

Final Thesis

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Minnesblick: A Swedish word literally translating to *memory glance/look/gaze**.

we can't ever truly translate something. take your pick.

Once while sleepwalking, I almost jumped out of a building. I was then guided back to reality, without any recollection of the attempted leap. As a photographer, my work is characterized by a sleepy haze, disoriented with a hand placed on the window lock and a foot on the ledge.

My photography is used to explore themes of memory and relationships in a dreamy and idyllic way with undertones of sleep phenomena. I confuse the senses with distorted visuals and experiences of space, pondering how we experience and define reality and what it means to be codependent on the things and people that deliver us comfort.

The choice of photography as a medium corresponds with the conventional association of memory with photographs. This ideology finds presence in my initial fascination with photography, stemming from the pit in my stomach I've had since I was a child: a lifelong fear of forgetting, compelling myself to photograph excessively. With this, I critique photography in its reputation of representing an undeniable truth.

There is a realm of derealization that exists between being awake and asleep; experiencing and remembering; remembering and forgetting. In between these binaries is where my work rests.



Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?, Digital Photograph, 2025

My thesis primarily finds its foundations in Susan Sontag's essay "In Plato's Cave," which opens her book *On Photography*. Sontag refers to photography as a "twilight art," which is the key term I use to summarize my final collection of light leaked, layered, and dreamy film photography work. Sontag uses this term to refer to photographs as a sort of elegy, explaining that all photographs are memento mori. With every photograph I ponder the death of a moment and the inevitable doom of forgetting, reflecting my origins in photography. I refer to Sontag when understanding my images and their correlation to memory as a sort of transitional haze, a twilight zone, in which one attempts to distinguish which visual signifiers ground them in their reality and memory, and what gets blurred in the haze of forgetting. This visually represents itself in my work through images bleeding into one another through light leaks, showing the death of a

moment blending into another. One of the central pieces of my thesis, *Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?* embodies a memento mori painting as it shows an array of objects gathered throughout my lifetime, reflecting on my own mortality and the fleeting nature of time. The title *minnesblick* partially alludes to the flashing visuals of memories we supposedly experience before death. The writings included in my work show what it means to document the details of an experience, attempting to solidify sensory and emotional experiences before they inevitably fade from our memories. In understanding Sontag's theory of photographs as elegies, I photograph as an attempt to eternalize my memories and soothe my paranoia of forgetting. Essentially, I'm always mourning the death of a moment.

Sontag refers to the act of reflecting on photographs as the attempt to "lay claim to another reality," which I explore in themes of depersonalization and derealization. This term is used to describe the experience of viewing old family photographs, with one experiencing memories that were never their own, but feeling a sense of ownership over them. My thesis includes a film slide projector full of found images taken by strangers, projected onto my own images. Each chosen slide falls under the criteria of having more universal imagery, rather than intimate personal images. Projections of clouds, sunsets, nature, and overall landscapes are to evoke a sense of familiarity with an image without the viewer knowing where the image is from. It's as though the viewer can experience vaguely remembering aspects of the image despite never experiencing the visual firsthand. With this, I am exploring how we visually define our realities, personal memories, and how we can even project others' experiences onto our own to further distort personal recollections. Ultimately I ask: What distinguishes visuals from being universal and from being personal? Additionally, the slides refer to the settings our dreams take place in and how they range significantly in their familiarity.



awakening, 35mm film scan, 2026

An underlying element that characterizes the visual themes of my photography are experiences of sleep phenomena. This includes experiences of sleep walking, sleep deprivation, hallucinations, and dreams. This element of my practice is rooted in first-hand experiences with the matter, which are then embellished by interviews of my mother and partner recounting their interactions with me sleep walking. Additionally, I reference sleep studies that discuss individuals who experience chronic sleep deprivation and hallucinations, taking notes of their descriptions of distorted visuals. Sleep phenomena is crucial in my overall theme of memory as it is often rooted in a sense of distorted reality, perception, and relies on concrete visual signifiers to ground the conscious. Dreams take our memories and distort them into a new fabricated sense of remembering.

Dreams are what form the dichotomy I establish in my photographs of Sweden and Illinois. A crucial aspect of my process is photographing these two locations and characterizing them, ultimately portraying Illinois as my relentless state of wakefulness and Sweden as being my dreamstate. By forming distinct aesthetic differences in the relationships, experiences, past, and future that lies in two different locations I am able to contemplate what grounds us in a space and how we are able to claim it as our own. I characterize my partner as a sort of hallucination that guides me into a dream world, using writings in Swedish that recount memories we share. The inability to effectively understand the language on my own alludes to disorientation in dreams, referring to the idea that most people can't read while dreaming. The theme of relationships in my work is present as I romanticize this dream world, photographing what I understand to be bliss and solitude. Ultimately through the lens of dreaming I ponder what it means to exist in and experience two vastly different places, specifically in the contexts of relationships and memory.

My photographic process is relevant as I challenge the medium for being truth based, mainly through idyllic and dreamlike imagery. I go against the conventions of documentary, typographical imagery through visual motifs such as analog light leaks that ultimately blend the material images together. By using the analog process of film photography, the distortion that appears on the film via light leaks as well as edited layered imagery questions the representational manner of the medium and how we experience memory.

Writing is also a crucial aspect of my work, evident in the handwritten anecdotes that overlay images with the purpose of verbal imagery, world building, and breaking the

photographic fourth wall. There is a relationship formed between the implicit nature of a photograph and the explicit nature of writing.

My photographic works are intended for those who simplify the act of photographing as “capturing the moment.” I invite audiences to ponder what defines a “moment,” what it feels to remember a point in time, and what grounds them in a memory.

References

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