

RE-CONSTRUCTING HOME: MEMORY
IN THE SCANDINAVIAN DIASPORA

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RE-CONSTRUCTING HOME:
MEMORY IN THE SCANDINAVIAN
DIASPORA

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RESEARCH OUTPUTS

Exhibitions

S. Davies, '*Corner of Mine*', Interim Paper #9, Paper Gallery, 14-20 Mirabel Street, Manchester, 4th October – 17th November 2013

S. Davies, '*Too Small, Too Grey, Too Sparse*', Lost and Found Project, Link Gallery - MMU, Chatham Building, Cavendish Street, Manchester, 1st -25th April 2014

S. Davies, '*Process and Performance*', Sara Davies and Naomi Kendrick Open Studios, 50-52 Kirkmanshulme Lane, Manchester, 11th -14th September 2014

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INTRODUCTION

Once I lived on a farm, not far from a lake, surrounded by tall conifer trees. The main house was painted red and the barn was grey and weathered. In the Nordic countries, this type of place is often a subject matter in historical paintings, used as front covers in magazines and frequently visible in the IKEA catalogue. It is a cultural symbol (Nora, 1996) deeply embedded in Nordic culture linked to the notion of home. So I return, not to the farm from my childhood, but to many places like it, both real and imaginary. I am a Swedish immigrant in England who has spent half her life here and simultaneously feels British and Swedish but is neither and both. I have been revisiting my ancestral home in my artwork and can trace this imagined journey back to the very frail first attempts, fragmented and somewhat unclear, to the more obsessive, recent re-visitations. Over many years, I have been collecting images and photographing the traditional red-painted croft in my art practice, piecing together one of my own through fragments. For me, this type of place has become a symbol and the kind of place I revisit when returning home in my imagination (Rushdie, 1991). It has been a topic in my work for over ten years and revisiting the Nordic cultural framework has become a way for me to establishing a position within cultures.

There is a rumour that the terrace houses on our road have something to do with the church. The road is called Kirkmanshulme Lane and is situated near the central parts of Manchester. Looking at the place name you can see how these rumours have started circulating. My neighbours make a connection to Scotland in the word 'Kirk' and subsequently to church. My mind makes an

immediate and greater leap and the name instantly creates a home for me. It gives me a sense of re-visiting a familiar place rather than occupying somewhere new. Being Swedish and because of the Scandinavian countries' intertwined past and shared linguistics, the street name offers me a story. This story predates the 160-year-old terrace houses and has its origins in the times of Danelaw, the repeated Scandinavian invasions and settlements around AD 800 to 950 and the subsequent mixing of cultures. Kirk – Kirkja – church, man – man, hulme – holme – small island surrounded by water or marsh (Ordnance Survey). This personal account is not trying to establish the true origin of the place name but highlights that a sense of belonging and home is neither fixed nor straightforward. There has long been a presence of Nordic migrants and their descendents (in the north of England) and these settlements are distinctly different from Nordic migration to the country's capital. Robert Lee (2008a, p. 8) believes that following the early Viking settlements, more recent Nordic immigrants to Liverpool and the north of England were seafarers and emigrants on their way to America that failed to complete their journeys or made a conscious decision to stay. The Nordic Church in the docks of Liverpool is the historic and contemporary centre for Nordic migrants and seafarers in the north of England (Lee R. , 2008b, p. 13). People in diasporas often lack official written histories and rely on memory and embodied practices in their transference of cultural knowledge (Connerton, 1989). Diana Taylor (2003) believes archives to contain dominant authoritarian viewpoints. She sees the performative as a repository of narratives and experiences of the marginalised. In this way, performance is political and a way to offer alternative views and create new meanings. My work concerns notions of contemporary migration

between the Nordic countries and the north of England. Making art is a performative practice (Bolt, 2004) and I am focusing on the formation of visual narratives within this community. It is an autobiographical case study exploring the experience of being Anglo-Nordic through art practice. Being Anglo-Nordic; negotiating identity in a space between cultures (Bhabha, 1994 [1991]). Living with two cultures.

Having moved from one culture to another the first culture has ceased to encircle me fully, the surrounding environment is that of another culture with fragments of the former culture scattered as images and symbolic objects. Nordic culture has become internal, linked to my body and this is why the body is important when studying how cultures transform in diaspora. This is why I use it in my art practice. I am exploring the specific characteristics of my own personal, imagined return home. I am investigating how I connect with the culture of my ancestral home and how this culture affects me in diaspora. My photographic work has become a theatrical place where cultural stereotypes of the nation are being explored and reconstructed. In my photographs, I am revisiting the culture of the Nordic countries. Imagining, dreaming, trying, letting cultures merge and transform. I am remodelling and shifting the visual imagery of the Nordic nations from my position in diaspora. In my photographs, I am revisiting national romantic paintings from the early 1900s. I am exploring the conifer forest, the traditional costume and the red-painted croft, symbols deeply embedded in Scandinavian culture and part of the nation's narratives. Using autobiography, I am re-constructing my Nordic past determined by the

social norms of the diaspora (Kuhn, 2000). I am searching this narrative for the points where meaning appears rigid. These inflexible structures are the collective narratives within a community (Langford, 2007). Astrid Erll (2011, p. 113) claims that personal memories gain relevance in society through media representation and that different media such as, print, radio, television and monuments, act as switchboards between individual and collective dimensions of remembering. These are the narratives that tie a community together and are transferred fairly unchanged through time. Communities in diaspora have collective memories and myths of the ancestral home and the view is often idealised and romanticised (Cohen, 2008, p. 17). I am going to re-visit the collective memories and myths of home circulating in the Nordic diaspora through performances capturing these in photographs. This form of theatrical rehearsal of national stereotypes objectified by photographs explores the following questions:

1. How is my response to Nordic cultural material influenced by my position as a migrant?
2. What roles do visual representations dealing with the collective myths of the ancestral home play for Nordic communities abroad?
3. What role does the migrant's imagined journey home have in establishing a sense of belonging for a person in diaspora?

I also wanted to position my case study in the wider discussion about migration and belonging, about national and diasporic identity. What does my case study do in relation to what is perceived to be typically British? What does it mean to be essentially Nordic? And where do we locate national identity more generally.

What impact does drawing attention to minority cultures have on rigid forms of national identity? How does it affect a society built on the idea of borders and nations where there is resentment towards cultural difference? The way Nordic culture just sits there within British culture, barely visible but distinctly different, the way it has done so for a long time makes rigid national structures evaporate just like the figures in my photographs appear only half visible and dissolving. Drawing attention to Nordic culture nestled within British culture, unassuming but persistent, reveals the illusion of nation states having ever been homogenous. To make images in diaspora, is to increase this minority culture's visibility. To study the visual tropes of a diaspora, is to find out how cultures transform.

The characteristics of the Nordic diaspora

Robert Lee (2008a) describes the historic Nordic presence in Liverpool and the surrounding area as transient, consisting of a small semi-permanent community also serving a large number of seafarers passing through and migrants on their way to America. He states that in the past Nordic migrants in the north of England often worked as seamen or were women who were commonly in domestic service. He believes that the community is currently growing and today it is common for Nordic people to emigrate for economic reasons, better job opportunities or to study. Contemporary Nordic migrants arrive in the north of England with the assurance they are following an already established migration route, they are following in the footsteps of others.

Nordic migrants blend well and assimilate quickly because of the host countries positive attitude towards their presence. They are assumed near enough British and assimilate quickly into dominant cultural and national discourses (Kalra V.S, 2005, p. 105). In my own journey as a migrant that old other culture, the Nordic, was suppressed and ignored for many years later to re-emerge in my artistic practice. Kalra, Kaus and Hutnyk (2005, p. 106) discuss movement of white communities. They argue the importance of analysing these journeys as forming diasporic communities rather than pioneer settlements. They argue that highlighting the different white cultures that have been incorporated into white dominant discourses is questioning the legitimacy of power relationship between dominant cultural discourses and cultures that have traditionally been marginalised. Revealing the idea of a homogenous dominant white discourse as fictitious opens up a space for debate.

Symbols and Semiotics

Carl Larsson's paintings contain a symbol of an ideal home and an idyllic life. I will explain below how this symbol is part of a Swedish national narrative and also how this is functioning in the surrounding Nordic countries. Clifford Geertz (1973, p. 89) is a cultural anthropologist who developed new ways of studying and interpreting cultures. He claims that symbols are part of larger systems and that these systems shape and uphold cultures through time. He argues that these symbolic value systems are connected to, for example, religion, nationalism and social ideologies. Geertz (1983, p. 12) examines how semiotic systems of signs and symbols are intimately linked to cultures and how they

generate a communal sensibility. Semiotics is a field often described as the study of signs. Roland Barthes (cited in Sontag, 1993 [1982]) believes that symbols should be thought of as signs and signification. He claims that meaning is formed in the relation between the sign and the person encountering it. He argues that signs are part of larger systems and acquire meaning from their context. Barthes (cited in Allen, 2003, p.41) builds his theories on Ferdinand de Saussure's idea that signs are made from two components: the signifier, the form a sign takes and the signified, the concept it represents. Charles Peirce (cited in Crow p.31) developed a system categorising signs and I am going to focus on his notion of 'symbolic signs', which de Saussure called 'arbitrary signs' where the signifier has no logical connection to the signified and the meaning has to be agreed upon and learnt by a group of people.

Barthes (cited in Crow, 2003, p.55) identifies a structural relationship within the sign that arises when a person reads it. He calls these components denotation and connotation. Denotation is the literal meaning of a sign and connotations are the meaning and associations experienced by a reader of a sign through its form. A person's connotations of a sign are dependant on its form, context and previous experience steered by conventions within a culture and its mythologies. Barthes (cited in Allen, 2003, p.37) also explains how dominant groups in society controls the language and the media generate meaning that is turned into myths. His concept of mythologies is close to Karl Marx's idea of ideology. Mythologies hide the process that transform signs into meaning and make them appear natural.

A red painted croft in the Nordic countries is a sign of an idyllic home and life. As a symbolic sign this meaning has to be learned and shared by a group. It is part of a dominant system that defines a nation. It is reinforcing the myth that a group of people belong to a geographical place and that they have similar traits because of common origins. The red painted crofts is a symbolic sign that denotes 'idyll' and this meaning is understood by a group of people, it is its literal and learned meaning. The form the sign takes evokes a chain of connotations. Carl Larsson's work containing the sign of the red croft signifying 'idyll' conjures connotations in its audience depending on the context and their previous experiences. These connotations are steered by cultural conventions and evoke different connotations such as longing, safety or a feeling of not fitting in.



Christian Skedsvig *Idyll* 1888



Martta Wendelin *Portti* no date

The Nordic countries have an intertwined past with shifting geographical boundaries. At different times in history Sweden and Finland were one country, Denmark and Norway were one country, Sweden extended into the northern parts of Germany and the Baltic countries (Árnason and Vittrock, 2012). These historic links between the Nordic countries are today experienced with different emotions in Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden and Iceland. This partially shared history also contributes to some common cultural characteristics. To demonstrate this I want to highlight two examples. A painting by Norwegian painter Christian Skedsvig titled 'Idyll' depicts a red croft and was recently featured on a Norwegian postage stamp. The romantic postcards designs by Finnish illustrator Martta Wendelin in the beginning of the 20th century such as 'Portti' shows a red croft and an idyllic life, two children waving happily standing by a gate in front of red painted croft. The red painted cottage as a sign signifying an idyll is also present in, for example, Norway and Finland.

Artistic Research

Artistic research works with tacit rather than explicit knowledge (Gray, C. and Malins, J., 2004). Coessens, Crispin and Douglas (2009) discusses how artistic research conducted in an academic setting is aiming to unravel how culture comes into being exploring how experience leads to understanding. They claim that it is seeking to go beneath language and interpretation, to access the complexity and contradiction of specific experience. They believe that the artistic researcher operates through one performative trajectory transforming the human experience from tacit to explicit knowledge. This process of making

is situated in time and space relating to other people and the surrounding environment.

Carl Larsson's little red cottage, the sign signifying idyll, becomes part of my trajectory aiming to visualise the experience of living in diaspora. Through a performative process of making artworks I form relations with people through their emotional responses. As discussed above Nordic people will recognise and understand the red painted croft as a sign signifying 'idyll' but have different experiences of Carl Larsson's work. Semiotic theory explains how the meanings of artworks are formed through relations between the work and the audience. Instead of seeing the work by Carl Larsson as representative of Nordic culture I see it as relational. In the same way as my artworks are not representative of everybody that views them but forms relations.

Collective Memories in Autobiographical Artwork

As an artistic researcher I am using an autobiographical case study to investigate the collective myths of the Nordic diaspora in the north of England. This is my performative trajectory. Annette Khun (2000) believes autobiography operates in the intermediate point between personal and collective experience. It is retelling personal memories and past experience in a more public form and as such the narrative has a tendency to reveal more collective structures of memory. When writing my life story in a more public form, as a series of

photographs, I will begin to recognise the places where the narrative seems rigid.

Martha Langford (2007, p. 25) discusses how collective memories are often embedded in personal contexts. She describes how artists use personal photographs in their work to construct a public image. She believes that artists visually reconstruct interior states of being and becoming. She calls these practices album works and argues that the repetition in these works are crucial as it reveals generic personal memories. She discusses how these memories share aspects of collective and public memories and how they are easily identified as places where the author loses the reins of authorship. I have then compared my photographic autobiographical narrative with other visual representations in a different medium, in this case historic painting. The study will give me an indication of the characteristics of the collective myths of the Nordic diaspora. My intention is to broaden and deepen this study by collaborating with a group of artists in my PhD studying and comparing our memories of home.

Symbols, Cultural Hybridity and Diaspora

How does cultural hybridity influence the view of traditional symbols? Erik H. Cohen believes that 'The use of symbols is playing an increasingly important role in the construction of identity in a post-modern and globalizing world. For dispersed groups with little physical contact, symbols may be the strongest

basis for identity' (Cohen, 2008, p.302). Ahrens and Stierstrofer (2014) agree that traditional symbols become important when not belonging to one defined geographical place and help in the process of forming identities. They claim symbols exist in-between being translated, transformed, re-appropriated and re-inscribed. They say that this process of remembering, reproducing and communicating through symbols strengthens diasporic identity and aids their sense of belonging.

When I use traditional symbols in my work I feel a deep attraction to them and I instinctively know they strengthen my 'Nordic-ness'. I can also feel an urge to translate, transform and re-inscribe them. I believe cultural hybridity makes traditional symbols seem more pertinent as they are used in the reconstruction of identity. As migrants we are attracted to them as they help reforming our identity. I also imagine living in diaspora and not belonging fully within national narratives helps us see a societies myth more clearly. We can more easily uncover a nations mythology. We can see how natural is not natural at the same time as realising we are depend on their promise.

1 SYMBOLS

A Painting of a Croft

Often we deem ourselves the originators of thoughts and ideas, feelings and passions, actually inspired by some group. Our agreement with those about us is so complete that we vibrate in unison, ignorant of the real source of the vibrations. How often do we present, as deeply held convictions, thoughts borrowed from a newspaper, book or conversation? They respond so well to our way of seeing things that we are surprised to discover that the author is someone other than ourselves. "That's just what I think about that!" We are unaware that we are but an echo. (Halbwachs, 1992 [1950], pp. 44-45)



Carl Larsson, *My Little Farm*, 1906

It was when I saw a watercolour by Carl Larsson, a Swedish painter and illustrator working around the 1900s that I knew which path I was on and where I needed to go next. Just like Maurice Halbwachs notes in the above quote I felt but an echo. Two children playing in the sun, a red-painted house,

dark green vegetation behind a hedge or a conifer forest. The girl is wearing a traditional costume and the boy is in a blue-and-white striped outfit. I experienced a sudden recognition of my works' resemblance to his. The watercolour forms part of a book called *A Farm*, with watercolours and text by Carl Larsson completed in 1906. The book consists of 24 coloured plates taking the reader through the farming year. When I saw this picture, it seemed to contain all the symbols I have been dealing with in my own art practice. The traditional costumes; blue-and-white stripes; childhood; dark conifer forests; pine cones; the farm; the traditional, painted wooden horses from Dalarna; the Swedish flag; the meadow flowers and the red-painted croft. The painting encapsulates Nordic national romanticism, Carl Larsson and other painters at this time are believed to have painted the Nordic national narratives (Huusko, 2012) that are still in use today. I remember earlier moments, when I marvelled over a photograph I had taken of a wood workshop in a Nordic croft that was almost identical in content and composition to a reproduction of a Carl Larsson watercolour in the calendar on my kitchen wall. Many of the Nordic artists at the time were inspired by Nordic folklore and myth (Jackson, 2012, p. 21) and used similar symbols within their work.¹ The question I asked myself was: why was I using the same symbols within my work a hundred years later? How were they similar and how were they different? How had time and context shifted their meaning and why?

¹Other painters working around 1900 using similar symbolic visual languages were, for example, Anders Zorn (Jackson, 2012, p73 & p75) in Sweden, Christian Skedsvig (Figenschou, 2009 p55 & p69) in Norway, Pekka Halonen (Nationalmuseum, 1995, p105 & p109) in Finland and Erik Werenskiöld (Jackson, 2012 p58) in Norway.

Painting Home

It is the artwork produced in and around Sundborn for which Carl Larsson is best known; he painted the village and its surrounding landscape, depicting village life, work and leisure time, the houses, workshops and fields. Most of all, he painted his own dwelling. He repeatedly returned to the subject matter, representing both the interior and the exterior of the house, garden and yard. He also portrayed his wife and his large family within this setting. In 1899 he painted an idea of home. Larsson published the book called *A Home*, it contains 24 watercolours taking us around the house room by room. He continued to develop this idea in three more books, entitled *On the Sunny Side*, *A Farm* and *A Family*, creating a lasting image of the ideal home and the idea of the good life (Snodin M. , 1997, p. 3).

Larsson and his family settled in Sundborn, a small village in the district of Dalarna, Sweden. Dalarna was and still is a sparsely populated area in Sweden, well known for upholding a traditional way of life. Michael Snodin (1997, p. 3) outlines that the region is a picturesque province, rich in surviving folklore and customs. In Larsson's day the inhabitants were mainly yeoman farmers, living on small-scale farms in villages surrounded by forest. The Larsson family moved there in 1888 when Karin's family gave them the property 'Lilla Hyttnäs' as a gift. He brings to our attention an old, rather tired, traditional, red-painted farmhouse, typical of the region, that the family adapted and extended so that it became the town dwellers rural retreat, which they had longed for. He believes Larsson and his wife portray their house in Sundborn as an ideal home

and his family as a model for a happy life. Later the family made this summer retreat their permanent home (1997, p. 96).

Painting a Symbol

Snodin (1997, p. 8) claims that the Larsson's transformation of 'Lilla Hyttnäs' and their images depicting the place provide a distillation of Swedishness and that this distillation can be symptomatic of the national romantic movement and the desire to map out the idea of a nation through images. He explains that in their lifetime they popularised their image through books and prints in low-cost magazines and through these reproductions they came to be perceived as the most famous Swedish family living in the most famous Swedish House in perhaps also the most famous Swedish landscape. Ulf Hård af Segerstad explains that 'every self-respecting citizen wants to own his own little red-and-white country cottage under the birches by the glittering water' (1982, p. 39) He agrees that Carl Larsson became and still is a national institution and that the Larsson's ideal home in the country has become a national home.

Madeleine von Heland also claims that Carl and Karin Larsson 'created a utopian Swedish home that still serves as a dream and a model of a more beautiful life for thousands of people' (Heland, 1982, pp. 65-66) in Scandinavia. It is believed that Carl Larsson and the other artists painting in the national romantic style around 1900 were shaping and defining the cultural identity of the nation in their paintings and that this image is still embedded in the contemporary narratives of the Scandinavian nations (Jackson, 2012, p. 11).

A Site of Memory

My dream house stands on a woody hill. As you approach it along the path, it emerges from between some spruce trees, mysterious and inviting. The roof is covered with moss, the steps are rotten and the windows gape at you, empty. Otherwise the front, a dignified grey, is in good condition. I have learnt to see it as my own. It really isn't, but it is exactly the house where I want to live. (Fagerström, 2011, p. 121).



Kai Fagerström, *The House in the Woods*, 2010

Kai Fagerström took his time when he photographed a group of abandoned houses near his summerhouse in the rural parts of Finland. It was the tiny tracks made by mice, badgers and other feral animals, visible in dust and debris, which intrigued him. These signs of activity had appeared after the former owners of the properties had passed away or relocated. I studied his images of the traditional Nordic croft, the crumbling wallpaper, the simple wooden furniture, the overgrown yards and thought of my own collection of images of these types of abandoned homes. For both of us, the act of photographing seemed to contain a desire to piece together an imaginary place

of our own, dreaming of possessing the symbol of the Nordic ideal home. I am struck by how he relates the animals in the photographs to Finnish folklore. I am intrigued by the way he relates the place to childhood memories and future dreams. The places pictured in his photographs are steeped in myth and part of dreams. For the photographer the traditional wooden crofts in Finland are symbolic of an ideal home, they are elements in our collective memory.

Maurice Halbwachs (1992 [1950]) explains collective memory to be a record of resemblances within a social group, he continues to say that remembering socially is a way of finding stability and balance, of finding a place within a changing world. He asserts that collective memory is a reconstruction of the past in the light of the present and that our identity is formed from without rather than within when we belong to one social group and come into contact with another. Pierre Nora (1996) worked in the field of memory studies in the 1980s and developed the notion of 'sites of memory'. Nora advanced Halbwachs' earlier theories of collective memory to include the persistence of symbolic imagery in the theory surrounding 'sites of memory' and the idea of nations. In the same way as Halbwachs, he saw memory as distinctly separate and different from the idea of history. He emphasises the difference between 'living memory', the memory passed down through generations in pre-industrial societies, and 'sites of memory', storage places or artificial placeholders for memory that contemporary societies depend on to remember (Nora, 1996, *passim*). Astrid Erll (2011, p. 24) highlights that Nora's notion of a 'site of memory' must contain three different aspects: a material dimension that is at

the same time culturally objective, a functional dimension within society and a symbolic dimension ascribed at the point of creation or developed later.

Fagerström's photographs have been published in a book called *The House in the Woods* with accompanying texts by Heikki Willamo and Risto Rasa. The writing in the book emphasises the traditional farm and yard as places reminiscent of childhood pursuits, transforming the place, in an instant, into what Nora calls a site of memory, a symbol that aids memory. The house in the woods is simultaneously discovered, photographed and dreamed, showing that Carl Larsson's symbol of the ideal home still circulates in Nordic collective consciousness as 'sites of memory' (Nora, 1996).

Out of the corner of my eye I see the little red house. I am standing, holding a tray of food in the IKEA store in Manchester and on the wall in front of me is a photograph of a traditional Scandinavian yeoman farm, red with white corners. It is occupying a space slightly above the midpoint of the image in the central parts of the picture plane. Behind it is a forest, in front are fertile fields. '... and this is what we call home' the caption below it ends.

The Way Home

Ladies, I connected immediately to your work when I saw it posted on Facebook. I am a Finn-American and totally understand your sense of humour and nature. LOVE that you are working with seniors. Keep up the great work! [...] You may wish to consider bringing your show to the Swedish Institute in Minneapolis! They would love it! [sic] (Thrall, 2013, online)



Riitta Ikonen & Karoline Hjorth, *Eyes as Big as Plates*, 2011

It is the informal and spontaneous words by Paula Thrall posted on the artists' blog that interest me. It is the commentator's position and her explanation of feeling an immediate connection with the photographs that is making me look more closely at how the images operate. Paula Thrall describes herself as a Finnish American and she makes references to the Swedish Institute in Minneapolis, which is situated within the area historically populated by many Scandinavian migrants. Around 1850 and 1910 a Scandinavian diaspora was formed in the American states by the Great Lakes. Riitta Ikonen and Karoline Hjorth are two Scandinavian artists that made the photographs that Paula Thrall is responding to. They explore Norwegian and Finnish folklore and mythology in their project *Eyes as Big as Plates*. In collaboration with their models the photographers explore Scandinavian myth and folklore. These myths are infused by the participants own personal relationship to these myths (Hjorth, 2013, online). I, too, feel an immediate connection with this work. How does artwork that engages with Scandinavian landscape, tradition, folklore and mythology resonate with Scandinavian communities living abroad? Does it

become a way for migrants living in diaspora to connect to the culture of their ancestral homes, a way to remember home? Robin Cohen (2008, p. 17) believes that people within diasporas have collective memories and myths of the ancestral home. He claims migrants often idealise and romanticise their former homes. Do I remember and relate to home through folklore and myths? Do I hold on to the collective memories from Nordic culture transported fairly unchanged through time?

2 THE SHIFT

A Family Photograph by a Wall



Photograph of my grandmother and me, around 1982

I recently rediscovered this family photograph of my grandmother and me as a child on midsummer's eve. We are sitting on a bench leaning against a traditional Nordic wooden outbuilding. The building is part of a group of traditional red-painted houses in Dalarna where local midsummer celebrations take place. There is the raising of the maypole, music, dancing and a picnic. We are wearing traditional Swedish costumes, mine originating from Falun and my grandmother's from further south on the western coast. I look at the photograph and suddenly think that maybe I am trying to re-create this moment in my own pictures. Recreate this scene, this memory, a moment from past experience. The midsummer celebration was an event often painted during the national romantic era. It is a scene associated with the idea of the nation. The croft, the traditional costume on midsummer's eve. The family photograph

shows me a time and place to which I can never return. It depicts a moment in time that is lost and if I tried to revisit the place, this wall at midsummer, the surroundings, as well as me and my grandmother have changed. Roland Barthes (2010 [1979]) explains that a photograph has a capacity to touch him across time and space. He claims that a photograph's direct point of contact with what it represents creates an umbilical cord between what is photographed and the viewer's gaze. He states that a photograph brings the passing of time to our attention, acting as a reminder of our own mortality, evoking a sense of loss. As a photographer, I can sense these qualities and every time I press the shutter on my camera, I imagine that I am framing loss. The moment I see in my viewfinder, that fragment of time, which I am framing, is gone with its own exposure. Barthes cited in Batchen (2004, p. 15) claims that a photograph replaces the process of remembering evoking a sense of loss. Within every photograph lies the gentle plea: 'Stay this moment' (Wolf cited in Warner, 2006, p. 205).² A desire to grasp and hold onto something, instantly undermined by the knowledge of the flowing movement of passing time. When I am performing cultural stereotypes I am playing with loss. I am remembering through performance, transforming these memories into photographs, evoking a sense of loss. A loss of *her*, loss of a cultural framework, loss of a national identity, loss and photography. Somewhere in this repetitive play with loss, somewhere between my body and the camera, the symbols are shifting. The national romantic imagery is re-inscribed through

² This phrase 'Stay this moment' has become the title of my visual work exhibited as part of the MA Degree show 2014 in the Holden Gallery, MMU. Wolf, Virginia (1932) *Diary Entry* cited in Warner, Marina (2008) *Phantasmagoria*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, p.205.

photography and appears different. Apart from absence and loss there is something else happening in the photographs. My body and photography have shifted the symbol. My body, through the medium of photography, channels the symbolic Nordic cultural material, in this case the traditional Nordic croft.

Francesca Woodman - Finding a Position



Francesca Woodman, *House 3*, Providence, Rhode Island, 1976

Francesca Woodman produced the main body of her work during the 1970s, when she was still an adolescent. Many of her photographs were shot when she was a student at Rhode Island School of Design. In one of these images, one of her legs is in focus as she rests on her knees on a mirror; the rest of the body is blurred through movement merging with the wall behind. In another,

she is hidden behind wallpaper, belly, one arm and feet showing holding the piece covering her lower body. She appears as if she is merging with the wall. Occasionally you are unable to see her head, cropped by the photographic frame, blurred through movement, obscured by shadows or dissolving as strong light from a window and the process of photography drowns the fine detail. Rosalind Krauss (1999, p. 162) describes her practice as performative, where she acts out internal thoughts and feelings in a tactile way, interacting with the surrounding environment through the process of photography. Krauss believes Woodman in this way resolves internal issues through the physicality of her body and the medium of photography. Woodman stages herself in front of the camera and by being both the photographer and the photographed, her practice has been described as self-portraiture. Marco Pierini believes that Woodman's photographs contain a declaration that 'the basis of every action, every image produced, every thought expressed through the images is nothing but her own self' (Pierini, 2009, p. 37). He says her self-portraits can be seen as a form of self-investigation, where her half-hidden, distorted or translucent body merging with the surrounding environment seems to highlight an 'awareness that the body is woven with the same fabric as the world' (Pierini, 2009, p. 38). He suggests that she is trying to convey a sense of place, immersing herself in the universe of things. I believe merging with a corner shadow, blending in with the crumbling wall, dissolving in the light from a window and becoming distorted by the pressure of a piece of glass or a mirror is a way of trying to find a place in life, a form of external and internal positioning. Extending the body outside of itself and breaking the photographic surface and frame; merging, blending, breaking down the separation between

body and place at the same time as realising the impossibility of certainty. I see a desperate attempt to work out where she stands in the world, as a person, an adolescent and a young woman. In my photographs, I control my body fully as both the photographer and the photographed. I am merging and dissolving, only partly visible, blending in with the interior, with the re-constructed craft wall. I am trying to find a position in the world, as a woman with two cultures.

Cindy Sherman - Self Staging Stereotypes



Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Still #62*, 1977

In some of the images by Cindy Sherman I recognise my own studio. Parts of her equipment are visible. Lights, tables, props. I imagine a mirror and a clothes rail. She is staging herself in front of the camera. In every photograph she is playing a persona. She is acting out a cultural stereotype drawn from our collective consciousness. Eva Respini (2012, p. 13) claims Sherman's images

explore the construction of femininity against the mass circulation of images in contemporary society. She believes that the photographer is not exploring an inner psychology but is using pop culture, film, television and magazines to stage personas and stereotypes that are deep seated in our shared cultural imagination. She argues that Sherman does not copy specific images or characters but hints at narratives, using multiple references, bringing fragments together. These personas are constructions, filtered through memory, playing on the vaguely familiar and slightly recognisable. She suggests that Sherman uses the camera's ability to lie, mask and seduce when re-representing female characters, reinforcing stereotypes at the same time as she is breaking them down (Respini, 2012, p. 49).

Respini (2012, p. 13) describes Sherman's method as a free association technique where the photographer is sampling and creating an illusion of familiarity, letting these composite personas evoke generic types. She suggests that it is within the mass of images of Sherman and in the slight variations of identities, that the signification in her work arises. She claims that Sherman's work is an exploration into how our identities are formed in relation to cultural stereotypes and how our identities are shaped by mass culture and society. She believes that the photographer emphasises the idea of oneself as complex, fluid and changeable rather than fixed and deriving from within. She also argues that Sherman re-represents feminine stereotypes at the same time as she reveals that they are illusions and fictitious. She states that Sherman's work reminds us of 'our own complicated relationship to identity and representation,

and how the archive of images we carry in our collective imagination informs our vision of the world and, ultimately, our view of ourselves' (Respini, 2012, p. 50). How do the images of home, carried in the collective imagination of Anglo-Nordic people, inform their lives?

Ragnar Kjartansson - Recreating the Past



Ragnar Kjartansson, *Scandinavian Pain*, 2006

Ragnar Kjartansson is an Icelandic performance artist who, in his piece *Scandinavian Pain*, examines the Nordic stereotype and myth of the melancholic, suffering male, in repetitive rituals. In an interview with Sabine Mirlesse transcribed online he explains how he is exploring the boundaries of what he calls 'the theatrical fake' and 'the reality of performance art' (Mirlesse, 2013, online) and discusses performative art practice in relation to ritual. He is influenced by feminist art practices and the idea of theatrical rehearsal and repetition and says that ritual is always based on repetition and that this is one

of the most basic human elements. He embraces stereotypes because he believes they encompass an element of truth and thus in his work *Scandinavian Pain*, he is examining the myth of Scandinavian melancholy (Mirlesse, 2013, online). The site of his performances is a traditional red-painted barn and it acts as a capsule from which he repetitively acts out the characters of, for example, Ingmar Bergman and Edvard Munch. This particular work was exhibited at *Momentum*, the 4th Nordic Festival of Contemporary Art in Moss, Norway. In 2006, he used a red-painted barn as a site for a performance. The place reminded him of paintings by Edvard Munch, an artist working at the turn of the nineteenth century deeply troubled by mental illness and alcoholism. He stayed at the barn for a week, acting out Munch's suffering turning Nordic melancholia into ritual, dealing with the stereotype of the solitary, melancholic, male creative artist (similarly explored by, for example, writer August Strindberg and filmmaker Ingmar Bergman) which is a strong national narrative within Scandinavian literature, film and art (Modernamuseet, 2013, online). The barn bears the heavy burden of a pink fluorescent sign giving the title *Scandinavian Pain*. There is drama and pain stirring within the Nordic symbol of the ideal home. The artist is restaging the past in the present, reconstructing the past in a ritualistic, performative event to which the audience may relate, offering the possibility to understand and feel the myth whilst also developing the sense that the present context has shifted. Re-staged in the present, the melancholy as a stereotype feels both desirable and humorous, both reassuring and slightly unsettling. The meaning of the myth has changed, the stereotype from the past is performed anew. In this new context and through Kjartansson's art, this shift is made visible.

3 METHODOLOGY

A Visual Autobiography

It is only after we have lived through cycles of our lives, in recollection, in photographs, that a narrative comes through. Afterwards we tell narratives that are partly true, but they are also narratives that must be fictionalized in order for us to make sense of our lives...in order to survive. (Mavor, 1997, p.115)

Through an autobiographical case study, I am looking at personal experience in relation to a wider set of cultural practices in a diaspora. As a photographer, my case study is a visual narrative which I examine in relation to the specific characteristics of the Nordic diaspora in the north of England, as well as wider issues of mobility and belonging. I use my body in photographs to explore diasporic identity and how cultural frameworks of nation affect our lives when living in diaspora. I am interested in how cultural narratives are contested by a person with a hybrid identity. The photograph is a space in which cultures meet, a space in which self becomes other and memory revises histories. I study the visual narrative that I have created, seeing to what extent it contests British and Nordic national narratives, how it is different, how it is ambiguous. My photographic work voices the complexity of position and location in a globalised transnational world. Out of my particular circumstance of location and position, my case study, my identity negotiation, I am hoping to explore how belonging and mobility are experienced more generally.

For a person living in a diaspora, for somebody with two cultures, memories of one culture are re-told from the position within another (Bhabha, 1994 [1991]). In my performative photographic work memories of experiences in Sweden are re-inscribed in the present, re-shaping Nordic culture from my location in the diaspora. Carol Mavor (1997, p. 115) discusses the way narratives of our lived experience occur and how these structures are fundamental in making sense of our lives. In the above quote, she emphasises that it is only in recollection that our lives are ordered into narrative form and that this forms a way for us to survive. Annette Khun (2000, p. 184) discusses past experience as being revised in the present and that our memory stories or the narratives we construct of our lives are remodelled depending on our current social situation. They are reshaped depending on whom we remember with and whence we remember. Joanne Garde-Hansen (2011, p. 35) explains Annette Khun's notion of visual autobiography as a way to analyse personal memory through photography. Garde-Hansen highlights how this reflective practice is pinpointing how personal memories are framed and organised around larger cultural narratives.

Annette Khun's (2000) notion of visual autobiography can be used by people in a diaspora as a tool to explore how their hybrid identity is formed. With its position between self and others in society it establishes a relationship between personal experience and history and is for this reason a good method to explore how someone with an alternative narrative contests dominant national discourses, how a migrant in diaspora re-inscribes dominant cultural symbols.

In my photographic work, I examine how I construct myself, how I locate myself in society and how I relate to historical narratives and the narratives of nations. In the next chapter, I will reflect on the characteristics particular to my visual autobiography. It is shaped by what I reveal and what I hide, what I remember and what I forget.

Between



From The Studio, 2014

When historical visibility has faded, when the present tense of testimony loses its power to arrest, then the displacements of memory and the indirections of art offer us the image of our psychic survival. To live in an unhomely world, to find its ambivalences and ambiguities enacted in the house of fiction, or its sunderings and splitting performed in the work of art, is also to affirm a profound desire of social solidarity: I am looking for the join...I want to join...I want to join. (Bhabha, 1994 [1991], pp. 26-27)

Reflection during studio practice: *The stage set in front of me is still, it is waiting. It is a wooden wall reminiscent of all the wooden walls I have ever seen. I have built the structure in my studio; horizontal boards forming a corner of a room with a small door on one side. In Sweden around 1900, bare wooden walls were common in domestic interiors. They often appear in the background in national romantic paintings from the period. The ideal home, the traditional Nordic croft, the rural idyll. It is a symbol within a national narrative, a symbol of a dominant culture. Slowly, I am re-inscribing, I am performing it differently, I am warping the symbol creating a space of uncertainty.*

I am Anglo-Nordic. I have two cultures. I am neither and both. Through the performative practice of making art (Bolt, 2004; Jones, 1998) I am trying to give a visual form to the connection between Anglo and Nordic. Through an exploration into personal memories I want to reveal what lies within the hyphenation examining the particular negotiation of cultures forming part of my identity. Am I Nordic-Anglo or something else? Identity as tied to the idea of nation seems inappropriate in describing the complex processes of here and there, this and that and back and forth, that fill my everyday.

Benedict Anderson (2006 [1983]) explores the idea of nations as imagined communities. He claims they are imagined, as they are too large in scale for all people to meet in person. He believes the nations to be textual and visual constructions reinforced by certain traditions or rituals. Nations are in this way homogenous and held together by kinship and common beliefs. He pinpoints their early beginnings in the printing of 'common languages'. The fixed printed word could be spread easily across a wide terrain and it made communication possible for people at greater distance. He considers that the imagined

communities of nations are joined by a common languages and limited to particular territories bordering other territories. He explains that archives hold the documents and artefacts that are important to nations. He asserts they store the information that establishes a dominant cultural discourse. Brian Isaac Daniels (2009) suggests museums and galleries display these documents and artefacts in a narrative form and comparable to sacred places they promote traditions ensuring a nation's control. The cultural knowledge within dominant cultural discourses gain their strength from institutions such as galleries and museums, these institutions are implicit for the transference of cultural knowledge. National narratives are also retold through other mediums such as newspapers and television.

People in diaspora are reliant on memory in the transference of cultural knowledge (Counsell, 2009). Not able to find their diasporic narrative stories in the usual providers of such information, for example, archives, museums or other institutions tied to the idea of the nation, they can only use memories to tell their stories. Memory is unreliable, changing and fragmented. Art practice often contains multiple layers of meaning and can engage with the contradictory and often transient experience of living with two cultures. I use my performative photographic practice to explore the complex and contesting aspects of diasporic identity.

I re-inscribe memories and personal experience through photographic self-staging, which I will discuss later in the chapter. The photograph can be a

document for an archive. As a document, it can become part of a nation's history. Its promise as a document sets the scene for my work; it becomes the frame (Jones, 1998). I use my diasporic body to re-inscribe national histories.

One theorist whose ideas are underpinning my research is Homi Bhabha (1994 [1991]). His theories explain the importance of the performative in my art practice. He proposes a view of culture in which the authority of linear history, the idea of nation and national identities is diminishing because of the increased movement and displacement of people. He believes that in the ambivalent relationship between existing historical national discourses and migrants in minority new cultural forms emerge. He claims people living in minority communities are both at the margins and between cultures contesting the dominant discourse through a performative re-inscription of this culture. He calls this contestation 'agency' and it leads to new cultural formations. Agency is a process of hybridisation that takes place where cultures meet in a location he has named 'third space'. It is a space of uncertainty between cultural utterances where cultures are negotiated through dialogue. He indicates the importance memory and enactment play in accessing cultural knowledge when in diaspora and that the process of making art becomes an essential element in an enactment of hybrid identities and the transformation of society.

I work with culturally specific and more generic forms. Homi Bhabha (1994 [1991]) claims that when you encounter something from a different culture that you cannot immediately understand, that you misinterpret or encounter

something that is untranslatable you enter the 'third space'. In my work the audience encounter a different culture. I knew this would be inevitable and something that had always happened in my work. There would always be a bit of Nordic in my practice. In my MA work I engage with memories of home, with re-inscribing Nordic culture and I knew there would be certain aspects of the work that were culturally specific, certain things a UK audience may misinterpret or not understand and others, more generic traits, that would be easily transmitted. I made a decision to work with this combination. To work with the culturally specific and the generic, trying to achieve a combination where the audience would enter a 'third space', a space of uncertainty between cultures, where some things are familiar and some are untranslatable.

So, I am 'hybrid' (Bhabha, 1994 [1991]). I am in a minority. I can be seen as belonging at the margins of society. In my performative photographic practice, I am responding to national symbols, I am shifting their visual appearance. I take on the role of figures in national romantic paintings, changing how they feel. I use my body to re-inscribe dominant cultural discourses. Staging stereotypes of nation: playing. I want to reflect upon how these performative acts create ambiguity and multiplicity contesting the certainty of national narratives. In the opening quote Homi Bhabha recognises art as a performative act that gives form to the ambiguous experience of negotiating two cultures. He explains art can contain the fragmented memories and ambiguous experiences of a displaced migrant. He suggests to live in a world of mobility and displacement, making art about hybrid identity negotiation expresses a desire

to join, of coming together in social solidarity. I have a desire to explore how cultural difference, the negotiation between two cultures, the desire to join (Bhabha, 1994 [1991]), can be manifested in my visual practice. I see the process as a way of positioning myself in homelessness expressing a desire to belong in-between.

Staging the Self



From the Studio, 2014

Reflection during studio practice: *The camera is on a tripod set for long exposures on a timer. I hear the shutters open and position myself between the camera and the backdrop. I pose. For a while I am locked in stillness. I am perhaps dead. I am posing like so many of the women pictured in Nordic national romantic paintings. I may tie my apron like the woman in the kitchen, I may be in deep thought on a chair, I may stand with a book in my hand. Looking away, looking down, fixed in submission. I have become another. I hear the shutter close and walk to the camera to view the digital image. I see her. I see me as her. I see her as me. I hear the mechanical click of the shutter of the camera opening again. I repeat. I pose again. I am enacting, examining*

and re-forming my identity, contesting Nordic, contesting Anglo. Moving here and moving there.

I photograph myself as others. I photograph myself for others. I am seen by others. There is a practice within the field of photography called self-staging. Amelia Jones (2006, p. 41) believes this practice is moving beyond photographic portraiture and self-portraiture turning these practices into a more self-conscious exploration into identity. She says is a type of performative photographic practice often taking place without an audience in a confined space. They are private performative acts taking place in front of a camera to create photographic images. The artist is both photographer and photographed and has in this way certain control over how the self is represented (Butler S. , 1987, p. 51). In a photograph a subject becomes an object and through repetition, these varying representations undermine the identity as singular and pre-determined (Jones, 2006, p. 43). During photographic self-staging the camera is an investigative tool offering multiple possibilities of the self to others. My private space is theatrical; there is a stage set, props, costumes, lights and mirrors. The camera is on a tripod and set to long self-exposures. The shutter opens for between three and six seconds to capture the image. The performance is the repetition of a gesture, a series of rehearsals, until there is a sense ambiguity of position in time, space and culture in the photographic image.

I photograph myself. I am transforming myself into an object. I am suspended in time forever. Amelia Jones (1998) is an art historian who examines

representations of the body in art. She explains that in western culture there has long been a desire to represent or confirm the self through different mediums. By making a subject into an object, by representing a person in paintings, sculptures or photographs, you proved or confirmed his or her identity. She explains that all efforts to contain the subject as coherent and knowable by these mediums has failed and she provides a way of thinking about the body and identity that explain why. She suggests the photographic medium as being developed out of a desire within western thought to transform a subject into an object. She proposes that photography contains this idea of separation and that photographs therefore contain the desire to suspend a subject in time forever.

Jones (1998) proposes there has been a shift in how we experience the body and think about identity. Drawing on the theories of embodied intersubjectivity (Merleau-Ponty, 2013 [1945]) she argues that there is no division between body and mind. Identity is formed between self, others and the world. Building on Judith Butler's (1990) theory of identity as performed rather than predetermined and unchanging, she explains how identity is a continuous process of adjustment of the self in relation to others and the world.

Jones (1998) explains how portraiture and self-portraiture is a performative exchange between the subject and its audience. She claims that the subject becomes an object through the pose and that in photographic self-staging our self becomes other and that through multiple others we become a subject, we

find our identity. She suggests that the photographed body has a way of enacting the audience to position themselves in relation to it, encouraging a bodily response. This is how the photograph extends beyond its frame, how it leaks. She claims that self-staged portraiture can be a good medium to interrogate and undermine the idea of identity as fixed, pre-existing and unchanging.

I pose. I pose again. My photographic work is a re-inscription of the national narratives of the Nordic countries voicing the experience of living with two cultures. Instead of staging the self as other I am staging the self for others. Using visual autobiography (Kuhn, 2000), I am exploring the point where the individual meets society and photographing the self for others. In this way, I am re-writing one culture from the current position in another, exploring the way identity is formed in diaspora. The work is concerned with the way a photograph can evoke a bodily response in a viewer, how it can be felt rather than interpreted. I am interested in how the photographs appear to fix time, how they function as a trace, opening up a space for endless future readings, one where every new exchange between the photographic work and the audience will form a space in which cultures meet. The viewers fill the gaps between the photographs with their own experience and cultures. The process of making my self-staged photographs is a negotiation of identity. Every new photograph is another other. Every adjusted pose is another possible self. My identity is adjusted in relation to others. Here I am who she is, but I am not, I am her, there but not and with every new photograph the uncertainty of my

existence resonates within, with every new pose it is amplified. In the photographs, I both see who I could be and who I am not.

Unfamiliar Home



From the Studio, 2013

All houses are haunted – by memories, by the history of their site, by their owners fantasies and projections or by the significance they acquire for agents and strangers. (Curtis, 2008, p. 34)

Reflection during studio practice: *It is a room. It is a lot like a home from the past. It is like one of those kitchens in the Nordic romantic paintings from the early 1900s. The inky silhouettes of the cast iron range, the chair and the cupboard set a scene. They make the room. They unmake the room. The dark shadows are not shadows. They form shapes on the walls without the certainty of a corresponding object. They are both familiar and impossible. The domestic interior, a place of safety, is warped a little, turned dark, made strange and uncanny. I stand, facing the wall, and reach out. The shadow of my arm merges with the inky dark form on the wall. The stuff of dreams and nightmares enter my body. I merge with the painting, the past, my past. With both desire and repulsion I merge with home.*

As a backdrop to my performative acts I have constructed a domestic interior. This type of space is often seen as a comfortable, private and safe (Perry, 2013, p. 7). From memory, I have re-constructed parts of a domestic interior, a kitchen from a traditional Nordiccroft. Two wooden walls form a corner of a room. One of the walls has a small wooden door. I create an illusion of a kitchen by projecting what looks like shadows of furniture onto the wooden walls. I project dark silhouettes of a chair, cupboard and cast iron range onto the walls both making the space homely and unfamiliar. In my photographs, the domestic interior is made strange, slightly out of proportion and warped. It refers to the Nordic symbol of the ideal home but has the slightly alarming feel of nightmares. I am turning the domestic interior into a space of imagination, shifted into the unsettling shapes of nightmares. I am making the homely seem strange, evoking the unsettling uncanny (Vidler, 1992; Freud, 2003 [1919]). In the photographs I am creating a space of uncertainty.

From the time of the invention of photography there seem to be a desire to capture haunting (Harvey, 2007). There are many examples in Victorian spirit photography where the images have acted as proof of apparitions and ghostly activity. John Harvey (2007, p. 7) highlights photography's commonly perceived paradox or double identity, both believed to be an instrument of scientific enquiry capturing the truth of the visible world and a magical process able to conjure up shadows, blur and translucency associated with supernatural occurrences. In spirit photographs you can see faint shadows, translucent faces

and blurred, unclear figures in domestic interiors and more formal studio settings bringing the rational and the irrational together. Today we all know these effects are created by photographic techniques and the photographs are fake. They are not proof of haunting, of spirits of dead family members' eternal return to the home, but double exposures, long exposures and motion blur. It could be argued that in some cases they made people believe the irrational but also a way of working through grief and loss (Harvey, 2007, p. 58). In my photographic practice, I use some of these techniques, I employ the visual language of haunting developed by the spirit photographers in the later parts of the nineteenth century, which have been used by many photographers since. A ghost from the past returning home. She revisiting me. I revisiting her. Eternally returning. Undermining the idea of linear time.

Gill Perry (2013, p. 143) argues that the metaphor of haunting has a strong currency in contemporary culture and recent critical theory. She says that traditionally haunting ghosts are tied to specific spaces such as buildings, homes and ruins. She suggests that the metaphor of haunting can be used when dealing with the emergence of marginalised minority histories. She proposes that minority cultures in diaspora, excluded by national narratives, can be seen as the ghosts of cultural memory. She believes the idea of haunting undermines linear narratives and can be used metaphorically when evoking the experience of living with two cultures.

In the same way as the spiritualist photographers, I am using the medium's rational frame, the camera's objective characteristic, the way it is seen as capturing the truth at the same time as I am undermining this notion by using the photographic language of haunting. My photographic work differs from theirs in that I am using the metaphor of haunting to express the uncertain and unclear experience of living between national narratives. I am staging myself as translucent. I am returning unclear in a haze. Ghost-like I am telling a different story. A story of not here and not there. A story of an eternal movement between national narratives. Questioning the idea of linear time, I am returning as the ghost of cultural memory, returning until the minority history is told. Ready for *her* to return eternally.

Red and Green Should Not Be Seen



From the Studio, 2014

Reflection during studio practice: *The skirt, the apron and the bodice. I have chosen three items from the Nordic traditional costume, the rest of my clothes are contemporary and plain. I am putting them on knowing I will become them and they will become now. The skirt is my friend and the bodice is my enemy. The apron I keep tying and untying. The hair I keep plating and un-plating. It is as if there is a need to remodel, remake, reinvent the costume. Blending the costume with my other clothes. I stand here, posing, half-traditional Nordic woman and half-contemporary British one. Half of the time I am with downcast eyes and half of the time demanding attention with a direct gaze. Tying and untying, plating and unplating. I become her for a moment, locked into position, then in frustration I let go. Hovering between. I am posing, knowing my Nordic traditional costume, so far a private affair, will become public in my photographs. It will encircling my body become a discourse of difference.*

Red is the colour of the traditional Nordic Croft. Green is the colour of the pine forest. Red is the colour of the skirt in my traditional Nordic costume. Green is the colour of the bodice. Since moving to Britain, I have many times been told that red should not be worn with green. Red and green is a common colour combination in Nordic traditional costumes. In the past, I have often worn the two colours together in day-to-day wear, as if one naturally leads to the other. Red and green should not be seen. In British culture they remain apart. Over the years, I have learnt to separate the two colours in dress, always tempted to bring them back together.

In my photographic work, I wear a traditional Nordic costume. Patrizia Calefato (1997) argues that the body is turned into a discourse through wearing clothes, adopting styles and reconfiguring fashions. Carol Tulloch (2002, p. 64) examines how clothes in diaspora often become a combination of traditional clothes from one culture remodelled and re-inscribed in the new culture. She

explains how an item of traditional clothing is re-modelled and used by a group as a way of showing solidarity, strengthening ties within a group and making a discourse visible.

There are traditional Nordic costumes for both men and women. The different styles are specific to certain villages. In the past they were worn in an almost identical manner and formed a way for people to feel that they belonged to a particular community. They had a collective identity and were easily identifiable when worn in different areas of the Nordic countries. Today they have become national symbols. They are often used during celebrations at the Scandinavian Church in Liverpool. For me, to wear the traditional costume in Britain has been a way of temporarily trying to join this collective identity, pinpointing my feelings when wearing and moving with the costume. It has been a way to re-inscribe this symbol. It has been an exercise in figuring out how I feel when wearing it and how I use it differently. The clothes and my body have become part of a discourse in an effort to make Anglo-Nordic culture visible. I have adopted the costume, letting it blend with the clothes I usually wear. I have worn the thick red skirt with a black contemporary top and a pair of heavy boots. I have worn the bodice, the shirt and the apron but not the underskirt, the bag and the scarf. I have worn one or two items at a time but never the full costume. In my photographs, I am making Nordic style public and with my clothed body, I am constructing a discourse, raising awareness of Nordic culture and making the Anglo-Nordic community visible in society. It has become a way of locating myself and finding a place, in the movement of my

body and clothes, in the layers of cultures in society. Reintroducing red and green, slowly bringing them closer. Finding a position.

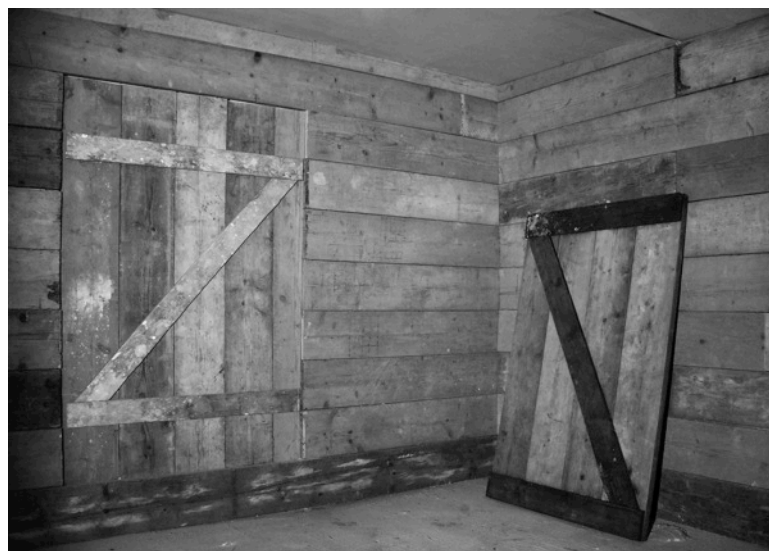
4 FINDINGS

In my MA project, I explored some of the experiences that lie within the hyphenation of being Anglo-Nordic, as well as finding a visual form that deals home and how these memories establish relationships with the ancestral home which ties a diasporic community together. I investigated what role they play in the formation of my identity. The investigation also led me to reassess my idea of the relationship between belonging and place. Through performative photography, I re-inscribed national symbols and narratives of the Nordic countries. Exploring memories from home has led me on a path of symbols, romantic myths, national romantic paintings, women in traditional Scandinavian crofts, plaiting hair, tying aprons, and sitting on rustic chairs. Because I am at the same time attracted by and resist the romantic material that I associate with the notion of home, I shift it deliberately in my photographic reconstructions; from my position in diaspora I re-inscribe it differently.

So, what did I find when using visual autobiography? How did my performative photographic practice solidify the location between cultures that Homi Bhabha (1994 [1991]) calls 'third space'? I embarked on a real and an imagined journey home. The experiences along the way have led me to realise that my relationship with the Nordic countries is complex and filled with both desire and

resentment. During my MA my experience of living in diaspora was transformed. In the beginning, I focused on what I lacked and the way I was not fully Anglo and not fully Nordic. In the work, I expressed a desire for a distant ancestral home and the project was exploration into loss, lack and alienation. Later, I realised that I was both Anglo and Nordic, at the same, yet slightly differently. It became an exploration into what I can add, precisely that I am both, and how to channel my hybridity further and actively engage in cultural exchanges. I have come to realise that my relationship to these places is far more complex than I first imagined and that the idea of home is not site-specific. The work has moved from expressing a desire to grasp and keep hold of a distant place and an idea of belonging as tied to particular locations to exploring more complex and ambiguous relationship to places (Rogoff, 2006), expressing a desire to find a position within layers of cultures in society. Here is the journey as it unfolds.

The Wall



Reflection during studio practice: *The lighting is flat. I am standing close to the wall, my nose following the grain as I am searching for home. I am looking for the smell of old hay and snow, the distant sounds of the forest, the softness of damp wood under fingertips. I am standing in the cellar in number 50 Kirkmanshulme Lane, Manchester, and the lighting is uniform.*

The re-construction of the walls is finished and they say nothing. It has an eerie, weighty presence that settles in my gut. It is demanding attention but despite the texture and grain it is blank. It is punctuating its surrounding with its difference but the boards give nothing away. In silence it is waiting. Persistently it is present. Standing next to the wall I reflect on how it seems to connect with the interior of my body, how it evokes. I am listening within, paying attention to the tingling feeling of many ideas. I am on the edge, in that space of possibility surrounded by the unclear. Before the work.

During the first stages of my research project, I attempted to re-construct parts of the interior of a Nordic barn in my studio. I wanted to reconstruct something from my ancestral home in the UK seeing how memories and symbols of home work in diaspora. The build was an exploration into materiality, gaps, grain and knots, and most importantly, touch. My being was filled with desire for the past, for my former home; I was ready to explore the interiors I had been photographing for so many years, in a new way. Instead of documenting existing traditional crofts in Scandinavia, an obsessive collecting of others' traditional interiors, I was going to build my own. More importantly what happened to my identity in the process of building? I intended to write my autobiography on the walls, acting on a desire to find myself a place within the familiar interior, inscribing my memories on the walls. My memories would be

constructed from my position in diaspora and in this way I was going to find out how my relationship with home was different.

I was not ready for the absence. I was not ready for the loss. Standing, facing the corner, I could only see what the wall was not. I could see the lack of a surrounding Nordic environment. The smell of the forest. The dampness of winter. The numbness of cold in my fingertips. It reminded me of a stage-set. Pretending. Faking. Hoping. I suddenly understood the blankness, the uniformity and the silence. To understand how I arrived here I need to tell you about another wall, a wall in Sweden on a damp and cold day in November in 2012, on day when the snow is uncertain whether to stay or melt.

The Wall in the Barn



Ekman-Davies, *Fritz's Barn*, 2012

Reflection during studio practice: *The only direct light is the murky overcast winter light entering through the small window, a secondary version of this light, soft as velvet, is permeating through the door of the adjoining corridor. The snow from my boots is mixing with strands of hay on the floor in the former barn. I am encapsulated by soft darkness. Visual details are lost to the small sounds of scraping, tapping, clicking and the lingering smell of cattle. Some of the inscriptions are large and untidy; some of them are small and uncertain. Some of them are faint and some of them are written in charcoal. Some of the names inscribed I recognise from stories about the village and some of them are new. Standing close to the wall, my nose nearly touching, trying to read the faintest messages from the past, I suddenly imagine many others standing close to the wall with implement in hand ready to inscribe. I almost see them in peripheral vision emerging out of the shadows, unclear. I want to add my name, somehow inscribe my identity to the fabric of the building, to temporarily position myself with them, there.*

I never completed the act. I never added my name. I wrote a series of memories on the walls of the old croft and barn but I never signed them. I remained anonymous. Yet this is the small detail that started the project. Pencil against wood. A signature. Leaving a mark for the future. Claiming a place. Saying that 'I was here'. I belong here. I belong here even if I leave.

Before I stood near the wall in my studio, I encountered another wall. In the failing light a late afternoon near Christmas, I saw the many names, dates and messages on a barn wall in a traditional Scandinavian croft. On a study trip in Sweden, as so many times before, I set myself the task of photographing a nearby traditional Scandinavian croft. This time it was Fritz's small farm down the steep path near a brook in the middle of a pine forest. This former home had been left to deteriorate after the former owner died and most of the out

buildings were open. As so many times before I was lost in a flurry of textures, objects, peeling wallpaper, old newspaper and tools. Capturing these traditional interiors from earlier times, with the accumulated stuff of generations of rooted yeoman farmers, had been an obsession for many years. When returning home on holiday I photographed houses and outhouses and their cast iron ranges, piles of magazines, chairs, piles of nails, tins, bags, family photographs, maps, chairs, beds, pans and coffee pots.

This time I also documented the act of me inscribing the walls with memories. I soon realised how incompatible the motion of the body is with the medium of photography. I wanted to capture the act of writing on the walls during long exposures and was left with a series of pictures of translucent and doubled bodies in images where the messages seemed insignificant. The gap between performance and photography, between bodily movement and the mechanics of the camera shifted the direction of my visual work. I was left with a set of images intending to do one thing but actually doing something different. Later in the project, I consciously use the translucent body but during these early experiments it became a way to express a sense of at once being there and not being there, perhaps of desire to belong and at the same time not belong.

This set of images, like so many times before, captured aspects of a traditional Scandinavian croft. The interiors were for the first time including my body. At this stage I knew my re-visitations to these interiors were obsessive and during the course of my MA I began to understand why. Perhaps I did not write my

name near the messages because I knew I did not belong in the traditional Swedish croft in the forest anymore. I had been walking around for days with the usual feeling of being an intruder, of upsetting the order of things. The act of signing the wall was left as a desire in my imagination. And during my study trip I pinpointed a desire to say 'I belong here'. This desire to explore belonging when living away from an ancestral home became the driving force in my MA project. What happens to identity when there isn't a clear and coherent relationship to place? When the act of signing your name 'I belong here' feels like an intrusion.

Wall Re-construction



From the Studio, 2013

Reflection during studio practice: I am standing close to the plaster wall in my studio. The wood is in the adjoining corridor. The tools are on the floor. The photographs and plan are on my desk. My forehead is resting against the

smooth surface. I use my body as a measure. I am marking the height from the tip of my nose remembering how it is to duck when entering a small, wooden door like this in a Scandinavian croft in Sweden. You duck and step over the threshold at exactly the same time. I was going to make a little bit of Scandinavia in my studio. I was going to build my barn wall here in Manchester. I wasn't sure exactly what my relationship to it would be but I imagined a shrine, a memorial of home. Seeing the cellar studio around the edges of the viewfinder makes the re-construction seem like an impossible undertaking. In this moment, the act seems more impossible, it is never going to be what I intended. It was always going to be without its Scandinavian context. Impossible. Sad. An act of longing and failure.

Re-constructing the walls from Fritz's barn in Sweden here in Manchester stemmed from a desire to complete the act of adding my name with the many other names, to complete the act of inscription. I wanted to act on the desire of claiming a place, saying 'I was here', I belong here, remember me here when I am not, anymore.

The wooden corner took about four weeks to complete. Each week started with one day of building and a couple of days photographing and reflecting on the experience in writing. The re-construction forms a wooden corner with horizontal boards and a small barn door. A barn door you cannot open; a barn door leading nowhere. There is a stark contrast between the tactile experience of building the wooden walls, the feel of grain, knots and corners and the act of photographing. I experience my body's closeness to the materials, the effort, desire and want of a re-construction, a small part of Scandinavia in Manchester in relation to photographs of the construction revealing what it is not, what it lacks. The walls occupy a corner within the room and the surrounding plaster

reveals its falseness. It makes my act of building seem even more impossible. The wall is without its former context. It is without former location, climate and wear. It has not, in the same way, settled in its surrounding.

I build out of desire for my ancestral home, thinking of the re-construction as a memorial of home, as a shrine, a stand in for home. It was only when the shrine was built and photographed that I realised what it was and what type of narrative it was contained within. The process made me realise how people in diaspora often relate to their ancestral home and how this relationship is one of both longing and loss.

Through the viewfinder of my camera the wood looks too neat, too uniform and too even. I am consciously choosing the position of nail holes, cracks and imperfections to give it character. The new construction, despite being made from old boards, looks new. It looks non-specific. I have simplified a barn to a generic structure. The reconstruction triggers in me a sense of displacement and loss. It is a barn but not a real barn. All the barns I have ever seen are merged into one, through memory they have lost detail and became one symbol.

False, impossible and with a new context the wall is ready. As a stage set it is waiting for a performance, for my inscription, my signature. How do I belong? How do I sign 'I was here', I belong here? I had intended to handwrite my

autobiography on the wall. I just didn't now where and how to begin. I was going to write my life on the walls in the shrine, examining the narratives for clues about how the relationship with home is re-inscribed when living away.

The Symbol and Astrid's Croft



Sara Davies, *Astrid's Croft*, 2011 & Carl Larsson, *A Farmstead*, c.1906

Reflection during studio practice: *I looked at the wooden walls in my cellar studio in Manchester, the generic barn and symbol of home. I thought of other walls, of exterior wooden walls painted with the distinct Falu red pigment, interior wooden walls with layers of crumbling wallpaper and the plain wooden interior walls often seen in smaller dwellings. I remember the tiniest glimpses of red seen through the weighty branches of a conifer tree one winter. I remember the neglected wooden walls of Astrid's croft, which I photographed so many times. I remember their varying shades from red to grey and how they looked against the snow. I remember how the red blends with the dark green of the conifers at dusk and how they are covered by frost in the winters. I remember the traditional red croft in the background of the image in the IKEA catalogue, the red croft in my interior design magazine and the red croft featured on tourist guides, in literature and newspapers. Many people in the Nordic countries own a second home in the countryside, this is often a real traditional red-painted croft. This type of place is also circulating in the imagination. It is an idea. It is a symbol of the ideal home, the ideal life.*

The ideal home. The ideal life. In my studio, I had constructed a symbol of the ideal home. For years I have returned to this particular type of place. I photographed other people's former homes as if I was gathering together one of my own through photographic fragments. From a position in diaspora, I was collecting photographic fragments of abandoned interiors and Falu red exteriors of typical yeoman farmer crofts from around 150 years ago. I was obsessively revisiting this type of place during visits to Sweden. I have been photographing the ideal home for many years. Years before I started my MA, I often photographed the exteriors and interiors of traditional Nordic crofts. By the wall in my studio it suddenly made sense. At the same time as I was re-visiting these specific crofts in Sweden, I was also returning to them because they were symbolic within Nordic culture. I returned to what Pierre Nora calls 'sites of memory' (1996), places, which are functional, culturally objective and symbolic within a specific culture. Before the little red croft I had explored the pine forest. Before the pine forest it was the meadow. They are all cultural symbols. All tied to the idea of nation. They are all places to which I return in my artwork.

It has been argued that people in diaspora use these collective myths to strengthen the ties within a community and their bond with their former ancestral home (Cohen, 2008, p. 17). The details I remember from personal experience before emigrating almost seamlessly hook into the national romantic myths of pine forests, lakes and little red crofts, of midsummers and Valborg fires. I believe artwork dealing with the Scandinavian landscape, tradition,

folklore and mythology resonate in a particular way with Scandinavian communities abroad. I believe it becomes a way for migrants to connect to the culture of their ancestral homes. Interacting with the symbolic becomes a way to re-form identity in diaspora. Writing national symbols anew.

Standing by the wall in my studio, thinking of all the walls I have ever seen and all the walls I have ever dreamt of, I momentarily find a way back home. I remember myself during midsummer, in the forest, by the lake and realise that my past experience is remodelled through hooking onto these more rigid collective structures of remembrance (Halbwachs, 1992 [1950]). Through them I re-form my identity. I look at the wall again and see the blankness, I see absence, and I see silence. The national symbol of the ideal home, the wooden wall is different. I know the notion of the ideal home seems to guide me back in time and across the waters to my ancestral home. I know that the collective myths of home assist in tying our diasporic community together. It seemed to me as if this happened in the physical interaction with the symbol. In the performative re-inscription it has changed. The former national symbol has changed from a dream to a nightmare. The romantic has turned dark and inky. It is as if the ideal home is haunted.

Scandinavian Pain



Ragnar Kjartansson, *Scandinavian Pain*, Moderna Museet, 2013

When I first encountered the image of Ragnar Kjartansson's slightly neglected red-painted barn on the world wide web I held my breath. The neon sign along the ridge of the roof seemed a heavy weight on the old structure. The luminous letters created a stark contrast to the weathered and settled appearance of the barn. When I saw what the sign said my response was immediate.

SCANDINAVIAN PAIN. In my mind the relationship between the words and the barn felt so right.

What I experienced through the picture on that day was a personal memory of a slightly different kind of pain. I instantly linked the notion of the ideal home with neglect, burden, solitude and pain. Scandinavian Pain. Somewhere in relationship between the barn and the neon sign, I see the symbol of the ideal

home and the good life in pain. Once I lived in a small red-painted croft by a lake in the middle of a conifer forest, not far from the home of painter Carl Larsson. Many said it was paradise. The croft was built in a remote location in a village that was once a thriving mining community. Before that it was a village of yeoman farmers. When my family moved there the mine had long since closed and this closure led to the usual social problems associated with the end of employment opportunities, such as depopulation, too much time and too little money. The neighbouring village suffered a similar fate. The area was incredible beautiful, full of traditional crofts, of which many were unfortunately unkempt and deteriorating, some uninhabited and never visited. The artist's neon sign declaring SCANDINAVIAN PAIN led me to the reason why I left Sweden. It is a country where social problems are swept under the carpet, and where the national myth of the ideal home, the red-painted croft by a lake surrounded by pine forest often painted by the Nordic national romantic painters³, is sometimes very far from reality.

³For example, Anders Zorn (Jackson, 2012, pp.73, 75) in Sweden, Christian Skedsvig (Figenschou, 2009 pp. 55, 69) in Norway, Pekka Halonen (Nationalmuseum, 1995, pp.105, 109) in Finland and Erik Werenskiold (Jackson, 2012 p.58) in Norway.

The Wall in the Yard



Documentation of *Corner of Mine* exhibited at Paper Gallery

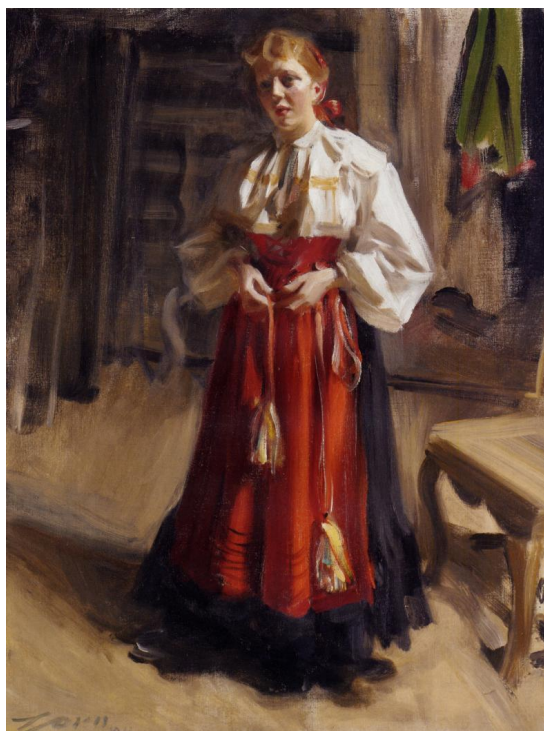
When installing the work at Paper Gallery it was still mute. It was still waiting. I was standing on the edge of a personal narrative, needing to find a way of voicing my mixed feelings of the national romantic symbol of the ideal home, the traditional Nordic croft in the forest, so that the work made sense to an audience without the same experiences. The experience of the fundamental difference between the narrative content of a national symbol and some of the real experiences I had encountered in the environment of a traditional croft somehow said something about symbolic narratives in general. The way they operate beyond the real, the way their meaning is shared by a group of people and the way this meaning is resistant to change when transported through time (Nora, 1996).

I installed a version of the work in the gallery yard. It formed a corner with a separate door. The gallery is part of former industrial buildings and the texture of the wood made a stark contrast to the typical Manchester red brick walls. Many said it reminded them of a stage set and I knew it was still waiting for some sort of performance. Writing my autobiography on the wall seemed too literal an act and as I already knew from my tests in Sweden the text easily seemed to get lost among larger shapes within the photographic frame. The movement when writing did not correspond with the effect created in the image. A camera never fully captures the experience of a performance, it objectifies, it fragments, as an index always referring outside of itself. The movement of the body creates effects in the images but often two or three jerky jumps look like a gracious sweep across the frame. There is a gap between the body and the camera, between performance and photography, they are unsynchronised, and they never fully meet.

On the evening of the preview I spent some time in the corner where the two walls met. The exhibition fell at the mid-point of my time doing the MA and I was nervous about exhibiting work in progress. This was what the exhibition was all about, showing academic research in art as a process but the gallery context somehow made the pieces into finished works and I knew my work was silent. I knew it was time to photograph. The light in the yard formed shadows on the wall. I saw silhouettes of the audience on the wooden boards. I saw my own body as a dark shape moving across the structure and suddenly realised the importance of the body in my work. It was during my interaction with the

wall that I would find out about how I relate to my former home. It was in this playful interaction with a Nordic symbol that I could begin to understand how my hybrid identity is formed. The re-construction of the traditional Nordic craft had been an act of desire for a distant ancestral home. It was an act of longing and loss. Placing the body somewhere between the camera and the wall demanded something different. It demanded movement; it demanded an addition. It was time to see how I re-inscribed the symbolic. How did Nordic national symbols shift in my process of photographic re-modelling? How did I change the narratives? How did I write them differently? Instead of creating work evoking a sense of loss and longing, of lack and being stuck, I was ready to transform, to add and to join the old with the new, join one culture with another.

Re-inscribing Paintings



Anders Zorn, *A Girl in Orsa Costume*, 1911

Reflection during studio practice: *I platted my hair, pulled the thick, red skirt over my head and stepped into the picture. All my work refers to paintings. It uses the conifer forest, the meadow flowers and the red-painted croft, symbols from Nordic national romantic paintings. This is why I had to put on my traditional costume. This is why I had to enter the photographic frame with the thick red skirt. With the wall nearby I slowly familiarise myself with the space. Long elongated shadows, a cooking range, a coffee pot, a table, a cupboard and a basket are spread across the floor and the wall. Dark and inky. The clothes I am wearing are handmade; they feel unfamiliar against my skin, a patterned apron, a green bodice, and a blouse with blue and white stripes. I feel as if I have just stepped out of national romantic painting and into this much darker space. A home changed and re-inscribed through photography. Shifted and changed by time and context. The body and the wall entangled in a story, a sort of strange dance. It is poetry of scale, distortion, translucency and doubling. Exploring memory, identity and place in the Scandinavian diaspora. Exploring the uncanny, the ambiguous, the non-linear and the multi-voiced.*

Anders Zorn painted the small villages of Dalarna. With intimacy he painted the interiors of the crofts, the surrounding fields and forests, the traditions, the celebrations, the work and the moments of rest. He was born in Mora, Dalarna, in 1860 and after spending time abroad he returned to his home, painting as so many other painters of this time, the narratives of the Swedish nation (Jackson, 2012, p. 11). When viewing *My Little Farm*, a painting by Carl Larsson, earlier this year I realised I echoed the symbols used by Nordic national romantic painters working around the turn of the nineteenth century. My artwork contained the same symbols but with a different feel. Astrid's croft was abandoned and deteriorating or in the forest you walked in circles, endlessly unable to exit. In my work national symbols were darker. I decided to actively re-create scenes from paintings of this period. Anders Zorn painted women in traditional costume, he painted domestic interiors in rural crofts and he painted wooden walls and furniture. Instead of faithfully copying one painting I look at

many, often the poses of the women are similar. I choose three common themes, tying the apron, combing hair and sitting on a chair in contemplation.

In acting out these female stereotypes, often represented in national romantic paintings, I was hoping to re-activate my experience of Nordic culture; channelled through my body I wanted to re-inscribe Nordic culture from my position in diaspora. I am hoping my agency (Bhabha, 1994 [1991]), will form a place where cultures meet. I want to shift the feel and content of the Anders Zorn paintings with my diasporic experience, questioning the idea of nations.

Staging the Self between the Camera and the Wall



From The Studio, 2014

Reflection during studio practice: *There is a corner and a beam of light. Within me are all the chairs I have ever seen. In front, there is nothing more than flat black outlines. The walls are blank. I reach for a shadow shape and my body changes the outline. I see the shadow of platted hair. Within me are*

all the plaits I have ever seen. Despite the grain the wall is empty. I hear a click and I enter. I take two steps and turn slowly. The red skirt is swaying. With downcast eyes I arch my neck, tying the apron at my waist. I am still. I am waiting. With uncertain steps I walk away, but nothing. With a jerk I look ahead leaving the old behind. I leave the rigid pose again and the apron sits askew. I follow the grain of the silent wall and feel all the crofts I have ever felt. Within me are all the midsummers I have ever loved. In front of me is the silhouette of a coffee-pot. Within me are all the coffee-pots I have ever known.

I am in studio mode. I am HERE and NOW pretending to be THERE and THEN.

An intense experience in a slow sense of time. I feel open and I easily get emotional. I let the work happen and I need to embrace what I don't understand. When I first entered the studio, I intended to focus on my performance to the expense of the final images. Day after day, I tried to ignore the click of the shutter but found it impossible. After a while, I started to focus on the pose, the photographs became a way of playing with identity, of acting a stereotype, letting the stereotype effect me, perhaps shift my position.

What is place? Where is my place? On this day my place is in the studio. The camera is on the tripod set for long exposures. The wall and the shadowy silhouettes form a kitchen in front of me. I am standing to the side in the traditional red skirt. With the camera on a tripod I let my body slowly move into the reconstruction I built in my studio. It feels as if I am stepping into of the interior of a Zorn painting. I step in front of the camera wearing my traditional costume, made by my grandmother and worn by my mother and I enter the three poses I have chosen. I am momentarily taking on the female stereotype in Zorn's paintings. I am becoming her. Locked in the pose. Staging myself in a

national romantic painting makes me feel uneasy. As a migrant in diaspora I no longer fit. Wearing the traditional costume used to make me feel happy. Now it feels overwhelming and too colourful. I only wear one or two items from the full costume. The rest of my clothes are black so that these parts of my body blend with the shadows in the images. I have practiced the poses from the paintings. Sitting on a chair with hands on my knees. Standing and tying the apron at my side. Plating my hair slightly to one side.

My body is almost constantly in movement except for the few seconds of capture and even then I occasionally make a sweeping motion or a jerk to form an effect on the final image. I have practiced these strange and unexpected movements before, in Fritz's barn, and they quickly come back to me. Then I described them as a strange dance of jolts and skips and small shudders formed because of the gap between performance and photography, between movement and what the camera captures. Today, I am repeating the poses maybe 40 times each, changing the costume between sets. Sometimes I return to a pose altering the position of the silhouettes, altering the furniture in the room. The work is repetitive. I pose and I pose again. It is in the moments of stillness that it feels as if I have entered a painting; when I am locked in position, it makes me emotional. I feel rebellious. I enter and I exit and the movement visible within the image as motion blur somehow changes the fixed characteristics of the painting. Am I changing the narrative of a nation? I enter and I exit. I enter and I exit again. I pose and I re-pose. When my body moves, I am me and when the pose locks me in stillness, I am her. My body

aligns with the woman in the painting and in the pose I am her for a moment. I am a representation. I am her as representation. It is in this space between me and her, my negotiation of identity, me as performer and me as image, me as subject and me as object, me as Anglo-Nordic and me as aligning with a Nordic symbol of nation that cultures are transformed. It happens after a few weeks of positioning and re-positioning, of my body moving in the national romantic kitchen, my body moving through this illusion of home, captured as representation, that I understand the complexity of place. Somewhere within the poetry of presence and absence I find my feet in movement.

In the end, I have around 450 photographs. They are playing with the idea of place. They are playing with the ideas of national narratives. By stepping into the place of the woman in the painting, I am trying out a history and a place within a nation that is not mine anymore. During the weeks in the studio, linear space and time collapse. I am re-inscribing the woman in the kitchen with the movement of my body, again and again. I realise that the memory of the painting becomes memory of paintings, memories of my personal experience in these environments. My personal experiences merge with Nordic national narratives of wood, red paint, coffee-pots and aprons. I return around 450 times and adjust the costume, the room, the poses and I can feel the national narrative from the painting slowly changing. Re-inscribing me as her in the kitchen. Repeating the poses again and again, returning. A national history returning to me, as a dream or a nightmare and I inscribe it differently.

The photographs explore my relationship to place as more complex. I am uprooted. Pulled out of the ground. I experience Nordic culture through national narratives. It is what ties me to other Nordic people but my experience is slowly re-writing these narratives. I instantly hook my experience onto these myths but I also intensely want to change them. Re-model them in my photographic work. In the photographs, I represent myself as partially visible, both there and not there. From my position in the UK and through artwork, I transform national narratives, expressing a more complex and uncertain relationship to place. In the photograph, the Nordic romantic myth of the ideal home is darker and less detailed. In my photographs place is ambiguous. Linear time and space are collapsing. Perspective is broken. There are patches of here, there, now and then within the frame. Jumbled. All brought together to express the complexity and uncertainty of identity and belonging in diaspora.

Editing and Sequencing



Stay this moment, 2014

After my time in the studio, remodelling national romantic paintings through performative photography, it is time to familiarise myself with the result. I have been working with the body in a space, repeating the poses, finally accepting the camera and the photograph as my primary methods of investigation. I have accepted the mechanics of the camera and worked with what happens to the body in the photographs. Now it is time to make a selection from the large amount of images and in this process begin to understand more about belonging in the Scandinavian diaspora. During the time editing photographs and sequencing them into a piece of moving image I realised that all the images contained a kind of spatial ambiguity. It placed me as the first viewer of the work in an uncertain position. I was wondering what type of environment I was experiencing. It started with the question 'What is this place?' shortly followed by 'What is place?' and 'Is this how place is experienced in diaspora?'. I also analysed the various methods I had been using to convey a poetic, complex and more ambiguous rendering of time and space.

I decided on a square format hoping the stable frame would emphasise the uncertainty within the frame. The images slowly moved through a process of desaturation, the colour fading until I reached a point where the images were black-and-white with the occasional red detail. Marina Warner (2006, p. 163) argues that we relate the monochrome photographic format to the idea of memories and past experience. She believes the black-and-white colours are symbolic of loss. I am also hoping the desaturated images would remind

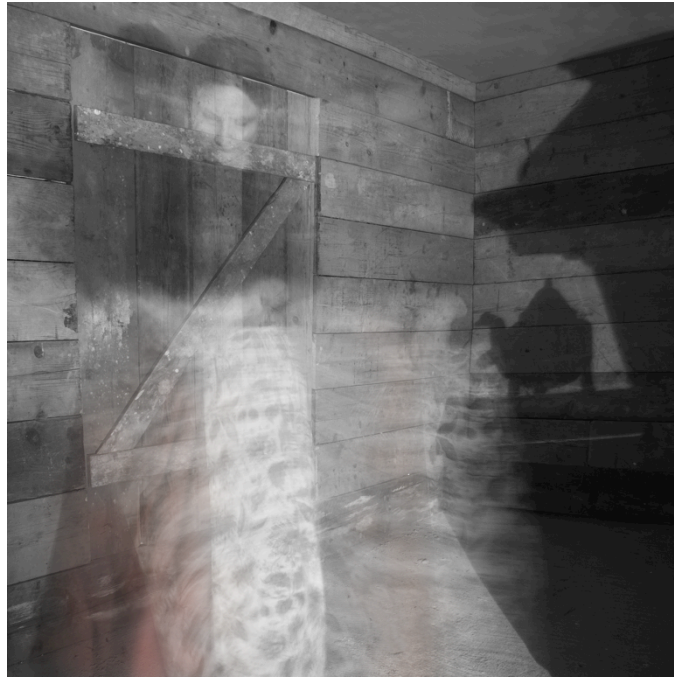
viewers of early spirit photographs. I let the colour red remain to mirror the colour of the traditional Nordic croft. When editing the images in Photoshop I realised that I used the function that skewed the perspective making the photographs slightly distorted. I had already used distortion when I projected the shadows on the walls of the stage creating a feel of the uncanny (Freud, 2003 [1919]) or unhomeliness. Skewing in Photoshop seemed to be a continuation of this process. Marina Warner (2006) discusses translucency as something viewers generally read as a haunting. She claims that the idea of a blurred or double figure in photography is generally ascribed as ghostly. The translucent figure in my photographs are reminiscent of ghosts and hauntings, questioning the idea of linear time. My use of motion blur is creating a sense of something unstable and floating. The shadows in the images, more present than the figure, make one feel that there is something ominous about to happen. Warner talks of shadows, or shadow play in magic lantern shows, as vehicles of ideas of absence, loss and melancholy (2006, p. 156). My images play with the idea of illusion, presence and absence, of here and not here, of there and not there.

In the end, I used four still photographs to make a piece of moving image. I created a six-minute loop in which the interior remained the same, a shadow of a cast iron range with canopy on one side and a shadow of a chair on the other. The chair and the figure are moving. They are changing position within the image. With very slow transitions the chair transforms into a figure tying the apron. This figure is dissolving and changing into a figure plaiting her hair.

After this, it is morphing into a more blurred body in a cloud of red skirt. Then the figure disappears and the room is empty. Me, her, the stereotype is fading in and out. Returning. Revisiting Nordic culture. Re-positioning.

In the images, I am somehow gathering together past and present and here and there into a layered and more complex experience. A floating, darker fairy-tale-like space. Through repositioning myself in relation to these Nordic national romantic paintings, through posing and inscribing them differently, I have formed my own narrative as a migrant of the Scandinavian diaspora. I make my story heard through the production of images. My story about belonging can be traced in how they have changed. I do not yet know why the emptiness and darkness but I can see a difference. My story differs from the British and Nordic national narratives. My story is not tied to a specific place. It is not site-specific. It is a poetic composition about the complexity in my relation to place (Rogoff, 2006). The question remains. How do I belong if place is more complex than now, then, here and there? Is there no home or multiple homes? Is belonging a more internal affair?

Audience Responses



Stay this moment, 2014

'I am in Dalarna, I think.' (Karlsson-Kemp, 2014). The words of Ingrid Karlsson-Kemp, another Anglo-Swedish artist based in the north of England, reverberated in my mind. They were so straight forward, both precise and simple. I have been very curious to see how an Anglo-Nordic audience would respond to the work and there it was in one sentence. She could see a connection between our practices, both investigations into belonging, both using symbols, folklore and myths, both asking the question: 'Where is home?' (Karlsson-Kemp, 2014). She was able to feel, understand and locate the symbolism within the work.



Anders Zorn, *Midsummer Dance*, 1903

A few weeks earlier another Anglo-Swedish friend, Helena Lee, stood in front of my work talking about longing and nostalgia when she suddenly said: 'You have been looking at the painting "*Midsummer Dance*" by Anders Zorn' (Lee H. , 2014). I was astonished she could pinpoint one of the Nordic national romantic paintings I have been using as source material. She also both instantly and instinctively knew where the work was taking her, it was taking her home, if only for a moment. Both Ingrid and Helena could see, feel and understand the culturally specific symbols within the work. Ingrid pointed out how the Nordic existed within her, waiting to come out in her artwork. I had long been wondering how my work could be a place where cultures meet. I had been asked where the 'Anglo' was located in the work. Helena answered my question she said 'The "*Anglo*" is brought to the work by the audience, it is in their

engagement' (Lee H. , 2014). They come with their experience to the work, feel a different culture and enter Bhabha's 'Third space' (1994 [1991]). My Anglo-Swedish friends could see Dalarna, they could see Zorn's paintings, they could sense the romanticism, the most beautiful village, route, lake, hill, croft in the world, the quintessentially Swedish location, the ideal home. They could connect to the ancestral home but I am pretty sure they could also feel its absence.

To partly answer the question how somebody with a different culture or cultures, born or currently living in the UK, would encounter the work I invited a group of research students and friends from Manchester Metropolitan University to spend time with the work and writing down their responses. One by one, I led them into the dark space to encounter the projections showing the work. I gave them five solitary minutes with the work and then some time to write in response to the experience. Everybody taking part had some previous knowledge of my work so the findings can only be an indication. I suspected that their responses would be different from Ingrid's and Helena's. I was interested to what extent they picked up the culturally specific symbols and if the more generic themes relating to time, space and the complexity of location would hold the work for audiences with different cultural frameworks. Did my work open up a space of active engagement where cultures can meet?

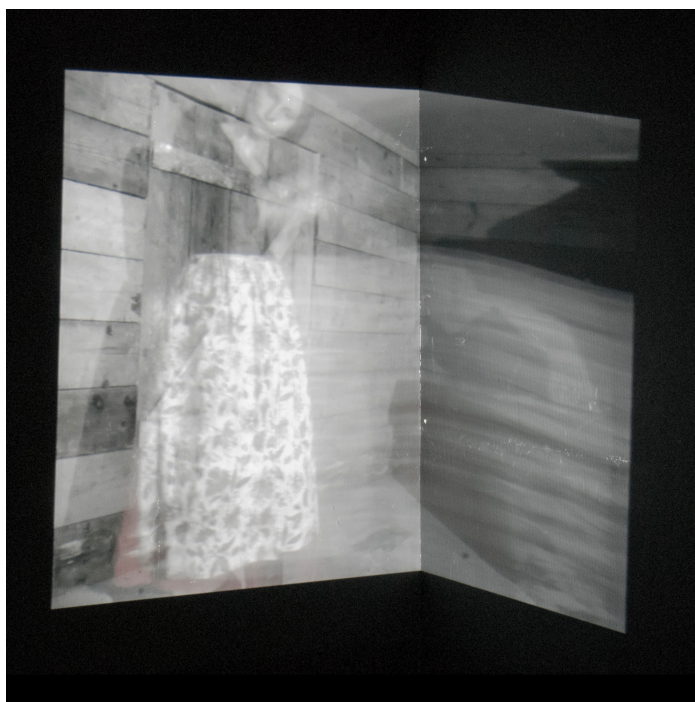
The written responses from the others were very beautiful and some of the accounts were very personal. Some were handwritten and most of them

immediate and unfinished. My work seemed to convey a sense of ambiguity relating to time and space. It offered the audience an experience of a blurring of the past and present. But as one of the participants observed the images also did something else: 'to my English eyes it had something of the darkness of the fairy tale to it, slightly exotic and decidedly Northern European' (Mitchell, 2012, online)

Many of the texts from the test screening and the comments from the MA show contain references to ghosts, non-presence, dance, doll-like, uncanny, dance, the poetic, beautiful, ritual, looming shadows, memories and dreams, movement in stillness, haunting, illusion, feeling small like a child, Alice-like, a floating sensation, melancholy, loss.⁴ These are themes I have been working with, the visual trope of spirit photography, the irrational, the uncanny and the dream. It is my Dalarna within, a poetic space of complexity and ambiguity, a space of here and not here, of there and not there, a space of movement and re-positioning, a space between cultures.

⁴ Audience responses from Jan Fyfe, Ralph Mills, Sarbjit Kaur, Liz Mitchell, Daksha Patel, Tilo Reifenstein and Myna Trustram in the test screening and at the MA show

Installing *Stay this moment* and Future Relocations



Stay this moment, installed at MA show

I installed the work for the MA Exhibition. It is shown in a dark space, on its own, projected into a corner. It looks so ephemeral. So ready to be gone, turned off, leaving no trace. Somebody did wonder if it was 3D. The corner splits the image. The corner in the installation space lines up with the corner of the room in the images. In my mind it is also lined up with the corner in my studio where I photographed the images, where I performed. In this way, the work encompasses three spaces. It layers them and places the viewer firmly in relation to them, facing the corner. The corner is splitting the image, distorting the image further. The figure is appearing and slowly dissolving lining up with how I experience Nordic culture. I move in and out. Revisiting this cultural framework again and again.

The photographs I have created are showing Dalarna within, Nordic cultural material shifted somewhere between my mind, heart and gut. It is filtered through memory and affected by my experience in diaspora. The images are floating in and out of focus, very slowly. In the dark space they arrest me. I want to 'Stay this moment' and see them transform. In the transition from the image where the figure is tying the apron and the figure is plaiting her hair, just one moment when the images are of equal opacity, the figures embrace as if they were dancing. I have told my visual autobiography. The case study is slowly moving across the walls in the darkened space. I feel there is something missing. It is time to move out of the studio and gallery space and anchor the research into the terrain of northern England. I feel the urge to make my work site-specific and place it in places meaningful to the Anglo-Nordic community and in this way highlighting our cultural narratives. I want to join my case study with other case studies and work with a group of Anglo-Nordic artists exploring the similarities and differences within our visual languages. I want to apply our visual practices to geographical locations meaningful to the Anglo-Nordic community. With a group of Nordic artists, I want to explore the complexities and ambiguities of location.

CONCLUSION

In my MA I have been exploring not-belonging here and not-belonging there, testing my position and examining my identity in my artwork. During my MA, I have studied the experience of being Anglo-Nordic in the north of England through photographic self-staging. I investigated how migrants in diaspora establish a sense of belonging through symbolic imagery and collective myths. I believe my response to Nordic cultural material is strong and emotional. I have noticed that most of the memories from Sweden are linked to cultural symbols and 'sites of memory' (Nora, 1996). I feel a strong attraction to visual representations dealing with collective myths of the Nordic countries and at the same time as they aid my connection with the culture from my ancestral home I find them unfulfilling, rigid and unable to fully see myself as belonging with these myths. My case study explored memories of home in the Scandinavian diaspora and re-inscribed national symbols from the Nordic countries from my position in diaspora.

In my work, I return to the traditional red-painted croft, a symbol of an ideal home in the Nordic nations and often the subject matter in national romantic paintings. From memory, I have re-created the interior of a croft and used this to explore female cultural stereotypes. In the photographs I represent myself as partially visible, both there and not there. From my position in the UK and through artwork, I transform national narratives, expressing a more complex and uncertain relationship to place.

Stemming from a sense of not fully fitting in, in the UK, I revisit the Nordic within my art practice. When researching how I relate to my ancestral home through memories I recognised a sense of not fitting there either. This is what lies within the hyphenation, the sense of not belonging fully but also the privilege of belonging in two cultures. I am beginning to understand belonging in diaspora as a form of constant re-positioning within layers of cultures. My work is a case study making an Anglo-Nordic narrative visible, questioning the idea of England as a homogenous nation. I have begun to understand culture as a complex weave of different customs and experiences leading me to question what is contained within the labels Anglo and Nordic and also what they leave out.

The Nordic in diaspora in the UK blend well. We assimilate well and relatively fast. There is sometimes a slight accent that gives our former lives and our status as non-British away. There have been Nordic people living here in the north of England since the mass-emigration to America over a hundred years ago. And before this there was Danelaw. Perhaps it is our ability to assimilate and transform that has left our diasporic community and past to some extent unexplored. There are no records kept, there is no obligation to report. Mostly hidden, our Nordic-ness is a fairly quiet and interior affair. But there are more Nordic people here than people usually think, and we have been here for longer than is generally believed. Our cultural memory has slipped out of view. It has not been explored. The fact that we are here, and have made a place here

relatively unnoticed, undermines the idea of a British nation as homogeneous. So it is about us, our history, but it is also what we make Britain. In a strange way we make Britain less homogeneously British and the Nordic countries less homogeneously Nordic.

Very early on in my studio, I experienced both a strange attraction and resistance towards the national symbols (Nora, 1996) of my ancestral home. I rehearsed the stereotype with both longing and dislike. I photographed myself as a woman in a national romantic painting, as if I was inside a traditional Nordic croft, trying to inhabit the Nordic cultural framework and feeling the rightness and wrongness of this act. In the pictures my ghostly figure is haunting the Nordic cultural framework. I am returning, playing at being Nordic, maybe even quietly saying to myself 'I was here' or 'I was there'. During the process of photographic self-staging, of me becoming her, again and again, I never represent myself as fully present. I am rehearsing a cultural stereotype but never photographically captured as fully visible. I am translucent. I am dissolving. I do not belong fully. I am rehearsing on a stage of Nordic symbolism where these symbols have become illusions, both absent and present, both here and not here. This is the complexity. This is the ambiguity. This is the way I re-inscribe Nordic culture as a migrant in diaspora, this is the way I have shifted the symbols; this is belonging in diaspora.

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