

At a Turning Point

Authors: Tuomo Rainio and Kristian Jalava

I

Before there is an observer, a ray of light touches the surface of the landscape. The touch is warm, the light's energy immerses into the structures, warming them up. Some energy dissolves into heat, but some manages to escape the pores of the world, eager to receive. Reflections scatter from the landscape's surfaces. The air is filled with light - the bouncing rays divide the landscape into fragments. Everything radiates.

Now, how should I organize this visibility? There are rock crevices, sprigs, leaves with holes made by caterpillars, and clear water running in a stream. Maybe I could use these to organize the light, even for a moment? Confine a comfortable space for the light, observe it in captivity?

If you shadow a stone with a large leaf, the one the caterpillar has chewed a tiny hole in, you can see a landscape on the stone's surface. The light transports the landscape sprinkled into the air, and the leaf collects the rays, turning them into an image. The image lives as a part of the landscape.

When the observer enters the landscape, all this happens on its own. The world is construed as the spectator's visual perception, with the pupil working as the leaf and the retina as the surface that receives the landscape.

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I am aware it is a paradox to write about a landscape without an observer. Thus, there is no landscape without the observer who forms it from the air dense with light, first optically, and then through language. A landscape is a composition by the observer, a conclusion that is difficult to let go of later. The observer carries it along, tries to fit it on everything they see. It is a model or a schema, a suggestion on how to organize the visibility, based on everything we have learned. If I could, I would love to spend a moment without this model, without a preordained image, without knowing what I'm supposed to see, and just sense the unorganized light. I wouldn't see a landscape, nor leaves, caterpillars, stones, or a clear stream. Everything would be in a latent state.

How to write about latent images, images one has never seen? We can imagine a latent state by entering an unknown, dark room. We know a room exists, but we do not see its features in reality. A dark room is in a latent state. Without light the room hangs on to its strangeness, but all it takes is a single flash of a single candela, and the latent room has turned into an image.

Until now, the photographs in Kristian Jalava's *At a Turning Point* series have been latent to me. The photographs have been exposed and developed, they exist and do not change materially, but I have not seen the images. For me, they exist like an unknown dark room.

II

On a hot summer day, the university building is nice and cool, thanks to the high-performance air-conditioning system. In this institutional micro-climate, I am isolated from the changing conditions of the outside world. I roam the empty halls, corridors, and workshops of the brand-new building.

I climb the spiral staircase of this old silo, up to the tower known as “the lighthouse”. The concrete moldings have been cut open, and I can see signs of the building’s previous uses. These silos, built in the early 1940’s, have a top part that was used for drying the grain. The grain was lifted from the silos to the dryer’s top compartment with elevators, and from there on, through various blocks and vacuums, it automatically found its way down through the drying facility.

When Helsingin Mylly moved its production outside of the capital in the 1990’s, the factory in Sörnäistenranta was closed, and the massive silos demolished, disappeared from the landscape. The simple tower, a fruit of Nordic functionalism, managed to escape demolition, and was left next to a busy road, awaiting its destiny. With the factory no longer running, graffiti artists and thousands of feral pigeons took over the abandoned building, thus dubbed the “pigeon hell”. The gray concrete walls were covered in layers of graffiti, until the building was blocked and the street art gallery barricaded in the early 2000’s.

A motion detector notices me, and turns on the lights in the staircase. The concrete walls of the former silo have now been polished clean of its layers of spray paint, mold, and history. On top of the building, where the machinery for moving the grain used to reside, you can still see signs of the times preceding the massive repairs. WUFFIS, NFMB, and a spray painting in three colors, with the number 200. These floor paintings in front of the balcony door were the only ones that survived the renovation, left as a proof of the building’s colorful past.

I stop in front of a window looking out to Sörnäisten rantatie. What landscape the factory workers, graffiti artists, and art students have seen, standing here and looking out this window, at different times? How has the city view changed since the wartime, and how different might it look after another 80 years, in 2100? Will there be a window here, then?

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A bright light enters a dim room through the blinds. All of a sudden, the walls are full of abstract scenes of the reflecting light, of magical dance of the linden, swaying in the wind. These momentary traces of light, the ones that catch our eyes in the idle moments, give us hints of the dark room’s potential.

The landscape is only just composing itself. Its outlines are blurry, but one can already make it out. There are block houses, church towers, cranes reaching to the heights. The every-day rhythm of the city. There are traffic routes in the shade of the lindens, pitch-black piles of coal and docks glimmering in the sunshine. Everything radiates, reflects light, and stores energy.

My aim is to make the room so dark not a single ray of light can enter. When the final aperture closes, there is but perfect darkness, and I’m surrounded by silence where I can hear myself breathing. When I light the red safelight on my headlamp, I can see the outlines of the room. I uncover the photographic paper roll from its black protective plastic, and spread it

open, carefully. It is as if I could feel the large paper's sensitivity to light as a bodily sensation. I use a staple gun to attach the paper to plywood, and hang it on a movable wall module. It is time to pierce a hole into the darkness and let the light catch the paper. Thus, the latent image enters the dark room.

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When you touch a landscape's surface, you can find different hollow spaces beneath. The facades of a city hide thousands of rectangular cavities – rooms – that form the landscape's sheltered inside. These man-made rooms have a built-in quality: a vision-like ability to organize light into an image. Can all these spaces have this ontological quality purely by accident? I catch myself considering a world where buildings would be partially conscious beings. How would a building perceive the slow changes in landscape? What would a landscape look like from a single point in space – over a very long stretch of time?

I see construction work slowly proceeding in the city's skyline. New buildings are emerging, and the city's consciousness is expanding. And at the same time, old buildings are being demolished, there are interruptions, memories are lost, the city is slowly being destroyed.

A surprising sight at street level returns my attention to the landscape's surface. A man is sun-bathing in trunks on the narrow green belt between a cycle-way and a four-lane road. He is lying on a small towel, leaning his head on a concrete bump.

III

I am on the second floor, and I am elsewhere. The photographs of Kristian Jalava have attached themselves into the space, and I am now seeing them for the first time. In one direction a city view, in another a building's insides, like mechanical intestines. And the third? The spectator, in between the images, in the intersection between outside and in. I am part of the building.

When the photographs are displayed in the same space they were taken, a photograph's *strange weave of time and space* starts to unwind. The space becomes a point of reference, something constant, something that reveals the difference between two events. The building itself turns into a camera: a space through which time begins to flow. And as I watch the photographs, the events keep on flowing. The blackness, created by rays reflected from the landscape on a light-sensitive paper, keeps on absorbing the light. The tireless light keeps on pressing against the image's surface. It is the condition for both creating and seeing the image!

But where once was bright is now dark. It is an uncanny feeling, observing the world like this – as a negative. You can recognize everything – the streets, the houses, the structures – but at the same time, everything seems strange, manifested in an alien light. As if the shadows had suddenly been illuminated, or begun to shine a strange light.

Light and knowledge have shared a path for quite a long time. Light has its ways of revealing, of showing, but wouldn't it be high time to look at the knowledge of the shadows as well? At how the shadows show us things in hiding? When the light

changes, the familiar can turn into unknown. This twist, along with Maurice Blanchot's idea of emergence of the *other night*, is a perfect frame for the situation in Jalava's images. Blanchot's *day* is devoted to work, and *night* devoted to rest, ensuring the day's endless industriousness. But through art we are given the *other night* during the day, a space of idleness where the night takes over. The negative light reflects the emergence of the *other night*: the city is empty, asleep, and void of industriousness. In Jalava's images, the long shutter speed has faded out the action. The streets are empty, the boats have returned to the harbor. The constructions are visible in the *other night's* light.

In the end, I have to look into two directions at once: inside and out, into the light and into the shadows, into the day and into the night, into the past and into the future. That is the only way I can find myself in between the things, build my world into the turning point between two states.

Translation: Laura Vesanto

This text was written for Turning Point (Käännekohta), a work by Kristian Jalava. The work consists of three parts, Lighthouse, Skylight, and Square, all of them exposed and developed in Uniarts Helsinki's Mylly building in July 2021. The public works from Finnish National Gallery's Finnish State Art Deposit Collection are on display in Mylly's second floor. The site-specific text can be read on the top floor of Majakka, by the window overlooking Sörnäisten rantatie.