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“Let the Camera Be a Weapon”:  
On Word and Image in Environmental Communication  
by Swedish Nature Photographers

**Abstract:** This article examines the interplay of word and image in environmental communication through the lens of Swedish nature photography, focusing on the exhibition *Vinnare och förlorare i svensk natur* (*Winners and Losers in Swedish Nature*) by the Swedish Association for Nature Photographers. The study contrasts this contemporary exhibition with Arne Schmitz’s 1977 photographic essay *Landskap i förvandling* (*Landscapes in Transformation*), highlighting divergent strategies in combining visual and textual elements to convey environmental messages. Drawing on W. J. T. Mitchell’s theories of image-text relations, the article critiques the exhibition’s reliance on aesthetically captivating close-ups of individual animals, which, while emotionally engaging, risk undermining the intended message about biodiversity and ecological interdependence. The accompanying texts, though informative, are often relegated to a secondary role, creating a dissonance between visual and verbal narratives. In contrast, Schmitz’s work exemplifies a more integrated and pedagogically effective approach, where images and texts mutually reinforce a critical environmental perspective. The article argues for a reconsideration of the conventional division of labor between image and word in environmental media, advocating for more cohesive strategies that align aesthetic appeal with ecological urgency.

**Keywords:** Environmental communication, nature photography, image-text relationship, biodiversity, visual rhetoric, documentary photography, media aesthetics.

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## Introduction

In 2016, the leading organization of nature photographers in Sweden, Naturfotograferna [The Swedish Association for Nature Photographers], turned 50. The members celebrated by arranging a joint exhibition. Titled *Vinnare och förlorare i svensk natur* (*Winners and Losers in Swedish Nature*) it sought to draw attention to the dynamic and changing character of nature (Ekman 2016). An expanded and updated version was exhibited outdoors in popular public places in five Swedish cities—Uppsala, Falun, Malmö, Luleå, and Stockholm—in 2021 and 2022.<sup>1</sup> This time, the association wanted to reach a larger audience for what was described as “a full-fledged biodiversity communication project” (Naturfotograferna 2021–22), combining photographs with educational texts and performed in cooperation with local museums.<sup>2</sup> The partners organized public programs and educational activities for schools in the region.<sup>3</sup> Combining striking photographs of untouched landscapes and wild animals with texts informing about the conservation status of the represented species, the exhibition was representative of how nature photography most often has been used to popularize environmentalism and shape the modern perceptions of the natural world. Ever since the early 20th century, that particular combination of words and images has been a recurring strategy for environmental movements wanting to reach the public at large.<sup>4</sup>

In this article, the expanded version of *Vinnare och förlorare i svensk natur* is used as a starting point for a discussion of that strategy’s effectiveness as environmental communication. To this end, it is compared to a work from Naturfotograferna’s earlier history, which exemplifies a far more radical strategy—one rather associated with documentary photography. Presumably influenced by the widely circulated Swedish translations of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* ([1962] 1963) and Eugene P. Odum’s *Ecology* ([1963] 1966), some members of the association turned their attention from untouched nature to produce images illustrating the direct effects of contemporary environmental problems.<sup>5</sup> One of them was Arne Schmitz, the association’s first head. My second example is his photographic essay *Landskap i förvandling* (*Landscapes in transformation*, 1977), which discusses how modern society and industrialization have transformed the Swedish

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1 The original exhibition was displayed at Naturhistoriska Riksmuseet (The Swedish Museum of Natural History) in Stockholm.

2 All quotes from Swedish are translated by the author.

3 These activities will not be discussed in this article, but the educational programs are available for download from the association’s website (Naturfotograferna b).

4 For an historical account of how nature photography has been used to promote environmental reform, see Dunaway (2005).

5 For an overview of the Swedish environmental debate of the times, see Rosén (1987).

landscape. It is probably the most ambitious attempt by a Swedish nature photographer at combining images documenting environmental problems with educational texts.

Comparing different media types, such as exhibitions and photographic essays, has been unusual in scholarship on photography. So have comparative studies of environmental communication in different media types overall. As noted by Bruhn and Salmose (36), this is unfortunate: such studies could lead to important knowledge of each type's possibilities and limitations. There are certainly many differences between exhibitions and photographic essays that could merit such a comparison. While an exhibition is encountered in the public space, often in the presence of many others, photographic essays could be consumed in almost any imaginable context, including in the solitude of one's own home. While an exhibition is experienced with the visitor's entire body, as he or she moves through it, the photographic essay could be held in one's hand. The latter has been the more common way for Swedish nature photographers to distribute their work (Bergengren 1969).

Despite such important differences, the aim of this comparison is not to reach any generally applicable conclusions regarding the two media types. The aspect I am interested in is one they both share: their combination of words and images, and the variable and fluent relationship between them. As argued by W. J. T. Mitchell (1994, 281), the relationship between language and photography "is a principal site of struggle for value and power in contemporary representations of reality; it is the place where images and words find and lose their conscience, their aesthetic and ethical identity."

If so, how does the way nature photographs are combined with text affect their potential for effective environmental communication? As stated by Mitchell (91), "the 'normal' relations of image and word" involve "the clear subordination and suturing of one medium to the other, often with a straightforward division of labor." While the exhibition format generally subordinates words, which "explain, narrate, describe, label, speak for (or to) the photographs," the photographic essay is a more complicated case where the images could "illustrate, exemplify, clarify, ground, and document the text" (Mitchell 94), but also, similarly to the exhibition, reduce text to captions. In a photographic essay, images and words sometimes even could be of equal importance (Bergengren 83). The dilemma of the media type, according to Mitchell (287), is its tension between the aesthetic and the rhetorical, between artistic and political goals. I would argue, however, that this dilemma is just as acute in an exhibition like *Vinnare och förlorare i svensk natur* as in the photographic essays so often published by the association's members. So, to engage with Mitchell once again (288), how to "mediate these disparate claims, to make the instrumentality of both writing and photography and their interactions serve the highest interests of 'the cause'?" What does the division of labor between language and photography mean for the combination's capabilities as effective environmental communication?

## The Timeless Beauty of Animals

In 2021, *Vinnare och förlorare i svensk natur* started touring Swedish cities. The first installation was displayed in Vasaparken in Uppsala. The 35 photographs were mounted on individual panels roughly the size of regular Swedish billboards. The first panel combined a striking close-up of an owl with a longer text that introduced the exhibition to the visitors. The rest of the panels had a different layout, as each featured a large print representing an animal species indigenous to Sweden. In these cases, all text had been relegated to the side of the images, where smaller panels had been added to the frames.

The panels were arranged after each other in a long line traversing the park. The consequence was that a viewer situated in front of one of the panels had no way of seeing the other images. Each photograph had to be contemplated by itself rather than experienced in relation to the others. This installation design was not repeated in other cities; instead, the placement of the panels seems to have been decided by the characteristics of the particular space.<sup>6</sup> In Falun, for instance, they were arranged in a rough square, enabling the visitor to see many images at once and make connections between them and between the species they represented. Despite this, the experience fostered by the installation in Uppsala seems invited by the displayed photographs themselves, no matter the exhibition design. The very composition of the images seems to direct the viewers' attention inward.

One example is the exhibition's representation of a species that is part of Sweden's charismatic megafauna: the brown bear. The photograph of the bear was taken by Magnus Elander, who also acted as project leader for the exhibition.<sup>7</sup> Its frame is dominated by the animal, who is portrayed in the absolute foreground. It is shown standing on its hind legs and peeking out at the observer from behind a tree trunk. Of its surrounding environment, only the tree trunk is in focus. The blurred background, where some other trees are recognizable among the green, vaguely suggests that the bear has been photographed in a (presumably Swedish) forest.

A second example features another renowned species: the Eurasian eagle owl, the largest owl in the world, here photographed by Viktor Sundberg. In an even more intimate image, the owl, depicted against a nearly entirely blacked-out background, occupies almost the whole frame. Photographed slightly from below and to the side, it looks down on its human observer without ever meeting his or her gaze.

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6 Photographs from the various installations of the exhibition are available at the association's website (Naturfotograferna a).

7 All the photographs shown at the exhibition are, together with their accompanying informational texts, included in a booklet available for download at the association's website (Naturfotograferna b).

The third and last example gives no more clues to where it was taken. The background of Johan Lind's photograph of a grass snake is a completely blurred yellow and light blue, while the snake's body occupies the rest of the frame. Compared to the brown bear and the eagle owl, the grass snake is a less appreciated part of the Swedish fauna. Many Swedes, considering the widely spread fear of snakes, would probably prefer nature without it. Lind's photograph, however, reveals the snake as intensely photogenic. Emphasizing the graphic markings and the coloring of the snake's head, it gives the animal a striking beauty that is strengthened by the motion blur over the split tongue. The snake is portrayed as remarkable rather than scary.

While very different in some respects, the three images are all close-ups or extreme close-ups, revealing a shared attention to the individuality of the represented animal. The same is true for most of the other exhibited photographs. Most of them, just like these examples, feature a single representative of a particular species, generally seen up close.<sup>8</sup> Directing the viewers' attention inwards towards the depicted individual, they are essentially portraits of beautiful and/or remarkable representatives of their species. None of them reveals the state of the depicted ecosystem or the human influence upon it. Instead, the represented animals appear disconnected from the world surrounding them. The row of close-ups presents them as beings existing outside of human history and culture.

Through this approach, the association places itself within a long tradition of photographic representation of nature. While the works of American landscape photographers like Ansel Adams and Eliot Porter are the most famous examples, much of 20th- and 21st-century nature photography adheres to the same ideals. Essentially, the natural world is represented as a separate sphere untouched by history, civilization, and human influence. With the words of Raymond Williams (55): "Nature was where industry was not." Williams (57), of course, also noted that the very idea of such a separation between nature and human civilization was "a function of an increasing real interaction." In other words, nature and human civilization were conceptualized as distinct, separate domains at the same time scientific and technological advances made them more tightly intertwined. In "Of Mother Nature and Marlboro Men," her influential essay on American landscape photography, the artist Deborah Bright frames the problem in a similar way. By presenting nature as a timeless sphere apart from human influence, most landscape photographs, in Bright's reading, aestheticize it in a manner that makes the images perfect vehicles for the same corporate system and conservative politics that work to destroy it. Landscape photography has almost always been used to argue for "the timeless virtues of a Nature that transcends history—which is to say, collective human action" (49).

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8 There were some exceptions to that rule. All, except an image of an Eurasian lynx photographed at mid-distance, show smaller animals: the whooper swan is represented by a pair of birds, the greylag goose and common frog by entire flocks.

When the members of Naturfotograferna decided to show images that adhered to this way of representing nature, they established an essential contradiction in their own messaging. When they directed viewers’ attention inwards, towards the individuality of the portrayed animals, they also directed it away from other things: not only the ongoing mass extinction and the human responsibility for it but also the very foundation for the biodiversity the exhibition set out to illuminate. Left outside the frames were all the portrayed animals’ connections to their environment and its myriad other individuals and species. The problem with this approach, of course, is that understanding those connections is the basis for grasping the importance of biodiversity. When the visitors’ attention was captured by the beauty of singular animals, it was also drawn away from the “variety of all living things and their interactions,” as biodiversity has been popularly defined.<sup>9</sup> The abundance of life on the planet was not on display here.

Since the publication of Bright’s essay, many others have continued her criticism of landscape photography and claimed that representations of pristine wilderness enhance the separation between humans and nature.<sup>10</sup> Despite such critiques, this type of photography has continued to be widely spread, promoted, and appreciated. Certainly, images such as those exhibited in *Vinnare och förlorare i svensk natur* have the same potential. It is easy to imagine them drawing the attention of people passing by, including many who otherwise might not actively search out and engage with nature photography. The exhibition might thus have functioned very well as marketing for Sweden’s most prestigious association of nature photographers. If the association’s goal of informing about biodiversity was met with a similar effectivity, however, is left to be determined. As this article works on the premise that the exhibition’s success as environmental communication depends on its combination of texts and images, it is time to turn to an investigation of the written messages included in *Vinnare och förlorare i svensk natur*.

### Informing about Biodiversity

The first text encountered by the visitors to *Vinnare och förlorare i svensk natur* was the long introduction, displayed together with a close-up of an owl. Here, the association offered its understanding of the biodiversity crisis facing the national and international community:

There is a growing consensus among scientists. We are living in the age of the sixth mass extinction. The last time was 66 million years ago when the dinosaurs disap-

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9 At the website of the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History. For a longer introduction to biodiversity, see Dobson.

10 See for instance “Beyond Wilderness,” a 1990 special issue of the influential photography magazine *Aperture*. Palmer provides an overview of similar critiques from the 2000s.

peared. Then it was an asteroid strike. Today, we ourselves are the cause. As many as a million species are at risk to disappear. In Sweden, several thousand species are red-listed, i.e. threatened to some degree. (Naturfotograferna a)

After thus delineating the problem, the text turns to optimism. As history shows, the unknown author states, the population of many species can recuperate.

The animals that were hunted to the brink of extinction come back when we stop persecuting them. Those that were poisoned recover when chemicals can no longer be used. But the species that have fastidious demands on their environment, the specialists who need old forests or hay meadows, they still have difficulties. (Naturfotograferna a)

The rest of the exhibition's textual elements were far less noticeable than this prominently placed, large introductory paragraph. Added to the frame of each exhibited photograph was a small text panel. Here, the details of the depicted species' past and present conservation status were described in Swedish and English. It was also here the visitor could find the answers to the implicit question of the exhibition's title. The text printed beside Elander's photograph of the brown bear thus describes the species as a "winner":

The brown bear is an unusual success story in Sweden. The return of this magnificent mammal has triggered bitter conflict in other countries, but in Sweden brown bears have expanded their range southwards without major controversy. A century ago, the species had a precarious situation, hunted widely for sport and as a threat to livestock. Then came government legislation protecting them from the gun. Having dropped as low as 130 individuals, the population staged a remarkable recovery and today an estimated 3,000 brown bears roam Sweden's forests and mountains. (Naturfotograferna c)

The short text is, as implied by its first sentence, structured as a small narrative. The brown bear used to be endangered. When the authorities protected it from further hunting, the population eventually bounced back without trouble. In the success story of the Swedish brown bear, the human plays the role of both villain and savior. Despite this double status, actual Swedish people are oddly absent from the narrative. The bear was protected from "the gun," not human hunters, and it was government legislation that did the saving rather than any particular persons.

The visitor who wanted to understand the environmental context of the eagle owl encountered a narrative without any such neat ending:

The eagle owl suffered such persecution at the hands of man that by the time it achieved protected status 70 years ago, most of its rockface nesting sites were

empty. When protection came the species faced a new threat from toxic chemicals in the environment. But a ban on mercury and DDT use and a captive breeding and reintroduction programme restored the population to a peak of 600 pairs in the late 1990s. Rats attracted to open refuse tips kept many an eagle owl pair well fed. However, many tips have since closed and eagle owl [sic] have fallen once more, albeit for reasons that are not fully understood. (Naturfotograferna c)

Like the previous example, this text references both the serious threats the species once faced from humans and the political decisions that enabled the population to be restored. It also omits the active participation of actual Swedish people in both its near extinction and restoration, even though it was the unpaid work of volunteers that ultimately enabled the population to grow (Birkö et al. 18). However, this text leaves the reader without a clear resolution. No one knows exactly why it now seems that the eagle owl is one of the “losers” of Swedish nature—a circumstance that also makes the situation impossible to rectify. While the statement is in accordance with the state of current research (Birkö et al. 22–24), it leaves the visitor who might want to continue the work of earlier generations without any advice.

The informational text accompanying Johan Lind’s photograph of the grass snake makes clear that this is another “loser” in Swedish nature.

The decline of livestock farming has adversely affected the grass snake. In particular, the disappearance of dunghills has made it difficult for the snakes to find the right place to lay their soft eggs. In among the manure and straw is the perfect spot for the female grass snake. Nowadays she may search in vain. Numbers have declined sharply, particularly in Sweden’s north and also on the island of Gotland, where land drainage has caused habitat loss. If you happen to come across a grass snake, enjoy the experience. They are beautiful and not dangerous in the least. (Naturfotograferna c)

In contrast to previous examples, the explanation given for the grass snake’s decline is not related to humankind’s direct influence but to the indirect consequences of changes in human ways of managing nature. Nevertheless, this text touches upon the Swedish people’s relationship to the species, as visitors are urged to change their presumably negative attitudes towards snakes. The matters that could change its conservation status are, on the other hand, not addressed. The text does not give any suggestions on how to change the conditions that threaten the population of grass snakes in the country, such as restoring drained wetlands.

The remaining texts are very similar in structure to the examples given here. They narrate the historical changes in population status of the other species included in the exhibition. That development is often described in relation to human influence over the environment, but the active participation of actual Swedish people is rarely acknowledged. The author

seems to presume that the visitors to the exhibition should play similarly passive roles in future challenges. They are informed about the state of biodiversity in the country but never called to action.

It is when the texts are considered in relation to the photographs, however, that their function in the exhibition becomes clear. All that was missing from the photographs makes its appearance here: human involvement with the environment, historical development, and interconnections between species and ecosystems. While not inviting the visitors to take an active part in its preservation, the texts clearly acknowledge the serious threats to biodiversity in contemporary Sweden. They have a complementary function in relation to the exhibited photographs, adding the environmental facts and arguments that were so conspicuously absent from the images. While the images portray the visual splendor of the natural world, the texts address serious environmental problems as well as provide at least tentative solutions.

Thus, the exhibition adheres to a common division of labor between word and image: while images are intended to catch the attention of the viewers with their beauty, words provide the rational arguments. While images are used to arouse people's emotions, words speak to their intellect.<sup>11</sup> The consequences of this division of labor could be seen through a comparison with recent attempts at environmental communication in a related media type, which has received much more scholarly attention than nature photography: wildlife documentary films. Most wildlife documentaries have tried to encourage environmentalist attitudes by "showing humanity the wonders of the world" (Mills 200) and thus adhere to the same ideals as nature photography. In the 21st century, however, a few wildlife documentaries have become more explicit about environmental threats (Richards 2013; Rust and Wurth 2024; Zemanek 2022). Their method of achieving this is remarkably similar to that used in *Vinnare och förlorare i svensk natur*. In Netflix's heavily marketed wildlife series *Our Planet* (2019), for instance, a voiceover addressing how the natural world has been impacted by climate change is combined with spectacular high-definition images of untouched nature and exotic animal species. Several scholars have addressed the problems with this approach. For one, Lucas Hilderbrand (14) has criticized the series since it, despite the voiceover, "primarily operates to show us what we risk losing." Similarly, Jones et al. observe that the series is visually remarkably close to traditional wildlife documentaries. Therefore, they conclude, "the viewer may be led to believe that things cannot be that bad for biodiversity as what they are seeing on the screen shows nature, for the most part, doing fine" (Jones et al. 422). Writing for *The Atlantic*, finally, Ed Yong makes the same point in

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11 Finis Dunaway describes how environmental movements have relied on the power of media imagery to evoke emotion in *Seeing Green: The Use and Abuse of American Environmental Images* (Dunaway 2015).

more frivolous terms. He notes that “without the sound on, viewers could easily think that they’re watching *Planet Earth*.”<sup>12</sup>

By choosing to work with the same division of labor between word and image as *Our Planet*, Naturfotograferna made themselves vulnerable to the same risk as the series’ producers: just as the former’s viewers might watch it with the sound off, the latter’s might refuse to read those texts. And even if they decided to read the texts, the visitors to *Vinnare och förlorare i svensk natur*, just as the viewers of *Our Planet* imagined by Jones et al. (2019), could conclude that nature, after all, is doing fine. The emotional impact of the images was, after all, greater. Using images to catch the attention of the viewer while letting words carry the rational arguments might therefore be a risky strategy in environmental communication. It could result in the communication of conflicting messages. In the case of *Vinnare och förlorare i svensk natur*, the result is the creation of two such conflicts. The exhibition wanted to inform about biodiversity while displaying individuals cut off from the variety of other life forms on which they depend. It wanted to inform about the dangers facing Swedish wildlife while showing beautiful and apparently healthy animals living seemingly idyllic lives. And, as is obvious from the similar dilemma plaguing wildlife documentaries, the problem is much larger than this individual exhibition by a Swedish group of photographers. As will be shown in the next section, however, other ways of combining nature photographs with words are possible.

### The Camera as a Weapon

In 1971, the Swedish nature photographer Bertil K. Johansson (32) published an article in the popular Swedish photography magazine *Foto* called “Naturfotografer! Låt kameran bli ett vapen!” (“Nature photographers! Let the camera be a weapon!”). Three years later, Guy Jamais (29) echoed the same appeal in the title of an article published by *Foto*’s main competitor, *Aktuell fotografi*.<sup>13</sup> They encouraged their colleagues to, like documentary photographers, turn their weaponized cameras towards that which threatened the natural world rather than the wonders they wanted to preserve. Their articles, consequently, were not illustrated by beautiful photographs of undisturbed nature but by images of birds incapacitated due to oil spills, factory chimneys spilling heavy clouds of toxic smoke through the air, and the remnants of discarded cars illegally dumped in old gravel pits.<sup>14</sup> The perhaps

12 The BBC’s blockbuster *Planet Earth* (2006) became famous for providing the most spectacular “widescreen visual splendor” ever seen, while it was criticized for not addressing any environmental concerns (Beck 2010, 63).

13 The article was called “Låt kameran bli ett vapen!” (“Let the camera be a weapon!”).

14 The examples are taken from Johansson (1971).

most ambitious attempt at using the camera as a weapon was made in Arne Schmitz's photographic essay *Landskap i förvandling* (1977). In its introductory chapter, Schmitz agitates against the environmental threats of modern society compared to some older, undated utopia.

It is quite clear that humanity has embarked on an extremely dangerous path [...] We do not always see or reflect on the gradual change before our eyes. A little reflection, however, can give us at least a blurred picture of what once was: what it looked like in the past, before the high-rise buildings darkened the horizon; before the thundering waterfall was hidden in concrete and silenced (Schmitz 6).

For Schmitz, the camera was the tool that could bring together the varying images of the past and the present and thus make people aware of the threats posed by modern society. Often paired on the book page as illustrations of a before and an after, the photographs included in the book thus provide visual evidence of the text's descriptions of the transformations of the Swedish landscape.

The book has no captions. The text sometimes explicitly addresses the images and explains how they are to be read, while sometimes leaving the exact interpretation up to the viewer. Despite these different strategies, the layout is always consciously used to establish relationships between individual photographs and between them and the text. An illuminating example occurs near the end of the essay. The left side of the spread features a close-up of two toads mating. Centered on the right page is an image of a car wreck submerged in an overgrown puddle of water, together with the remains of a barrel and a bicycle. The combination of these two images immediately communicates quite a few meanings to the viewers, even before they read the text printed below the second image. The photographs represent the differences between an environment left alone by humans—a place teeming with life and preoccupied with the production of new life—and one affected by modern society, where that life has been replaced by toxic waste products.

The text enhances that impression, as it provides some basic context.

The small ponds are important components of the landscape, not least in the fields where oases are needed. Unfortunately, they are usually considered useless and are filled with all sorts of junk. This affects, among others, amphibians, which have their playgrounds in such waters. [...] The combination puddle—toad gives incredible results: each female gives birth to up to 15,000 offspring, an impressive contribution to the livelihoods of many animals. The toad population disappears with the destroyed playground, causing repercussions far up in the food chains (Schmitz 9).

The two images could now be understood as direct illustrations of matters discussed in the text: mating toads and junk in puddles. But, enriched by the concrete details provided by the text, they also produce further meanings and offer the viewers the possibility of thinking far beyond the puddle. Not only is the life in that particular place threatened by human carelessness, but, so, by extension, is the entire ecosystem.

Another example repeats the basic layout of the spread considered above: a single photograph occupies the left page, while the right features a centered photograph with a short text printed below. But here, very little information is communicated through the images besides the purely aesthetic. The photograph to the left shows a uniformly gray sky, on which the black silhouette of a single bird is visible, situated in the absolute middle of the page. The photograph to the right represents an equally gray sky, only this time seen through the bare branches of a tree. In the tree sit dozens of birds, most of them reduced to black silhouettes. Two are possible to identify as magpies. The contrast between the lonely bird and the flock creates a graphically striking composition that could be enjoyed solely for aesthetic reasons. The text in this case, however, contributes entirely new meanings.

Environmental toxins are destroying the food chains and are hitting harder the higher they reach. Several species at the top of the ecological pyramid have declined drastically and are threatened by extinction. The most vulnerable of all is the peregrine falcon, whose glorious silhouette against the sky will soon only be a memory. Instead, the species adapted to the cultivated environment are on the rise and dominate the field of vision (Schmitz 43).

The visually interesting layout is (on the reading of the short paragraph) transformed from a purely aesthetic experience to an environmental lesson on how humans are impacting which species of birds are visible in the skies. The magpies are, in an instance, transformed from a pleasing sight to a nuisance or even a threat. The shock at this realization enhances viewers' ability to bring that lesson with them in their encounters with actual birds and, perhaps, their understanding of how ecosystems function and how humankind influences them.

In the first spread, words communicate the facts and logical arguments, while photographs appeal to the viewer's emotions, just like in *Vinnare och förlorare i svensk natur*. In the second, however, this division of labor is reversed. The words bring grief and perhaps anger, while the images emerge as pedagogical illustrations of the new proportions of animal life brought forward by human emissions. In both cases, though, words and images are joined together in a manner quite different from that used in the exhibition. Rather than communicating conflicting messages, they work together to build the same argument. Contrary to the exhibition, it would be quite impossible to present them separately without rendering that argument unintelligible.

Also worth noting here is that Schmitz, contrary to his colleagues Johansson and Jamais, has not sacrificed aesthetics in order to achieve this pedagogical effect. While he has included some images that show the consequences of industrialization on the landscape, others are classical nature photographs depicting the beauty of untouched nature. This separates his strategy from that proposed by Bright (42), who suggests that a politically engaged landscape photography not only should show a nature inextricably linked to human lives but should also make clear “the precedence of the informational over the aesthetic.”<sup>15</sup> While artistically interesting and politically persuasive, it is difficult to imagine such works drawing the attention of casual observers who might be attracted to more traditional nature photography. Instead, Schmitz manages to show the pristine beauty of untouched wilderness while simultaneously illustrating that there is no possibility of separating the realm of humans from that of nature. The ecosystems illuminated by Schmitz invariably include both.

## Conclusion

The calls for nature photographers to use their cameras as weapons would soon die down. With the end of the 1970s, the members of Naturfotograferna largely stopped their documentation of the effects of pollution and industrialization. The approach tried out by Schmitz in *Landskap i förvandling* would not get any successors. While the association has never abandoned its environmental roots, its later members have largely kept to depicting the splendor of untouched nature. *Vinnare och förlorare i svensk natur* epitomizes the strategies of environmental communication that are evident in such works: just as most wildlife documentaries, they mainly work to remind the viewers of the natural wonders that might soon disappear.

As this article has shown, that approach might be risky. The environmental communication of the exhibition is marred by double contradictions. The focus on individual animals rather than the interrelations of individuals and species undermines its message about the importance of biodiversity. The focus on singular, remarkable, and beautiful animals who are doing well undermines its message about the threat of mass extinction. This conclusion does not imply that nature photographers ought to stop photographing beautiful wild animals or the wonders of the natural world. Arne Schmitz did both. It does not even imply that they ought to stop using images to speak to the viewers’ emotions, while words get to carry the rational arguments. The problem, instead, is that the routine adherence to this division of

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15 Her primary example is Lisa Lewenz’s *Three Mile Island Calendar* (1984), which shows the Three Mile Island nuclear power plant photographed from the homes of nearby residents. See Bright ([1985] 2020, 40).

labor risks confusing the viewer with conflicting messages. In the struggle over our society’s representations of reality, as argued by Mitchell (281), the relationship between language and photography matters. As shown by the example of *Landskap i förvandling*, alternative ways of combining them are possible and could lead to more forceful environmental communication. As stated by Kurt Bergengren (83), sometimes images and words could actually “interact with equal force.”

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