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Master of Arts thesis abstract

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Abstract

This thesis, *The Landscape as Oneself*, considers the role that human embodiment plays in the constitution of the cycloramic phenomenon which surrounds man, and vice versa.

With particular reference to the phenomenological ontologies of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Martin Heidegger, I reflect on the meanings of embodied perception and what the landscape photograph can tell us about being human. This questioning is explored amidst man's existential encounter with a world which is visible without artifice, and whose frontiers and boundaries remain out of sight but for the cultural and historical paths whereon it comes into view.

The second chapter, *A Path in the Snow*, concerns my photographic series of the same title, and discusses the meaning of my pictures from Sápmi with reference to the historical legacy of Mikel Utsi, a Sámi man from Swedish Norrbotten who emigrated to the Scottish Highlands with his reindeer in 1952. As a Scot living living amidst the view of Fennoscandinavia, I use the history of Mikel Utsi as a touchstone to contextualise my inverse encounter with the Nordic landscape.

With further respect to the photographs of Ellisif Wessel, Sophus Tromholt and Jorma Puranen; the paintings of Helmer Osslund, Harald Sohlberg and James Giles; and the poetry of Paulus Utsi, I consider the northerly setting my photographs from Sápmi occupy within the Northern European tradition of landscape representation.

In addition to the textual component, this thesis includes a series of photographs, presented as an accompanying portfolio of 36 images in a 32x26.5cm photobook format.

Keywords Landscape, Lapland, Phenomenology, Photography, Scandinavia, Sápmi

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The Landscape as Oneself

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To the names, faces and places we may encounter along the path.

Notes

This thesis, *The Landscape as Oneself*, is the result of an ongoing encounter with the Nordic landscape from a Scottish viewpoint. The photographs included in the series *A Path in the Snow*—as discussed in the second section of the text and presented in the accompanying portfolio book—have been made during multiple visits to Sápmi between 2017 and 2021, with the majority having been taken in 2020 and 2021. All illustrations unless otherwise referenced are the original copyright of the author.

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Contents

If this world is a poem, it is not because we see the meaning of it at first but on the strength of its chance occurrences and paradoxes.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*

Prologue

Coming into View

What does it mean to see a landscape as a dimension of one's self? What role does the flesh play in the constitution of the phenomenon that lays itself open ahead of my eyes, and vice versa? With these ambiguous and profound questions in mind, what can the landscape photograph tell us about being human amidst an encounter with a world which comes into appearing without artifice? These problematics lie at the outset of my reflections concerning the nature of the landscape picture, for just as Maurice Merleau-Ponty says, when we question "what *seeing* is, and what *thing* or *world* is, we enter into a labyrinth of difficulties and contradictions" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 3).

As Merleau-Ponty suggested in *The Visible and the Invisible*, the world which appears clear and true before the eyes of the individual, nobody can communicate to the other with the same level of preciseness that the embodied perception of one's self already guarantees: "What Saint Augustine said of time—that it is perfectly familiar to each, but that none of us can explain it to the others—must be said of the world" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 3).

A landscape belongs to the phenomenon that must be tasted by oneself. So long as the photograph remains a way of throwing light on an understanding concerning the meaning of being human, my views of the world are interpreted out in the open, in my exposure to the light I can never hide from. As tracks in the snow intimate the recent wandering of an animal across a mountain terrain, my pictures are signs which unveil the essential transfusion between the body and the view of a world that bleeds through the life of the flesh.

"My body," proclaims Merleau-Ponty, "is to the greatest extent what every thing is: *a dimensional this*" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 260). Whilst perception is always embodied, there can be no flesh without the view ahead, for in the landscape we understand ourselves as not in the body, but amidst the heart of a world. Indeed, it is the body which reveals the light that falls throughout the place where we stand, as Merleau-Ponty reminds us in *Phenomenology of Perception* when he describes the body as "our general medium for having a world" (Merleau-Ponty, 2003: 169). In some form or another this message is at least as old as the biblical reflections of St. Paul.

The flesh is not of our man's making. It "gives itself," explains the Finnish phenomenologist Juha Varto in *A Dance with the World*, insofar as it neither needs to be emphasised nor explained. Its sheer living presence is its enigma. It is identical to the world we see, in the sense that it remains "self-emergent and does not require us to be active" (Varto, 2012: 88). The flesh stands as a vector of revelation which discloses the horizon which unveils itself to itself by way of the body. Accordingly, it is the surrounding cyclorama "whose massive being and truth teem with incompossible details," which signifies the essential nature of human incarnation (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 4).

We can now already begin to see that perceiving and thinking belong together to the world of an unglimpsed horizon wherefrom and wherein everything that *is* comes to be present. Whilst indefinite and obscure, such a horizon makes its multivalent and tenuous meanings visible amidst the contours and features it holds out in the open before the body.

Unveiled to myself amidst the view of a world which decides itself, the body is and remains undivided from the phenomenon at hand. After

all, we are bound to the meanings and histories of our life by the time and place where we discover ourselves as seeing, thinking and feeling. As Varto reminds us, "one cannot share this with anyone else, because no one else will occupy the space and time that I have" (Varto, 2012: 49). Moreover, I am always in communion with the visible without necessarily having to be told anything in particular about its appearance. As Merleau-Ponty observed, "there is always a language before language," which is the embodied perception more original than mere metaphor or symbol (Merleau-Ponty, 2003: 219).

If we photograph landscapes, it is because man is *made* of the mute perception which remains equal to the form of the world. As such, I do not simply look from a distance upon the places I photograph. Rather, my body is a feature of the landscape I photograph in such a way to form a single whole without the latter becoming the former, and vice versa.

Abiding without a boundary or a frontier, it is the country of the visible which situates the issue of the photographer's embodiment. Not only is the world the essential element of such a question, but the original landscape wherefrom and wherein we may interpret an understanding of such an enigma. As the American photographer Robert Adams says, photographs "establish that though we are not central, we share in a mystery" that can never be fully reconciled nor forsaken (Adams, 2021).

Just as Merleau-Ponty reflects, the world is the phenomenon as commonplace and banal as it is unexpected and unexplained, not necessarily because of what remains unseen, but because it is abundantly present in ways that are immediately obvious and visible (Merleau-Ponty, 1968). Whilst to see the world is also to understand it, the phenomenon which allows itself to be understood is by no means something that is possible for man to fully comprehend.

Motivated in part by the ecological questioning of our times, my pictures establish a broader recognition concerning man's intimate circumvolution to the view whose movements and migrations cannot be decided by the human being. Thus, the landscapes wherefrom I gather my photographs belong to the open element which challenges the meaning of my life with every glance. In a world which is always appearing anew, my photographs are made along the frontiers of an open-ended phenomenon

which clears its view as the meeting place wherefrom and wherein my embodied existence bleeds into the lives of the others. After all, only in our dynamic situatedness to what is other can we relate meaningfully to the essential encounter with ourselves.

Let us briefly consider the work of the contemporary American photographer Bryan Schutmaat (Fig. 1). The everydayness of the North American landscapes which Schutmaat brings to light are significant because they echo one's own embodied perception of the Earth. With their emphasis on a horizontal landscape, there is something peculiar about these photographs that I recognise from my own view of the world. They are reminders that the same phenomenon wherefrom I draw my works must also be present and intimate to the lives of all the others, no matter the linguistic or cultural context we may appropriate to give meaning to the contours we see. Moreover, whilst Schutmaat's work remains a testament to the poetic nature of the embodied view, for such everyday banality to converge into the focal point of the photographer with such a profound intensity is not at all a commonplace occurrence.

The structure of the text to follow is ordered in two sections. In the first chapter, *Being a Landscape,* I consider the role that human embodiment plays in the constitution of the landscapes which surround the photographer with particular attention to the phenomenological explications of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Martin Heidegger. The second chapter, *A Path in the Snow*, discusses the meaning of my pictures from Sápmi with reference to the legacy of Mikel Utsi, a Sámi man from Karesuando parish in Swedish Norrbotten who emigrated to the Scottish Highlands with his reindeer in 1952.

As the Russian filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky explained in *Sculpting in Time*, art should be a means to elucidate "what man lives for, what is the meaning of his existence. To explain to people the reason for their appearance on this planet; or if not to explain, at least to pose the question" (Tarkovsky, 1989: 36). Accordingly, the sketches and reflections mapped throughout this thesis are addressed to the phenomenon that provides the photographer with the original touchstone for the abiding question of what it means to be embodied in the world.

Figure 1: (Schutmaat, c. 2011-2012).

Landscape pictures matter because they open paths through the ambiguities and dilemmas of human existence, bringing us closer to an unclouded view of one's place amidst an existence which cannot be fully explained or resolved. By opening a space for the photographer to attend to the view of the world with care, empathy and solicitude, the camera affords a way of being with the phenomenon ahead which is neither fully endogenous nor exogenous to the photographer's look.

What then is a landscape? An overflowing field of multivalencies wherein the meaning of the embodied phenomenon plays out in the open amidst the original setting of its freedom. If photographs reveal the trace of a perception which is real and true, it is because the photographic negative provides a vehicle to interpret the signs of the cycloramic phenomenon, the primordial encounter of which can never be deciphered anywhere else other than the paths whereon the embodied experience of truth, meaning and understanding originally comes into view.

One

Being a Landscape

In Nan Shepherd's post-war account of the Cairngorms, *The Living Mountain,* the Scottish writer and poet describes a landscape as a place where man "is not made negligible, but paramount. Flesh is not annihilated but fulfilled. One is not bodiless, but essential body" (Shepherd, 2011: 107). To begin with, why are there landscapes? Because there exists a being who, in addition to the embodied perception his existence affords the dimension that originally exposes his life to himself, makes audible the question that no other feature throughout the Earth is able to enunciate. The very articulation of such a question signifies that a landscape is not simply a "cultural image, a pictorial way of representing, structuring or symbolising surroundings," but a basic existential possibility of the photographer who pulls into focus the temporal self-revelation of the world wherein he finds himself embodied (Cosgrove & Daniels, 1988: 1).

As the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty acknowledged in his unfinished manuscript of *The Visible and the Invisible*, and to whom I owe the genesis of the following reflections, the mortal incarnation of

man is not divorced from the spectacle which sets out the transcendental disclosure of his perceptual field (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 134).

It is the human body that, rather than being an impediment to be overcome by technological means, provides the photographer with a primordial access to the appearance of the dimension which holds his gaze open amidst the phenomenon wherefrom all his questions spring.

The view before me not only affords the setting where my life bleeds into the others. The place wherein I discover myself as seeing contains the paths by which I too originally become accessible to myself. Embodied amidst a landscape that surrounds me as the cyclorama of my life, the world reveals the perception wherefrom I come into the meaning of my own. "I am all that I see," proclaimed Merleau-Ponty, "not despite my body and historical situation, but, on the contrary, by being this body and this situation, and through them, all the rest" (Merleau-Ponty, 2002: 525). As such, the visible world is neither fully exterior nor interior to my look, but instead, immanent throughout an unfolding perception which is always opening and closing as the features I see. The photographer whose look opens onto the landscape is thus continually undergoing a peculiar kind of "metamorphosis" in relation to the appearance that migrates from one view to another as the needle of his attention rotates from north to south, and then back again (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 148).

The embodiment of oneself in the landscape is therefore equal to the self-revelation of a world that gives itself, for "my body sees only because it is a part of the visible in which it opens forth" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 153, 154). It is impossible to reflect on the meaning of what I see without initiating an elucidation concerning the meaning of one's self. After all, "man is not the end of the body," for "things are the prolongation of my body and my body is the prolongation of the world" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 265). Rooted in the "language before language, which is perception," the landscape photograph thus defines an existential-ontological practice that welcomes the arrival of the space man could not be himself without (Merleau-Ponty, 2003: 219). So long as it remains my flesh that lets my look appear as the contours which encircle my body as the landscape I photograph, my pictures show a "Being of which my vision is a part" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 123). They signify an intimate disclosure which

involves the organs by which the view in the distance meaningfully unveils itself. The photographer thus never lacks the environment from which he frames the views he is recognised for.

As Merleau-Ponty described, human embodiment abides as a "chiasm" which endures as the intertwining exchange between "the phenomenal body and the "objective" body, between the perceiving and the perceived" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 215). If the terrain which appears throughout the dimension wherein man has his life remains an original character of being human, the thinking of the photographer must too be a feature of the topographies he converts into his images. As such, we cannot expect to arrive at the meaning of the landscapes we photograph from any other place of departure but the photographer who already dwells amidst the horizon which discloses its view amidst the perspective of one's self.

As the German philosopher Edmund Husserl recognised beforehand, the "psychophysical" body as I live it (*Leib*)—as I most intimately feel it from within myself—remains what Merleau-Ponty later described as the "general medium for having a world" (Husserl, 1983: 82) (Merleau-Ponty, 2002b: 169). Thus, my living body is thoroughly indivisible from the landscapes and spaces I set my tripod upon. It too is given to me as an aspect of the cycloramic phenomenon which, although it can be followed in the direction of every compass point, comes into sight most immediately ahead of my eyes.

It is therefore with the body that man dwells amidst the overflowing omnipresence of the manifold that appears wherever I may turn my head, the meaning of which I am continually encountering anew with every glance. My photographs of a decisively Northern European expanse pursue the meaning of the enduring stillness that lingers amidst the perspective of landscapes that are fated to pass away. They are hymns to the horizon that withstands and prevails throughout man's corporeal perception of the temporal. After all, it is in the clear view of a world that does not dim, and only ever here, that one comes to grasp the ambiguities of the significance of one's own life and death.

So long as I have the eyes with which to see the world, the view ahead never disappears. The revelation that dances back and forth before me reveals a mortal perception which nevertheless remains synonymous with

the cycloramic phenomenon that envelops me at any given moment—the appearance of which never fades but instead returns to me anew with every passing second. Thus, to be at home in oneself means to dwell amidst the view which obscures its vanishing without a trace amidst the same instant as its unveiling. When all is considered, the appearances which fall away before my eyes conceal themselves amidst the sight of a world that is always coming to be. The light that waxes and wanes amidst my embodied view of the world belongs with the implicit horizon which, as the German philosopher Martin Heidegger says in *On Time and Being*, "remains constant in its passing away without being something temporal" (Heidegger, 1972: 3).

Whilst it remains the body destined to perish which grants the photographer an original access to the landscape as it is in itself, the human being cannot simply be reduced to the flesh that feels its way through the world. For only amidst the view of the horizon which prevails does man encounter himself. After all, it remains my body which affords the space whose view spills through my flesh as a summer thunderstorm overflows a mountain ravine. To make landscape pictures is therefore to abide, through and through, amidst the view that continually outruns the resolve of the photographer. Still, whilst I am ensouled amidst the visible body of the temporal phenomenon which escapes my perception in all directions, it is neither here nor there whether such a world is either infinite or finite, for a landscape implicates the embodied view of a world which is always *there* ahead of me, but whose recurring view is never twice the same.

In man's first-hand pre-conceptual experience of the land to which his questioning belongs, the seeing of the photographer remains identical with the landscape as it is encountered according to the aesthetic values—either explicit or implicit—that such an artist appropriates to interpret the meaning of his environment. As Merleau-Ponty notes, "the perception of classical painters already depended upon their culture, and our culture can still give form to our perception of the visible" (Merleau-Ponty, 1977: 48). The same is true for the photographer making images today. The landscape that appears always includes within its view the disposition of the human being who turns towards it with its question, not simply

because it belongs to the phenomenon that inspires the thoughts of such, but because the landscape reveals a view of the "miracle" wherein human "significance and existence are one" (Merleau-Ponty, 2002b: 377).

The Earth I photograph is not reducible to the soil upon which I set my tripod, nor a perspective isolated within the proscenium of my cranium. The Earth alludes to the phenomenon of the cycloramic horizon that appears for as long as my body is surrounded by it. Thus, by the word *horizon* I do not only mean the farthest limit of the landscape which is visible, nor the distinction between the land and the sky, but the primordial space which grants the intimacy of my perception its original place and setting.

The landscapes my photographs recite are not the models of the cartographer or the surveys of the geologist, but rather, the perception of an Earth whose view cannot be forecast in advance of its arrival. Like Ishmael says in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, the phenomenon my work expresses "is not down on any map; true places never are" (Melville, 1851: 61). Instead, the topographies my pictures reference implicate the bodily experience of a landscape whose original meaning cannot be mathematised or symbolised in geometric terms.

With no privileged centre or foundation, the landscape I see remains the expression of a temporal perception which presents its sensorial form amidst a manifold of points across an unbroken range of depths. Thus, the photographer who perceives the landscape neither looks at a planet that is round, nor an Earth which is flat, but apprehends the perception of the landscape from the level of the ground according to the figure of the human sensorium which affords the world the visibility of its contours.

It is thus with his eyes horizontal and with his feet on the soil that the landscape photographer appropriates himself with the phenomenal abundance from which he cultivates the meaning of his images. Thus, surrounded by the visual presence of the cyclorama wherein the photographer stands with his body, there is no interruption between the Earth which is thought, the Earth which is seen and the Earth which is photographed. It is because he already dwells amidst the country of the visible that the photographer makes pictures of the phenomenon which surrounds him.

Giving itself most essentially as the place where I encounter the original significance of my life, the meaning of the Earth nevertheless remains somewhat ambiguous. It is the plenitude "which cannot be forced, that which is effortless and untiring," says Heidegger (Heidegger, 2002: 24). Accordingly, its view is not reducible to a representation or a concept but remains the abiding field of the phenomenon in the Heideggerian sense of the term: "'phenomenon' signifies that which shows itself, the manifest" (Heidegger, 1978: 51). In other words, the Earth remains the tacit horizon of the appearance which comes forth from itself as itself according to the mode by which it is experienced by the living body.

In a 1942 lecture on the river poetry of Friedrich Hölderlin, Heidegger suggests that it is the Earth, in this case the banks of the Ister—the Ancient Greek name for the Danube—which "determines the dwelling place of human beings" (Heidegger, 1996: 20). In the specific landscape of Hölderlin, it is the river which represents "the locality that pervades the abode of human beings upon the Earth, determines them to where they belong and where they are homely" (Heidegger, 1996: 21). Thus, the Earth prepares "those realms that human beings transform with all their skilfulness, use and make their own, so that they may find their own vicinity through such realms" (Heidegger, 1996: 73). Thus, making landscape pictures affords a way to reconcile the meaning of the "homely" amidst the openness of the "essentially undisclosable" (Heidegger, 2002: 25).

Whilst it is by looking that the photographer signifies the nature of the Earth he photographs, it remains impossible to glance the appearance of such as a whole. For the most part, the Earth that appears amidst the place where I find my body remains obscured by the landscape that is already visible to the eye. Thus, man can only ever glimpse a fragment of the Earth, for what I see is always infinitely deeper than what appears. Every picture I make therefore expresses a meaning of a world which can neither be condensed nor exhausted by a single photograph.

The photographer is not fastened to the Earth as if he was its infant, but the very footing around which every significant possibility throughout its landscape comes to mean something by its revelation. It is neither that the photographer is contained by the landscape he photographs, but

rather, that the announcement of the phenomenon such an artist works from must already be an intrinsic possibility of being human.

As Merleau-Ponty points out, man does not spectate the world purely from his body for the same reason the photographer is neither superimposed onto the appearance he photographs (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 138). "Things pass into us as well as we into the things" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 123).

I therefore no more stand in the landscape than the landscape appears amidst the place where I stand. After all, if I photograph the phenomenon which surrounds me, it is only on account of the eyes which are already inscribed within the same spectacle the photographer raises his camera towards. The possibility of being human thus not only occurs within the body which is most intimately one's own but within a transcendent sphere of appearances that man does not command but are neither external to the nature of his experience.

The work of the photographer is determined by the landscapes that he photographs. In my openness towards the movements of a landscape that abides without appearing twice the same, the photograph is my response to the question of an appearance that emerges from a place beyond the whims of the imagination. Antithetical to the comments of Liz Wells in *Land Matters* regarding the "ego-centrality" of the landscape picture, my photographs do not confirm the "unique subjectivity" of a Cartesian observer that forces its ideas against a world from which it remains distant and detached (Wells, 2011: 5).

My photographs are not the assimilation of a landscape that resists my thoughts and actions, for my gestures towards the world are inseparable from the perception of the landscape whose distant view is meanwhile as intimate as I am to myself. As Merleau-Ponty says, "the visible world and the world of my motor projects are both total parts" of an unbroken Being that cradles my vision of the world (Merleau-Ponty, 2007: 354). Therefore, not only is my embodiment never a grain apart from the phenomenon I photograph, I am neither the source of the landscapes that come into sight. Whilst the view of the world is always the view of oneself, such a perception could never reveal its meaning without the landscapes which make ready for the photographer the polymorphic abundance of his visual field.

As Merleau-Ponty outlined in his essay *Eye and Mind*, seeing expresses its meaning most readily in the movements of the body. The further my legs wander, the more I discover that the world begins everywhere I open my eyes. "Everything I see is in principle within my reach, at least within the reach of my sight" (Merleau-Ponty, 2007: 354). Insofar as I photograph the world as it is given to ocular vision, my images reveal a dimension that is transposable with bodily perception. Thus, the photographer does not first apprehend the world he photographs through the viewfinder, but with the entirety of his organs.

It is by standing back from the camera that I originally participate in the world I photograph. I have therefore never felt that the camera cleaves a distance between the photographer and the landscape. Instead, the camera affords me with an experience that compels the photographer to listen earnestly with care and interest to the role his corporeal existence plays in the presence which unfolds its appearance as the immediate view of one's life.

Moreover, landscape photography, as an ontologically orientated practise, is by no means restricted to the negative. By granting the photographer a way of being at home in the world, the medium exists as a touchstone for the inexhaustible yet ambiguous meaning of life amidst the place where the human being comes to be. It is thus by focusing on infinity that the photographer is drawn into an intimate encounter with one's self. Furthermore, when one uses the camera to sound the depths of the world, it brings the photographer closer to what is being articulated by the phenomenon which our words can only point to. To thus attend to the silence that is always staring man in the face, this is what the creation of the landscape picture affords.

It is instead when the camera circumscribes the immediacy of our embodied perception that its machinery estranges us from the poetic nuances of the cyclorama wherein man becomes visible to himself. In other words, it is when we let our devices obscure our view of the phenomenon ahead that they alienate us from what Heidegger articulated in his thinking as the "question of Being" (Heidegger, 1962).

So long as the creation of the photograph demands the photographer to stay with the silence that lingers throughout what we see, the landscape

picture provides a way to deepen one's contact with the poetics of the phenomenon which lays itself out in the open. For the most part, the photographic medium is no more a concern for the fixed image than it is a regard for the primordial experience wherefrom such a picture originates. As the French philosopher Gabriel Marcel notes, "the true artist […] is anything but a superficial spectator and nothing if not a deep participant" in the meaningful appearance of the enigma which inspires him to contemplation (Marcel, 1950: 123). Thus, the landscape which sublimates my seeing into the visible features of the world is never experienced beyond the life of oneself. The perception of the terrain which pronounces its contours across a range of distances and durations discloses a world as it is revealed by the living, breathing presence of my body.

Inasmuch as the photographer wanders in relation to the disclosure of the world he neither invents nor commands, the landscape image provides an indication that man is only his own because he is never completely alone with himself, insofar as his singularity involves the indivisible reconciliation "between the For Oneself and the For Others, between individuality and generality" (Merleau-Ponty, 2002b: 525). The landscape image elucidates the implicit significance of the view which holds open man's experience of the world, and which overflows the perception of the photographer at any given moment as the unspoken realm of appearances and meanings, and without which our photographs could not be made.

The landscape photograph provides a means to decipher the unexpectedness of the Nature which abides throughout man's perception of such. If Nature is indeed poetic it is because it is *there*, dancing without artifice, regardless of man's wants and desires. In his *Course Notes from the College dé France*, Merleau-Ponty describes Nature as "an enigmatic object, an object that is not really an object at all; it is not really set out in front of us… facing us, but rather, that which carries us" (Merleau-Ponty, 2003: 4). Moreover, as the Finnish phenomenologist Juha Varto carefully observes, "man's connection with the Earth and Nature is most apparent in the flesh" (Varto, 2012: 111).

Phenomenologically speaking, Nature is the view "with a meaning, without this meaning being posited by thought" (Merleau-Ponty, 2003: 5). To put it another way, Nature is the affordance of the sensorial world without such a perception having been originally put there by the perceiver, and whose perception is meanwhile inseparable from the phenomenon which is being perceived. Thus, not even the body with which the photographer steers his view of the world belongs to himself alone. Whilst the light that falls through the passing clouds is not of my doing, it nevertheless belongs to the horizon wherefrom and wherein my embodied perception dwells. The flesh wherefrom I look outwards onto the world exists too as a gesture of the mystery by which its flesh abides. In the very embodiment of one's self the photographer glimpses something of the same enigma as the appearance that lays its view open before his eyes.

The living presence of my body is correspondent with the phenomenon of the world ahead. Belonging to an experience of a world as near as it is far, the tissue of my body is too a feature of the place such a body reveals. This is, of course, what Merleau-Ponty meant when he illustrated the human individual as a being caught amidst the "flesh of the world" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 248). From the visual perspective of the flesh which opens outwards onto the landscape, the eye which affords the visible world its depth and transparency is blinded from itself amidst the view which gives such an organ its meaning. Unable to turn to see itself, the eye catches sight of itself only in proximity to the phenomenon before it. This is also to say I discover myself embodied amidst the distance of the dimension that surrounds me in all directions as a "system of perspectives" that open back into it, and which, whilst originally "not spread out by me," nevertheless belongs to the same possibility of Being (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 84). In other words, the dynamic cyclorama which clothes me with the significance of seeing and thinking is never a moment apart from the temporal perception it affords the human sensorium.

The flesh by which any landscape is meaningfully revealed, and which is most intimate as mine, remains only the case for as long as it sustains my name amidst the phenomenon that incites the considerations and gesticulations of the photographer. As Merleau-Ponty himself hints in

his dismissal of the Cartesian *cogito*, there is something inexplicable and uncanny even within the carnal experience of what is most authentically man's own, "It is not I who makes myself think any more than it is I who makes my heart beat" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 221).

What then is this enigmatic Nature that makes seeing and thinking possible? What is it that holds open our view of the world? Where is the origin of the light which illuminates the waypoints for such questions to find their path back to us with their insights and revelations? "Nobody knows better than we do how this miracle is worked," concedes Merleau-Ponty in the preface to *Phenomenology of Perception* (Merleau-Ponty, 2002: XXIII).

Yielding to the view of a landscape brings us closer to the enigma of the Being which is unearthed by it. Wandering amidst the cyclorama whose boundaries and frontiers remain occluded but for the foreground where its horizon comes into sight, the landscape photographer is an artist who breathes from the same phenomenon his work brings together without ever discovering the source of its luminance. The fells, fjords and seas which establish the possibilities of the visual field wherefrom I individuate my pictures, whilst not originally of my deciding, remind me that I am neither the author of the eyes that make present the view of the phenomenon from which I expose my negatives. As such, the landscapes I poeticise throughout my photographs allude to the mystery which loses its meaning as soon as I make any effort to occlude its view with subjective representations and rationales.

It is not the photographer who renders the world visible. The light that endures amidst the embodied view of what is always passing away is "something other: it is subtle, it penetrates everywhere, explores the field promoted by our gaze and prepares it to be read." Most poignantly perhaps, as Merleau-Ponty reminds us, I perceive the landscape thanks to the light which lacks the organs to see the world itself (Merleau-Ponty, 2003: 42, 43). The body is unearthed to itself in relation to the alterity of the light which ignites its look with its meaning. It is this uncanniness of the luminance from which I expose my photographs that elevates my look into a mode of gentle participation which preserves the light that falls across the world amidst the original environment of its independence.

Whilst the sun that sets aflame my perception of the landscape is not of my creation, neither is my body. Thus, when we open earnestly to the appearance of the world as it is originally given to us, the closer we direct ourselves towards an encounter with the meaning of the otherness intimate to the innermost embodiment of oneself.

"Light never first creates openness. Rather, light presupposes openness," remarks Heidegger in his essay *The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking* (Heidegger, 1972: 65). "Brightness in its turn rests upon something open, something free which might illuminate it here and there, now and then" (Heidegger, 1972: 64). It is this uncertain openness of the "presencing of presence itself" that Heidegger appropriates to the Pre-Socratic notion of *aletheia* (ἀλήθεια) (Heidegger, 1972: 68). Whilst Plato and Aristotle later represented the meaning of *aletheia* as the "correctness of assertions," Heidegger distances himself from this understanding of truth as *veritas*, returning instead to the earlier thought of Parmenides to argue that before any claim concerning the nature of the world can even be articulated, man must already stand amidst the experience of the primordial disclosure of "the open" (Caputo, 1988: 522) (Heidegger, 1972: 67). As Heidegger suggests, truth cannot be found beyond our life, for it "can only be what it is in the element of the opening" (Heidegger, 1972: 69). According to the American philosopher John D. Caputo, Heidegger therefore interprets *aletheia* as the implicit "staging" that provides and sustains the truthfulness of the human experience (Caputo, 1988: 520).

"Thinking and Being belong together in the Same," claimed Parmenides (Heidegger, 1969: 27). Whilst never visible, *aletheia* grants a way of grasping the withstanding nature of the "element in which Being and thinking and their belonging together exist" (Heidegger, 1972: 69). Because it is nothing which is temporally manifest, *aletheia* alludes to the human experience of the concealed horizon—"the clearing," says Heidegger—wherein the photographer's palpable encounter with the landscape takes place and unfolds in unforeseen ways without certitude (Heidegger, 1972: 65). By directing us towards what is there in front of us, *aletheia* is the opening that appears amidst the land of "thinking and saying" (Heidegger, 1972: 71).

Whilst the meaning of *aletheia* remains obscure and opaque, the place where I stand reveals its view in the openness and stillness of such. Nevertheless, whatever holds open my bodily perception of the world remains unseen. Even our representations cannot reach it without turning it into something which it is not. *Aletheia* therefore alludes to the apprehension of the undisclosed pre-conceptual process of disclosure whereby the phenomenal condition of the Earth appears meaningfully amidst the dimension of its freedom (Caputo, 1988: 520). *Aletheia* affords a way to glimpse the "opening of presence" which circumscribes its origin amidst the embodied view of its unveiling (Heidegger, 1972: 71). As Heidegger himself inscribed in *Being and Time*, "that which does the announcing and is brought forth does, of course, show itself, and in such a way that, as an emanation of what it announces, it keeps this very thing constantly veiled in itself" (Heidegger, 1978: 53).

In Heideggerian terminology, the landscape I photograph thus comes to be amidst the primordial opening where *aletheia*—as the unconcealment of Being—endures. Furthermore, the otherness of the light which graces the world is inseparable from the primordial opening to whom the landscape photographer must relate himself. To dwell amidst the unfoldment of *aletheia* is thus to withhold oneself without withdrawing from the places which decide their view anew during every glance. As a photographer at work in the landscape, it means to answer to the echoes of the fells and fjords which draw me from myself without infringing upon or colonising their contours as mine alone. To put it another way, it means to observe the world amidst the element of its freedom wherefrom all appearances shine forth.

To interrogate my perception is inversely to be questioned by the landscape which declares its view without the volition of oneself. The world I perceive is itself like an eye which is always open, for I do not gaze at the world that upholds the essential meaning of my look anymore so than it stares at me. In his essay *Eye and Mind* Merleau-Ponty touches on this sentiment by citing the French painter André Marchand: "In a forest, I have felt many times over that it was not I who looked at the forest. Some days I felt that the trees were looking at me" (Merleau-Ponty, 2002: 358). Similarly speaking, my photographs are demanded by

an environment that *has* me from the very first day, for the "great mute land" that I work from asserts itself without contrivance in unexpected ways as an essential dimension of the human experience (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 126). When I photograph the Earth, I do not make an attempt to mould its contours into the valleys of my thoughts. Rather, the places that provide me with the content of my pictures necessitate my answer to the poetic nuances of an incandescent openness of which the essence of human life remains indistinguishable.

As the German Romantic painter Caspar David Friedrich remarks, "I have to surrender myself to what encircles me, I have to merge with my clouds and rocks in order to be what I am" (Schonle, 2000: 108). However, contrary to the solitary figure seen from behind (*Rückenfigur*) in Friedrich's 1818 painting *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog*, the landscape photographer is not an autonomous consciousness in awe of the supernatural grandeur of the sublime (Fig. 2). As Joseph Koerner comments on Friedrich's use of the *Rückenfigur*, "in the way the landscape appears to emanate from his heart, [the figure] stands as the source for everything we see" (Koerner, 2009: 89). Meanwhile, as Friedrich himself declared, the Romantic subject "should not paint merely what he sees in front of him, but also what he sees within himself" (Koerner, 2009: 90).

On the opposite hand, like Merleau-Ponty says, it is by offering his flesh to the landscape as it appears that the photographer converts the phenomenon he did not create into the meaning of his pictures (Merleau-Ponty, 2002: 353). Moreover, I make no effort to intervene or reclaim the Earth as land artists such as Richard Long or Michael Heizer do, but instead, leave the landscape in the same way as I encounter it—with attention and concern for a world which is already the case. Accordingly, the photographer who announces the appearance of the Earth is neither the creator nor the commander of the landscapes his images speak of. Such an artist is not the origin of the view he expresses, but the herald of its advent, which is as much a view as its departure.

Further contrary to the aesthetic dispositions of Romanticism, my works are not "interiorised" self-portraits, but glimpses of the cycloramic openness that lays out the visual perception of the photographer at any given moment (Koerner, 2009: 89). So long as I remain embodied amidst

the greater body of the appearance which fulfils my view, my being is not circumscribed by the flesh that bleeds red when pierced. As the Finnish photographer Jorma Puranen remarks, the landscape photograph is a bodily gesture of intimacy that involves "letting one's eyes linger in the distance, in the wind and the rain, among the sounds of the animals" (Puranen, 1999: 11).

It is in accordance with the phenomenon ahead that I make my pictures. For the most part, when I photograph a landscape, the landscape photographs with me. In contrast to the subjective disposition of a Romantic painter such as Friedrich, my works remain sober and unidealised views that have their origin amidst the landscape of their source. By allowing the cyclorama which surrounds me to appear during a genuine window of vision, I strive to poeticise my environment in a way that exposes my perception according to the place where the Earth is encountered as itself. In relating the landscape back to myself in a mode that preserves the freedom of its appearance, my pictures are not made by re-imagining one's view of the world from the refuge of the artist's studio. Rather, they are photographed by yielding oneself towards the landscape at the moment of its unveiling concordant with the meditative manner of *Gelassenheit* that Heidegger summarises in his *Memorial Address* as a "releasement toward things and openness to the mystery" (Heidegger, 1966: 55).

Confined by the question of the world I see and not another one, I do not abandon the poetics of my lived experience for the realm of an imagined or transcendent reality. The world to come is already underway, encountered *here* by the photographer in the midst of its appearing. That this world reveals itself is astonishing enough. If such an encounter is indeed incalculable, it is because it is visible without any clear beginning or end other than the place where it comes into view. Whilst the landscape photographer similarly thinks against the question of an embodied perception whose origin he cannot fathom, he does not fantasise a conception of the sublime but opens himself to the self-revelation of the visible at the moment it presences itself. My images are therefore neither idealisations nor exaggerations, but faithful expressions of the world as it touches me during a genuine window of vision. In contrast to so many of the paintings that characterise the aesthetics of

Figure 2: (Friedrich, 1818).

the Romantic movement, my pictures neither accentuate nor glorify the features my bodily perception already affords.

Although many of my compositions share similarities with the visual motifs and themes associated with 18th and 19th century Romanticism, my scenes are nevertheless a collection of views that speak from their own time. However, in a similar fashion to the Romantic disposition, my pictures poeticise the enigma of which the human being is a part, albeit without being the centre. Nevertheless, unlike the traditional Romantic sentiment of the sublime, my existential views are not a response to emotions of awe or terror, but a poetic reflection on the mystery of the phenomenon the photographer is always losing himself amidst. After all, so long as the landscape photographer dwells upon the Earth, he is an artist whom "each morning finds in the shape of things the same questioning and the same call he never stops responding to" (Merleau-Ponty, 1977: 58).

It is thus out of doors amidst the landscapes that plan their own course that the photographer determines the perspectives by which he will reveal his life to the others with whom he shares the Earth. Unlike the Romantic painter who responds to the call of Being from the sanctuary of his workshop, the camera affords an artist such as the photographer with an opportunity to respond to the landscape as it affects him during a genuine window of vision. Moreover, the light the photographer receives from all directions cannot be mixed beforehand as the painter blends his pigments. Whilst photographs remain the bodily "intertwining of vision and movement" just as paintings do, the light the photographer works from prepares itself without the technical method of the artist (Merleau-Ponty, 2007: 353).

The landscapes I photograph not only afford the style, mood and visual motifs of my works but express the geographical region wherein I am at home. Having grown up amidst the heather moors of the Scottish Highlands before moving to the coniferous swamps of Finland, my views of a particularly subarctic ambience reveal topographies which are lived in by the photographer. They disclose the solace of a boreal setting the Scottish poet Norman MacCaig recounts in his mountain poems from the

Northwest Highlands as a space wherein man is "alone but not lonely" (MacCaig, 2018: 170).

Much of my work is made by waiting alone with the topographies that fulfil my look, amidst the gentle solitude of faraway horizons, in response to the contours of a boreal wilderness. As Peter Davidson illustrates in *The Idea of North*, a bearing northwards signifies "a willingness to encounter the intractable elements of climate, topography and humanity" (Davidson, 2005: 9). My views of a northern milieu therefore expose the profiles of fells and fjords which migrate "out of reach, receding towards the polar night, which is equally the midnight dawn in the summer sky" (Davidson, 2005: 8).

In the quietude of the northern air my sight clears. Out in the open amidst fells and fjords, there is no longer anywhere to hide from oneself. Within the unclouded appearance of the distant and remote I am brought nearer to the intimate view of the mute perception that cannot be taken away from me for as long as I live. Raising myself beyond words, I remember again what it means to listen to what *is*, which is not only the silence of the visible appearance before me, but just as the American novelist Jack Kerouac described in his novel *The Dharma Bums*, the sound of my own blood as it "roars" through my ears (Kerouac, 1976: 157).

Whilst my photographs are not the metaphysically inspired fantasies of the sublime that motivated the aesthetic tendencies of Friedrich and his contemporaries, neither are they the pale copies of what William Henry Fox Talbot termed in *The Pencil of Nature* as "Nature's Hand" (Fox Talbot, 1844). Although my northerly perspectives of a peculiarly Nordic ambience are similarly inspired by long and solitary wanderings under the shadows of fells and fjords, I do not recollect my vision of the Earth as an artist such as Friedrich did amidst the sheltered seclusion of his studio (Koerner, 2009).

My pictures are instead the onto-centric expression of Nature that takes root in the enduring presence of the open amidst a hyperborean climate that abides without artifice or resistance. The solemnity of my images is inscribed by being with the "dark holiness" of the north, *en plein air*, closer to the technique by which the Swedish painter Helmer Osslund affirmed his encounter with the northern Swedish wilderness

(MacCaig, 2018: 77). As Osslund himself is reported to have said, artistic expression "must first of all be based on the study of Nature and not be a pure creation of the imagination" (Gapp, 2019: 96) (Fig. 3).

Being open to the appearance I photograph does not mean I must simply conform myself to the features that circumscribe my field of vision. Neither does it suggest a passive uncoupling between the seer and what is seen. On the contrary, being open affords a watchful engagement that demands a deeper reflection on the meaning of the signs the Earth delivers the photographer. To be with the landscape as it appears is therefore not to surrender to the view which stares back at me, nor to force oneself against it. Instead, to be with the landscape is to acknowledge one's perception amidst the original element of the freedom which is neither completely outside nor inside of oneself.

Therefore, whilst the landscape photograph presents us with a scene other than the primacy of vision, it implicates a phenomenon that is photographed precisely at the moment it is lived by the photographer. As such, my images reveal the view of an enigma that leaps forth anew with every glance I cast upon it, honest to the phenomenal condition by which I encounter the existence of such an environment with my body.

The primordial encounter with oneself is indistinguishable from the self-revelation of the world and all that arises in its view. Thus, the possibility of being human doubles as the phenomenon of the Earth whose appearance re-ignites in the morning sun. Whilst the landscapes I see could not manifest without the eye, if there was only darkness before him, the photographer would remain blind. Moreover, without the fells and fjords that prepare the living form of my visual field, my photogaphs would reference nothing.

Invisible to myself from within, I am fulfilled by the landscapes I see. It is in the same space where I cannot doubt my eyes to be that my environment appears. As Merleau-Ponty says, "my visual body includes a large gap at the level of the head" (Merleau-Ponty, 2002: 108). Therefore, so long as the photographer remains the shadow amidst the light which scatters itself without artifice across days and nights, the landscapes wherefrom my negatives originate appear as the positive view to a

latent image of thoughts and intentions that drift silently throughout the contours of what I see.

The view of the phenomenon ahead takes up the photographer into itself. I am thus bound to the landscape as a mirage that evaporates from view whenever I make any conscious attempt to objectify myself amidst the features of the appearance I presume must be visible to the others, at least in principle. When we pause to ask ourselves how we exist as the view ahead, we are inclined to vanish from it. Furthermore, whilst my photographs are created in reference to the original view of my flesh, my body is nowhere to be seen in them. In fact, the more I question how I exist amidst the picture, the more I lose sight of the image itself, not least the original perception of the world to which such a photograph refers.

If I photograph the landscape, it is because its presence is already circumvoluted amidst the embodied perception I crystallise throughout my images. Thus, the body never lacks the place that all the others must also see. If the landscape is therefore a dimension of myself, it is not because the world is endogenous to the one who looks, but that the seeing of the photographer is immanent amidst the phenomenon which asserts its view across a distance.

To be able to ask the question of myself is already to have been thrown into the circumvolution between the same and another. In this sense, the landscape I photograph is both myself and not myself. It abides as the same and not the same. Further to this paradox, it remains neither nor the space between. The phenomenon ahead is thus the contradiction of two unopposing truths that co-exist without one rendering the other false.

It is this elementary dialetheism that characterises my entire experience of the landscapes wherefrom and wherein I create my images. Furthermore, whilst seeing and thinking are inseparable from the phenomenon I traverse with the body, it is not possible for my flesh to merge with the appearance I touch without annihilating myself completely for, as Merleau-Ponty says, “then the vision would vanish at the moment of formation, by disappearance of the seer or of the visible” (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 131).

Still, landscapes belong to the same horizon which founds percieving and thinking insofar as they are fastened to one another by the hidden underside of the dimension which holds open man’s view of the visible.

Figure 3: (Osslund, n.d.).

If such places are significant for us it is because they reveal the space where seeing dwells. For the most part, it is because the contours of the land expose the question of human existence within the midst of its essential setting and milieu. If the landscape ahead is therefore myself it is because man and the Earth share a single horizon that the photographer cannot hope to glimpse anywhere else but in the midst of the inexhaustible manifold where the lived experience of being human originally comes into sight.

Insofar as I belong to the Being whose perception runs beyond the living body whereby and wherewith such a world is revealed, the landscape is and remains the view of one's self. Still, whilst the landscape belongs to the space identical with the possibility of being human, its topographical features and contours remain visibly distinct from those of the body. Furthermore, whilst I make my photographs with the body whereby fells and fjords are revealed, such corporeal gestures individuate my flesh from the light which affords the decisions I perform with my camera. It is instead when the photographer corresponds with the Earth "in its presence as it stands forth unconcealed" that the visible landscape becomes an assertion of oneself (Caputo, 1988: 525). Yielding my body to the world ahead, I let myself be touched by the phenomenon which gives itself. Accordingly, without opening oneself, such an appearance does not come into view.

The flesh with which I live the world and the cycloramic phenomenon that presents itself to the eyes therefore belong together to the unseen possibility by which everything in the world becomes manifest. Thus, without ever covering over one another, my look at the moment of vision *is* the landscape and the meanings which arise from it. My bodily perception exists at the same time as the view amidst which fells and fjords *are*. It is when I make myself present that the world becomes a world. Insofar as the presence I see is always contemporary with my life, it remains the essential circumvolution between my flesh and the space that escapes it which makes it possible for the landscape ahead to be a landscape. The landscape, according to the manner that I meaningfully encounter it at the moment it unearths itself, is not only the world as I witness it, but precisely the way such a reality *is*.

Thus, only by their original belonging-together are man and the landscape present to each other amidst an encounter which is always dialogical. Making pictures in close dialogue with the poetics of my environment exposes a view of an essential difference which constitutes an ambiguous process of assimilation that meanwhile preserves the world in the primordial element of its freedom. Such an attunement with the landscape remains a way of letting the other be another whilst appreciating the other as an essential dimension of one's self. In other words, I acclimatise myself with my environment without possessing it as my own, identifying my being not with predetermined definitions and ideas but with the view ahead whose signs revise themselves with every look.

Thus, destined by a "singular phenomenon in time and place, bound to place and, to the largest extent, to the individual whose experience is at stake," my photographs evince an ontological practice which involves not only the question of the phenomenon that stares back at the photographer but the answers such an artist searches for (Varto, 2012: 45). Insofar as my pictures remain the embodied view of the surrounding omnipresence wherefrom and wherein every encounter with the landscape takes place, only in a profound dialogue with an environment that is visceral and immediate can the signs and meanings I interpret from the appearance of the landscape be found.

Such a way of thinking about creating pictures does not necessarily entitle the authority of the photographer above that of the space into which the former looks. Nor to the contrary, for precisely the reason that the light which fulfils my images cannot be summoned in advance of its candescence. My photographs refer to the intimate gestures of the life I did not choose but which I must nevertheless negotiate if I am to interpret my situation amidst the language of its cultural and historical milieu.

Furthermore, only from the unclouded perception of a world that is already clear and transparent can man uncover a view of the enigma that meanwhile never leaves the shadows. In the vernacular of Merleau-Ponty, "the invisible is the secret counterpart to the visible, it appears only within it," nevertheless "one cannot see it there and every effort to see it there makes it disappear" (Merleau-Ponty: 1968: 215). The photographer then, much like the poet or the painter, must welcome

the fleeting daylight that beclouds its origin within the contours of the landscape it illuminates.

As Heidegger says,"the Nature which 'stirs and strives', which assails us and enthrals us as landscape, remains hidden" (Heidegger, 1978: 100). As the American philosopher Richard M. Capobianco comments, "the landscape is not yet Nature itself. Landscape, gathered around human beings and inclined toward them, indeed lets appear Nature in an initial gleaming" (Capobianco, 2014: 30). As such, the photographer can never truly know the Earth that exposes the perspectives he must decide, not least because he perceives the world his body reveals without ever being able to understand why. After all, it is with the body the photographer did not ask for that he poeticises the call of the appearance which gives itself without artifice. So long as my pictures are created in in accordance with such a mystery, what the landscape does, "not even the poet knows" (Heidegger, 1996: 20).

If photographing the world grants the photographer with a path to interpret man's place amidst the horizon that runs through the perceptual embodiment of oneself, what then is a photographer? An artist intimately circumvolved amidst the otherness of the light that ignites the country of the visible. Thus, amidst a horizon whose appearance is never twice the same, making landscape pictures presents a way of welcoming the vision of the world as if the photographer was discovering it on the first morning in all its strangeness and unfamiliarity.

As Merleau-Ponty suggests in *Signs*, "if this world is a poem, it is not because we see the meaning of it at first but on the strength of its chance occurrences and paradoxes" (Merleau-Ponty, 1977: 317). So long as I perceive the landscape most intimately amidst an embodied cyclorama that trails off into the distance in all directions, the meaning of both the photographer and the landscape can never be exhausted as things that exist in and of themselves. Together they belong to the temporo-spatial presence of an event with no clear beginning or stopping place which, whilst neither completely self nor other, opens itself along uncertain paths amidst the light whose source is never visible but for the place wherefrom and wherein I perceive it with my flesh.

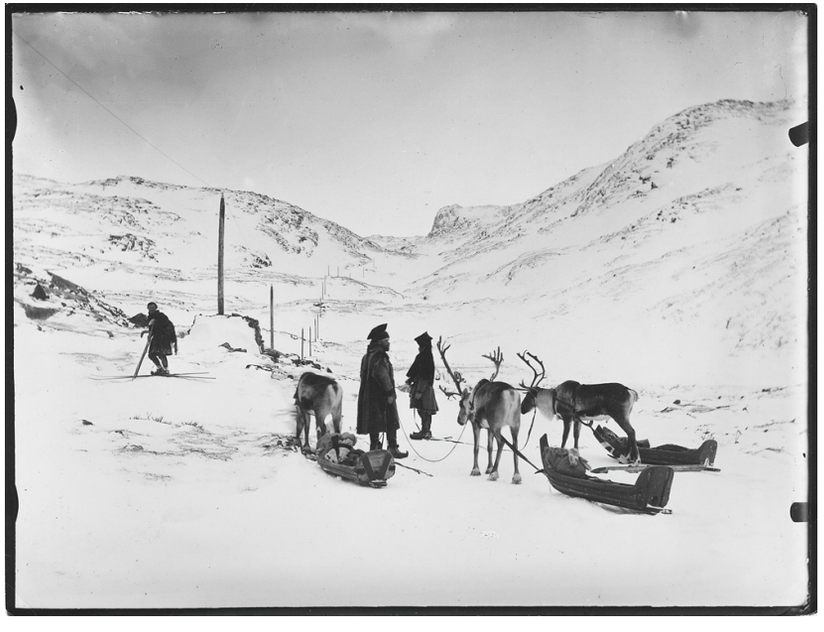

Figure 4: (Wessel, c. 1896-1905).

Two

A Path in the Snow

Photographers have long been journeying northwards to Sápmi to gather their images from its fells and fjords. In the late 19th century, the Norwegian socialist politician and activist Ellisif Wessel photographed the region of Sør-Varanger in eastern Finnmark, documenting poetic agrarian scenes of Sápmi on glass plate negatives during an age under increasing sway from the increasing industrialisation and cultural homogenisation of European modernity. By bringing together rural motifs of traditional Sámi life with miners, telegraph workers, churchgoers and land surveyors, Wessel's images from the north, photographed mostly between 1896 and 1905, negotiate an encounter with a nascent outpost amidst the fells and fjords of the Norwegian-Finnish-Russian frontier (Fjellestad, 2015) (Fig. 1).

Another early photographer of Sápmi was the pioneering Danish astrophysicist Sophus Tromholt, who initially ventured north to study the aurora borealis at his scientific observatory in Kautokeino during the First International Polar Year of 1882-1883. Whilst Tromholt failed to produce any successful photographs of the aurora borealis, he became

interested in the local indigenous culture and routinely visited Sámi encampments in the surrounding area to make portrait and landscape images (Tromholt, 1885: 527, 528) (Lein, 2018).

In his memoir *Under the Rays of the Aurora Borealis*, published in 1885, Tromholt writes in detail about his year in Sápmi, claiming that his images "form the sole complete collection of its kind in existence of life, people, and nature in the Land of the Lapps and Kvæns" (Tromholt 1885: IV). Though the polar night deprived Tromholt's eyes of "sunshine to draw by," he described summer in the north as a season when one may photograph at midnight as they would at midday (Tromholt, 1885: 249).

The Norwegian art historian Sigrid Lein argues that many of the traditional photographs of Sápmi typically reflect the cultural attitudes of European explorers, ethnographers and missionaries from the 16th century onwards, and Tromholt's images are no exception. However, whilst Tromholt conceived of the Sámi people as "true children of nature," saying as much in his words, Lein proposes that his pictures humanise his sitters as individuals rather than as ethnographic types (Tromholt, 1885: XI) (Lein, 2018) (Fig. 2).

In his work *Imaginary Homecoming*, the contemporary Finnish photographer Jorma Puranen seeks to contextualise the histories of the Sápmi landscape by re-appropriating the photographic archive of G. Roche, the French photographer consigned to Prince Roland Bonaparte's 1884 ethnographic expedition to Sápmi. After re-photographing the negatives of G. Roche before printing them onto perspex, Puranen returned to various townships across Sápmi between 1991 and 1997 to photograph them once again amidst the horizon of their source, announcing a dialogue between the past and the present. Although my photographs of Sápmi also involve "letting one's eyes linger in the distance, in the wind and the rain, among the sounds of the animals" as Puranen so beautifully describes the method of own process, I am not 'repatriating' archive photographs to the cultural milieu of their origin in the manner that he does (Puranen, 1999: 11) (Fig. 3).

Moreover, rather than intervening in the landscape as Puranen's works do, I photograph Sápmi according to the mode by which its appearance discloses itself in relation to the meaning of my embodied perception.

Figure 5: (Tromholt, c. 1882-1883).

Figure 6: (Puranen, 1991).

Thus, my images are onto-centric, made in relation to the landscape as it presents itself during a window of vision that leaves no trace but for the photographs I expose from it. Nevertheless, my pictures of Sápmi are very similar to Puranen's by the way they are motivated by a similar encounter "between the past and the present; between two landscapes and historical moments, but also between two cultures" that dwell within the same horizon that holds itself open throughout the history of both (Puranen, 1999: 11).

My interest in photographing Sápmi began during an unusual encounter in the heart of the Cairngorms, a glaciated mountain plateau situated amidst the north-eastern Scottish Highlands, a place described by Nan Shepherd in *The Living Mountain* as "a mass of granite […] shattered and scooped by frost, glaciers and the strength of running water" into the shape of "blunt pyramids (Shepherd, 2011: 1, 19). Having spent many a season trekking and bothying amidst the view of a topography which only "grows with the knowing," the bens, glens, lochs and beallachs of the Cairngorms present a familiar and habitual view that I recognise as home (Shepherd, 2011: 108).

It was during a cold winter's night with my father in 2019 amidst the Glenmore Forest, sheltered from the Scottish weather in a bothy known as Utsi's Hut, that I first became acquainted with the meaning of Sápmi. Barely high enough for a human being to stand up in, Utsi's Hut is a spartan, austere refuge with a single sleeping platform but no stove; an unusual omission for the sub-arctic climate of the Cairngorms. Its shuttered windows hold no glass, therefore letting the wind flow freely through its chamber.

In *Perception of the Environment* the anthropologist Tim Ingold describes the character of buildings as clues that reveal the histories of human dwelling. Buildings not only provide a way of sheltering amidst a landscape, but expose the meanings of lived environments which "arise within the current of their involved activity, in the specific relational contexts of their practical engagement with their surroundings" (Ingold, 2000: 186). For Ingold, the house is an articulation of what it means to be in the world. As Martin Heidegger says, "we attain to dwelling, so it seems, only by means of building," for "to build is in itself already to

dwell" (Heidegger, 2001: 143, 144). It is therefore significant that Utsi's Hut was originally hammered together as a reindeer herding encampment. As I would subsequently learn, there would be no reindeer wandering the Cairngorms today if not for the individual who originally built it, a Sámi man named Mikel Utsi.

Mikel was born in 1907 in Karesuando—or Gáresavvon as it is known in the local language (Lorimer, 2000: 508). Situated on the border with Finland, it is the northernmost parish of Sweden. In his article, *The Reindeer-Breeding Methods of the Northern Lapps*, published in the anthropology journal *Man* in 1948, Mikel draws upon the memory of his transhumant childhood passing between the fells and fjords of the Arctic Circle. He describes how the Karesuando Sámi "migrated with their [reindeer] herds over the watershed to the Norwegian coast in the summer, and back again and down into the forests in the winter" (Utsi, 1948: 98).

During the annual spring migration over the Scandinavian mountains towards the summer pastures in coastal Norway, Mikel describes leaving behind "snow and often stormy weather, endured on long and taxing journeys, to drop into a different world, filled with the scent of green foliage and flowering trees" (Utsi, 1948: 98). The summer encampment at the "beautiful, narrow-necked peninsula" at Lyngseidet, which lasted for approximately five months, never lacked the voices of the foreign, "many of them English or American" (Utsi, 1948: 98). In September, the southward autumn migration through the mountains began and the township of Karesuando over 200km away was reached again by Christmas.

When Utsi was a teenager his family left Karesuando at the suggestion of the Swedish authorities due to increasing border restrictions (Lorimer, 2000: 508). After departing on "a long train of reindeer-drawn sleds," as Utsi recalls, the family travelled southwards for two months, "finally reaching a chain of lakes" in Jokkmokk municipality "from which deer, fish and transport to winter pastures, over a hundred miles south-east were easily accessible" (Utsi, 1948: 100).

In 1934, Mikel met the American-born Cambridge-based anthropologist Dr. Ethel Lindgren whilst she was conducting academic fieldwork in northern Sweden (Lorimer, 2000). During her time serving as a Liaison Officer at the Royal Institute of International Affairs during the Second

World War, Ethel encountered Sir Frederick Whyte's photographs of the Cairngorms and was "struck by the resemblance to certain mountains in the northernmost province of Sweden" (Lorimer, 2000: 508). The couple later married in 1948, and in 1952 they embarked on an ambitious plan to re-introduce reindeer to the Scottish Highlands where they had been extinct for centuries. Today, almost seven decades later, the descendants of Mikel's original herd still roam the slopes of the Cairngorm plateau and are now very much an intrinsic element of the massif's spirit and cultural identity.

Indeed, it is said that when Mikel arrived in the Cairngorms, he was immediately reminded of the birch-covered reindeer pastures of the Scandinavian mountains. Accordingly, the geographer Hayden Lorimer has described the founding purpose of Utsi's Hut as a "sanctuary and a gathering place" between herder and herd. In his article *Herding Memories of Humans and Animals*, Lorimer suggests the construction of Utsi's Hut was not purely practical in design but a way for Mikel to further deepen a sense of the homely amidst a landscape that whilst topographically familiar to the fells of northern Sweden belonged to a terrain which remained culturally distinct from his beginnings in Sápmi (Lorimer, 2000: 513).

Following my initial research, I came across an archive press image of Mikel, photographed at his Highland pasturage in 1959 for *The Daily Telegraph* (Fig. 4). Dressed in traditional British deer stalking attire aside three of his reindeer amidst the heather of the Scottish Cairngorms, it is clear by this image that Mikel did not abandon his northerly beginnings. What interested me in particular about this image was that he was not represented like other Sámi individuals that I had previously seen in the pictures of Wessel and Tromholt.

Unlike so many historical photographs of the Sámi, Mikel is not wearing a reindeer fur coat (*beaska*) nor is he photographed in the snow in front of a turf-roofed hut (*goahti*). As an image that situated him at home in the Scottish Highlands rather than the fells of Sápmi, the photograph represented an encounter between two cultures that invited many more questions about the place of Mikel's origins. With such considerations in mind, I made plans to journey to Karesuando on the Swedish-Finnish border from Helsinki where I had already been living for several years.

When I first visited the township of Karesuando in late February of 2020, the river dividing Sweden from Finland was covered with ice. At night, the aurora borealis meandered back and forth across pitch black skies. Winters in the north are long. It is not unusual to see ice on the lakes even in late May during a month when the nights no longer get dark—as I was surprised to witness during my first visit to Kilpisjärvi in 2018.

Upon my arrival in Karesuando, I was met by Nils Henrik Wasara, the nephew of Mikel, whom I had arranged to meet prior to my visit. Whilst Sámi by origin, old enough to have been born on the fells of the Scandinavian mountains during the annual reindeer migration, Nils is an official Swedish citizen. In my long conversations with Nils, fluent in the four regional languages including Northern Sámi, Swedish, Finnish and Norwegian, as well as English, it became clear that Sápmi is not only a home for Nils but a place of encounters and collisions with other ways of speaking, being with and negotiating a world whose meaning is ambiguous and multivalent.

It would be naive to simply equate Sápmi to the region that Fenno-Scandinavians and tourists commonly refer to as Lapland. Sápmi instead embodies a way of thinking about such a space according to the local culture and language of the indigenous Sámi population. "Sápmi is not a nation, but wherever our reindeer are. For as long as that is so Sápmi remains our land and our identity," as Nils expressed to me. When I then asked him in response if that implied there was a fragment of Sápmi in Scotland because of his uncle, his response was, "I suppose that's correct."

The cultural territory of Sápmi is indeed complex and indefinite, further complicated by international border treaties and histories of empire that we do not have the time to illustrate in fuller detail here. As a historical region, Sápmi is traditionally defined as an area fractured today by the northern frontiers of the modern nations of Sweden, Norway, Finland and Russia—kingdoms and states with colourful histories of their own, and which have undergone numerous territorial changes between their respective capitals since the 16th century.

During my week-long stay in Karesuando, Nils invited me to join him as he herded his reindeer on the Swedish shore of Kilpisjärvi. There had been much snowfall that winter and the reindeer were no longer

Figure 7: (Morris, 1959).

able to paw deep enough to reach the lichen buried under the snow. It was therefore the responsibility of Nils and his fellow herders to make sure his reindeer were adequately fed. Using snowmobiles, we left from the small border settlement of Keinovuopio in Sweden, travelling over 20 kilometres as we crossed back and forth numerous times between the frozen river separating the international frontier between Sweden and Finland. As we finally approached the winter pastures of Duoibal, overlooking Kilpisjärvi with distant views across the border towards the iconic Finnish mountain of Saana, it became almost impossible amidst the snowy plateau to distinguish where the land met the sky. After stopping on a fell named Ristinasvaara, there were not yet any reindeer to be seen. But as Nils began to call for them, a landscape which initially revealed itself as faraway boulders and birch trees began to gather in a new shape before wandering over to us.

As Nils articulated to me during our outings together on the fells, the Sámi community has always had to appropriate their needs to the seasonal demands of the reindeer. "According to our traditions, reindeer-breeding has always been the family's principle concerns," wrote Mikel (Utsi, 1948: 97). Whilst the Sámi traditionally depended on fish and other species of game, the reindeer is perhaps the most recognisable feature of Sápmi. Such a being is, of course, the primary reason why the Karesuando Sámi exist. The reindeer is more than just an animal, however. It illumines an entire way of communing with the Earth.

Historically speaking, the decisions of the Sámi people have been made before a landscape which decides itself. As Ingold explains in his article *On Reindeer and Man*, the nomadic Sámi herder is so closely intertwined with the behaviour of the reindeer that he recognises his own being within the wanderings of such an animal (Ingold, 1974: 523). The Sámi have not always been herding reindeer, however. Whilst the Sámi have been journeying the landscape of Sápmi for at least ten thousands years, they originally stalked the reindeer as hunter-gatherers rather than transhumant pastoralists. Before the domestication of reindeer began in the 16th century due to the increasing pressures of frontier settlement, the Sámi were reliant on hunting techniques and methods of deception to bring the reindeer within their reach (Ingold, 1974: 525).

Whilst the Karesuando Sámi have since been herding reindeer for centuries, such a pastoralist still has no other choice but to follow the reindeer whenever the seasonal migration begins. However, only the reindeer, which the Sámi have traditionally depended on for food and other materials, can decide the exact moment of departure. Historically, the Sámi year was not measured by the calculations of the Gregorian calendar but in a concrete and cultural relation to natural events such as the reindeer migration or the salmon spawn.

Ingold further explains that when the Sámi herders tailed their reindeer using dogs and with no other technology apart from skis, it was a natural process without haste. The arrival of technological modernity however, despite its apparent conveniences, has changed the meaning of herding from a gentle "symbiotic pastoralism" into a noisy "predatory pastoralism," not least since the introduction of both the snowmobile and the quad-bike which have transformed the social contract between man and reindeer into a negotiation of "pursuer and pursued" (Ingold, 1974: 537).

In his own writing, Mikel offers his own perspective of the issues facing the Sámi culture from the modern "herder's point of view," explaining how a problematic succession of difficult issues had arisen throughout the course of his own lifetime (Utsi, 1948). These included but were not limited to the fact that the Sámi, who had been free to wander Sápmi with their reindeer for centuries, now shared their homeland with farmers and landowners who knew nothing of such transhumant nomadism (Utsi, 1948: 100). Moreover, the arrival of heavy industry in the region since the late 19th century had further fragmented historic pasturelands and migration routes.

Indeed, Mikel's brother, the acclaimed poet Paulus Utsi, compared the Sámi way of life throughout his verse to fading ski-tracks in the snow (Utsi, 1980: 15). Describing himself as "a remnant of a people in the north," Paulus' work, which also includes numerous drawings and illustrations, is remarkable because it affords a vision of the Scandinavian mountains from the local indigenous perspective. Indeed, it seems to have been his belief that someone who did not understand the local Sámi language would never be able to fully recollect the Sámi way of seeing the

world. Nevertheless, Paulus' poems collected in *Giela Gielain*—originally written in his mother tongue before being translated into Swedish—are ecologically aware works that bemoan the advent of national institutions and modern industries which to this day continue to flatten, pollute and trample upon the meaning of Sápmi.

Paulus' poetry recurrently mourns a homeland logged, mined, harvested, dammed, fenced-in and hunted by settlers who come from elsewhere for purely economic reasons and do not care for the deep histories and oral traditions of the local Sámi culture. "Our gods were destroyed / Our drums were burned / Our language was rendered useless," he despairs in *Remnants of a People* (Utsi, 1980: 88). In his poem *Kiruna*, titled after the mining city of the same name where I spent a week in 2017 during my first journey to Sápmi, Paulus introduces a sorrowful lament for the industrialised iron ore landscape of Swedish Norrbotten. He grieves the mining operations at Kiruna as a "wasp nest" whose workers "do not remember the reindeer's paths" and contribute nothing of cultural value or significance to the meaning of the landscape of Sápmi (Utsi, 1980: 46). Instead, they scar its fells to seize only what they can yield from its soil in the hollow name of economic forecasts and meaningless commercial results.

Paulus' poetry envisions a way of seeing the world radically contrary to the contemporary hyper-technological disposition. Hindering the course of Nature, not only does Paulus feel that technological man has forgotten how to see the mountains and rivers of Sápmi for what they are in themselves, he neither has an interest in the local traditions and histories which enrich the meanings of such places. Most significantly, the industrialists at Kiruna have no memory of the ancient ways of the animals such as the reindeer or the salmon. Therefore, whilst bound by his affinity to a landscape he saw as his home, Paulus' ecological awareness regarding the industrial degradation of Sápmi demands us to re-consider our relation to the horizon which holds us as we are, no matter our cultural milieu or language.

Despite its obvious anguish, the poetry of Paulus Utsi likewise presents an idyllic image of a boreal landscape characterised by both a language and a way of being that is radically different to the cultural disposition

of the contemporary hyper-technological individual. In the poem *Where the Wind Is*, Paulus describes the moors over which the storms of the north wind blow as the same landscape which shelters him amidst the warmth of the homely (Utsi, 1980: 16). In another short poem titled *Evening* Paulus illustrates the landscape of the Scandinavian mountains as the setting where he brews evening coffee as he watches his reindeer graze on the hillside (Utsi, 1980: 23).

However, as Paulus' words suggest, we must be careful not to romanticise these pastoral views of the northern fells without acknowledging Sápmi as a landscape which the Sámi historian Veli-Pekka Lehtola has described as a place characterised by "asymmetric power relations, subjugation, and colonialism" (Lehtola, 2015: 2). As Lehtola explains in his essay *Sámi Histories, Colonialism, and Finland*, it is evident that the supplantation of the Sámi culture is "a result of a long intervention from the 16th to 18th century, caused by the competition between the kingdoms" of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia (Lehtola, 2015: 25).

While Lehtola suggests that the cultural repression of the Sámi was not typically the official policy of any one Nordic government, "the economic utilisation of northern resources proceeded hand in hand with [the] national interests" of industrial Fenno-Scandinavian nations who have re-appropriated and exploited the meaning of Sápmi at the expense of a landscape which has been the cultural home of the Sámi people for centuries (Lehtola, 2015: 26). Dispossessed by the advent of the modern nation state and technological modernity rather than the blood and soil mythologies of a violently racist ethnocentrism, according to what interpretation imperial narratives pervade Sámi discourse remains something for which Lehtola nevertheless concludes there will never be a consensus (Lehtola, 2015: 22).

Whilst completely discounting the colonial point of view may limit the sensitivity of our awareness concerning the collisions between local Sámi culture and the external influence of foreign values, Lehtola appreciates the invaluable and positive consequences of intercultural exchange. Whilst the ongoing acculturation of indigenous populations throughout the world threatens to annihilate ways of thinking about man's relation to the phenomenon which surrounds him, "the encounters of

two or many cultures," similar to that which we see in the story of Mikel, "create new kinds of phenomena" which offer the individual unforeseen and thoughtful ways to deepen the meaning of the horizon wherewith and whereby all human beings have their abode (Lehtola, 2015: 31).

Mikel's wife, Ethel, explored the theme of 'culture contact without conflict' in her own academic research, arguing that "the interchange of cultural traits is a very important background" for the meaningful "blending of cultures" (Lindgren, 1938: 621). Even before emigrating to Scotland, Mikel reflected on his own experiences of resettlement within Sweden during his teenage years, discussing how the Karesuando Sámi have moved "to many areas in Sweden, meeting with very different types of [Sámi] and other methods of keeping reindeer. Adjustment and learning have been mutual" (Utsi, 1948: 100). Furthermore, whilst the reindeer herding methods of the Karesuando Sámi evolved amidst a "homeland of interlocking frontiers" along the northern Swedish, Norwegian and Finnish borders over centuries, Mikel describes how such techniques "have spread far afield, southwards within Sweden, and across the Atlantic to the New World" (Utsi, 1948: 97).

Similarly, my photographs of Sápmi are made by engaging myself open-mindedly to to the view of what is not one's own. They embrace a willingness to understand other ways of being with the world whose reciprocal meanings play out in the open amidst the snow and the rain. For the most part, photography is a way of deciphering the possibilities of an appearance that breaks out everywhere. Thus, as interpretations of the phenomenon that touches me at the moment of its disclosure, my pictures of Sápmi circumscribe a definite response to a call which remains pertinent wherever I may find myself. Made by listening to the landscape at the point of its unveiling, they heed the multitudinous signs of an existence, the original encounter of which leads us out into the field wherein we come face to face with the recurring existential question of what it means to be a human being.

Whilst the photographic medium clears a path towards the understanding of histories that lie buried underneath the surface of the visible, my apprehension of the light that falls ahead is irreducibly bound to the view at present. As such, this mode of perception is not something that can be

foretold in advance. Accordingly, I endeavour to engage with the world as I encounter it at the moment of its disclosure rather than how I may conceive or anticipate it to be. My pictures of Sápmi are therefore no more interpretational than they are presentational, insofar as they express an engagement with the phenomenon that comes into being amidst the photographer's meaningful participation with the world.

Whilst it is too often our unseen biases which blind us from a real and true encounter with the phenomenon at stake, it is meanwhile only in relation to our own cultural predispositions that we can hope to ask the question of what it means to be in the world, the utterance of which remains constant and abiding amidst the view that passes before our eyes. It is thus with reference to Mikel through way of my own language that I access the meaning of Sápmi. Still, when we look towards the trail that stretches out before us with a watchful solicitude and a receptive open-mindedness, we reconstruct the relevance of our situatedness as if we were encountering the myriad possibilities of ourselves for the first time. After all, it is only at a distance from what is near at hand that we can possibly negotiate what the world is for us. In other words, it is the view of the unfamiliar which challenges us to reflect on the meaning of our existence anew.

Made in the living presence of the landscape, my pictures from the north therefore express the temporal view of a horizon whose meaning, whilst multivalent and overflowing, is never final but remains unstable and tenuous. *A Path in the Snow* is thus a series that reveals the milieu of a Northern European wilderness which remains a particularly human perception, although one that I cannot reduce to 'Scottish', 'Sámi', 'Finnish', 'Swedish', or 'Norwegian', whatever the vague pre-established determinations of each category may signify. After all, man is made up of all sorts of meanings and contexts, and as such, it is only in our continued and irreducible encounter with the horizon that reveals no boundary which makes us more and more of what we already are.

The world is a field of histories, meanings and interpretations which converge and unfold in ways that are unforeseen and unexpected. Photography is just one of many traditions by which man thinks through the question of his phenomenal embodiment amidst the landscape of

the world, the fluid meaning of which never stays the same. So long as landscape pictures are made by being with the phenomenon that arrests my gaze, there is abundantly more significance to the view ahead than prepared by the limits of its pre-determined geographical, political, historical or cultural inheritance. Thus, only in the photographer's definite relation to the space that pronounces its features and contours across a range of distance, depths and durations can the appearance he crystallises as a photograph become meaningful as the place that proposes the question of its history.

As my experience with Sápmi makes clear to me, the meaning of a place is not only interpreted in relation to mute features unable to ask the question of their existence, but in the photographer's everyday encounter with persons and creatures who are equally an event of the landscape as mountains, rivers, trees and rocks are. If landscape pictures renew an understanding of one's own being with the world, it is because they grant an encounter with other modes of seeing and thinking about the Earth. Hence, the landscape of Sápmi as I express it in *A Path in the Snow* comes into sight not as a distant and uninhabited frontier but a "contact surface," whose histories collide with my own to forge new ways of seeing the phenomenon which presents its view wherever I look, like Merleau-Ponty says, "as language to the other" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 271, 218). After all, if the photographer wishes to gather a genuine perception of the land he draws his photographs from, he must be open to the voices of the faces who dwell therein.

If landscapes bridge an affinity between self and other, it is because they belong to the presence which is neither fully endogenous or exogenous to one's perception of it. It is therefore not only the silent terrain the photographer depends on for his pictures, nor the body with which he negotiates his view of the world. Without the local hospitality of Nils, the solitary hiker with whom I summited Bárrás under the light of the midnight sun, or the unnamed stranger on the trail who gifted me his map of the Kilpisjärvi fells, many of my pictures would not have been possible. Thus, it is through meaningful encounters with other persons that the photographer deepens the meaning of the places wherefrom his photographs originate.

Whilst my pictures of the Scandinavian mountains speak to a way of being whose local understanding is perhaps thoroughly incommunicable in the context of my own language as Paulus Utsi believed, such images hint at the sky without which the view of the Earth would lack the prominence of its appearance, and which remains visible wherever the photographer may shepherd the light that penetrates the world. As my images show, the clouds that drive the snow and the rain across these fells linger as an appearance of the landscape too, just as the changing light of the sky remains an element of the mountain-birch forests below through which the photographer wanders to reach the windswept tundra of the plateaus above.

Most, if not all, of my photographs of Sápmi have been made whilst hiking across its terrain, often for days. During visits to Kilpisjärvi and the surrounding wilderness of Duoibal, Pältsan and Bárrás—close to where the borders of Sweden, Norway and Finland converge at the Three Country Cairn—I made sure to carry enough photographic film and food to be able to commit to at least a week alone amidst the inclement hyperborean weather of the Scandinavian fells. At night I would either shelter in my tent or in unlocked mountain cabins along the ancient migration routes of the Karesuando Sámi. Moving solely by foot during my sojourns across fells, ravines, birch forests and upland tundras, I kept myself in proximity to landmarks and features whose lingering presence I presumed would have meant something to the look of Mikel.

Walking amidst the shadow of the Scandinavian mountains as Mikel would have done one hears the Earth wander. As I journey across the landscapes which grant me passage, the Earth moves with me. In the distance I hear the dull rumble of a distant rock fall as water unseen trickles somewhere underneath my feet. Walking is significant because it remains the most human way to uncover the meaning of the Earth. By obligating the photographer to stay with the landscape as it assumes its appearance in relation to the ambulations of the body, moving with the legs affords a perception which is as patient and slow as the phenomenon itself. Many of my pictures of Sápmi are photographed during long days both on and off paths beaten by the footfall of reindeer and herder alike for centuries.

Figure 8: (Sohlberg, 1893).

It was by enduring the ancient herding roads of Sápmi with reference to the history of Mikel that I became further acquainted with their historical significance. It is important to mention that *A Path in the Snow* is not, however, the re-imagining of Mikel's gaze. On the contrary, my photographs belong to an embodied encounter which is and remains irreducibly the photographer's own, not least because the nuances and details of the landscape's appearance have no doubt changed since Mikel herded these fells with his family a century ago. Nevertheless, during my traverse across the Scandinavian fells, I did not forget that the path upon which I entered Sápmi had been broken an ocean away in the shelter of a small cabin during a cold winter's night in the Scottish Cairngorms.

Having grown up amidst the heather moors of the Scottish Highlands, mountains have always been close. The prominence of Bárrás and Pältsan at the Norwegian-Swedish-Finnish border give way to ravines and waterfalls without any name on the map that I almost feel I have seen before during summers in the Scottish Cairngorms. Moreover, whilst there exists a desolation and remoteness to Sápmi which remains intrinsically Nordic in its milieu, it nevertheless belongs to the manifold of the same horizon that undergirds my view of the Scottish landscape. After all, wherever he looks, the photographer's perception never vanishes from the country of the visible.

The austerity of the Karesuando wilderness is not at all alien to me, even on first glance. Its fells and plateaus belong to a perception that calls across the distance to views that are already near and familiar. As such, the Scandinavian mountains immediately bring to mind the rural Caledonian scenes of Lochnagar by the 19th century Scottish painter James Giles (Fig. 6), just as much as they recall the Synthetist aesthetic of Swedish landscape artist Helmer Osslund (Fig. 7) as well as the neo-Romantic views of Norway by Harald Sohlberg (Fig. 5). Furthermore, these scenes remind me that the world I see must be the same world the others see too. Accordingly, no matter how far or in what direction the photographer chooses to wander he finds himself amidst the territory of a phenomenon which is perceivable by all the others regardless of their cultural inheritance, at least in principle.

Figure 9: (Giles, 1848).

Figure 10: (Osslund, n.d.).

If the legacy of Mikel has taught me anything it is that history is seldom local, but comes into view from lands afar. Man's cultural apprehension of the phenomenon that reveals itself at the moment of its disclosure is multivalent and dialogical, and inevitably so, involving chance encounters with unfamiliar faces and names, languages we do not understand and landscapes we are seeing for the first time.

Whilst man's everyday bodily engagement with the world is abundantly significant, the original meaning of such an existence is not clear to us, but waits in the shadows of mountains to be interpreted anew with each passing step. As such, only by venturing along the paths that lead us face to face with the world can such a meaning be found. For the myriad dilemmas of human life cannot be resolved alone, but only through the open and recurrent encounter with each other, amidst the light that illumines the horizon wherethrough all beings journey.

When we open ourselves to make room for the view of the foreign without forgetting our cultural origins we establish news ways of accommodating the meaning of the horizon that holds itself open throughout all encounters. Commenting on Freidrich Hölderlin's hymn *The Ister*, Heidegger wrote; "Coming to be at home is thus a passage through the foreign" (Heidegger, 1996: 49). "What is one's own," Heidegger says, "contains the relations to that foreign through which coming to be at home takes its path" (Heidegger, 1996: 49). Likewise, so long as the photographer wanders towards the foreign, he enters a perception of the unfamiliar with a demand and an obligation to heed the meaning of the commonplace.

Whilst landscapes provide the original space where man's thoughts about the homely come to dwell, it is likewise amidst the hearth of the commonplace where man stumbles upon unexpected histories, the clues of which break outwards into the distance across paths without a clear beginning or end. It is only by venturing the Earth that grants us passage that the implicit significance of the landscape I bestow my look upon unfolds as the phenomenon which reveals no limit. As Merleau-Ponty remarks, "there is nothing to be seen beyond our horizons, but other landscapes and still other horizons" (Merleau-Ponty, 2002: 389). Every landscape, therefore, no matter how remote and unfamiliar its terrain

may appear on first glance, already includes within its frontier signs that return the photographer to a renewed understanding of the world wherein all appearances belong.

Thus, when I reflect on the significance of my photographs as a whole, it has often been my artistic intention to make landscape pictures which demand a contemplation on the existential disclosure of a world whose unexpected significance is far richer than any pre-determined value. However, man cannot hope to apprehend this horizon without first the view of the manifold which makes the appearance of every landscape specific and culturally meaningful as itself. In this sense, without a definite place such as the Cairngorms or Sápmi to circumscribe the contours of my look, I could not hope to approach the meaning of the enigma which holds open the view of all places and the histories which pass throughout.

Thus, only through a genuinely interested and curious encounter with the world, without subjugating or laying claim to its soil as one's alone, can the photographer interpret the meaning of the light that illumines the distance between the near and the far. In doing so, the photographer not only establishes the multivalent possibilities of a world whose paths open and close everywhere he looks. More significantly perhaps, he uncovers the view of the place whose existence is not only equal to the embodiment of himself but to the lives of all the others he may meet along the way.

Entering Sápmi along the vague impression of a trail that Mikel had left more than half a century ago on his journey towards Scotland, it is amidst the fells of the Scandinavian mountains wherein I encounter anew the meaning of the homely amidst the phenomenon which does not stop at the limit of my perception, and which is preached by languages other than my own.

So long as the landscape picture remains a way of bringing into closer view the meaning of man's horizons, *A Path in the Snow* concerns the accidental and chance encounters of the human odyssey. Interpreting the meanings of the roads we wander is often like following footprints across a winter's landscape. Sometimes they melt away or get covered over by the morning snow. Typically their starting point as well as their destination remain unclear. But no matter the clues these routes turn

up, the faces we may meet along the way or where their questions may lead our feet, we are assured to uncover new ways of seeing the Earth wherewith all human beings have their abode. It is these unmapped paths which invite the photographer out into the open towards a place wherein a genuine dialogue between the landscape and the historical meaning of its perception occurs.

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A Path in the Snow

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