses and what is also becoming increasingly unimportant is that they are actually representing something.

Due to photo- and videomanipulation being such common practices, the line between truth and fiction has become a blur. A green screen, done well, should not be seen, and is either known to the audience and appreciated for the fantastic experiences that it provides, taken for granted, or when it is really bad, subject of scorn in online forums. “I can do it better” is not even an ignorant comment anymore, because now anyone really could.

For John Berger, writing before the digital camera or the spread of the internet, the dislocation of time between the moment of taking a picture and seeing it developed took the representation of a moment in time out of it’s context. An image could be personal and retain it’s context in the minds of the person who remembered the moment, or the image could be public and it would be interpreted by people who didn’t recognise what it represented.

For Berger it was a question of time and space but today we see the photograph on our mobile devices as we are taking it and more importantly it’s immediately uploaded and sent to recipients all over the world.
9. Full circle: From the flat surface, space was created

The circulation in fact creates a new level of abstraction that has to do with time-space. The digital images often contain metadata, geographical and temporal that can tell a tech-savvy recipient where and when a photo was taken. But, as it is with the image, metadata is not always reliable and can be altered or damaged. There are methods, however, that can determine the origin of the image in time-space.

Forensic Architecture, a group working out of Goldsmiths University are doing exactly this. They are compiling images and videos and sound from bombings, shootings and drone strikes to provide evidence for prosecution of war crimes. Their method is to recreate the space where an event took place, inside a virtual simulation. Forensic Architecture relies on the witnesses that take snapshot photographs and shaky videos and the compiled information this brings, because if they can correlate one video that has no reliable metadata with one that has, they can create a timeline for the event. Later a 3D space can be built from these two, or more points of view.

Through the lens of a camera that captures a moment or a sequence of time in space, via public circulation, the space is recreated virtually with a new timeline that represents the context. But this is only information that will be subject to the scrutiny of the court, under the influence of real world lobbyists of the powers that be. An oracle in defeat.

Game developers such as DICE utilise photogrammetry to reproduce real world objects in a game engine, to create an environment of a planet from the fictional Star Wars-universe with procedural textures that gives the appearance of realistic graphics that could be experienced as a real place. This sentence is as complicated as the relationship between all these factors (the image of a rock is not the rock but is used as a rock and has the property of being a solid object in virtual space, it hinders the player from directly proceeding but can be circumvented, it can be traversed but it can’t be destroyed). The original object is used for purely aesthetic reasons, as a building block. As opposed to the work of Forensic Architecture, DICE is not interested in the original timeline or context, but what is relevant is the experience of the player in the game, the end result. The processes are similar, as are the outcome, but the motivations differ.

10. The Biennial and a landscape in which the artist can operate

If a fleeting photograph is instantly taken out of both time and space and given new meaning in endless readings, can the same happen to a seemingly eternal sculpture? If the sculpture is allowed to stay in place, the surrounding landscape, the original context will change over time and so the sculpture will also lose it’s anchoring in time and space.

Visiting Münster, the Skulptur Projekte Münster, that takes place every ten years, I am aware that I’m experiencing something that cannot be conveyed through photographs. Seeing a work of art on site reveals the strength of the medium. In the case of Pierre Huyghe, the biotope he creates in an abandoned ice hockey rink, demands the viewer to be there, in the moment, almost desperately, as the snapshots flows in a steady stream from the huge installation to the small screens. Further alienating the viewers on the screen, there are more perks of actually being there: there are industrious bees flying from their lumpy clay hive up to the ceiling where motorised hatches open and close; there are guards that tell you where you can and cannot go, which may both add or detract from the experience. In my own images of the art work, people are used for scale or as ways for me to keep relating to the work with my body. Some art works just demands your physical presence.

What documentation does to the sculpture and installation and land art and painting, is creating an ideal line of sight, even an ideal angle. But individual visitors see it individually. Depending on their own variables: height, eyesight and handicap will give everyone
visiting Huyghe a vastly different experience. Such is the work, that it also reacts, changes and adapts to the amount of visitors in the space, so that no one will have the same experience.

This experience of the present is impossible to reproduce in a photograph, but at some point the photograph will be all that remain of this event, and together with a description, the circulation will shape the imagination of the vast majority who did not visit a small German town in the summer of 2017.

11. Do we have time to make sculpture?

With the increasing speed of information and the need for more, is there a way to experience in the now? I remember sitting next to a boy in the cinema, about 10 years old, texting on his phone. I told him to stop, and he did but I could tell he was reluctant. The boy was shaking by the end of the film, stomping his feet and when it was over he immediately pulled out his phone and frantically started texting.

The general wish for fulfillment in the life experience is relatable - to experience everything with so little time. Not to mention the dopamine infusion the notifications on our devices give to us.

In the not-so-scientific experiment on time me and my fellow project students instigated, there should perhaps have been different states of mind being investigated rather than different people. People often report time slowing down during life-threatening experiences or moving very fast when working in a state of flow.

Sculpture breaks the circulation when it notifies you of its presence. By its nature it demands that a viewer moves around it, or appreciates its presence in the space. Even someone wholly conditioned by the static image or taught to sit still in front of endless video clips has to acknowledge that it takes up space, and that they have to move around it. It doesn’t click away, you have to remove yourself from it. Sculpture slows down time, it takes up space, it is what you bump into when you back away to see the whole Barnett Newman-painting. It is the spatial experience of going into a landscape.

While breaking the convention that is digital circulation it also makes sure that it starts again, sculpture is undeniably not outside any discourse, and as influenced by photography and the promise of distribution as anything else.

Addendum

In the year 2117, artificial prospectors unearth a ruined human recreation center located at 51° 57’ N 7° 38’ E. The concrete floor has been removed and a perfect biosphere of plants and insect life is prospering. The leading machine archeologist adjusts its oculars and compares the present registration of the biosphere with images gathered from a connected network, photographs of humans with sharpened steel on their feet running over frozen water. The archeologist concludes from the evidence present that the humans abandoned the practice of running on water and left the building for nature to reappropriate. The archeologist will not connect the biosphere with the files on Pierre Huyghe; ever since the last human ceased, machines care not for names.
Sources:
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