

*Landscapes of Care: Photography, Film, Modern Architecture  
and Landscape Heritage*



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## VISUAL ESSAYS

# Unsettling in Norrland

Tonia Carless and Robin Serjeant

## Abstract:

This research uses film, photography and projection to analyse the changing space of Northern Sweden (Norrland). This peripheral region is one of the most rapidly reconfiguring spaces in Europe, with on-going programmes of corporate and state investment to exploit space and natural resources for settlement and extraction.

The images are part of an archive of the moving of buildings, a common practice in the region. Buildings are moved in relation to changing environmental conditions and now urban land values and global property speculation. It is understood to be a distinct process of what David Harvey has described as "remaking capitalism's geography"<sup>1</sup>

Images analyse the material conditions, ideology and power in this frontier economy. The project considers an architecture of de-growth<sup>2</sup>, challenging ideas of the expanding urbanisation of Norrland. As land values and modes of occupation change, buildings are displaced from the urban centre to increase occupation density through speculative investment. This process displaces social space and previous land formations. The city of Kiruna has been entirely displaced by expanding mine workings. The practice of relocation also has the capacity to shift large-scale historic architectures, as a distinct form of caretaking.

In this moment of new waves of investment in mining and forestry, of urbanisation of parts of the region, predicated on an underlying and largely uncontested agenda of 'development', the archive offers other conceptions of space and architectural production.

The images consider the wrenching of a house from its location and moving it to another location, documenting this process of detachment. It records the re-arrangements of space between land and building. Displacement is illuminated through projections to unsettle, by superimposing architectures onto previous conditions.

Keywords: Unsettling, de-growth, relocation, house-moving, displacement.

<sup>1</sup> David Harvey, *The Enigma of Capital and the Crisis of Capitalism*. (London: Profile Books, 2011), 180.

<sup>2</sup> André Gorz, *Ecology As Politics*. (UK: Pluto Press, 1987)

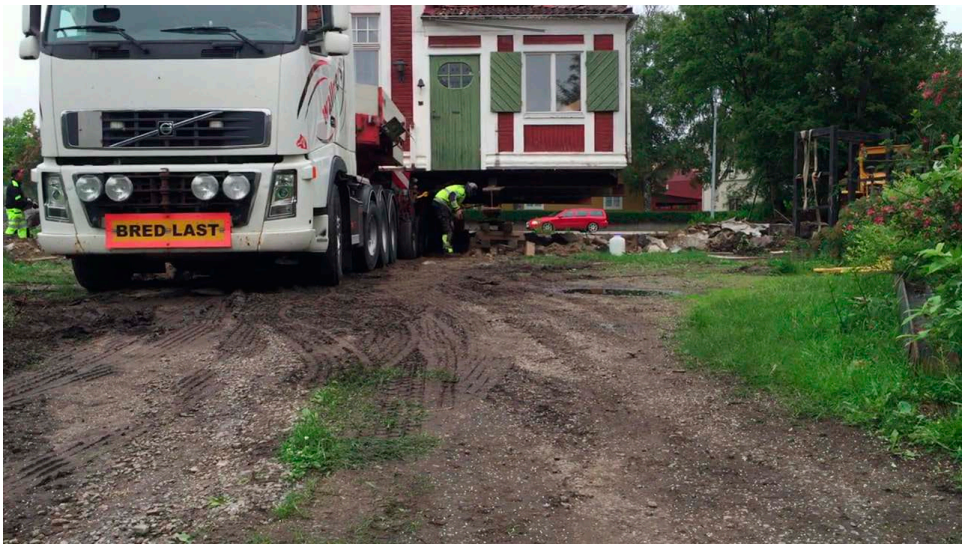
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[Fig. 1]  
Tonia Carless, "Car under the house", June 2021, Film still

[Fig. 2] Next page  
Tonia Carless, "Under the house and into the hall", 2021







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The first sight of the one-hundred-year-old house was in an online newspaper article. The second was of the house raised up on low-grade pine, stacked timber, in a suburb of Umeå, Northern Sweden. The house seemed to rest lightly on the ground, floating above the surface, contained in its own stability and rigidity.

The space of the city, traffic and bodies, flowed between the underside of the house and the ground. The preparation for moving revealed a gap between house and ground. It was entrancing to see the acts of disconnection, shocking and inspiring to witness the slow wrenching of an apparently fixed object from its attachment to the ground, and floating it on air away to somewhere else. The unfixing occurred at a moment when the seventy-tonne house was held up with the lightness of air, at several atmospheres' pressure, on inflatable pillows.

The connection between house and the ground was wrenched apart; there is violence in this process to the land and its garden. This wrenching of parts is in contrast to the care of moving the house and maintaining aspects of its domestic space and three generations of family dwelling. Inside the house the disconnection was less obvious. Furniture remained in place, coats on hooks, mirrors on walls, chandelier wrapped in a dustbin liner. The domestic space was transported intact over ten kilometres to a rural location, and landed at the new site with things and artefacts 'in situ'. There was a delight in the paradox of domestic order maintained, fragile, lightweight, non-rigid, impermanent things moved and in place.

The gap between house and ground triggered ideas about Norrland as a place of settlement, of flux and shifting of things within and through a frontier landscape. Waves of European settlement have happened for four hundred years in this area. What was this land before the farm and house were laid out and built, and what will the land be after the house has been moved?

Norrland is a wilderness in Swedish popular and official culture<sup>3</sup>, a wilderness containing things to be exploited: Timber, iron magnetite, lithium, space, and recently, low ambient temperatures for cooling digital data banks. This area of Northern Sweden was occupied in stewardship by indigenous peoples for centuries before European ideas of territory, forms of production and exchange practices largely displaced these peoples. Now a further wave of investment, development, and movements of people from hinterlands to the cities of Norrland, and from further afield is swelling the numbers of incoming and transient occupiers in urban places, including the appropriation and refiguring of previously precious, preserved spaces of generations of city occupants.<sup>4</sup>

3 Madeleine Eriksson. (Re)producing a periphery Popular representations of the Swedish North (Umeå University Sweden Department of Social and Economic Geography Kungliga Skytteanska Samfundet. 2010)

4 Po Tidholm *Norrland. Essays and Reportage.* (Sweden. Teg Publishing, 2012) and David Loeffler, *Contested Landscapes/Contested Heritage history and heritage in Sweden and their archaeological implications concerning the interpretation of the Norrlandian past.* (Umeå University: Sweden, Department of Archaeology and Sámi Studies, 2005)





[Fig. 3]  
Tonia Carless, "House passing Ikea", 21 June 2021



[Fig. 4]  
Tonia Carless and Robin Serjeant, "The journey of the house back along the ten kilometre route projection: Bus stop with housemover flag 'to be moved'", December 2021





[Figs. 5-9]  
Robin Serjeant, "Midwinter projection inside the house.",  
Degernäs, December 2021, Film stills

[Fig. 10]  
Tonia Carless and Robin Serjeant, "E12 road to airport projection  
onto industrial building.", Urmeå: Teg, December 2021

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The building was moved across different territories of development, from a place of early twentieth-century farmsteads, and reframed against factories, shops, airfield, advertising hoardings for new apartment buildings, fast-food outlets, a 'do-it-yourself' home-making warehouse, over bridges and along highways of public infrastructure, artefacts of common service, uprooting and smashing traditional Swedish timber boundary fences.

"A friend came to see me in a dream. From far away. And I asked in the dream: 'Did you come by photograph or train?' All photographs are a form of transport and an expression of absence"<sup>5</sup>

Photography and video-making was unsettled. Photographs and video from one stage became material reused through projection at another. Different places and time were then documented by further image-making. The flux of image projection at places is not fixed they are at one moment settled and another moment unsettled and moved on.

Ephemeral media (light projections and digital modelling) left unmarked existing buildings, artefacts and surfaces whilst settling on them and into the imagination. The image superimpositions and resulting transparent juxtapositions were then the subject of further recording. It was a mobile, fleeting, transitory process, taking place inside and outside the house and along the path of its unsettling and settling. The act of projecting marked a speeded-up mutability of the house across land, through spaces and over artefacts in this Norrland moment of remaking capitalist geography, melting much that is solid into air. Projections onto trees, buildings, bus stops, roads along the route of the move, were later projected into the interior of the domestic landscape of wallpapers, radiators, cupboards, curtains and more.

What was left behind, months after the move, were artefacts of habitation, such as entrance steps, mangled washing line poles, fruit beds, which were the remnants of an understor[e]y as an archaeological reveal of previous settlement, including pipes connecting the site to the district and city infrastructure. Re-emergent flora reclaimed ground, unmaking the space of farmstead and garden.

Photographs and video brought focus upon material and substantial things such as the construction material of the house, the transformations of parts of domestic interior (a tactical, not a necessary, change to its internal structure), the materials, devices and tools used and constructed to carry out the move. Some of the projections align with how the previous occupant would see the 1960's city administrative Kommun building from the living room window and in the new position, a view across a rural, farmed landscape to the large Volvo plant, glowing white, in the distance. The process produces a temporary stillness in the hundred year history of a building in a landscape, the three month history of its unsettling and in its six-hour spatial relocation.

5 John Berger, John and Mohr, *Jean A Seventh Man*. (Cambridge: Granta, 1989.)

The image projections created a visual space for other views of making and the settling of space, land and architecture, all dynamic across surfaces, Projecting the images of the move, and of material of the building's and district history, back into the house were undertaken as a midwinter event in the long hours of darkness, illuminating this domestic space as a marker of settlement and inhabitation. These projections re-animated the house interior to re-imagine the space and its sliding capture across the ten-kilometre terrain, as acts of re-use through unsettling and settling.

Landscapes of care are manifest through the combined process of film, photography and projection. In the physical space of the region, these landscapes are made by the house movers (Magnus Mårtensson and Nya Töre Husflyttningar) with their understanding of the histories and weight of built form on land. They effect careful manoeuvring across highways, bridges and between narrow village roads, through seeking permissions and marking obstructions, of high-level communication cables, bus stops, trees and more. They are custodians through the move of three generations of home owner/dwellers.



[Figs 11-12]  
Robin Serjeant, "After the house move.", Umeå: Teg, December 2021





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[Figs. 13-14]

Tonia Carless and Sonja Lindgren, "Midwinter event, window and chimney gap projections.", December 2021



