Creating Images of Belonging Through Diasporic Touch

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Creating Images of Belonging Through Diasporic Touch

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ABSTRACT

The process of making artworks has become a way to feel *at home*, yet, I also use it to share my Anglo-Swedish experience with others, to claim a space for my barely visible diasporic subjectivity in my adopted country. Drawing on my experience as a first-generation Swedish migrant in the UK I created a unique body of work that articulated my particular bi-cultural experience, it conveyed my homing desire—elements from Swedish national narratives, influenced by my longing and veiled by my loss. My art-based research is a practice of belonging that binds times and places together in composite cultural forms that undermine the idea of nation and national identity. This work is urgent, as nationalism and even far-right nationalism is on the rise, the acceptance of difference is reducing. It is also timely, as the aftermath of Brexit continues to transform our identities and leave many migrants and diasporics with a deeper sense of loss.

Situated in the wider field of Scandinavian migration and diaspora studies it explores the role of artistic processes in subjectivity formation, from a maker's perspective. However, it says something significant about creativity and diasporic subjectivity formation more generally. Previous research on creativity and diasporic subjectivity formation identifies it as an entwinement of inner world and outer environment that transforms both self and the surrounding environment (Bhabha, 1998; Papastergiadis & Trimboli, 2017), however this theoretical research does not account for the experiential, sensory aspects of this process. As a maker I knew that engaging in art practice counteracted my sense of self uncertainty arising from the effects of migration. My contribution to knowledge is the development of a process that I named *diasporic touch,* an activity part of my art practice that has a soothing effect. It utilises a combination of performative strategies to harness moments of connectivity and the medium of photography to frame these intimate encounters.

When making images through diasporic touch, I discovered that the unconventional self-portraits externalising my internal world, materialised my self fragmentation—my diasporic melancholia, as dissonant montages with visible joins. My losses worked themselves through my body, marking the surface of my artworks. This research has led me to a position where I can challenge some aspects of psychoanalytic theory, in particular Butler's account of melancholic loss. Instead of diasporic melancholia being impossible to overcome, as Butler (2003) claims, my unique contribution to the field shows that, although still undefined in language, melancholic loss can become externalised and mourned. Utilising psychoanalysis, specifically, object relation theory (Melanie Klein Trust, n.d.; Winnicott, 2005 [1971]; Ehrensweig, 1995 [1967]) helped me understand that art practice, by instigating a process of mourning, can help migrants and diasporics to work through their difficult palette of emotions.

INTRODUCTION

Whilst waiting to authenticate documents at the Honorary Consulate of Sweden in Manchester, the red house touched me again. In the United Kingdom's current political climate, and likely exit from the European Union I was applying for Swedish citizenship and passports for my children, just in case. "Do you know about this?" The consul points to a sheet *Setting Down Roots* showing how to apply for settled status as an EU citizen in the UK using the recently introduced EU Settlement Scheme (HM Government, n.d., p. unpag). Focusing elsewhere I answered, "Yes I do, it's done". I picked up a conveniently displayed pamphlet. It was a publication by the Swedish Institute, advertising Swedish language courses abroad. Encountering the pamphlet shifted attention away from the paperwork. The bleak room, the rain outside and the monotone sound of the single printer faded, as I indulged in the image on the front cover. There it was, the Falu-red house, framed by light coloured birch leaves. Its porch, corners and window frames were painted white in a traditional way and just above the front door there was a small Swedish flag. There, inside the consul's office, below the photographic state portraits of King Carl-Gustaf and Queen Silvia, on the large, wooden desk, was a representation of a Falu-red house with its front door open, a summer idyll, an image of the Swedish national home (Blomster, 2016; Segerstad, 1982; Snodin & Stavenov-Hidemark, 1997), enticing me in.

Although born in Sweden, with a Swedish passport, I have lived in the UK for more than half my life. The European Union's legislation encouraging free movement of people between member states (European Commission, n.d., p. unpag) made my border crossing possible. When I was twenty, I moved to the UK out of choice, longing to obtain proficiency in the English language, and ended up staying to get an education and later a job. My research is autobiographical in character, dealing with one migratory journey that began in Falun in Sweden in the autumn of 1993 and that took me first to London, then to Manchester in 1999, and has continued to play out in my mind and art practice ever since. My artistic research makes use of the specific to highlight what it feels like to inhabit a space between cultures more generally. It is political as making visible my diasporic experience, the combination of my foreign Swedishness and adopted Englishness, undermines the idea of national homogeneity. My research is in the field of contemporary northern European migration, a field where much more research could be done. As an ethnically white, female, middle class migrant my journey to, and transition into, a new culture was easy and safe.

Although there are some similarities between the way migrants with different race, gender, class, and ability experience a sense of displacement, there are significant differences in the material conditions. White privilege results in people like me finding it easier to assimilate into British society and more able to realise dreams. The intensity of the feelings of displacement are dependent on the migrant's material conditions (how welcome does the migrant feel? Is there a safe place to return to?) and they can also change with time and context. The similarity that I noticed between my feelings of displacement and the displacement in relation to migration and minority cultures theorised by postcolonial thinkers (Hall, 1994; Bhabha, 1994a; Brah, 1996) led me to read and use these theories to contextualise my visual research. However, as the material conditions of my minority cultural experience are very different from migrants from, for example, the former British colonies, many aspects of their writings do not apply. Because of this I engage with their writing in a selective way, I am testing out what aspects of their theories apply to my migratory situation.[1]

Initially the introduction will establish the relation of the Falu-red house environment to my past and present research. I will account for how this environment emerged in my practice, how I became aware of its significance and began to explore the many ways in which I transformed it. I have already briefly accounted for my migratory journey from Sweden to England and later in the introduction I will explain how this journey continued after my arrival in a new place. It will consider how my subjectivity has shifted and how I have at different times in different ways positioned myself in relation to the Anglo-Swedish community. The second part of the introduction will account for what my art practice based research entails and why this type of research is particularly good at gathering knowledge of borderline experiences. I will in this section identify my project's contribution to knowledge as being the process of *diasporic touch,* an activity that is linked with representation and image making as well as being closely connected to migrant and diasporic subjectivity formation. I will further account for my contribution to knowledge later on in the

[1] It is important to note here that the reasons why people migrate, and the characteristics of migratory journeys are hugely different, and it depends on their personal economic circumstances and the situation in the society they come from. Some people may be fleeing persecution, war or poverty and enter the United Kingdom as refugees, whereas others, including myself, move out of free will, undertaking a more privileged migratory journey decide in search for better opportunities. When I migrated, the United Kingdom was still part of the European Union, and I could enter the country easily. These differences have an impact on how migrants relate to their former home and to their new host country. My migratory journey, as discussed in the introduction, is one shaped by white privilege where the colour of my skin hides my difference—I am often mistakenly assumed to be British—something that most of the time protects me from racism.

introduction but would like to stress that the idea of diasporic touch slowly developed during my research journey, in the beginning it seemed to lead me home, yet later I realised it was much more complex—it turned home from a place into a process. My research project addresses the questions "what is diasporic touch" and "what does diasporic touch do to self and in society" and in a similar way to the contribution to knowledge I will consider these questions in further detail later in the introduction.

My contribution to knowledge, the process of *diasporic touch*, intervenes in the field of migration and diaspora studies. By connecting ideas about diasporic subjectivity formation and psychoanalytic thought with a particular focus on the reparative effects of artistic practices, my research produces new understandings about how art practice can be mobilised to counteract the sense of self fragmentation often felt by migrants and diasporics. Previous research in the field by, for example, Homi Bhabha (1994b) makes connections between theorisation of anxiety in psychoanalytic thought and migrant and minority culture experiences. He suggests that migrants and people in diaspora use creative practices to articulate their life stories, however, he does not fully account for how artistic processes can be harnessed to counteract and even mend this anxiety. Through engaging with my artistic practice and further exploring psychoanalytic theory dealing with the reparative qualities of art practice (Ehrensweig, 1995 [1967]) I began to understand how diasporic touch mended the sense of self fragmentation caused by the sustained effects of my migratory journey.

As my fingertips touched the smooth surface of the Swedish consulate pamphlet, the instinctive gesture transported me elsewhere, to a familiar place of memories and dreams. At this point the touch shifted my attention away from what I felt was an unbearable friction caused by Britain's exit from the European Union.[2] For a moment, when focusing on the front cover of the pamphlet and the idyllic home, the pain caused by changing narratives of nations and continents was reduced. The encounter with the symbolic environment instigated the escape to an internal, sensuous space of memories of dreams. I instinctively

[2] Britain's exit from the European Union was a long, complicated process and to understand its effects on my life as a Swedish migrant in the UK, I will recount a brief timeline. On 23rd January 2013 prime minister David Cameron promised a referendum on the UK's continued membership of the EU if the Conservative Party wins the next election. On 7th May 2015 the British voters elected a majority Conservative government whereby Cameron confirmed there would be an "in\out" referendum of EU membership. On June 23rd 2016 Britain voted 52% to 48% to leave the EU, a ballot I was not allowed to take part in, and 29th March 2017 The British Government formally triggered Article 50 of the EU's Lisbon Treaty, setting in motion a two-year process for Britain to leave the EU on 29th March 2019 (Cowburn, 2020, p. unpag)

knew that this touch was of vital importance to my investigation—it had deep significance to my artwork and my life. This type of physical touching resulting in affect became the starting point of my research and later on, when engaging with the surrounding environment in a similar way, the notion of *diasporic touch* emerged. I started my PhD research in 2014, which became deeply affected by Britain's exit from the European Union. Before the 2016 EU referendum, my artworks were more nostalgic in character but in its aftermath, they became more political, engaging in a series of live performances that both directly and indirectly dealt with questions about residence. In the later stages of the research and sometime after the referendum, although still using the body as a source of knowledge, I returned to the photographic as a mode of presentation, as the practice became engrossed in a desire to articulate loss. There is uncertainty for everyone in the country as the national containers are changing, regrouping, and becoming more defined. For many years it almost felt as if my nationality was irrelevant. As a Swedish passport holder in the UK, I now sense this movement acutely, as a wound. Like many other Swedes in the UK, I was assimilating well, I was keen to adopt new ways and sometimes my nationality was untraceable. I often received the comment "I knew you were from somewhere else, but I couldn't guess where". One day, soon after the British referendum, I sensed my nationality again, it boxed me in. As boundaries became more important, I was trapped with the clammy, anxious weight of a problematic passport. Paperwork ripped me apart and the in-between space (Bhabha, 1994a) within me was raw and painful to negotiate.

Printed at the top of the pamphlet advertising Swedish language courses was the word *Välkommen (Welcome)*. It was blue with a yellow background, like the Swedish flag. In the bottom right corner was a yellow rectangle with blue writing stating, "Learn Swedish: Open up the door to Nordic society and culture" (Swedish Institute, 2018, front cover). The pamphlet was published by the Swedish Institute, which is "a public agency that promotes interest and trust in Sweden around the world" (Swedish Institute, 2018, p. unpag). The pamphlet also contains information about a series of essential elements of Swedish culture. It contains familiar narratives of love for nature, the famous coffee and cake break *fika*, the quirky gesture of tilting the head to face the sun in early spring and cycling as a preferred mode of transport. Today, my encounter with the pamphlet was a pleasurable relief. The idyll's stillness, clarity and vivid colours became an escape from the bureaucracy of citizenship, the trails of paperwork that form a path to national belonging. Other times the image of the Falu-red house fills me with mixed emotions, regarded as the Swedish national home (Blomster, 2016; Segerstad, 1982; Snodin & Stavenov-Hidemark, 1997) it is an

environment that I, as a foreign Swede, long for at the same time as it fills me with deep unease. As a symbol of nation, it invites some people in and excludes other people, including me. Nations are held together through homogeneity and my difference makes it impossible to be a satisfactory national subject (Anderson, 2006 [1983]). I cannot fully belong. It is a symbol that I question in my art practice, an environment that I pull apart and continually reconstruct so that it better reflects my diasporicity. In the Swedish consulate in Manchester, I am instructed to put down roots but instead my narratives falter, the stories that I tell about myself fracture, my instinctive gesture is to quickly place the pamphlet in my bag. Is this greedy gathering gesture a way to manage my loss? Though what exactly have I lost? Can it ever become clear to me? Does it have a name?

During the cause of my research journey, I called this internal sense of ambiguity being Anglo-Swedish. Although I was aware that the term Anglo used in the context of compounded identities has different meanings in different situations, the hyphenated word Anglo-Swedish, combining the two nationalities affecting my subjectivity came to stand in for my life circumstances. I have adopted this term Anglo-Swedish to refer to a particular form of diasporic identity that emerges when Swedish people migrate to the United Kingdom and their cultural traits both come into conflict and merge. It refers to a particular liminal subjectivity that emerges between languages, nations and histories (Bhabha, 1994a). The term Anglo-Swedish has previously been used by *The Anglo-Swedish Society*, an institution established after WW1 to promote transnational links (Anglo-Swedish Society, n.d., p. unpag). For me, it became a way to describe somebody of Swedish origin or descent whose subjectivity is substantially changed or deeply affected by various elements of both Swedish and English cultures. In order to understand my particular position as an artist in Manchester and my relation to the Anglo-Swedish community, I will give an overview of how, over the years, my proximity to communities of other Swedish migrants has shifted. It is important to note that I have always experienced the Anglo-Swedish community as fairly loosely held together, we come together for our children, to celebrate and to remember, but I would argue that the ease in which we assimilate into UK society, the way we do not often need to assert our position by showing strength in numbers (Diverlus, 2018), contributes to a more fragmented and diffuse community. Throughout my time in the UK, I have moved in and out of proximity to groups of Swedish migrants, I have sometimes been seeking solace at the community centres linked with the Swedish Church in London and the Nordic Church and in Liverpool but other times I have not felt this need.

I arrived in London as an au-pair in the beginning of the 1990s, seeing it as my ticket to new life in a different country, new cultural experiences, and a way to improve my English. I was crazy about art but had not managed to get onto a university course I really wanted to do. There was a need for a change in direction and a year in London seemed full of promise. I was following a long tradition of young Swedish women temporarily moving to the UK as au-pairs during a gap year before going to university, however, little did I know that I was to make the UK my permanent home. At this point in my life, being part of a community of Swedish migrants was extremely important. There was a large network of Swedish female au-pairs around where I lived, and being part of this community helped me navigate a new culture and counteract feelings of homesickness. At this time, however, because I was newly arrived in the UK, I did not consider myself as being part of an Anglo-Swedish community.

After finishing au-pairing, I realised my dream of studying art at Central Saint Martin's. During my four years there my connections with other Swedish people reduced. I had a couple of female Swedish friends (one that I met during my time as an au-pair) but art college in London at the time offered a very cosmopolitan experience. There were a large number of people on my course from Europe and beyond. At this time, I felt European or maybe northern European rather than Swedish and apart from occasionally visiting the Swedish church for traditional Swedish celebrations, I didn't feel I needed a connection with my former culture. After my time at art college, I moved to Manchester and spent nearly eight years not knowing another Swedish person—in fact I felt nearly British. It was only when I had children that my need to connect with my former home, with other Swedish people in my local vicinity returned. I made friends with a Swedish woman at a baby group, then another, and another and we all felt the importance of bringing our children up knowing Swedish culture. At this stage, my relationship with my home country had changed, I felt a greater sense of longing, a greater sense of loss—I felt diasporic. Because most of the mums I met had spent a long time in the UK we connected through sharing the knowledge and memories we still had of Sweden. I felt we did it so we could transfer it to our children. We celebrated Swedish traditions together, we met so that our children could hear us speak Swedish and we sometimes travelled to the Nordic Church in Liverpool, but we were also aware that we were somehow warped, time away had made us more than Swedish, we were a community of foreign Swedes. At this time, I began to identify as Anglo-Swedish and although my artwork had since my time at Central Saint Martin's been dealing with Swedish cultural narratives, it now more overtly dealt with the longing and loss of diasporic experience.

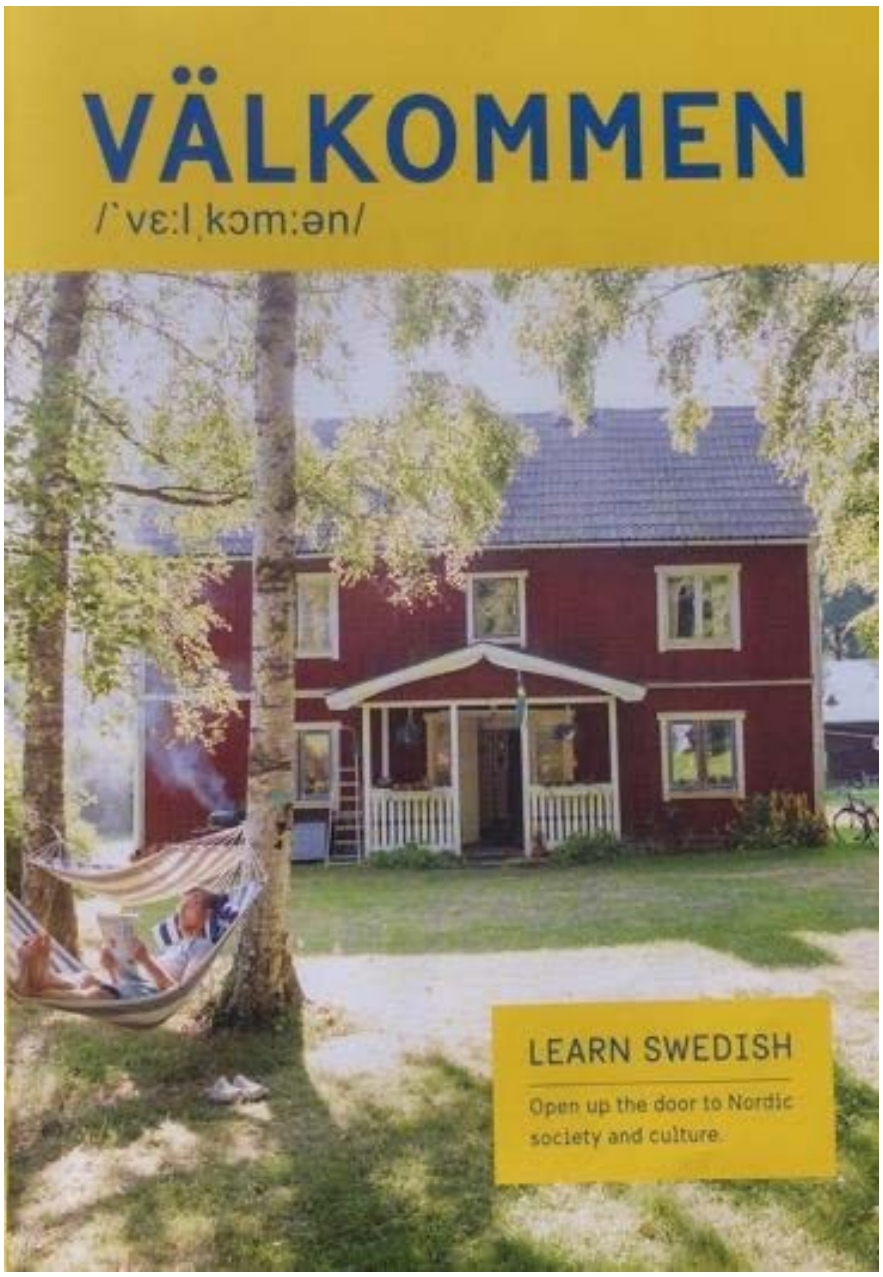

Figure 1 Swedish Institute, *Välkommen Learn Swedish*, 2018

The Falu-Red House Environment in Past and Present Research

The Falu-red house environment has haunted my art practice for many years. Sometimes it is more allusive – you can sense a trace of it or notice some parts of it, whilst other times it is most definitely there but fragmented, broken and obscured. The red paint was used early in the 1700s by wealthy people as a status symbol. Although costly, it was often used to imitate more expensive brick-built structures (Falu Rödfärg, n.d., p. unpag). The unique red pigment, a form of *slamfärg* (mud paint) with preserving properties, was historically used (and still often applied) on cottages located in the Swedish countryside (Kjellin & Ericson, 2004 [1999]). It has been argued that the image of the Falu-red house as a rural idyll emerged simultaneously out of an urgent housing crisis for the working class and a desire to establish democratic nationalism (Blomster, 2016). The Falu-red house environment was written into the Swedish national narrative in the beginning of the 1900s, incessantly painted by Swedish national romantic painters (Segerstad, 1982; Snodin & Stavenov-Hidemark, 1997; Romdahl, 2004 [1932]), often featuring along with the Swedish flag in educational material such as classroom posters (Fig. 2) and school textbooks (Beskow & Siegwald, 1953 [1935]) (Fig. 3). It was promoted on postcards, lantern slide series and even as life sized museum objects at the open-air museum of Skansen in Stockholm that at the time aimed to bring together the essence of Sweden in one place (Skansen, n.d., p. unpag). In this way, it became a significant element in the narratives of Sweden that people dreamed about, learned to desire and wanted to own.

Over the years, the Falu-red house environment has become a stereotypical image with a very particular meaning. It has been distributed widely, circulated in various media for over a century, something that has strengthened its influence (Blomster, 2016, p. 254). It has, for example, been heavily used in advertising by the paint manufacturer Falu-Rödfärg owned by Stora Enso, to promote their products (Björkman, 2019, in conversation) and by the furniture manufacturer and retailer IKEA—both in their advertising posters and brochures (Davies, 2015). Identifying its widely understood meaning, Anna Blomster (2016) suggests that it has over time become "condensed and naturalised as the 'Swedish home'", and that it for most people evoke a range of connotations such as "childhood, nature, summer and home" (Blomster, 2016, p. 254). The Falu-red house emerged as a practical solution to a problem, but it has now also got a cultural role, it has symbolic value. It is an environment that is intimately linked to the formation of Swedish identity—whether it being rural, vaguely northern like mine or for example, a more southern, coastal, or urban kind.

Aspiring to own, restore, visit, dream or share stories about this stereotypical Swedish home has become part of being Swedish. It is one of the elements that Swedish people are meant to identify with, a narrative of place they need to engage with, in order to achieve a sense of national belonging (Anderson, 2006 [1983]). It is a stereotypical environment that has persisted through time, a symbol that still conjures up images of an idyllic home where summer never ends and childhood is close, yet, as I have noticed, has been used to support a variety of views.

Figure 2 Maja Synnergren, Biology: *Vitsipporna Blomma (Wood Anemone Blossoms)* from series *Träd och Blommor (Trees and Flowers)*, Display Board for Schools, 70 x 100cm, c.1940.

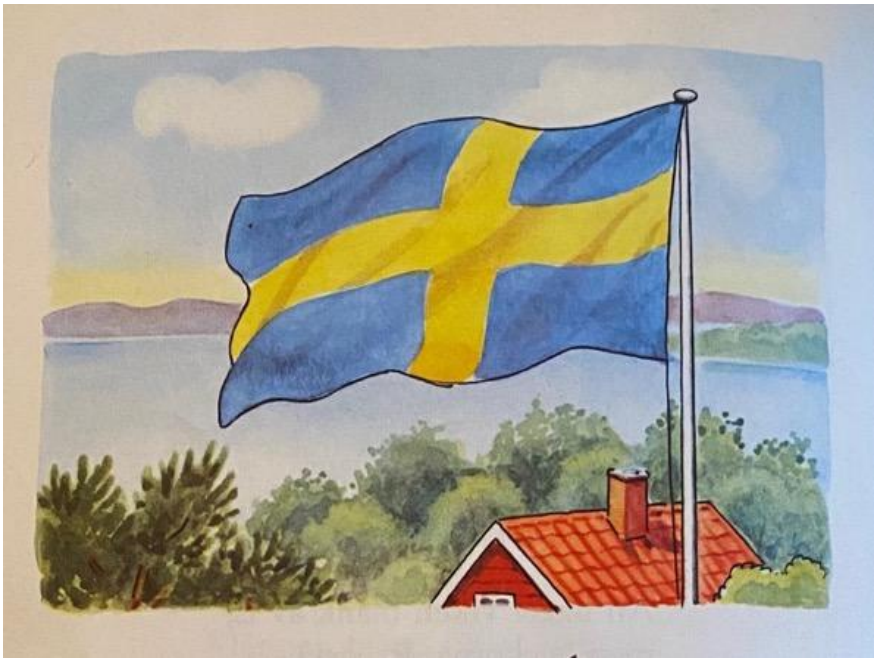

Figure 3 Elsa Beskow & Herman Siegvald, *Vill Du Läsa: Första Läsåret,* 1953 [1935]

It has become apparent to me in my position in diaspora that belonging in a national sense is steeped in exclusivity. Built around ideas of similarity and the rejection of difference, it is for most people located in the realm of imagination and desire (Anderson, 2006 [1983]) (Bhabha, 1994a), something that I will explore further in the following chapters. For me, however, with a diasporic perspective of nation, a position of fundamental difference, the impossibility of being the same is second nature. Emerging from my particular mix of Anglo-Swedish-ness, my viewpoint of nation includes its flaws, and the aspiration of homogeneity appears as an impossibility. Because of this, my feelings towards the stereotypical image of the Falu-red house environment and the national narratives it supports are complex and ambiguous. After all, I do not fully belong to them. What drives my process of investigation is an engagement with stereotypes like the Falu-red house and its surrounding environment through my diasporic consciousness. The process of dismantling stereotypes is the source of my visual work. In my artistic practice I address the implications of the Swedish stereotypes of home and landscape on my diasporic subjectivity. In Chapter One I explore how I use my artistic process to deconstruct stereotypes of home, the Falu-red house, and in Chapter Two, I take apart stereotypes of place that are closely connected to it—the birch tree, the pine forest, and the lilac bush. I articulate the Swedish home and its surrounding environment in an incomplete way, suggesting something that I can never really have. I explore what being Anglo-Swedish looks like.

From my position in diaspora, I repeatedly return to this typically Swedish environment. It is a symbol deeply embedded in Swedish culture yet its association with the Swedish nation is obscured in my adopted culture. Some people make links between wooden, red painted houses and rural America—they may have seen them in horror movies, and it is possible the wooden house and with the distinctive colour followed Swedish migrants to America at the end of the eighteenth century, but this is another story which falls outside the scope of this PhD. This obscurity makes it hard to explain the environment's significance, it makes it hard to translate. I am going to explore how and why it is of importance in the Swedish diaspora, how it rests within our bodies and minds, faintly pulsating with our heart beats and shudder with our steps. I do so, knowing that translated in writing, the narrative of the Falu-red house and my experience of this environment falters. In translation the story line misses things (Bhabha, 1994a), it is full of gaps and overlaps (Papastergiadis, 2007 [2000]). Grieving, I turn to my art practice, the house repeatedly emerges with inconsistencies and shadows. It makes visible the affect emerging from the bodily experience of the fault lines of translation.

I have sensed the significance of the Falu-red house environment in my life and artworks for many years, in the beginning it emerged sporadically in the process of making and I noticed its presence in retrospect. Later, as I became aware of the reiteration, I began to examine how it returned in different ways. I experienced contradictory feelings when symbols of Sweden emerged in the process of making and these complex emotions lay the foundations for my practice based MA by Research project *Reconstructing Home: Memory in the Scandinavian Diaspora* (2015). I reconstructed elements of a traditional Swedish barn in my studio and captured my encounters in a series of photographs, my body moving in and out of frame. In the project, I examined similarities between my artwork *Stay this moment* (2015) and Swedish national romantic paintings from around the 1900s (Davies, 2015). I explored how these paintings were entangled with ideas of nation: imagined stories of place-bound origins and homogenised identities (Anderson, 2006 [1983]). *Stay this moment* is an echo, reiterating symbolic elements from paintings by, for example, Carl Larsson, Christian Skredsvig, Erik Weirenskiold and Anders Zorn. The re-iteration interested me: I explored the echo effect in relation to ideas of collective memory (Halbwachs, 2011 [1950]) and national belonging (Anderson, 2006 [1983]). Each national romantic painting became a beginning to my diasporic story, the brushstrokes of red houses, white birch trunks, trailing red skirts, deep lakes and dark pine forests became idealised entry points to my former home (Cohen, 2008). My investigation resulted in me noticing how I observed the way national echoes in diaspora and the Falu-red house environment repeatedly return and how each reiteration undoes the idea of single, uncomplicated origins a little more (Derrida, 1995).

From my location in diaspora, I reiterated the Falu-red house, but I also shifted its meaning. My artistic expression emerged from a liminal and ambiguous space between cultures (Bhabha, 1994a). As an echo, my work reverberated with the national imagery from my diasporic location, veiling the national red and green with sorrow (Davies, 2015). In my work the colours fade, the compositions blur and the shadows become deeper. Seeing how I transformed the Falu-red house environment in my art practice and how it changed with every reiteration left me with further questions which lay the foundations for my PhD project *Creating Images of Belonging through Diasporic Touch*. Understanding my art practice as a diasporic articulation of self (Hall, 1994; Bhabha, 1994a; Papastergiadis, 2007 [2000]), I wanted to study the transformation of the house in detail to find out more about diasporic self formation. In addition to this I wanted to find out more about diasporic articulations of home; that however fractured and unstable they may be, they might also act as sites of

resistance to established and national narratives of belonging. I wanted to understand how my creative expressions conveying my understanding of and feelings towards national belonging diversified and undermined established national narratives. My exploration conducted through my performative art practice made it possible to gather information about the role of touch in diasporic subjectivity formation and the way it counteracted effects of dislocation.

It is important to note that the Sweden I remember is to some extent frozen in time. I am like many people living in diaspora, as identified by Avtar Brah (1996) carrying an image of Swedish culture that was formed before my departure. Strangely, even though I am aware that Swedish society has become much more culturally mixed—something that I find deeply positive—my body knowledge of Sweden, my memories and dreams circulate around a somewhat outdated perception of Sweden from thirty years ago. From engaging in a social practice collaborating with a group of Swedish artists based in the north of England (a project I will explore in Chapter Four) it has become clear the Falu-red house environment and other national narratives have a deep relevance for the Anglo-Swedish community in Manchester. I am aware, however, that people in Sweden today may not relate these narratives of Sweden in the same way. In a similar way to me some minority ethnic Swedish people may not feel like they fully belong to the Falu-red house environment, though unlike me this environment is not a substitute for an object that they long for and that somehow acts as a recompense for their losses. Some people who are tolerant to difference and change may find the symbolic environment an irrelevance. In contrast to this, however, there may be other Swedish people that more intensely cling to the accepted symbol of Sweden, that would view my reconstructions of it as a violation.

Over the course of my PhD journey the meaning—and my understanding—of the Falu-red house environment, has changed with the political climate and current issues. In the aftermath of Greta Thunberg's protest about climate outside the Swedish Parliament in 2018, the house became attached to narratives calling for a simpler, sustainable, and rural life in tune with the natural world. In this guise the Falu-red house environment's association with small-scale farming from a bygone age was used to encourage a physical move to become closer to nature. It was as if the idyll had become a mental escape from—or perhaps also a solution to—climate breakdown (Lindén, 2019). For example, in a book with a front cover picturing a Falu-red house in field with forest behind, Axel Lindén writes that after becoming aware of the environmental crisis and our unsustainable demand for resources, he

came to the conclusion that "the only way to seriously tackle the threat of the climate and global injustice, while making sure of the bare necessities when it all came tumbling down , was to start growing our own food and chopping our own wood" (Lindén, 2019, pp. 1-2). More recently, the rise of extreme right, anti-immigration sentiments in Sweden pushed the Falu-red house environment towards a different meaning—one that sits very uncomfortably with me. The Falu-red house environment, together with an array of other symbols of Sweden were adopted by the far-right party the Sweden Democrats—a party with roots in the neo-Nazi movement in Sweden becoming the country's second largest party (Gustavsson, 2022) and used in their propaganda. In the below examples Figs. 4 and 5, images from their current website both associate the environment with the slogan "this is what we want" and with a "strict policy on migration" (Sverigedemokraterna, n.d., p. unpag). Emerging from my sense of dislocation, my art practice challenges the authority of this symbol of Sweden. By articulating my foreign Swedishness and adopted Englishness, I challenge the validity of nation and nationhood.

Figure 4 Screenshot of Sverigedemokraternas Webpage, 2022
My translation of heading: "A Strict Immigration Policy"

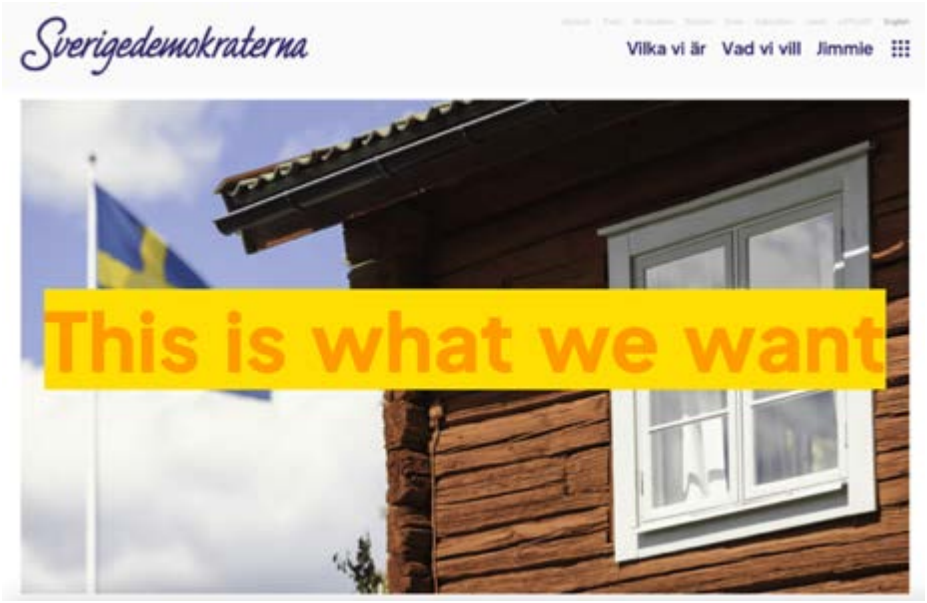

Figure 5 Screenshot of Sverigedemokraternas Webpage – English version, 2022

I transform the Falu-red house environment, the Swedish national home, by materialising my diasporic "homing desire" (Brah, 1996, p. 193) in my artworks. Brah's notion of "homing desire" has become very important for my research, however, I am using her idea in a slightly different way. Brah identifies how migrants and diasporics, rather than associating home with a geographical place, situate the notion of home in their psychic life. She suggests that it exists in the affective realm as a "homing desire"—a longing to *feel at home*.[3] Developing Brah's idea, Laura Rus (2006, p. unpag) suggests that in "homing desire" the dislodgement from a physical place has become embedded in the mind and associated with a desire for and loss of our primal home—a psychic and developmental state where we experience a sense of oneness with our mother. She argues that the internal lives of migrants and diasporics are characterised by persistent elaborations of home (Rus, 2006). The notion of "homing desire" (Brah, 1996, p. 193) has become very important for my research and agreeing with Brah and Rus I believe that for migrants and diasporics, home or a desire for oneness, plays out in their minds. Following Rus, I suggest that I subconsciously link the rupture caused by migration with the much earlier separation. Utilising my knowledge as a maker, however, I have developed their ideas and use the term in a slightly different way. I believe that homing desire is the visual impressions of home that emerge in my mind—the memories and dreams veiled by my diasporic palette of emotions, but it is also the creative

[3] Brah (1996) argues people living in diaspora place home and dispersion in creative tension. She claims that "on the one hand, 'home' is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination" and on the other hand "home is also the lived experience of a locality" (Brah, 1996, p. 192). She believes that as such it makes returns impossible even though you might be able to visit the geographical location where you migrated from.

activity of materialising (or inscribing) the fabric of the surrounding environment in this palette of emotions. As we shall see in the following chapters, I articulate my own homing desire by re-forming the Falu-red house environment, by shifting its meaning from the harmony of national belonging to the fractured dissonance of life between nations.

Contribution to Knowledge, Research Questions, Approaches and Methods

The subsequent sections will address the approaches and methods of my research, its unique value and contribution to knowledge. It will account for my use of the practice based methods of photography and performance as well as explain my particular writing strategy. For many years I have noticed recurring processes in my art practice, particular ways I manipulate objects, images, and photographic technologies. Emerging from my Anglo-Swedish diasporic experience, my research produces visual representations of home that convey my culturally non-binary experience. It is motivated by a desire to know more about the creative agency of migrants and the threshold experience of diaspora, how the experience of having many cultural affiliations manifests itself in creative endeavours and how this is linked with the formation of self. I want to discover how, as a first-generation Anglo-Swedish migrant, rather than feeling at home, I use my art practice to materialise my particular diasporic palette of emotions—a persistent and sometimes powerful longing for and loss of home.

My research contributes to knowledge with the process of *diasporic touch,* a process that is intimately connected with the process of making images and the image world, more specifically, it is linked to the creative production of migrants and diasporics. Looking at it from a maker's perspective, I first experienced it when I photographed myself *touching* slide projections but this interplay between touching and framing runs through my artistic process. My research has led to an understanding that diasporic touch heals. It is a process that has a reparative effect (Melanie Klein Trust, n.d.; Ehrensweig, 1995 [1967]) on diasporic subjectivity and aids the transformation of diasporic melancholia (Eng, 2000) into a process of mourning (Freud, 2009 [1915]; Freud, 2010 [1923]). It counteracts the self uncertainty associated with migration and the condition of diaspora. The two questions that my research project responded to were "what is diasporic touch?" and "what does diasporic touch do to self and in society?", questions which have helped me understand in more detail the

creative agency of migrants and diasporics, what motivates us to make, and how our creative output has a potential for initiating change.

My research investigates how I use the touch of making to develop a sense of self—how I mobilise the gathering, bending, reconstructing, and erasing of art practice to counteract the sense of displacement caused by migration. I have over time become aware of the importance of touch in my life and of many encounters similar to the one in the Swedish Consulate where touching an object seemed to resonate deeply within. I noticed that I sought out similar tactile experiences when making artworks, realising their reparative qualities on my sense of self. I studied how it affected my inner world and the way I formed artworks. Early on, I named the process of making: *diasporic touch*. Realising that it had a soothing effect on my sense of self I utilised psychoanalytic theory, more specifically object relation theory (Melanie Klein Trust, n.d.; Ehrensweig, 1995 [1967]), to examine its reparative characteristics. Exploring diasporic subjectivity formation and creative making from this perspective resulted in a completely new understanding of the field. Previous researchers dealing with migrants' creative agency and the emergence of new cultural forms (Bhabha, 1994a; Papastergiadis, 2005) study these processes objectively as non-practitioners and because of this, I would argue that they cannot fully consider the processes linked with creativity. As an artist and practice based researcher I can add to their theories by accounting for the internal processes linked with creative making. By examining my Anglo-Swedish art practice from a subjective perspective—from *inside* this process—I provide a different, fuller account of the creative agency of migrants and the emergence of new cultural forms. By studying the creative process from the viewpoint of the maker, I access more detailed information about the links between migrant and diasporic creativity and the formation of self.

My research into Anglo-Swedish diasporic subjectivity formation and art making contributes to knowledge in an unexplored field. Although research exists on the Swedish diaspora in the US and on minority ethnic communities in Sweden, there is little written or documented about the Swedish diasporic community in the UK. Previous research on the Nordic Diaspora in the north of England has a historical approach (Lee, 2008a; Lee, 2008b) and does not deal with the particular emotional sensorium of our homing desire. It does not mobilise the image to explore Anglo-Swedish in-between life experiences. My research, both the practice based exploration and a critical analysis of the visual formation of diaspora, makes a significant contribution to the visual culture of the Nordic diaspora in the UK and

elsewhere. As such, it also adds to and expands the literature on and visual culture of diaspora more generally. My artistic practice also makes a considerable contribution to an emergent post-Brexit visual culture within and beyond the UK. It captured my feelings as the process unfolded and nationality became of more importance. It articulated the shift in subjectivity that occurred as categories such as Swedish, Nordic, and European became more prominent.

There is a relationship between diasporic touch and Brah's notion of "homing desire" (Brah, 1996, p. 193) which I have been exploring. I soon realised that diasporic touch, implicated in the artistic process that materialised these psychic elaborations of home, or psychic elaborations of oneness or continuity (Rus, 2006, p. 193) seemed to counteract the uncertainty of my diasporic life. This way of thinking about home as a sense of lost oneness, has become foundational for my research, it is what propels my desire to unify. However, I am also adding to her theories by accounting for the healing qualities of art practice (Ehrensweig, 1995 [1967]). I explore how art practice and more specifically diasporic touch can counteract the sense of dislodgement associated with the sustained effects of migration and the condition of diaspora. I examine how diasporic touch evokes a sense of oneness within the boundaries of the artistic process and how framing this experience, how binding it in the external world, can counteract a fragmented sense of self. There is some indication that the process of diasporic touch is a transferable process. In a collaborative project, although small in scale, I discovered familiar patterns in our experience that led me to believe that its reparative effects might be experienced by others.

Practice Based Methods: Photography, Performance and Strategies of Writing

My practice engages in various performative strategies, sometimes I make live art where my body is the artwork, I also stage myself in film and photography and occasionally let the camera become an extension of my body. Rather than using the medium of photography conventionally, capturing things in the surrounding environment, I engage with the medium in a tactile way. I make photographic artworks that blur boundaries, expanding the understanding of what photography is. Performance art and performative approaches to art making have been used since the 1960s to question, challenge, and dissolve the boundaries between, for example, the art disciplines (Bachman-Medick, 2016)—they blur the boundaries of enclosed fields of knowledge and neat categories of things. The body in and as art, Amelia Jones argues, is a "fundamental subversion of modernism's assumption that fixed meanings are determinable through the formal structure of the work alone" (Jones, 1998, p.

21). It challenges the longstanding idea of fixity and coherence that underpins the social world. It has been argued that setting in motion a form of intersubjectivity encourages the meeting of perspectives (Jones & Stephenson, 1999), it connects things, it deals with touch. My research follows this lead, it traverses thresholds and questions the simplicity of the divisions often drawn between cultures. Yet, it also materialises this connectivity or oneness through *diasporic touch,* a process with soothing qualities. My research uses performativity to undermine the divisions between national identities. Reinforcing the above, my practice based contribution to the field does not fit neat categories, the new knowledge of bi-cultural experience traverses many fields of knowledge.

My approach to photography is also performative, I often intervene in its sharp and defined boundaries. I use photography because of the medium's association with national histories (Schwartz, 2015), and because it supported and supports the nation state. The photograph creates boundaries and, for reasons I will discuss in more detail in Chapter Three, it became a metaphor for national belonging. It was the medium that helped me capture and collect the Falu-red house environment, but it also had a history that I strongly felt the need to challenge. Instead of accepting the common belief that photography is a scientific and mechanical process that can capture things objectively, I approach my medium in a performative way. Rather than using photography to bind and sustain nations, as it was used historically (Schwartz, 2015), I inhabit the medium through performative strategies to claim a space for a previously largely invisible diaspora. My body, the focus of my diasporic displacement, weaves itself through the process—it traverses, intervenes in and blurs boundaries. It resists the camera's way of separating things in frames, it binds things together. My artistic process makes use of the tension between the camera's tendency to order, and my unruly performativity that challenge stability. Sometimes it is about performing for the camera as I did when creating the piece of work *Unbounded* (2017) and other times it is about performing with the camera as I did when photographing for the piece of work *Birch Shattering* 2 (2021) and occasionally the camera helps me picture my performative process of making.

The genres of performance and performative art have been associated with the emergence of the performative turn in cultural studies, an approach that began in the 1950s and took hold in the 1990s, it was rooted in and focused on the practical dimensions of the formation of culture. Rather than treating culture as text—as slowly sedimenting in various forms of written inscriptions—it "seeks to understand the generative and transformative aspects of

culture on the basis of events, practices, material embodiments and media forms" (Bachman-Medick, 2016, p. 73). The performative turn is regarded as challenging the structuralist perspective that claims linguistic binarism as governing meaning and subsequently our understanding of the world. In structuralism binary oppositions are two related terms or concepts that are opposite in meaning that gained their value in relation to each other, it is seen as the basic principle of organising language. It was a movement of thought that aimed to extract universal patterns from cultural texts (Belsey, 2002). However, structuralism has been challenged by some feminist (Butler, 1988) and post-colonial thinkers (Bhabha, 1994a) who argue that the perceived divisions between and different values ascribed to, for example, man-woman, black-white nature-culture and east-west validated and preserved a system in society that gave power to some and kept others in place (Belsey, 2002). In this way the performative turns open up avenues of thinking about binary oppositions not as separate categories but as having boundaries that are permeable (Derrida, 1987) and nations not as exclusive entities but as having borders that are porous (Bhabha, 1994a). Engaging in performative practices can be seen as acts of cultural resistance (Pollock, 1998, p. 26). Seeing culture as forming through performance rather than through textual structures undermines the validity of the idea of stable cultural frameworks such as nations. Considering how bodies connect rather than separate, it is easy to see how a performative approach to gathering data may result in richer, more complex results. It potentially makes it possible to explore the many variations of things in between. Throughout my research I use performativity to explore my liminal diasporic experience. I use the movement of my body to transform boundaries—it negotiates the edges of photographs, limits of the medium of photography and the boundaries of nations. By articulating the between, I am challenging the idea of binary oppositions.

How do you write performance or performativity? How do you write the body's experiences between categories? As the writing progressed it became clearer that my embodied experience of being between the Anglo and Swedish, the experience that I articulate in my artworks, did not easily translate into language. Non-binary cultural experiences like these often fall somewhere between words, sentences, and paragraphs. As well as this, my non-linear and often multidirectional artistic process did not easily gather into a linear narrative. The academic structure necessary for PhD writing did not seem to capture the richness of the artistic process, nor did it very well convey the intuition grounded in body knowledge. Rather than establishing explicit and exact knowledge, artistic practice generates tacit knowledge—forms that are beyond words (Coessens, et al.,

2009, p. 179). Coessens, Crispin and Douglas (2009, p. 179) argue that words are often too blunt to fully describe the richness, fine nuances and intricacies of making. In writing, art practice and artworks are reduced and to avoid some of this reduction, my dissertation does not always follow a traditional structure, instead interweaving literature with accounts from my practice and personal reflection, highlighted throughout the thesis by different fonts. Throughout the PhD journey new knowledge and understanding emerged from making. I often worked with many parallel processes—some merged, others were left incomplete, and some resulted in finished pieces of work. I have chosen to write about a selection of moments from these processes, moments that resulted in new understanding about how the notion of diasporic touch emerged, what it is and what it does in society. Yet, the instances did not necessarily occur in the order they are represented in the writing.

Throughout my research journey I compiled a notebook of visual material that seemed pertinent to the issues I was dealing with in my practice. Some aspects of the notebook surveyed the presence of the Falu-red house environment in Swedish national romantic paintings, in some ways continuing research conducted during my MA by Research. It included works by Swedish national romantic painters such as Carl Larsson and Anders Zorn but also examples of the environment in early to mid-19th century educational materials such as works by Maja Synnergren (Fig. 2), Elsa Beskow (Fig. 3) and Maj Lindman. I also collected images of the Swedish national home featuring in contemporary settings such as advertising and political campaigns and recent children's literature. In the notebook I also included research into artists and photographers visualising memories as means of questioning established historical narratives being particularly interested in visual tropes these artists used to articulate memory. I used some of this research in the introduction of my thesis and the knowledge gathered supported my artistic practice throughout my PhD journey.

As my research makes an intervention into the field of migration and diaspora studies, however, the visual practices that I discuss in the chapters of the thesis also negotiate these fields. To my knowledge, at this point in time there are not many Swedish or Nordic artists living in the UK who explicitly deal with the experience of migration and diasporic subjectivity formation, so the artists I discuss in the thesis deal with these issues from different perspectives. All are migrants, have migrant backgrounds, lived a nomadic and international life, or engage in practices of decolonisation through collaboration, where issues associated with these circumstances affect their imagination and creativity. For me, it

was important that the artists included in the thesis enhanced my understanding of migrant or transnational creativity and imagination, that they supported me in understanding my place in the field and my own migrant or diasporic visual language. Despite the differing backgrounds and material conditions of the artists included, some of their artworks contained similar visual tropes. They were all place-making endeavours that locate the artists (and in some cases their collaborating communities) in new locations at the same time as they, in different ways, seemed to deal with fractures in ideas of self or loss. The four illustrations in Chapter Two and Chapter Three, Veronica Ryan, *Loss of Selves, Place of Transformation*, Gravitas Profundis III, 2000 (Fig. 41), Charif Benhelima, *Black-Out*, 2006 (Figs. 42-45), Francesca Woodman, 1975-78. *From Space 2 Series, Providence, Rhode Island* (Fig. 78) and Ana Mendieta, *Untitled: Silueta Series,* 1976, Gelatin Silver Print, 13.02 x 13.02, 1975-78 (Fig. 79), frame loss by erasing visual information in different ways. The first two involve photography and the second two incorporate elements of performance. In contrast, the visual practices discussed in Chapter Four, the collaborations between artists Anna Ekman, Cecilia Järdemar, Freddy Tsimba (Figs. 141-143) and artists Beulah Ezeugo & Joselle Ntumba's online archive *Éireann and I* (Fig. 144) construct more community orientated network-like places designed to combat the effects of loss. Overall, the visual practices discussed in the thesis explore migrant, transnational and diasporic experience, however, their approaches and perspectives are different. My artistic practice dealing with these issues from a northern European, Nordic or Swedish viewpoint enter conversation with these perspectives as well as more generally adding to the rich, heterogenous fabric of varying artistic accounts that shapes the "shared space of dreams, fantasies and visions" (Bader, et al., 2019, p. unpag) that according to Brian Keith Axel is the "diasporic imaginary" (2002, p. 412). Here, stretching his concept a little to include transnational experiences, my artworks form part of a shared space of reciprocal processes, cross cultural conversations about what home is and what home could be that is formative of transnational, migrant and diasporic subjectivities, something that I will return to in Chapter One.

Thesis Structure

The thesis is structured in four chapters with an introduction and a conclusion tracking the cause of the development of diasporic touch. The main body of the thesis includes a review of literature, an explanation of methods and a line of enquiry, as well as more immediate and textured passages reflecting on my evolving studio practice. However, as my narrative thread follows the developments in my artistic process and they are, rather than being

assigned to different chapters, distributed throughout the thesis. In retrospect, I consider Chapter One to contain a survey the field that my work intervenes in, migration and diaspora studies and to identifying the gap my research addresses. Chapter Two is more about finding out about and defining diasporic touch. Chapter Three contains vital information about my methods and methodologies and Chapter Four is exploring the transferability of diasporic touch. Despite this, because it is an art practice based PhD, the work and its characteristic rich, unpredictable, non-linearity always takes precedence. The ideas form from making artworks, then subsequently settle in a linguistic narrative.

Chapter One, *Uncertainty and Diasporic Touch* accounts for how my artistic practice is situated in relation to my embodied experience of migration and the related condition of diaspora. It explores how our globalised interconnected world has caused an uprooting of people's sense of self that has led to a general sense of uncertainty, how people affected by the sustained effects of migration and diaspora establish a sense of self through creative endeavours (Bhabha, 1994a; Hall, 1994; Papastergiadis, 2007 [2000]) and how these accounts form a shared but heterogenous entity referred to as the diasporic imaginary (Axel, 2002; Quayson, 2013), that has the potential to challenge national forms of belonging. The chapter shows how my art practice materialises my homing desire, my psychic elaborations of home (Rus, 2006), to make visible my Anglo-Swedish experience and how this process dismantles stereotypical ideas of home and landscape associated with narratives of Sweden. In addition to this, the chapter tracks the early developments of my understanding of diasporic touch. It outlines how it is a form of opening up to the process of making that counteract my uncertainty. It establishes new understandings about making and diasporic subjectivity formation that adds detail to Bhabha (1998) account on this topic that draws on Winnicott's (2005 [1971]) idea of transitional phenomena.

Chapter Two, *Losing Self/Transforming Place* deepens the understanding of the links between creativity and diasporic subjectivity formation by establishing the dynamics of diasporic touch. The chapter explores the reparative effect of art practice (Ehrensweig, 1995 [1967]) and how it can be harnessed by migrants and diasporics to mend their sense of displacement. It examines how the sustained effects of migration and the condition of diaspora result in self uncertainty and a preoccupation with loss, and how diasporic touch can be used to counteract these emotions. By exploring the making of *Birch Shattering* 1 (2019), *Lilac Seeping* (2019) and *Pine Bleeding* (2019), the chapter establishes that diasporic touch has a by-product. Drawing on Ehrensweig and using information gathered when

making, it challenges Butler's (2003) claim that melancholic loss stays embodied and presents itself in repetitive aimless performances—that it cannot be completely overcome. The chapter accounts for how diasporic touch materialises loss, how it travels through the body and discharges into the form of the work, how it is a process that makes it external to self, acknowledgeable, and therefore more manageable.

Chapter Three, *In and Out of Frame,* shifts focus slightly and examines how artworks made through diasporic touch intervene in frameworks that govern our lives. It explores how artworks articulating diasporic experience destabilise the idea of national belonging and propel cultural transformation. More specifically the chapter examines how the sustained effects of my migration results in a contradictory relationship with frames and frameworks, how I, on the one hand desire their promise of unity and belonging (Bateson, 2000 [1972]; Reese, 2003 [2001]), yet also feel drawn to their liminality—how they connect things together (Derrida, 1987). The chapter also looks at the links between the methods I use when making and my overarching methodologies. By studying the process of making the piece of work *Sidney Nolan's Frames* (2017) and subsequent works *Gaps and Overlaps* (2017) and *Birch Shattering 2* (2021), it accounts for how I use photography and a range of performative strategies to express my diasporic longing to belong and liminality. I account for how I place things within the archive-system that supports nation with the help of photography—by placing them within a structure that determines their meaning—but also how I unplace them with help of performance, by unfixing their meaning—and finally how these methods very effectively support the mourning process of diasporic touch.

Chapter Four, *A Socially Engaged Practice*, explores a collaborative project that unfolded parallel to my individual practice which situates my research in the wider context of Anglo-Swedish diasporic making and subjectivity formation. The chapter accounts for how we used a living archive model (Sabiescu, 2020) to create an Internet archive, the Anglo-Swedish Archive (2015), of objects, places and images that reminded us of home that challenges the idea of national belonging. It looks at how the online location of the archive resulted in an openness and connectivity that encourages conversations about home and nationality. It examines how it fosters a questioning attitude to ideas of national belonging by placing our sense of collectivity in a wider context. In addition to this, the collaborative project, although inconclusive, unearthed some important information about the possible transferability of the process of diasporic touch.

The *Conclusion* highlights how art practice can be utilised to counteract the self uncertainty arising from diasporic experience, it shows how my arts-based research intervenes in previous theories of migrant and diasporic subjectivity formation. It explains how my research evidences the way entwining inner world and outer environment (Winnicott, 2005 [1971]; Bhabha, 1994b) through diasporic touch has a reparative effect (Ehrensweig, 1995 [1967]) on the self fragmentation associated with diaspora. It accounts for how my research findings challenge Butler's (2003) ideas about diasporic subjectivity formation and loss, how they suggest that art practice, or more specifically diasporic touch, allows diasporic melancholia to settle in artworks and this process of externalising provides a way for migrants and diasporics to mourn.

CHAPTER ONE
Uncertainty and Diasporic Touch

As a migrant I am influenced by many cultural frameworks, the certainty I previously felt about my identity has turned into a multitude of questions and, for me, making art has become a way to establish a sense of self. I am not saying that I was completely comfortable as Swedish, in many ways my rural, vaguely northern kind of Swedish-ness to which I only partly felt I belonged, for example, made me feel out of place in the country's capital, however, I believe my move to a new country deepened my questioning attitude. My art practice deals with the embodied and sustained effects of migration, the sense of unsettlement within (Papastergiadis, 2007 [2000]), that brings with it a particular palette of emotions. For migrants, the notion of home is a multidimensional place, it is a journey where multiple affiliations are encountered along the way (Langford, 2007, p. 38). My artistic practice explores the tensions between the knowledge of Swedish culture I carry within and the cultural narratives in my surrounding environment. This chapter addresses how globalisation has contributed to a general uncertainty that national structures try to conceal. It explains how and why people living with the sustained effects of migration, and the condition of diaspora, feel unsettled and how engaging in my art practice changes my feelings of uncertainty. Over time I have come to realise my belonging is not bound by place anymore but is a continuous process of place-making. I have come to understand that my making is a practice of belonging (Abebe & Saha, 2015) that works through my inner sense of misalignment.

This chapter will account for how my artistic practice engages with my embodied experience of migration and the related condition of diaspora. It will begin by situating my artistic practice in relation to existing theoretical accounts that deal with the relationship between migration, the experience of uncertainty and creativity. In the second part of the chapter, I will focus on my art practice, exploring how the experience of uncertainty manifests itself in my visual work. Using my home in Manchester as a base or a canvas from which my work emerges—a series of montages that bring together partial and multiple homes. The work dismantles Swedish stereotypical narratives of home, taking apart the Falu-red house environment. The art works articulate how, for migrant and diasporics, home and belonging are not straight forward but complicated and ambiguous. The process of dismantling a Swedish stereotypical narrative of home resulted in an unexpected finding.

It was as if the creation of visual ambiguity emphasised in my artistic process as a location of touch, the connectivity of things, came to the forefront of my mind. The second part of the chapter will explore the emergence and development of my notion of diasporic touch, a tactile experience emerging from the process of deconstructing home, that counteracts my sense of misalignment. I will account for how my work challenges both the idea of there being a *national home* and the homogeneity of *nation* by drawing attention to how, in a society defined by global mobility, our sense of self is multifaceted and ambiguous. My artworks will claim a space for me as a migrant, although a privileged one, that will question stereotypical ideas of where immigrants come from, who we are and how we participate in, interact with, and resist dominant cultural narratives.

Figure 6 Sara Davies, *Rehearsing with Bergma*n,[4] 2015

[4] The images are stills from video material documenting my encounter with the slide projections. The video material was shot on a mobile phone, for research purposes.

Studio Reflection: The emergence of diasporic touch

During the early stages of my artistic research, I experimented with a series of slide projections picturing stills from Ingmar Bergman films. Titled *Rehearsing with Bergman* (2015) it involved me interacting with the images, following my gut instinct at the same time as I filmed the encounters. The images were projected onto the walls in my cellar studio where the crumbling plaster and uneven surfaces seemed to protrude and interfere with the subject matter, so that the materiality of my Manchester cellar somehow merged with the images shot in Sweden. I reached for content in the images that reminded me of my childhood, things that symbolise Sweden also reflecting on my current location, the dampness in the room, the traffic noises outside, the rough textures of the walls and floor. There was one still that I returned to, from Bergman's short film *Daniel* (1967), featuring his wife and son.[5] In a home movie style, Bergman captured a mother and young child in a garden surrounded by what for a moment looked like meadow flowers. The idyllic scene, suggesting the familiar rural identity that has become part of the narrative of Sweden that I often return to, reminded me of my sons, myself as a young child and of midsummer.[6] I slowly touched Daniel's cheek, remembering the feeling of baby skin, feeling the cool plaster wall, *there and then* became *here and now*, and I simultaneously experienced the two cultural narratives of my life through a Swedish national symbol. Documented in Fig. 6 you can see my engagement with the still, showing when I touched Daniel's cheek and felt a connection, a closeness that counteracted my sense of uncertainty. It was not a coincidence that I discovered that some of Bergman's work was filmed near my home in Sweden and he was seen as embedding Swedish symbols within his films (Ingmar Bergman Foundation, n.d.). Later, in writing emerging from making, I named this gesture *diasporic touch*. It seemed to evoke both longing and sadness, a gesture that felt important to my well-being, and from this moment my research became a quest to find out its characteristics.

[5] The short film *Daniel* forms a chapter in an eight-chapter experimental film titled *Stimulatia* released in 1967. Interestingly, although I experimented with many images from Ingmar Bergman films, the diasporic in me responded to this one with its home movie characteristics. I seemed to be attracted to a film by Bergman that is personal and intimate, very different from his usual filmic outputs (AB Svensk Filmindustri, 2022, p. unpag).

[6] Bergman's film contains elements that I associate with the Swedish red-croft environment, the idyllic Swedish national home. For further information about the importance of the red-croft environment for the Anglo-Swedish diasporic community see (Davies, 2015) *Reconstructing Home: Memory in the Scandinavian Diaspora*.

Uncertainty

Globalisation, Mobility and Transnational Becoming

My migratory journey is one of many in a world where migration and displacement have become the norm. The prevalence of migration and a general sense of flux has resulted in a questioning of ideas of stable nations and place bound belonging. The structure of our modern world is moulded by processes of globalisation and this results in a certain set of emotions. It has been argued that our societies, rather than being constituted through ties to place, are formed by both interlinked modes of mobilities, such as the motion of bodies and objects; virtual and communicative movements; and imaginary mind travel (Larsen, et al., 2006, pp. 47-48). Movement has become the defining feature of globalisation, a powerful process moulded by capitalism that has made the world into a more connected and continuous place (National Geographic, n.d., p. unpag). The movement of people to trade, explore and conquer is not a new phenomenon—earlier forms of globalisation have always been with us contributing to a web of intertwined cultures (Boullata, 2008, p. 15), however it has been suggested that since the 1980s new technologies of transportation and communication have caused a widening, deepening, and speeding up of global interconnection (Held, et al., 2008 [1999], p. 2). Faraway places can be reached by the touch of a button, information about the world is readily available and we are able to meet other cultures in both our physical and virtual world. This world, formed by a web of mobilities, has changed the way we understand our sense of self; it has transformed the way we relate to the frameworks in society. The fluidity and indeterminate characteristics of globalisation bring with them an increased sense of uncertainty and through my research I have come to understand that this uncertainty can have both positive and negative effects.

According to Arjun Appadurai (1996), the way we understand our place in the world is influenced by a shift in media technology from the printing press, that paved the way for the construction of imagined communities of nations (Anderson, 2006 [1983]), to a networked society defined by a world reaching digital communication technology. Examining the cultural aspects of globalisation, Appadurai suggests that the interconnectedness of mass migration and digital communication technology forges a particular transnational environment that affects our imagination. In fact, he maintains that globalisation results in us using our imagination to shape our deterritorialised subjectivities, at every turn dealing with the tensions and contradictions of our shape shifting, transnational environment. Key to my visual research, Appadurai identifies a form of rupture between the experience of

having a deterritorialised sense of self and the local languages available to name this experience. He identifies a tension between the global and the local; between the flow of things and the bounded forms in our society that attempt to contain these flows, a tension that begins to explain my feeling of misalignment. Digital communication technology results in a world where many have a more uprooted sense of self, and subsequently experience many cultural influences; Appadurai attempts to show how the languages available cannot, however, fully articulate these experiences. His ideas begin to explain the discordance that I sense between my embodied experience of migration and the stories that I tell about it. It is this tension, this discordance, and the particular palette of emotion that it evokes, that my artworks are aiming to communicate. It is what drives my art practice. Later in this chapter I will explain this relationship in more detail and its implications on subjectivity.

Studio Reflection: Setting Foot

When I boarded the bus taking me to London, I felt both excited and scared; I was looking forward to experiencing a place that I already felt I knew from books and television programmes. I was relieved to leave my old life behind and have a chance to start anew, perhaps finally being able to grasp some of the opportunities that seemed to evade me in Sweden. I was also worried that I would not sufficiently understand or be understood. Upon arrival, I realised that my idea of London, formed through media representations, was a little skewed. I stepped off the bus and was overwhelmed by the materiality of the place, its differences. I was intrigued by the quaint shop fronts (they were nothing like Swedish shops), richer and more ornate, they promised me fairy tales. Everything looked, smelled and sounded so different. Why did I embark on this migratory journey? Was I inspired by my great grandad's migration to America around 1900 or was I responding to my desire for change? My migratory journey was in a way a privileged one, I wasn't forced, I wasn't fleeing from my home, I was searching for opportunities to work, study and to improve my English. Over time, my out of place-ness became the dominant feature of my experience. At first, the uncertainty felt overwhelming but as time passed the sensation became a familiar but difficult companion. I often wonder if the sustained effects of my migration have become embodied and influence my visual practice. I wonder if the artistic process has become a means for me to work through my sense of being out of place.

Globalisation has destabilised the widely held idea that national belonging equals certainty and stability. It has resulted in a matrix of multiple and partial cultural affiliations that in some ways enrich our lives but that also result in a more fragmented sense of self. It has been suggested that in our globalised world defined by migration, memories are no longer

attached to containers such as nations and artefacts that help us acquire historical continuity, they are instead fluid and flexible. In the words of Bond, Craps and Vermeulen unbound memories "travel across the migratory paths of the world citizen" (Bond, et al., 2018, p. 1), and in this way, "interconnecting traces of different voices, sites and times" (Silverman, 2015 [2013], p. 8). The way memory is understood and theorised had over time transformed, form being seen as something that can be recalled, to emerging in the present through the construction of different media forms, for example, the telling of stories, making of artworks, creation of literature, but now also emerging in complex digital networks (Assman, 2018). People with deterritorised subjectivities, it has been highlighted, harbour composite memory forms that have the potential to build new bonds between cultures (Silverman, 2015 [2013], p. 8). These transnational, composite memory forms cannot sufficiently be captured in linguistic narratives, they reach beyond languages and their wordlessness contributes to the rupture that Appadurai (1996) describes. Through my art practice I mobilise the visual to articulate the complex, composite memory that emerges from my migrant experience. I work through the effects of globalisation on my subjectivity by making visual artworks. In this way my work exposes that inadequacy of languages and the national structures they support.

Nation and Anxiety

The discordance between transnational experience and language's ability to categorise this experience (Appadurai, 1996) has profound implications for our sense of self. It has been argued that identifying with nation always brings with it uncertainty (Bhabha, 1994b), something that is particularly pertinent for people with deterritorised subjectivities. I will now focus the investigation on how uncertainty is built into the fabric of nation with a particular focus on how it affects migrants and diasporics. Nations have been described by many and most noteworthy by Anderson (2006 [1983]) as imaginary constructions.[7] Although he claims that national belonging is tied to a geographical location, Anderson also identifies the way it is created and sustained by a national imaginary. Highlighting how nations are "imagined because members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson, 2006 [1983], p. 6), in this way arguing that, as nations are often large entities—people are spread out across great distances—shared life plays out in their minds. Identifying how and why nations were formed, Anderson suggests

[7] Nations as imaginary constructs will be discussed further in Chapter Three.

that at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century the formation of nation states was enabled by the invention of the printed press, as it sustains narratives of nation through time and distributes them across space. Arguably, although nations are geographical territories, they are determined through a series of imaginative and symbolic acts that shape peoples' understanding of themselves (Anderson, 2006 [1983]; Miller, 1995; Edwards, 2015). A sense of belonging is created through a series of performative acts where people identify with, and find a sense of unity in, shared cultural traits (Anderson, 2006 [1983]; Schwartz, 2015). However, it has since been claimed that nations, although promising continuity, are far from stable entities (Bhabha, 1990), and because of their more fundamental differences the uncertainty affects migrants and diasporics more acutely.

Building on Anderson's ideas, Bhabha shifts the focus from thinking about cultures in a binary way to focusing on their liminality. He claims that nations unfold in a cultural process that both determines form and holds together its people. The nation, Bhabha explains, is "a narrative strategy" written through "a form of social and textual affiliation" (Bhabha, 1990, pp. 2-3). It is shaped by an engagement with constructed stories compiled as history that creates a sense of commonality and an affiliation with a geographical place. These national structures that foster a sense of belonging through homogeneity, however, also harbour the chance of rejection. It is a system that creates divisions through the inclusion of some people and the exclusion of others with different cultural backgrounds (Anderson, 2006 [1983]). Although nations are regarded as stable entities, Bhabha highlights their precariousness, how they conceal our actual living conditions. He argues that "the invention of the national past…is a turning away from the differential, disjunctive cultural present, and presence of modern society" (Bhabha, 1994b, p. 205), in this way highlighting how engaging with history screens out the fluidity and cultural intricacies of globalisation. It is through this backward glancing— an investment in a historical narrative that differs from what our bodies know of the past—that he argues the nation turns uncertain: it induces unease and anxiety.

In this way, Bhabha (1994b) disproves the idea that national structures are stable entities; he highlights how the very process by which nations are formed also unravels their claim of unity and continuity. The uncertainty at the heart of national belonging, he claims, is formed from the tension between the national strategy—the unfolding of a common history, and peoples' individual expressions of this history in everyday life (Bhabha, 1990, p. 297). It is, according to Bhabha, created through a movement between two experiences of time—the

epochal, linear time of history that unfolds from an originary moment and the many criss-crossing events of the everyday where he says "scraps, patches, and rags of daily life must be repeatedly turned into the signs of national culture" (Bhabha, 1990, p. 297). In this way national identities are created in what Bhabha calls "double-time", a process where they identify with nation as "historical *objects* of a national pedagogy" (Bhabha, 1990, p. 297) and, at the same time, through an engagement with these national narratives through a performative activity of making meaning that is at all times influenced by the material conditions of globalisation. However, as the complexity of this everyday time is denied by nations, the process by which it is constructed and held together also brings with it a great sense of uncertainty. The uncertainty created by this simultaneous movement towards and away from identity at the heart of the construction of nation, Bhabha claims, opens up a supplementary space of liminality within nations where migrant and minority ethnic life stories can emerge. It creates a space that allows alternative perspectives to surface and challenge dominant national narrations (Bhabha, 1990).[8] This space is one of non-linearity where the pull of two national strategies on people results in a different kind of movement—a journeying between histories where here, there, now and then is gathered into composite forms.[9] He highlights how they, in their construction of cultural composite forms, weave a global and visual text. It is important to remember, however, that Bhabha is a literary theorist and his ideas about the visual are limited by his lack of expertise. To offset this limitation, I therefore use throughout my research the theories of Nikos Papastergiadis (Papastergiadis, 2005; Papastergiadis, 2007 [2000]; Papastergiadis, 2012) whose research focuses on the connective power of art practice in order to explore how I weave together global betweenness in visual images.

[8] In the essay 'How Newness Enters the World' which is included in his book *The Location of Culture,* Bhabha (Bhabha, 1994a) further develops these ideas to take into account globalisation and widespread migration where he says that newness emerges from migrants' liminal position between global forces and local national structures. He clarifies the idea of this everyday temporal experience and further anchors it in the context of the experience of globalisation.

[9] Although deriving from a postcolonial context Bhabha's ideas have been adapted and applied in migration studies more generally. Papastergiadis' development of his theories focuses on the role of the visual in migratory experience (Papastergiadis, 2005; Papastergiadis, 2007 [2000]; Papastergiadis, 2012). Updating Bhabha's model that responded to the colonial/postcolonial situation, considering a world of widespread migration and mobility, Papastergiadis argues that cultural translation or hybridisation emerge in the tensions between a deterritorialised sense of self forged from a sense of global movement and local, often competing, frameworks, where the former instigates a desire to connect and the latter results in a sense of disconnection.

Studio Reflection: I am a Translator

After my arrival in London, I spent many years living alongside people from many parts of the world, there was a continuous sharing of cultures and experiences. When I moved to Manchester my network of friends became less diverse and at this point, I often considered myself more English than Swedish. When forming a family, however, Swedish traditions and customs suddenly mattered again and I took on the role of translator. I often considered my position within my family at the crossroads of cultural frameworks. Although I was aware of the intricate web of cultures surrounding me in my day-to-day life, two cultural frameworks dominated my experience, two sets of values deeply influenced my life, two histories competed for attention. I felt that this duality was shaped by the languages spoken in my family, English and Swedish, of which I was the main translator. I was filling in the blind spots in the lines of communication between my family members in Sweden and my family in England. My attempts felt blunt, imprecise, often slipping off course. As a translator I felt a rift in my personality, an internal misalignment. It was something that in my mind's eye looked like a collection of jagged crevices and irregular lines, perhaps a series of misalignment fragments in a form that brought my old and new life together. As a translator I was bearing the burden of the untranslatable, the silences, the misunderstandings: I am the bearer of the gaps and overlaps in my family's experiences. I was the one who bound my family together, I was connecting our experiences in different languages, but I also deeply felt the moments when we were out of step. I was beginning to think that my body was a storeroom of untranslatable experience, a container for the gaps and overlaps in my family's communication and the dark uneven patchwork with visible joins.

The Creative Agency of Migrants

This way of thinking about the formation of nations places particular importance on liminal cultural experiences. It places the migrant or minority ethnic centre stage, as an actor who can drive social change. The creative agency of migrants has been articulated by post-colonial theorists such Bhabha (1994a) and Stuart Hall (1994); and later by cultural theorists such as Papastergiadis (2005). They adhere to the view that migratory or transcultural self formation is a process that is ongoing, that is generated through creative encounters with the surrounding environment, through making representations that offer alternative views of established cultural narratives and in this way renew culture. This is most clearly expressed by Bhabha, who claims that people from minority cultures do not form their subjectivity by identifying outside self—with written histories, but through a performative agency that reconstructs these narratives (Bhabha, 1994b, p. 212). Both Bhabha and Papastergiadis claim that instead of identifying with external national forms their sense of self emerges in a

process of cultural translation, (Bhabha, 1994a), from a consolidation of multiple affiliations in visual art forms (Papastergiadis, 2007 [2000]). Both writers believe that migrants and minority ethnics generate a sense of self in a string of creative encounters with the surrounding environment, making material constellations in different media to consolidate self, an activity that also hybridises and renews culture (Bhabha, 1994a; Papastergiadis, 2005).[10] Papastergiadis (2007 [2000], p. 15) focuses on the role of the visual in the migrant subjectivity formation and cultural production. He claims that the visual articulations of people with hybrid identities can form bridges between cultures that function beyond the constraints of language. Instead of mirroring established forms, Papastergiadis claims they can be seen as propositions of what could be free flowing forms, roaming between, without straight forward meanings in languages. This places my artistic practice that emerges from the experience of migration in an important position. It explains that art practice holds the potential to visualise new possibilities and change perspectives. Yet, as my research progressed I noticed that making art also seemed to hold back my self uncertainty and help in the formation of my sense of self.

To some extent explaining this, Bhabha (1998) draws on D. W. Winnicott (2005 [1971]) to explore cultural liminality.[11] He describes the process of hybridisation as a harnessing of transitional phenomena—a form of threshold area of human experience between internal psychic life and the external environment that is said to help reform subjectivity. Although, according to Winnicott, transitional phenomena can be experienced by most people, Bhabha explores what happens when they are harnessed by liminal subjectivities. By using

[10] *Hybridity* is a concept that has recently been used to "describe the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonisation" (Mambrol, 2016, p. unpag). Bhabha (1994a) argues that all cultural statements are formed in an ambivalent *third space* of enunciation, in a sense, between the writing and the performative speaking of a culture. This *third space* of enunciation, he claims, when migrants' utter cultural statements differently, harbours the potential for hybrid cultural forms to emerge. In this context, the concept of hybridity or cultural hybridization has since been developed further by Hall (1994) and Papastergiadis (2005). However, the use of the term *hybrid* has also been criticised as it was used by the Eugenics movement in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, a set of beliefs and practices (famously used in Nazi Germany during the second world war) that aimed to improve the genetic quality of human populations by controlling the reproduction of people and groups judged to be inferior, or promoting those judged to be superior. In this setting, racial purity was preferable and hybridity undesirable (Britannica, n.d., p. unpag). In a sense, what Bhabha, Hall and Papastergiadis do is to change the use of this term, which simultaneously re-addresses the balance of power. They see hybridity as a process which is positive, harbouring creativity and propelling cultural renewal.

[11] Papastergiadis and Daniella Trimboli (2017) continue the exploration of liminality as being a form of entwinement between somebody's internal world and external environment. In Chapter Two I will explore how they mobilise Gilles Deleuze's (2005 [1993]) notion of *The Fold* to add detail to this argument.

Winnicott's ideas Bhabha accounts for how the migrant's and minority ethnic's embodied experience of their former culture becomes externalised in the fabric of the surrounding environment of their adopted culture. He highlights how art practice as a liminal activity both aids transcultural self formation and contributes to the renewal of cultures. However, I suggest that Bhabha does not push his involvement with psychoanalytic theory far enough. The lack of detail in his argument around this issue leaves me with further questions. As my research progressed it became apparent to me that he did not fully account for how engaging in art practice counteracts the anxiety of displacement. As a practice based researcher and visual artist my investigations in this field can add detail to his ideas. It can account for how making art can hold back feelings of uncertainty, something that I will explore further in Chapter Two.

The age defined by migration and mobility has contributed to new ways of understanding ourselves as part of the world. It has contributed to the formation of hybrid subjectivities that play a key role in the production of alternative views and new cultural forms. In addition to this, the embodied and sustained effects of individual migratory journeys can also contribute to a diasporic experience, a particular way of relating to a former culture and the culture of the host country that emerges from a sense of displacement (Brah, 1996). Diaspora is a condition of subjectivity that makes people feel homeless and having many homes (Cho, 2007).[12] Brah argues that it causes a friction between our idea of home and the experience of dispersion and results in a "homing desire" (Brah, 1996, p. 193) where, instead of seeing home as a geographical place of origin, it becomes a place we return to in our imagination—it pulsates in a psychic space where stories of home are imagined and sustained. The condition of diaspora focuses the process of hybridity on the notion of home where it undergoes intricate elaborations, persistent questioning and sometimes violent subversions. Developing Brah's theories Rus (2006, p. unpag) suggests that the dislodgement from a physical place of origin can become embedded in our psychic life and manifest itself as a desire for, and loss of, our primal home (a psychic and developmental state where we experience a sense of oneness with our mother). "Homing desire" can, in this way, be understood as a desire for oneness that plays out in the constant formation and

[12] The notion of *diaspora* has a long history and through time its meanings have undergone changes. It has been argued that the usage of the term "falls along a spectrum between emphasising a group identity as a bounded object of institutional intervention, to understanding the diasporic belonging and mobilisation in more fluid, dynamic and performative ways" (Sigona, et al., 2015, p. XVIII). This means that sometimes the term *diaspora* is applied to a particular group of people who feel a continued connection to their homeland and sometimes to a condition of subjectivity that constantly re-negotiates notions of home (and self) through imagination and creative practices.

reformation of imaginary homes. In my experience as an artist, I recognise Brah and Rus' psychic life of home as a quest for oneness and I can see how it materialises in my practice. The sense of discordance mentioned earlier that affects my sense of self results in me mobilising the visual to articulate my migrant experience. These articulations, because of my diasporic subjectivity, focus on expressing my relationship to and questions regarding home. Through my research I have come to realise that the process of materialising these imaginary renditions of home expresses my cultural liminality, harnessing transitional phenomena (Winnicott, 2005 [1971]) they help me form my subjectivity. The process, however, also seems to reduce my sense of uncertainty, something that I will explore further in Chapter Two and Three. I will, in these chapters, account for what happens when my "homing desire" is materialised and how this process relates to the notion of diasporic touch.

To summarise briefly, in these accounts—theorised in slightly different ways by Bhabha (1994a) and Papastergiadis (2012), and reiterated by Bader, Mersmann et.al. (2019)—we have seen how these explanations of migrant and diasporic articulations of difference emerge in the intersection between the experience of the global transnational sphere and national structures. These articulations have a collective dimension that has been theorised by, for example, anthropologist Brian Keith Axel (2002) and literary critic Ato Quayson (2013) with claims that diasporic subjectivity formation is a time-based process of identification that focuses on material and physical encounters that are deeply affective in nature. Together the complex forms emerging from these engagements, the stories, artworks, literature, and other media texts have become known as the "diasporic imaginary" (Axel, 2002, p. 412) and described as a "shared space of dreams, fantasies and visions" (Bader, et al., 2019, p. unpag). It is a collective body of materialised "homing desires" which is said to constitute a collective understanding of the condition of diaspora, however, rather than being a stable entity, it shifts and changes with each new articulation. Trying to give shape and contours to the diasporic imaginary Quayson (2013) proposes that it has some important and recurring features. The diasporic articulations linked with it feature a proximity between one's sense of self and place; it is permeated by nostalgia and often includes genealogical accounts. My artistic practice deal with these themes, and I argue that my artworks add an Anglo-Swedish perspective to the diasporic imaginary. By materialising my homing desire through my artistic practice, by making a thing out of a feeling, I remodel stereotypical narratives of home, nation and self, expressing a more complex and ambiguous picture. To articulate my uncertainty, I take them apart.

So far, the chapter has considered how, through my artistic practice, I engaged with my embodied experience of migration and the related condition of diaspora. It has explored how I do this by articulating the tension, or discordance, between an embodied transnational experience and languages inability to convey it (Appadurai, 1996). My artistic practice has become a way to materialise the uncertainty associated with migrant and diasporic experience and I have discovered that making it tangible reduces its hold. The chapter identified a gap in the research relating to how and why artistic practice contributes to the formation of subjectivity (Bhabha, 1998). Bhabha's argument about art practices by migrants and diasporics being transitional phenomena (Winnicott, 2005 [1971]) lacks detail, however. My knowledge as a practitioner adds substance to Bhabha's argument about migrant art practices being transitional phenomena; it can (amongst other things) unravel why art practice seemed to counteract self uncertainty. In addition to this, the first part of this chapter has illustrated how uncertainty can be a source of creativity and how artworks by migrants have the potential to create new cultural forms that transform perspectives. To continue, I will focus on a specific example from my art practice that engages with the idea of national belonging and how my experience as a migrant, my embodied transnational experience, result in a questioning that affects this process. I will explore how I dismantle Swedish stereotypical narratives of home and landscape, and how my art practice reshapes the Falu-red house and its surrounding environment to articulate my uncertain, ambiguous and complex sense of self.

Diasporic Touch

The idea of creating montages of home grew out of my experience touching the projected image of Bergman's son Daniel. I wanted to understand how and why the tactile experience that emerged when making artworks, the experience I named diasporic touch, felt productive. As discussed earlier, transnational subjectivities are formed through creative endeavours (Bhabha, 1994a; Hall, 1994; Papastergiadis, 2005). They are continually recreated through the construction of hybrid forms that attempt to unify a deep sense of dissonance (Hall, 1994) and both disrupt (Bhabha, 1990) and bridge (Papastergiadis, 2007 [2000]) national entities. I instinctively knew that diasporic touch played an important role in this process and, as this chapter will show, the notion proved more complex than expected. Diasporic touch is part of a process that materialises Brah's "homing desire" (Brah, 1996, p.

193), the fluid shapeshifting home within, that emerges when dispersed and is formed through the intimacy of memory and imagination. It is an activity in which physical touching results in feelings of emotional connection, a pursuit that is linked with the activity of framing. This practice of framing my connections in various ways is nothing new, it is a method that I often use when making artworks and something that I will discuss further in Chapter Three. After my encounter with the projected image of Bergman's son, though, I wanted to further explore why touch came to the forefront of my mind when confronted with the stereotypical narratives of place and landscape associated with the Swedish nation. I wanted to understand what diasporic touch did to these stereotypes and how this process seemed to counteract the self uncertainty caused by the sustained effects of migration on my subjectivity.

Studio Reflection: At once-ness

I used my living room as a site for several projections, it seemed the perfect place where I could materialise the complex, shapeshifting home of my diasporic imagination. Whilst alone at home, I transformed various rooms into cultural composite environments. This time using multiple slide projections I could place different times and places together in composite forms, weaving together the here, there, now and then. I projected images taken in Sweden picturing various aspects of the stereotypical Swedish home linked with ideas of nation – the red-painted house in the forest – onto the interior walls of my house in Manchester. Images of pine trees, meadow flowers, moss and lingonberries photographed in Sweden adorned the interior walls of an English terraced house. I realised that I, through my practice, unravelled and reinstated boundaries. For some time, I moved through the projections, experiencing details, some close up, some merging with the patterned curtains and some on the bare skin of my arms. The projections transformed the room into a threshold space, not quite Sweden, not quite England but both at once, and with the movement of my body they were continuously changing it. It changed the familiar spaces of my day-to-day life – the interior décor, furniture and ornaments—into intricate forms that articulated my psychic and distinctly diasporic dimension of home. Moving through the space I felt a strong connection to the composite environment. As I moved the projectors in the space, changed the position of the furniture and playfully moved my fingers across a picture of red-painted wood I felt an attachment to the activity of joining the memories of my multiple homes into projected montages, I sense a form of at-onceness with the montaging process.

I used my home in Manchester as a site from which my psychic elaborations of home (Rus, 2006) could grow, I used it as a site from which my artistic process questioning the validity

of stereotypical notions of national identity could emerge. Migrants' homes have often been regarded as sites of cultural resistance (Papastergiadis, 2012) and it seemed the perfect site from which render belonging uncertain. It has been argued that the interior of our homes often reflects our subjectivity (Ionescu, 2018, p. unpag), and that a migrant's residence is where old traditions and cultural values are maintained and rules of the host country can be challenged (Papastergiadis, 2012, p. 74). Svetlana Boym (2002, p. 328) explains how migrants' homes often become museums of personal memories and souvenirs; reminders of their former home are gathered, arranged, and displayed in strategic places. In some ways my cultural difference was already present in the interiors of my house—there were an array of Dalecarlian Horses; blue and white striped fabric; and traditional Kurbits paintings, but I was convinced that my art practice would take this difference further. I was sure that the Victorian architecture of my terraced house would open up a space where my cultures could merge into complex constellations. During a prolonged period of experimentation, I further inscribed my difference by transforming the interior of my terraced house by projecting images of Swedish stereotypical environments of place and landscape on walls and furniture. I combined two cultural narratives until they collapsed into ambiguous visual forms. I used my house in Manchester to explore how the idea of home for a migrant can be both complex and contradictory.

Studio Reflection: Making Ambiguity

I worked with the three-dimensional montages in my living room for some time, trying different combinations of images, projecting in various places of the room and moving through the space in different ways. Gradually the complexity of the compositions increased and at times the separate entities ceased to be, they became something else entirely. The images and my living room cut into each other—corners appeared skewed, furniture seemed fractured, and clusters of pine trees cut in half. Straight lines mutated into fantastical forms that were not fully this or that and at the same time both. Often the uncertainty of being culturally in-between seemed overwhelming, yet here in the midst of making another kind of liminal space the ambiguity seemed to be productive. The process of making and its connectivity cancelled out the feeling of being out of place. As I transformed the composite environments the boundaries between things became less pronounced, thin edges turned into larger areas of darkness, defined borders were transformed into zones of gradually changing tones and lines appeared rich and complex. My artistic practice was slowly blurring the boundaries between things, it was making ambiguity. My art practice was not just about bringing cultures together, but about showing their porous nature. Sometimes, it was as if the

ambiguity of the compositions softened the misalignment I felt inside, they soothed the friction and mended the rifts.

Montaging Home

I dismantled the stereotypical Falu-red house environment, the Swedish national home, through a montaging process that rearranged both the compositions in the projected images and the rooms of my house. It has been argued that to convey their in-between lives, diasporic artists often use montage, the juxtaposition of cultural signs and the gathering together of contrasting perspectives (Papastergiadis, 2005, p. 46). This physical process of taking things apart to create more ambiguous forms became a way for me to question uncomplicated ideas of belonging more generally. My artistic process can, to some extent, be understood in relation to Papastergiadi's idea of hybridity, a process that aids migrants and diasporics to reform subjectivity through the creation of new cultural forms. He suggests hybridity is a process that "involves ripping it out of one context, pushing against existing boundaries, rearranging the order of things" (Papastergiadis, 2005, pp. 61-62). When creating photographic montages, I recognise the activity of gathering that Papastergiadis describes and I also notice an incessant focus on the expansion, contraction and shifting of boundaries. For example, this process of bringing things together and rearranging boundaries has a presence in Figs. 7-9 picturing documentation of the composite environment *Lingonberry Room* (2017) where I engage in an activity of montaging that transforms established cultural forms into new compositions.[13] My artistic practice dismantles the Swedish stereotypical narratives of home and landscape, it takes the Falu-red house environment apart, by transforming clarity into visual uncertainty. I suggest that my complex and ambiguous montages of home articulate the sense of discordance that Appadurai identifies: they convey uncertainty and it is from this space of ambiguity, this space of discordance, that diasporic touch emerges.

[13] When encountering the composite visual environments in a performative way, what I saw and experienced was often different from what can be seen in photographs documenting these performances. I have therefore included passages of *Studio Reflection* that capture important aspects of my research and findings.

Figures 7-9 Sara Davies, *Lingonberry Room (test)*, 2017

Blurring Boundaries

By taking apart a stereotypical image of the Falu-red house environment—the Swedish national home—and bringing the fragments together in new ambiguous compositions I articulate the porous characteristics of boundaries. It has been argued that migrants and diasporic artists often focus on boundaries in their art practices (Papastergiadis, 2005), a discussion that I will deepen in Chapter Three, and it is as if their liminal experience manifests itself in an incessant transformation of dividing lines. Explaining the focus on boundary reconstruction in more detail, Papastergiadis identifies that the hybridity thinking of migrants and diasporics is driven by a dual desire for separation and connection where the borders between things are contested zones (Papastergiadis, 2005, pp. 61-62). In this way, my art practice plays out in an activity where I expand and contract the boundaries between things. An example of this can be seen in Fig. 10 *Stepping in/out* (2017) where I use layering to reduce the sharpness of the boundaries between entities, I push and pull at dividing lines until the composition is filled with gaps and overlaps and collapse into hazy and imprecise compositions. In some strange almost contradictory way this activity of blurring boundaries counteracted my sense of uncertainty and made me feel a deep sense of connection. It was as if I could identify with the ambiguous environments in a way that I couldn't with the stereotypical Swedish narratives. I dismantled the Swedish stereotypical narratives of home and landscape through blurring boundaries and it slowly dawned on me that the process counteracted my sense of uncertainty. My research resulted in an understanding that uncertainty in life could have negative effects, but ambiguity contained in my artistic practice could be beneficial. I understood that in some way, diasporic touch

played an important role in this process and that it had something to do with joins, connections, bridges, attachments and at-oneness. Exactly how it worked was still not completely clear, but I knew it had a soothing effect.

Figure 10 Sara Davies, *Stepping in/out (test)*, 2017

Studio Reflection: Dissolving Body

After the experiments with projections in my house, and when examining the documentation, I began to understand how the photographs of the composite environments in my room were about disappearance. The edges between things unravelled and my figure seemed to dissolve on many occasions. Out of all the photographs I took during these early experiences there were three that, when placed together as a triptych, seemed to articulate the fluidity and uncertainty of my life (Figs. 11-13). I could see my figure from behind, sitting on the floor looking at the uneven patchwork of times and places projected onto the living room walls, a cultural composite form with visible joins. As my gaze moved from left to right, the boundaries between my figure and the surrounding environment became more and more porous until they disintegrated all together. The first image depicted my body being invaded by horizontal lines across my hair and body that at times appeared to cut through its edges. The second image displayed a deformed body with a contorted back and twisted, partly disappearing limbs. In the third image my figure was nearly absent, only leaving a faint trace, a dark haze slightly off centre.

When photographing the composite environments in my living room the images often included a silhouette-like representation of my body, and as my research developed, I started to think about my work as unconventional self-portraits. However, rather than creating mirror images of my appearance, they were much more about articulation of an out of place self. I articulated my "homing desire" fuelled by dispersion (Brah, 1996, p. 193) and my work's hazy, complex and indistinct compositions somehow corresponded with the sense of displacement that permeated my being. They were an articulation of me. When following the narrative of the triptych *Unbounded* (2017), Figs. 11-13, it told a story of disappearance, that things were receding from view, as if the triptych expresses my fear of a slowly increasing sense of self fragmentation and loss of self. The images showed a form of unbinding of my body, an unbinding of self, but the dark haze, the trace of my body also reminded me of my losses, the unnameable and the forgotten. The triptych revealed to me some of the dynamics of diasporic touch. They showed how diasporic touch simultaneously fragmented and unified the subject matter, how it rendered the subject matter ambiguous at the same time as it photographically framed it. It created a bounded form that depicted a fractured subject matter.

Figures 11-13 Sara Davies, *Unbounded*, Triptych 3 x 29.7cm x 42cm, 2017

Discussing diasporic artworks Hall identifies that they "offer a way of imposing an imaginary coherence on the experience of dispersal and fragmentation" (Hall, 1994, p. 224).[14] He claims that artistic practices have an ability to create bounded forms that temporarily unify an otherwise fragmented and uncertain experience. They temporarily hold the fragmented experience of diasporic subjectivity, so that it appears more coherent and manageable. What was beginning to interest me more and more, however, was exactly how externalising self in artworks could reduce feelings of uncertainty. As discussed previously, Bhabha (1998) drawing on Winnicott (2005 [1971]) identifies the liminal experience of artistic practice as "transitional phenomena", and positions it as vital to migrant, minority ethnic and diasporic subjectivity formation, however, his account lacks detail. It does not help me understand why materialising feelings of uncertainty as visual ambiguity reduce these feelings. My research has resulted in the understanding that diasporic touch somehow counteracts my feelings of uncertainty, and this is something that Bhabha's ideas do not fully explain. My position as an artist offers me direct access to what I feel when making. Unlike theoretical accounts of diasporic subjectivity formation and creativity, I can account for how the making of art affects my inner life. Determined to add to Bhabha's account of art practice as a liminal experience implicated in diasporic subjectivity formation, I decided to

[14] Here, Stuart Hall examines enforced diasporas, specifically focusing on the African diaspora, whose dispersal was caused by colonisation and slavery, unlike my own migratory journey. However, with my own research in mind, I would suggest that his ideas, to some extent can, be applied to experiences of migration and diasporic experiences more generally. There may, however, be a difference in the degree and quality of the experience of fragmentation and the desire to unify.

turn to psychoanalytic theory that specifically dealt with the reparative qualities of art practice (Ehrensweig, 1995 [1967]) to explore the soothing characteristics of diasporic touch. In the next chapter, I will account for how and why diasporic touch counteracts my sense of uncertainty, I will explore how it can be understood as an activity that aids the reparation of self.

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This chapter was an exploration of how my artistic practice is situated in relation to my embodied experience of migration and the related condition of diaspora. It began with looking at how globalisation affects the way we understand ourselves and our lives. With a focus on subjectivity formation, it highlights how, rather than identifying with national identities, migrants and diasporics form a sense of self through creative endeavours (Bhabha, 1994a; Hall, 1994; Papastergiadis, 2005). It looked at how they engage in practices of belonging (Abebe & Saha, 2015) spurred on by embodied transnational experience and the inability of languages to name this experience (Appadurai, 1996). Because of my art practice's continued engagement with a previous culture, I explored how the embodied and sustained experiences of migration can lead to a diasporic outlook on life where *home* becomes the focus of the creative endeavours. The chapter explored uncertainty in relation to national structures and globalisation (Bhabha, 1994b) and how, for migrants and diasporic, this uncertainty is experienced more acutely. It also began to examine how art making seems to counteract these feelings. The first part of the chapter provided an initial account of how my artistic practice dismantled Swedish stereotypical narratives of home and landscape through the materialisation of my homing desire, my psychic elaborations of home (Rus, 2006). It also started to account for how migrants and diasporics create composite memory forms that connect rather than divide cultures (Silverman, 2015 [2013]) and how my homing desire, composed from my fragmented memories, challenge the homogeneity of national identities.

The second part of this chapter focused on a particular example from my artistic process where I made montages of home. It examined how I dismantled the Swedish stereotypical narratives of home and landscape and how—by transforming clarity into visual ambiguity—I have been able to articulate my questioning attitude to ideas of nation and national identity. The chapter explored the relationship between the profound uncertainty caused by the sustained effects of migration, with my idea of diasporic touch. During early

experiments I noticed the simultaneous experience of touching and being touched—I opened up to the process of making in a way that seemed beneficial to my sense of self. It was as if the activity of dismantling stereotypical ideas of home associated with narratives of Sweden to articulate my uncertainty set diasporic touch in motion; as if my sense of misalignment—stemming from the continuous process of cultural translation—propelled this special sense of connection. Whilst making, I named it diasporic touch. My research has led me to understand that the open connectedness of diasporic touch—the simultaneous experience of touching and being touched—counteracted the negative effects of the uncertainty caused by migration and diaspora. Partly explaining this, Bhabha (1998) acknowledges how the art practices of migrants, diasporic and minority ethnics could be understood as transitional phenomena (Winnicott, 2005 [1971]), an entwinement of inner and outer worlds, that aids self formation. However, his account lacks specificity and his ideas do not fully account for the mending qualities of diasporic touch. Realising that I could add detail to Bhabha's claims, I decided to develop and push his ideas about the role of art practice in migrant/minority ethnic/diasporic subjectivity formation further. In addition to Winnicott's (2005 [1971]) idea of transitional phenomena, however, I needed to explore psychoanalytic thought that dealt with the reparative characteristics of artistic practice (Ehrensweig, 1995 [1967]). I soon realised that the notion of diasporic touch was much more complex than I first thought, yet I was still convinced that connecting, connections, connectivity was key.

CHAPTER TWO
Losing Self, Transforming Place

Emerging from my artistic practice the notion of diasporic touch seemed to be about a form of open connectedness. It encompassed a feeling of being particularly affected by things in the surrounding environment at the same time as it instigated a desire to touch or reshape them in my artistic practice. It was as if the special touch entwined my internal world of memories and dreams with the fabric of the external world. Being a migrant affected by the condition of diaspora I have long used my artistic practice to negotiate my subjectivity and, in the work developed during this research journey, to articulate my complex and often contradictory sense of self by intervening in stereotypical narratives of Sweden. My work critiques stereotypical narratives of place and landscape associated with nationality and national identities through a montaging process that complicates them, a practice where I use stereotypical images that symbolise Sweden and manipulate them by fragmenting, layering and blurring. In the last chapter I accounted for how this process created a visual ambiguity that expressed my sense of uncertainty and I realised that this uncertainty set in motion diasporic touch. In the following chapter I will further explore how and why there is a connection between uncertainty and diasporic touch, I will in more detail examine its soothing qualities.

In the first part of the chapter, I will therefore further explore the links between migrant and diasporic subjectivity formation and creativity, focusing on how the emotional sensorium is linked with the process of forming self in these circumstances and how it sets in motion diasporic touch. I draw on Judith Butler's (1988) notions of identity as performative, to explore my art practice as a site where self is remade, and cultural frameworks are tested and challenged. In contrast to more public art performances, my performativity occurs during making, although my body does not always inhabit the final piece of work. The narrative thread follow the development of the photographic installation works, *Birch Shattering 1* (2019), *Lilac seeping* (2019) and *Pine Bleeding* (2019) in which I continue to dismantle the Swedish stereotypical narrative home linked with ideas of nation, this time not focusing on the Falu-red house itself but what usually surrounds it in existing symbolic representations, for example, pine forest, birch trees and lilac bushes. I examine how I manipulate materials, how the process emotionally touches me and in what ways my work challenges the idea of stereotypical identities. The first part of the chapter examines how the

palette of emotions associated with the migrant and diasporic self uncertainty set in motion diasporic touch—a process of immersion in materials and a desire to frame this experience.

Through my unfolding research it has become increasingly clear that diasporic touch, although being a process involved in making where the boundaries between self and world fall away, also does something else. In order to explore this, the second part of the chapter focuses on how and why art making and diasporic touch counteracts the feelings of uncertainty associated with migration and the condition of diaspora. I gather information about what happens when my inner world and the fabric of the surrounding environment become entangled in my artistic process, adding new insights to the already existing theoretical accounts, linking creative practices and diasporic subjectivity formation (Bhabha, 1994a; Hall, 1994; Papastergiadis, 2005). To contextualise my exploration I will engage with, for example, Walter Benjamin's (2015 [1940]) notion of messianic temporality, Butler's (1995) ideas around identity formation, mourning and melancholia; Boym's (2002) ideas of migrant nostalgia; David Eng's (2000) proposition of diasporic melancholia; Paul Carter's (2004) notion of diasporic place making and Anton Ehrensweig's (1995 [1967]) ideas around art practice and reparation.

Messianic Temporality

When deconstructing Swedish stereotypical narratives of place and landscape through montaging, I repeatedly felt myself opening up to the artistic process. These moments of open connectedness—of simultaneously touching and being touched—seemed equally as important for my art practice as they were for the development of my sense of self. During these experiences an object or a place in the here and now seemed to expand and resonate particularly strongly with me, conjuring up mental images: visual impressions and memories of many similar experiences from disparate times and places. It was clear that during these moments of at-onceness, the surrounding environment somehow appeared more non-linear and visual. It was as if time collapsed, narratives fragmented and that important moments in my life were brought together in a spatial formation. The way these encounters shifted my emphasis to a visual register reminded me of Benjamin's (2015 [1940]) alternative perception of time—that there is an experience of temporality very different from the seemingly all-encompassing linear progression associated with capitalist empty homogenous time. Benjamin maintains that there is another mode of temporality, a form of

messianic time (Benjamin, 2015 [1940], p. 104) that can perforate our forward-facing orientation, conjuring up a form of immediacy, spatiality and non-linear connections.[15] I soon realised that the open connectedness I felt was linked to this alternative perception of time. It was an experience that helped bring out my homing desire—the many complex elaborations of home in my imagination.

In order to understand the dynamics of this alternative perception of time we need to briefly look at Benjamin's ideas and their context. As a historical materialist thinker writing in the early twentieth century, Benjamin rejects historicism, he disagrees with the idea that historical development is a top-down activity, where the great minds of the privileged few determine the order of events. Drawing on Karl Marx (2016 [1867]) he suggests that historical development and cultural change arise in our material interactions with the surrounding environment. The living body and its engagement with the surrounding are key to his thinking, highlighting how our bodies have agency and how doing is transformative, something that for an artist is incredibly enticing. Linking *messianic time* with a more embodied encounter with the past, Benjamin describes it as an experience where "the past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant", where "it can be recognised and is never seen again" (Benjamin, 2015 [1940], p. 100).[16] In this way, we start to have an insight into how the past, rather than progressing as linear history, emerges as ephemeral images—as memory. Benjamin (2015 [1940], p. 104) argues that, during moments of messianic temporality, events are experienced side-by-side in constellations allowing us to see alternative perspectives and make new connections. Interpreting Benjamin's writing, Andy McLaverty-Robinson (2013, p. unpag) emphasises how messianic temporality provides a way for excluded groups to mobilise and bring forth alternative accounts of the past that can challenge closed down or restrictive historical forms. Adopting

[15] According to Andy McLaverty-Robinson (2013), Benjamin claims that *messianic time* involves moments that mean something specific to those who experience them. He believes that this alternative experience of time allows other stories to be told and cultures to renew. The alternative conception of time has theological undertones, but it has been argued that "it is a theology that is enlisted in the service of historical materialism" (Lejbowicz, 2019, p. unpag). Benjamin (2015 [1940]) asks us not to accept the victors' history—or dominant cultural narratives, and their written accounts, but to turn our heads to the past and see how they accumulate in a chaotic and haphazard way, something that will allow us to see other stories or events that emerge.

[16] It is important to remember that although Benjamin links his idea of *messianic time* (Benjamin, 2015 [1940], p. 104) with the visual, he considers images in a very broad sense. For Benjamin, the idea of an image floats between mental impressions, physical artworks and, considering Benjamin himself being a writer, perhaps also more non-linear pieces of writing. For me as an artist, there is perhaps a clearer distinction between imagination and its manifestation in artworks which may add something to the discussion.

Benjamin's ideas, and in a similar way to McLaverty-Robinson, Bhabha (1994b) links the experience of messianic temporality with liminality and the bringing forth of new perspectives and cultural forms. Inscribing or materialising memories, this alternative perception of time that does not follow a linear narrative could in this way be seen as a revolutionary practice that has the potential to undermine established histories. With this in mind, I argue that my work, by articulating my homing desire through a visual practice, has the potential to question ideas of nation and nationality.

Later in the chapter, I will draw on Benjamin's thinking to explore how, during my moments of at-onceness, there is a shift in how time is experienced that in turn sets in motion the making of material forms and the process of diasporic touch. I will investigate how, for migrants and people in diaspora, revelling in the non-linearity of memory leads to an open connectedness where self and world become intimately entwined. Writing over seventy years later, Papastergiadis and Daniella Trimboli (2017) also adopt a materialist approach when exploring how cultures transform. They explain how migrants and diasporics materialise the immediacy and non-linearity of their memories in their artworks. They explore how migrants materialise this embodied experience of their past in visual composite forms. In my research, I saw that there were certain ways that I engaged in the process that materialised my memories, there were particular ways that I made visible the moments when I experienced time differently. For example, Fig. 14 is an example from the *Composite Birch Series* (2019). I dismantled the Swedish stereotypical narrative of landscape linked to the ideas of nation by materialising my memories of home through photographic montages. First, I captured details of many birch trees at different times—using my art practice to fragment them. Later, I used these photographs to make composite forms, by layering transparencies on a lightbox. I created complex and ambiguous compositions that seemed to articulate my uncertainty. As discussed earlier, the birch tree is part of the Swedish narrative of home linked with the idea of nation and my artistic process transformed it to reflect my complex diasporic feelings towards place-bound belonging. I transformed the symbolic image of the birch tree into a much more complex form that articulated my homing desire. As the work progressed, I recognised my loss in the dark marks that began to inhabit the work. Throughout this chapter I will account for how articulating my homing desire seemed to materialise my loss, and how this process is linked to the diasporic touch. However, in order to understand this, I will first look at the links between migrant and diasporic subjectivity formation and loss more generally.

Figure 14 Sara Davies, from the *Composite Birch Series*, 2019

Melancholia, Nostalgia and the Movement Beyond

Studio Reflection: Emerging from Everyday Life

After conducting my initial studio and house experiments that led to the emergence of diasporic touch my art practice entered a different phase. Instead of using photographs taken in Sweden for creating my photographic montages, I began capturing Sweden in Manchester. I felt that it was important that my artworks emerged from my everyday life, that they were influenced by my movement through the urban environments that surrounded me, my routine activities and the wishes and needs of my family. When making work, my parents and grandparents are often in my

thoughts and I can sometimes hear my children playing in the background. I photographed: on my way to pick up my youngest son from school, on my way home from work, whilst running errands in the local shopping area and when taking my children to the nearby park. Capturing pine needles, clusters of birch trees and old worn wood – things that can be associated with the Falu-red house environment—I was slowly building a collection of images that reminded me of home. My choice of subject matter was influenced by a particular attachment to certain objects and places—a form of familiarity—where photographing them incorporated them into my life narrative. I was beginning to think that the experience of attachment, the opening up to the environment that led to a psychic bleeding together of the categories, here, there, now and then, was essential to the formation of self and the notion of diasporic touch.

Shifting I, Grief and Melancholia

To understand the links between migrant and diasporic subjectivity formation and creativity we first need to look more closely at how the process of subjectivity formation has been theorised, with a particular focus on how people with non-normative subjectivities such as migrants and diasporics negotiate cultural stereotypes and narratives of nations. The idea of self being an evolving process was famously explored by Butler (1988), who claims that rather than having a core of essential and unchanging qualities, identity is a performative practice. Drawing on Simone de Beauvoir, Butler proposes that "as an intentionally organised materiality, the body is always an embodying *of* possibilities both conditioned and circumscribed by historical convention" and through "a manner of doing, dramatizing, and *reproducing* a historical situation" (Butler, 1988, p. 521). She explains how we develop a sense of self in the tension between the norms in society and the articulation of difference.[17] Over time, she argues (1988, p. 520), our repeated performances of stereotypical identities sediment in our bodies and give us an illusion that we have a stable, inner core. We learn correct behaviours to fit in and eventually, through repetition, we experience an identity stereotype as us. Drawing on Butler (1988) and explaining how this process of subjectivity formation unfolds in migrant and diasporic circumstances, Bhabha (1990) suggests that they, at the same time, perform and renounce already existing identity stereotypes and national ways of belonging. For migrants and diasporics, the formation of self becomes a negotiation of cultural stereotypes belonging to more than one culture. There is a strong pull to conform to many different and sometimes conflicting identity stereotypes, something that results in a

[17] It is important to remember that when Bhabha (1990) developed his ideas about nations and national identity formation, he adopted Butler's (1988) notion of identity as something performative that emerged between societal conventions and the articulation of difference.

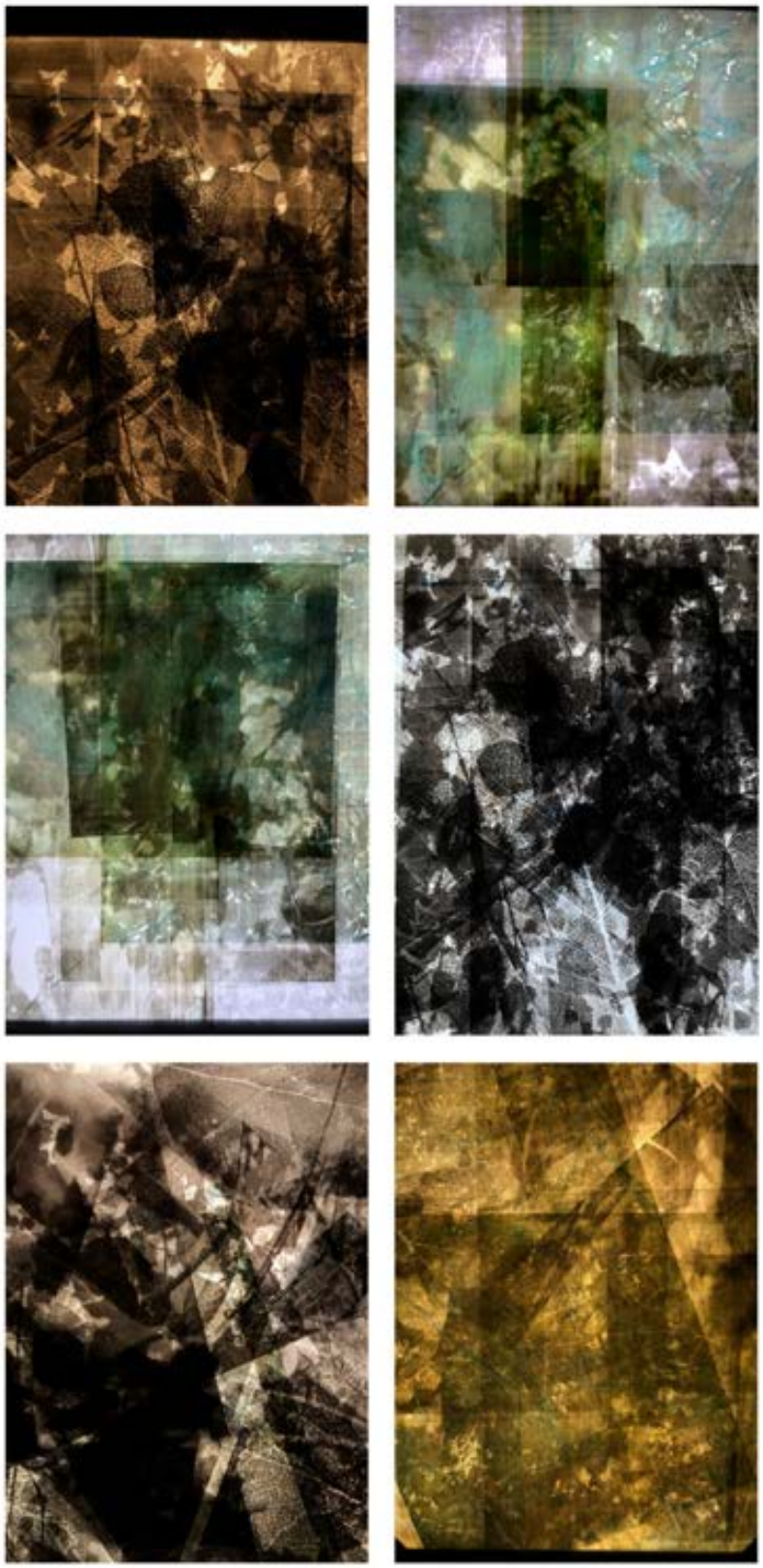
questioning of the validity of the idea of an inner core (Bhabha, 1990). To some extent, this explains why I feel a sense of uncertainty in relation to self, the pull in different directions explains how my questioning attitude towards ideas of national belonging come to be. Not fully identifying with the histories of my former or my adopted culture, I rely on embodied experiences to generate a sense of self (Bhabha, 1994a); I articulate my liminality by materialising my internal world of memories and dreams in artworks. My art practice becomes a way to question the perceived certainty of national belonging yet, as my work progressed, I realised that it also materialised my loss.

More generally, the process of subjectivity formation is imbued with loss and to reform our sense of self we need to be able to work through these losses: we need to know them so we can let go and move on. Butler (1995) argues that the performative process of subjectivity formation is characterised by a sense of self that is uncertain, and she maintains that the shifting meaning associated with "I" induces sorrow. For some, with normative subjectivities endorsed by society, this grief can be resolved through a mourning process, and for others, with non-normative subjectivities, it remains fully or partially unresolved. In other words, lost self-narratives recognised by society can more easily be mourned—this recognition helps people frame and understand their loss—whereas loss unknown or overlooked by society cannot be named or shared, and therefore continues to linger.[18] For migrants and people in diaspora, displacement from a former culture and the assimilation into an adopted culture results in a substantial transformation of self. Yet, as many old stories of self are not fully understood in their new surroundings, grief often remains. Butler suggests that when loss stays unresolved, it can become incorporated into our psyche and come to define our existence. Adding more detail to her argument she employs Sigmund Freud's (2009 [1915]; 2010 [1923]) theory of mourning and melancholia. She argues that when unrecognised, a lost entity is kept in a person's psychic life as a ghostly impression and incorporated into one's being, the loss becomes melancholic—a condition where loss has become absorbed into our idea of self, subsequently fragmenting our sense of unity.[19] As

[18] Butler (2003) and Eng (2000) apply Freudian theory to, not only explain individual psychic processes, but to explain collective and cultural experiences.
[19] In an early account, Freud (2009 [1915]) treats mourning and melancholia as two separate ways of dealing with loss, where mourning is productive, resulting in losses being overcome and melancholia wholly unproductive, leading to a person being stuck and unable to move on. Later, Freud (2010 [1923]) acknowledges—and so does Butler—that melancholia is not a completely unproductive condition and that mourning and melancholia are intimately entwined, both vital in the process of subjectivity formation. With this in mind I suggest that migrants and people in diaspora, whose loss is not always recognised by the society of their adopted country, struggle to move from a state of melancholia to one of mourning. They find it hard to pin their loss down so they can move on.

a migrant, I carry many outdated narratives of self that are not fully understood in my new host country. In this way, there are aspects of self that I cannot fully name. This loss sits within, it has become melancholic, and contributes to a fragmentation of self that is hard to bear. It permeates my homing desire, it seeps into my memories and dreams.

In recent times, melancholia has been discussed, not solely as an individual experience as Freud did, but as a social condition (Eng, 2000; Butler, 2003). Instead of defining themselves through identifying with stereotypical narratives of nation, migrants and diasporics define themselves through loss. Furthering Butler's ideas about subjectivity formation and grief, yet focusing on the experiences of minority groups displaced by migration, Eng explains their collective understanding of themselves through "a collective group memory of historical loss and continued suffering" (Eng, 2000, p. 1276). By identifying collective forms of melancholia as a new model of social formation Eng argues they associate as a group, not through a common place of origin but through sharing repeated stories of loss. Drawing on Freud's ideas, it could be argued that migrants and diasporics work through losses lodged deeply within, through the sharing of ghostly impressions and vague feelings. With this in mind, I suggest that loss imbues homing desire—that it gathers in the psychic elaboration of home and is shared via different kinds of creative endeavours that hybridise cultures (Bhabha, 1994a; Hall, 1994; Papastergiadis, 2005). For example, when making *Birch Shattering 1* (2019) seen in Figs. 15-20, my loss emerged through the formation of ambiguity, it gathered strength in the distorted colours, the fracture lines and the overlapping visual material. So far, I have come to understand that this very particular kind of touch involves a dismantling of stereotypical narratives associated with the Swedish national home and, in Chapter One, I recognised how this process seemed to reflect my sense of uncertainty. I now recognise that the uncertainty common in migrant and diasporic experience is caused by the self fragmentation associated with the condition of melancholia. Melancholic loss is part of the palette of emotions that propels diasporic touch. I also knew, however, that the palette of emotions associated with the experience of migration and diaspora was more complex.



Figures 15-20 Sara Davies, from the *Birch Shattering 1*, 2019

Studio Reflection: Little Gems of Sweden

Using my phone camera, I photographed things in the urban environment that I associated with Sweden. I was convinced that using everyday technology, equipment that fitted in my pocket, would enhance the connection between my art practice and daily life. The city around me was loud, busy, and fast moving but the sites that I photographed spoke to me of tranquillity and perfect summer days. Some I visited once and others I returned to often, capturing elements from the Falu-red house environment in different ways. These sites seemed to be particularly effective at evoking and bringing the here, there, now and then together in complex imaginary forms. I instinctively called these sites *My Little Gems of Sweden*, because they were deeply significant and enabled my imaginary elaborations of home and self. Their meaning was apparent to me and for the most part obscured to people around me from different cultural reference points. *The Little Gems of Sweden* evoked nostalgia, they reminded me of the distance between me and my Swedish family, yet engaging with these sites through artistic practice seemed to reduce these feelings. During this period, I returned to a local park to photograph the cluster of birch trees. At first, I captured them more at a distance but soon realised that, although creating the distance associated with nostalgia, the images did not sufficiently convey its closeness. The subject matter seemed too clear and the edges of the image too defined. They did not capture the closeness I felt, the complex and multifaceted qualities of the homes I carried inside. Knowing that photography is associated with stability, clarity and distance, I started to work against the characteristics of the medium.

Nostalgia and the Movement Beyond

For some time, I noticed that when my self uncertainty became hard to bear, I gravitate towards a nostalgic outlook. I experienced a form of homesickness that manifested itself in a desire for a myriad of Falu-red houses and tall pine trees warmed by summer's sun. Nostalgia is considered a symptom of our age and a side effect of modernity and the belief in progress (Boym, 2002; Radstone, 2007).[20] It is a condition that involves a different way of engaging with time, similar to Benjamin's messianic temporality (Benjamin, 2015 [1940], p. 104), it emerges when there is a fracturing in the belief in the linear progression of time and the capitalist economic model that it depends upon (Radstone, 2007, pp. 112-113). I suggest that for migrants and diasporics, the engagement in nostalgic longing is a way to deal with their fracturing belief in the perceived certainty of national belonging. Although Boym claims that nostalgia is "a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed"

[20] As Radstone's account (2007), this discussion dealing with nostalgia will focus on a contemporary understanding of the concept, not its history. It is also concentrating on the feeling of nostalgia rather than the sentiment's material manifestations.

(Boym, 2007, p. unpag) and that it often incorporates a longing for earlier childhood times. However, she also points out that a longing for *home* and *childhood* in these circumstances stand in for a desire for something more fundamental.

In some psychoanalytic accounts, nostalgia is seen as a universal phenomenon, a yearning for oneness. More specifically, it is considered to be a longing for the very earliest infantile experience before we recognised ourselves as separate from our mother (Peters & Sohn cited in Radstone, 2010, p. 188). Echoing these claims, Boym (2007, p. unpag) maintains nostalgia to be a longing for a sense of continuity in a turbulent, fragmented world. She continues to explain that we substitute the idea of continuity for *home* and *childhood* in order to make longing more tangible. Often associated with the sustained effects of migration and the condition of diaspora, nostalgia offers a temporary escape from pains of dislocation, it is a retreat where the past is processed selectively with a focus on pleasant and idyllic experiences (Boym, 2007).[21] Nostalgic remembrance enables the migrant to sidestep, for a moment, a sense of misalignment and engage with the partial and highly idealised memories of their former country and culture. This happened to me while I encountered a series of objects and places that I named my *Little Gems of Sweden*; they were sites in my urban surroundings that involved material things that could also be associated with the Falu-red house environment, the Swedish stereotypical narrative of home. An example of a *Little Gem of Sweden* site can be seen in Figs. 21-24. Encountering the clusters of Birch trees helped me to temporarily sidestep the pains caused by my sense of self fragmentation. They are objects of my nostalgia; they evoke a longing for home and childhood that I was beginning to understand as standing in for a more general desire for continuity.

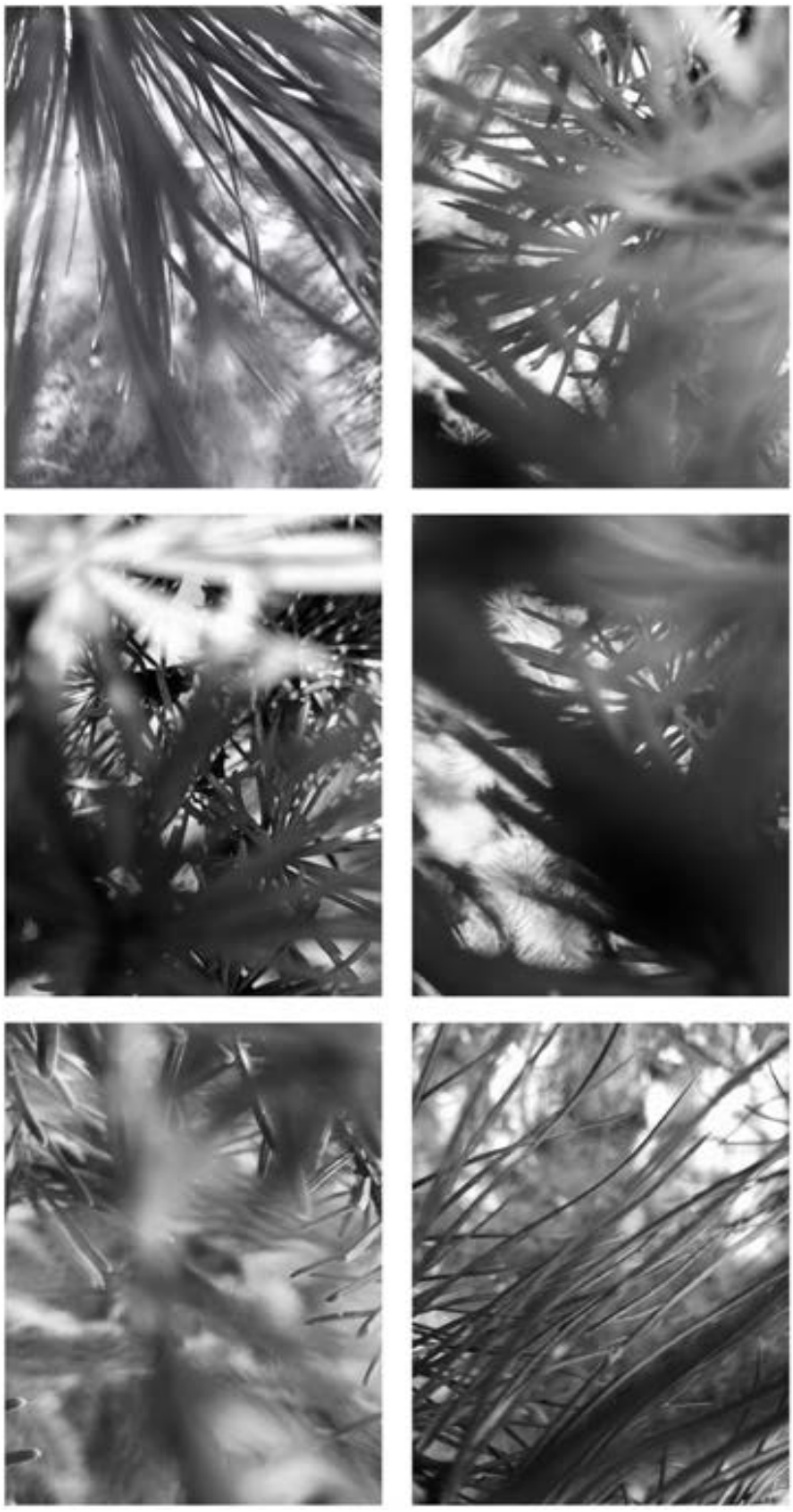
[21] Nostalgia has been seen in a negative light, and has been argued to have anaesthetic qualities, often leaving out important historic information (Williams, 1975; Lowenthal, 1988 [1985]). Others claim that the greatest feature of nostalgia is the way it provides a way to escape difficulties in the present (Spitzer, 1999). I understand it as an important aspect of diasporic subjectivity formation.

Figures 21-24 Sara Davies, *Little Gems of Sweden* in Wonderland Park, 2021

The self uncertainty experienced by migrants and diasporics evoked by the condition of melancholia can be all consuming and is often managed by repeated retreats into the realm of nostalgia, however, at other times I engage in my artistic practice as it also has a soothing effect. As identified earlier, making artworks counteracted my sense of uncertainty and the process' soothing effects were linked to diasporic touch. As my research progressed, I realised that diasporic touch was connected with a non-linear experience of temporality (Benjamin, 2015 [1940])—with memory—that at times was nostalgic in characteristics. In order to further understand the relationship between diasporic touch and nostalgia, I will

examine Paul Carter's (2004) ideas dealing with diasporic subjectivity formation. Carter proposes that creative and material practices result in a movement beyond nostalgia, he suggests it leads to a form of the spatial and material thinking that is integral to the process of diasporic subjectivity formation. Explaining this in more detail, Carter maintains migrants and diasporics make use of creative and material processes to archive a sense of unbounded non-linearity crucial for their self development. The experience of nostalgia, although a more non-linear experience, is not fully separated from the idea of progressing time—it emerges in contrast to, or because of this sense of progression, so in making the structures that govern our lives recede, it becomes possible for an experience of almost boundless non-linearity.[22] Only then, Carter explains, in creative and material processes, can migrant and diasporic subjectivities be reformed. With this in mind, I suggest that I engage with self uncertainty in two ways: I either gravitate towards nostalgia where the greater and disorientating melancholic loss of self is substituted for desire for an easier way to manage loss of home and childhood, or I immerse myself in art practice. Rather than being a temporary escape from melancholic loss, artistic processes can be a way to work through this. For me, nostalgia and its more conscious experience of non-linearity propel an immersion in making that involves a dismantling of stereotypical narratives of home and place associated with nationality and nation. It offers up a way to process my unknown or unnameable losses.

[22] Importantly, Carter believes that the movement beyond nostalgia, to a process of place-making can only be achieved through direct and creative collaborations between migrants, and this is something that I will discuss in Chapter Four. However, drawing on Jones and Stephenson (Jones & Stephenson, 1999) I propose that the intersubjective characteristics of the process of making and receiving artworks also provides a way to move beyond nostalgia. There is always an immersive exchange between artist, material, technology, and audience. In this way, migrants and diasporics can move beyond nostalgia through a practice of place-making or, as Carter says, "Placing" (Carter, 2004, p. 11), which can happen through indirect and direct collaborations.



Figures 25-30 Sara Davies, from the *Pine Tree Series*, 2019

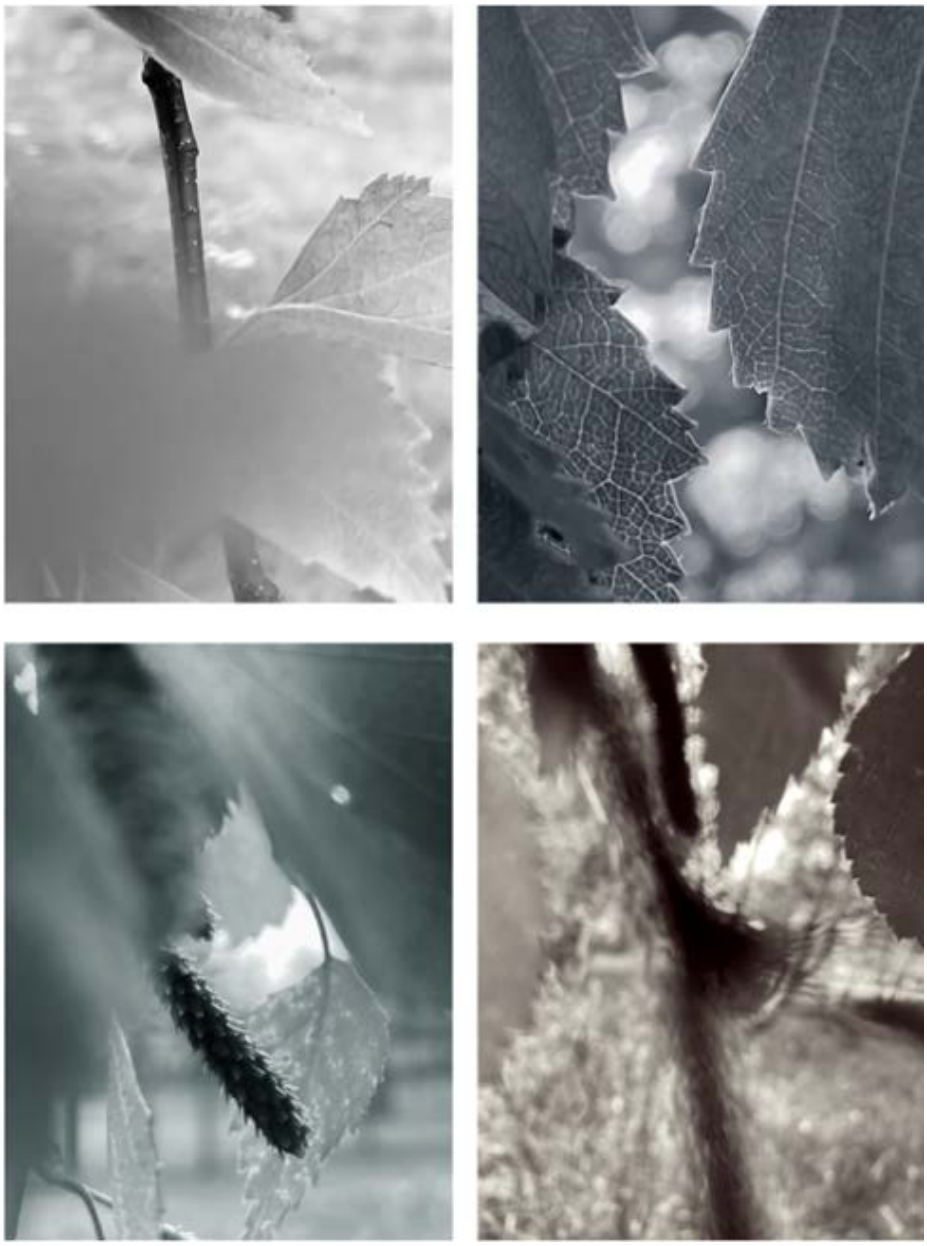
In sum, unable to let go of outdated self-narratives (as explained by Butler (1995)), migrants and diasporics fluctuate between selective and idyllic nostalgic memorialising and recall, and the disorientating experience of self fragmentation characterising the condition of melancholia. Nostalgia, with its easier way to manage loss, permeates my homing desire, my psychic elaborations of home (Rus, 2006, p. unpag). However, melancholia simmers under the surface, often without my intention arising in the work. In this way, both my nostalgia and melancholia guide the direction of my artistic process; the former influencing the subject matter, and the latter in the form of the work. For example, in Figs. 25-30 you can see how nostalgia, a longing for home, resulted in an engagement with a group of pine trees, however, you can also sense how my sense of self fragmentation, my melancholic loss settled within the form of the work as dark marks. Initially, in my artistic practice, by focusing on a nostalgic longing for home and childhood, I managed the sense of self fragmentation caused by my displacement; later, I harnessed my practice to work through my experience of melancholia. I used my immersion in creative and material processes that Carter identifies to move beyond nostalgia. Tackling my melancholic loss head on, it is as if the loss worked itself through my body and into the artwork. With this in mind, I propose that the process of diasporic touch, the process that frames open connectedness, is a way to work through migrant and diasporic loss. Set in motion by the complex palette of emotions associated with nostalgia and melancholia it propels an immersion in materials that has a soothing effect. I argue that the immersion associated with creative and material processes, the state of unbounded non-linearity, counteracts my uncertainty because it reduces the effects of the conflicting cultural frameworks on my sense of self and therefore reduces the sense of misalignment. To continue, I will more closely study exactly why immersion in practice linked with diasporic touch counteracts feelings of uncertainty.

Framing and Montaging Oneness

Studio Reflection: Moving Closer

The experience of *The Little Gems of Sweden* enabled my psychic elaborations of home, the birch trees, pine needles and old, worn wood evoked memories of life in Sweden. I was transported to the yard between house and barn where birches grow, by a remote lake and a multitude of midsummer celebrations. The little gem enabled me to move out of time and experience the past, not as lost but as pulsating within me. As I photographed and in a quest to capture the Sweden inside, instead of giving into nostalgia, I began excluding indicators of Manchester's urban environment from the images. Moving closer I eradicated houses, street signs and shopfronts. I moved closer so that the

subject matter extended beyond the frame and even closer so that I saw details and textures of my memories. Photographing the trees closely, I captured the subtle tones of the fine twigs, leaves, and catkins. I let the camera touch the leaves, realising that this pushed the camera technology beyond its limits so that it captured digital distortion (see Figs. 31-34). I captured many small parts of the trees, transforming the little gems of Sweden into a myriad of fragments that better corresponded with ephemeral glimpses of home from my memory. Establishing a connection between my internal world and the external world that seemed to reduce my uncertainty, a way to lessen the effects of my nostalgic longings and losses. Yet, in the more subconscious movements of my body I could sense greater unknown losses emerging.



Figures 31-34 Sara Davies, From the *Birch Tree Series,* 2018

Fragmenting, Unification, and the Deepest Oceanic Feeling

In order to further understand the movement beyond nostalgia, the immersion in practice that was linked to diasporic subjectivity formation and diasporic touch I turned to the field of object relation theory (Melanie Klein Trust, n.d.) (Winnicott, 2005 [1971]) (Ehrensweig, 1995 [1967]). At this stage, I recognised that diasporic touch was linked with the process of immersion and in order to understand its soothing effect, I needed to explore how creative endeavours have, in some psychoanalytic circles, been regarded as restorative in characteristics. Exploring the relationship between art making and subjectivity formation more generally, Ehrensweig (1995 [1967]), drawing on object relation theorists Melanie Klein (n.d.) and Winnicott (2005 [1971]), suggests that artists harness a series of psychic processes that initially help us mature as infants and, in adult life, continue to support our self development as we continue to mature. Adopting Klein's stance that this process is one of repair, Ehrensweig examines how artistic practice induces a psychic state of feeling at one with the surrounding environment.[23] This can help us overcome the sense of absence felt when the meaning of "I" shifts (Butler, 1988) and we let go of out-dated self-narratives. Agreeing with Adrian Stokes (2001 [1959]), Ehrensweig believes that art's greatest value is its potential to bring about a state of unity, that helps to counteract the suffering inherent in the process of self development (Ehrensweig, 1995 [1967], p. 119). Yet, Ehrensweig also maintains that the artistic processes where the artist projects aspects of self into the work can capture and depict fragments of their being that have become dislodged (Ehrensweig, 1995 [1967], p. 102).[24] Applying this to the migrant and formation of diasporic subjectivity, it is easy to see how artistic production can unify their deep-seated sense of self fragmentation. It can externalise melancholic loss that has become incorporated into their sense of self (Freud, 2009 [1915]; Freud, 2010 [1923]) by creating material forms.

Continuing to give a more detailed explanation of how art practice can repair self fragmentation, Ehrensweig (1995 [1967], pp. 102-104) suggests that when making, the artist moves between three states of mind. During the early stages of making an artwork, he

[23] Drawing on Klein (Melanie Klein Trust, n.d.), Ehrensweig claims that self fragmentation is an integral part of all processes of self reformation and that it induces a desire to creatively achieve self unity. Like her, he argues reparation is the foundation of all creative activity and it plays a key part in our self development.

[24] In some ways, solely treating artistic practice as a tool of self development could be seen as reductivist: surely many artists have other purposes when making art? Yet, drawing on my experience as a maker it is impossible to create artworks without some traces of self, sometimes accidentally, entering the work.

explains how artists enter a psychic state that enables them to become aware of their inner fragmentation but that this experience, at this point, causes them an overwhelming sense of anxiety.[25] Ehrensweig continues this account by describing how this anxiety prompts artists to mirror their sense of inner fracturing by physically fragmenting things in the surrounding environment. They take apart things they have come to associate with self. To some extent, this explains the significance of my engagement with my *Little Gems of Sweden*. Associating the sites with *home* and *self* I deconstructed them so that they better corresponded with my inner self fragmentation. For example, in Figs. 35-38, you can see a series of photographs of a lilac bush—a symbol of Sweden that has come to substitute home and self—that I revisited many times during spring and summer in 2018. Instead of capturing the whole bush, I photographed it as many fragments so that it mirrored my inner world, imbued with unknown melancholic losses (Freud, 2009 [1915]; Freud, 2010 [1923]; Butler, 1988). My body responded to my uncertain self and I began to manipulate materials in the surrounding environment to mirror my inner world. In this way, my repeated dismantling of stereotypical narratives of home and landscape associated with the Swedish nation can be explained as an attempt to reflect my internal fracturing. It is a process that lays the foundation for diasporic touch.

[25] Ehrensweig's (1995 [1967]) ideas about artistic processes draw on Klein's (Melanie Klein Trust, n.d.) theories that our early psychic processes continue throughout our lives and help us develop a sense of self. In contrast to, for example, Winnicott (2005 [1971]), Klein believes that we have a crude inner life from birth that encompasses feelings of love and hate. These strong emotions, she claims, make us oscillate between two positions or states of mind – the anxiety filled paranoid-schizoid position and the more depressive position in order to mature and develop. In this passage Ehrensweig draws on her account of the paranoid-schizoid position that is a mental state defined by fragmentation. In this state of mind, Klein claims we see the objects around us as both good and bad, something that causes an overwhelming sense of anxiety. As a defence, we split self and objects, so that we can incorporate the good and expel the bad, something that results in self fragmenting.

Figures 35-38 Sara Davies, from the *Lilac Bush Series*, Spring-Summer 2018

In the later stages of the artistic process, when the artworks are nearly finished, Ehrensweig (1995 [1967], p. 104) suggests that artists enter a state of mind where they can again recognise the artwork as a separate entity with clear boundaries. At this stage, they understand the destructive nature of their earlier activity and, by engaging in their artistic process, they begin a process of mourning. They undertake a process of repair, bringing fragments together, and although they do not always form harmonious artworks, they create unified or framed entities, alleviating their loss. The idea that art practice is reparative, the way it has the capability to frame inner inconsistencies, is something that I recognise in my practice. For example, in the piece of work *Lilac Seeping* (Fig. 39), I recognise my fragmentation in the dissonant composition—in its many uneven lines and unsynchronised angles, yet the outer photographic unifies its many inconsistencies. Ehrensweig believes that artistic practice aids the formation of self by materialising the artist's inner world through processes of fragmentation and unification. However, for migrants and diasporics—with potentially greater losses incorporated into self—the reparative qualities of art practice are sought more fervently. The process of fragmentation and unification, an activity often highlighted by theorists dealing with migration and diaspora as linked with the liminal process of hybridity (Bhabha, 1994a; Papastergiadis, 2005), is undertaken more incessantly.

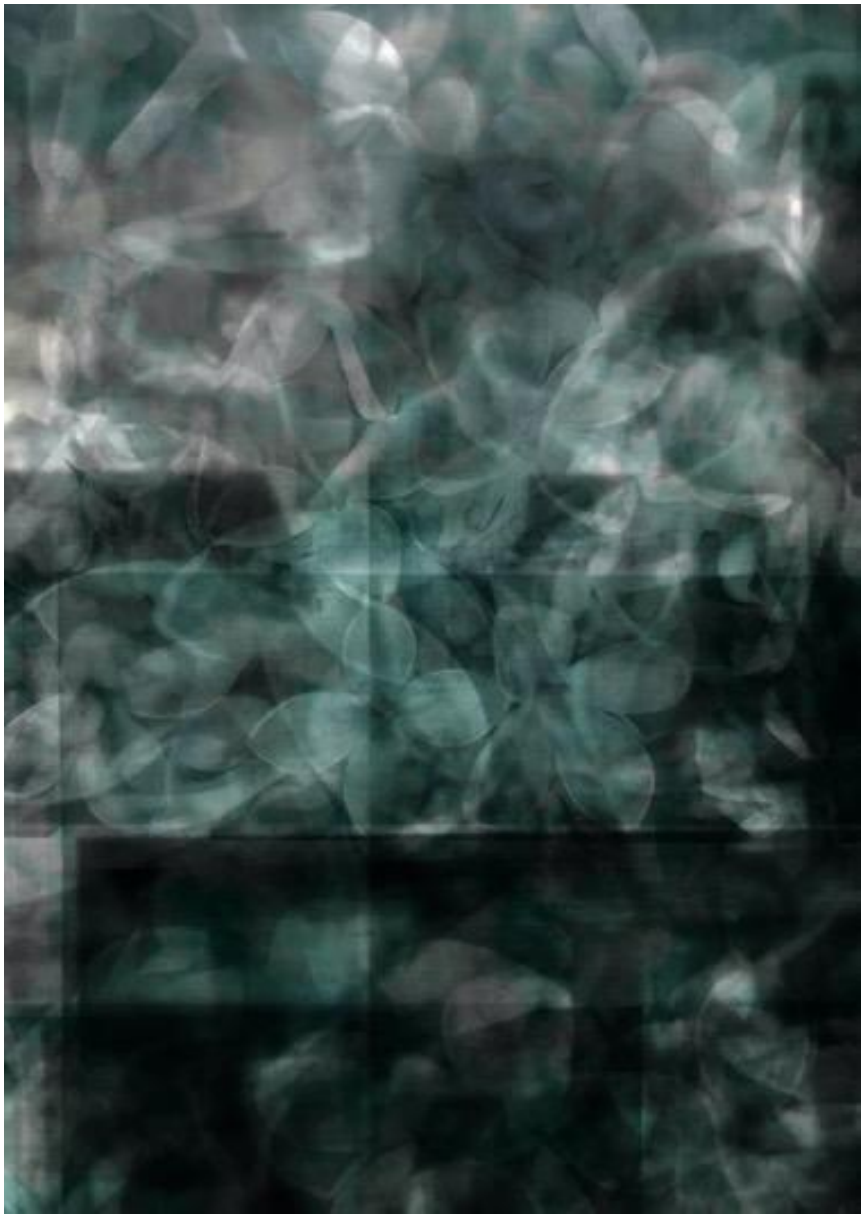


Figure 39 Sara Davies, *Lilac Seeping,* 2019

In addition to the artist's psychic states mentioned above, Ehrensweig (1995 [1967], p. 103), inspired by Winnicott (2005 [1971]), identifies a third mental process that is vital for the subjectivity formation which helps explain what occurs in the liminal space of making that make it possible for migrants and diasporics to create new cultural forms (Bhabha, 1998). He recognises a form of immersion—that to some degree appear similar to Carter's—where he experiences a feeling of oneness. Giving more detail of this experience, however, Ehrensweig describes how this third mental process is a non-linear and deeply irrational experience that dissolves our usual understanding of time and space as separate entities. During this immersion in practice, he suggests, the artist simultaneously encounters an all-encompassing form of connectedness and begins to see their work taking shape. Moreover,

Ehrensweig acknowledges that this feeling of oneness is similar to Winnicott's transitional phenomena—the idea that Bhabha (1998) adopts to explore the liminality of migrant, diasporic and minority ethnic creativity. Vitally important for my research, Ehrensweig claims that immersion in practice is a means "to become more at home in the world of reality where objects and self are clearly held apart" (Ehrensweig, 1995 [1967], p. 121), a way to feel at ease in the surrounding environment. With this in mind—even though Ehrensweig does not directly deal with migrants and diasporic experience—we can make use of his ideas to explore the creativity associated with the liminal lives. We can utilise them to further Bhabha's (1998) account that explores diasporic subjectivity formation in relation to Winnicott's notion of transitional phenomena (Winnicott, 2005 [1971]). In essence, Ehrensweig's ideas explain how artistic processes can be used to work through the uncertainty of an in-between life by materialising self uncertainty; it accounts for how they can draw out, and depict losses, and how unifying these losses in artworks has a reparative effect on self.[26] Ehrensweig also highlights how art practice results in a form of immersion: it induces a oneness where new connections can be made that can make artists feel more at home.

Framing Oneness

To recap, I first identified my art practice as involving two different types of tactile experience, a form of at-oneness similar to Benjamin's messianic temporality (Benjamin, 2015 [1940], p. 104), and an opening up to the process of making more akin with the experience of oneness that Ehrensweig (1995 [1967]) describes. Although I first thought of the at-onceness as part of diasporic touch, I later realised that this tactile experience was responsible for setting it in motion. It was only when I discovered an account by Ehrensweig, describing the artistic practice as encompassing a gradual immersion in the materiality of their processes, that I understood the links between the tactile experiences in my art practice. I realised that the former (the experience of the at-onceness in nostalgia)—propelled the latter (—a descent to oneness in making). My uncertainty stemmed from melancholic self fragmentation, an experience that resulted in me either gravitating towards nostalgic longing or a movement beyond this to an immersion in my artistic practice, an experience of opening up to the process of making, that I had come to understand as

[26] Ehrensweig (1995 [1967]) describes artistic process as linear and ordered, he explains how they begin by becoming aware of their self fragmentation, this awareness evokes a desire to immerse themselves in their practices. This sense of oneness is soon followed by the artist seeing the work as a bounded and separate entity. In Ehrensweig's world the artistic process has a clear beginning, a middle and an end, however, in my experience the artistic process is more complex and non-linear.

diasporic touch. However, as I reflected on the ambiguity of my images, the obscurity and the haze, I realised that diasporic touch was not just about harnessing tactile experiences, but about making these experiences visible. Ehrensweig describes the artist's gradual immersion in materials, as them moving from a more conscious state where they can see the work as a separate entity, to a preconscious state where the boundaries between self and work blur, then finally experiencing a psychic state where concepts of time and space collapse. He expresses how the artist gradually lets go of self, whilst beginning to make new connections in making. It strikes me that I articulate precisely this experience of letting go in my artworks. The more I study the ambiguity of my visual images, it dawns on me that the qualities correspond with Ehrensweig's description of what happens slightly below the surface level of consciousness where boundaries begin to dissolve. An example of me articulating a dissolution of boundaries can be seen in the artwork *Pine Bleeding* (2019) seen in Fig. 40: mistiness, indistinct forms, and blurred boundaries dominate the images. They capture the ambiguity of forms that Ehrensweig ascribes to the process of immersion. I propose that I make visible my immersion into oneness, I show my self fragmentation and connectedness, and framing my uncertainty makes it more manageable. I would therefore suggest that diasporic touch is a move beyond nostalgia (Carter, 2004, p. 5): it captures my immersion in materials and it frames the dissolution of boundaries between self and world (Ehrensweig, 1995 [1967]). In addition to this, diasporic touch is a process that enables the losses associated with the sustained effects of migration and the condition of diaspora—the losses associated with self—to settle in the work.

Figure 40 Sara Davies, *Pine Bleeding* (detail), 2019

Examples of Practice

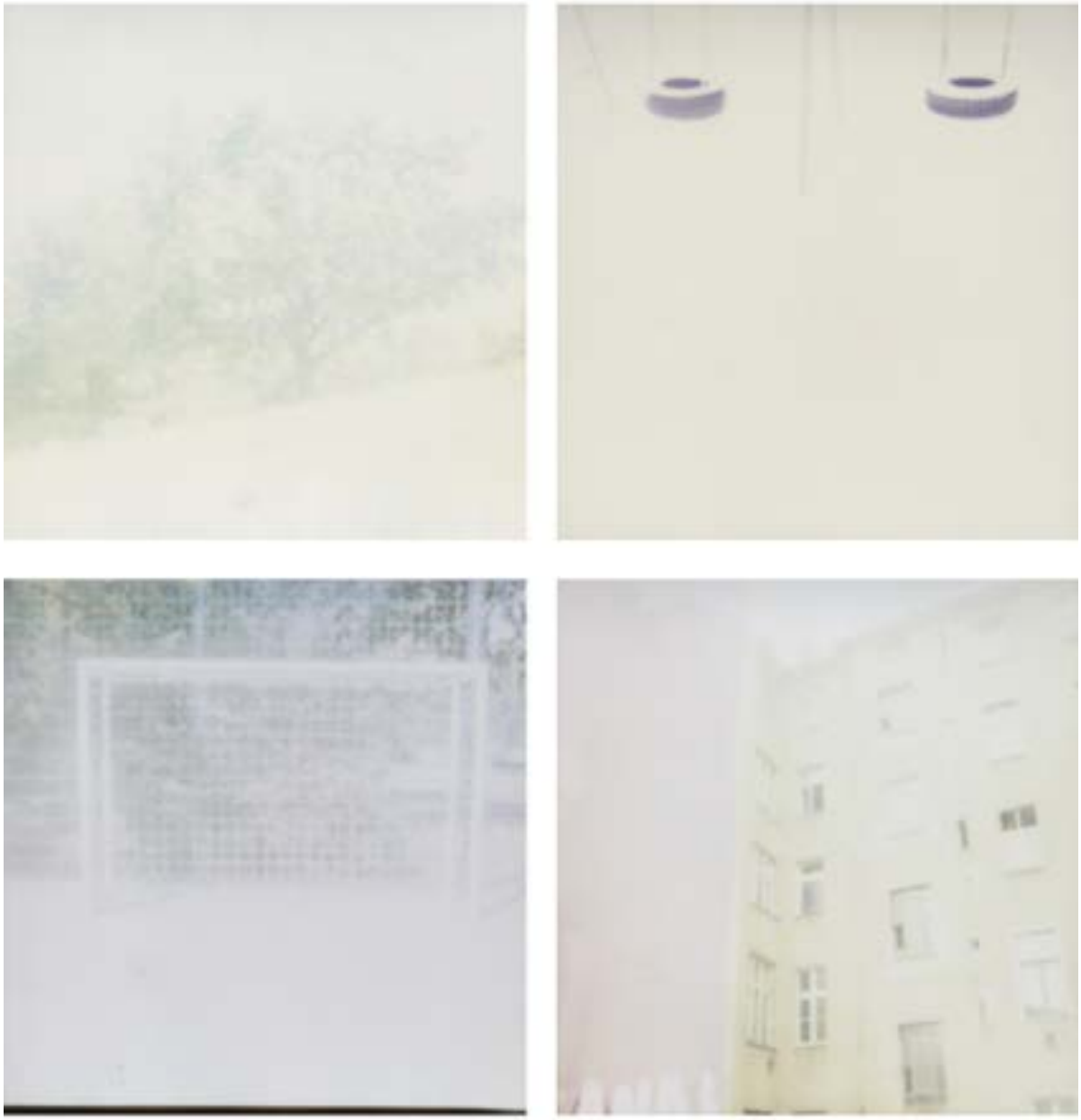
In order to situate my practice in a wider field, I am now shifting focus slightly to explore other artists' practices that in different ways intervene in the field of migration and diaspora studies. I will examine works by artist Veronica Ryan (Tate, 2023a, p. unpag) and Charif Benhelima (n.d., p. unpag) and although conveying different cultural perspectives still resonate with my artistic process. Ryan, a Montserrat-born British artist, created a piece of work *Loss of Selves, Place of Transformation* (2000) seen in Fig. 41, that articulates the self uncertainty caused by migration. Drawn to the expressive brushstrokes applied to a copy of a photograph, I could see similarities between her work and mine. Working with photographs from her own family archive, and in this piece revisiting childhood memories, she adds a white shape that appears to be inspired by a bean or a seed (Bilske, 2004, p. unpag) so that it partially obscures the subject matter of the photograph. The unevenly applied paint sometimes forms a translucent haze and other times obscures the subject matter. This reminded me of my ambiguous compositions and the way that, through my artistic process, I made things disappear. The title of her work *Loss of Selves, Place of Transformation* signals an understanding of the artistic practice as a process where self can be reformed. In a similar way to me she erases visual material to articulate the self fragmentation and loss associated with migrant and diasporic experience.

In a similar way to Ryan, the photographer Benhelima also erases visual information from his compositions. Instead, however, of manipulating existing photographs like Ryan, Benhelima reduces the clarity of the photograph's subject matter at the point of exposure and when printing. Autobiographical in character, and dealing more directly with issues associated with migration and the lives of refugees (Geo, n.d., p. unpag), his work captures the uncertainty of floating between frameworks. The work *Black-Out* (2006) seen in Figs. 42-45 contains a series of enlarged, underexposed polaroid photographs (Blokland & Pelupessi, 2012) portraying a fragmented urban environment, seen from a child's perspective. The images show diffused compositions from daily urban life—a block of flats (or a cluster of homes) and views of a park, only barely visible. They are described as existing at the threshold of existence and non-existence (Geo, n.d., p. unpag). In a similar way to Ryan and me, Benhelima articulates the uncertainty of migrant and diasporic experience. Like me, he creates a tension between visual ambiguity and the perceived certainty and stability of the photographic medium.[27] Examining other artists and photographers work that deal with the

[27] This issue will be discussed further in Chapter Three.

experience of migration or the experience of having a migrant background has aided my understanding of the diasporic imaginary (Axel, 2002) (Bader, et al., 2019). More specifically, studying how there is a similarity in the tendency towards erasure of visual information, erasure of the subject matter, in Ryan's, Benhelima's, and my own practices has helped me further understand how self uncertainty stemming migrant or migrant background experience manifests itself in art practice.

Figure 41 Veronica Ryan, *Loss of Selves, Place of Transformation*, Gravitas Profundis III, 2000



Figures 42-45 Charif Benhelima, *Black-Out*, 2006

Studio Reflection: Uneven Patchworks with Visible Joins

I revisited several *Little Gem* sites to build a collection and further experiment. Each time I repeated the process of moving closer to the subject matter creating photographic material that better corresponded with the homes of my memory and imagination. To create composite forms, I experimented with photographic montaging. Drawing on my experiences of at-onceness and ambiguity, during my experiments with the Bergman-slides and composite environments in my living room, I layered transparencies on a light box so that they overlapped. This time, however, with more images to work with, I could push the process further, in essence overlap more. I was intrigued by how my artistic process created new, more fantastical places with distorted shapes and bent lines. I

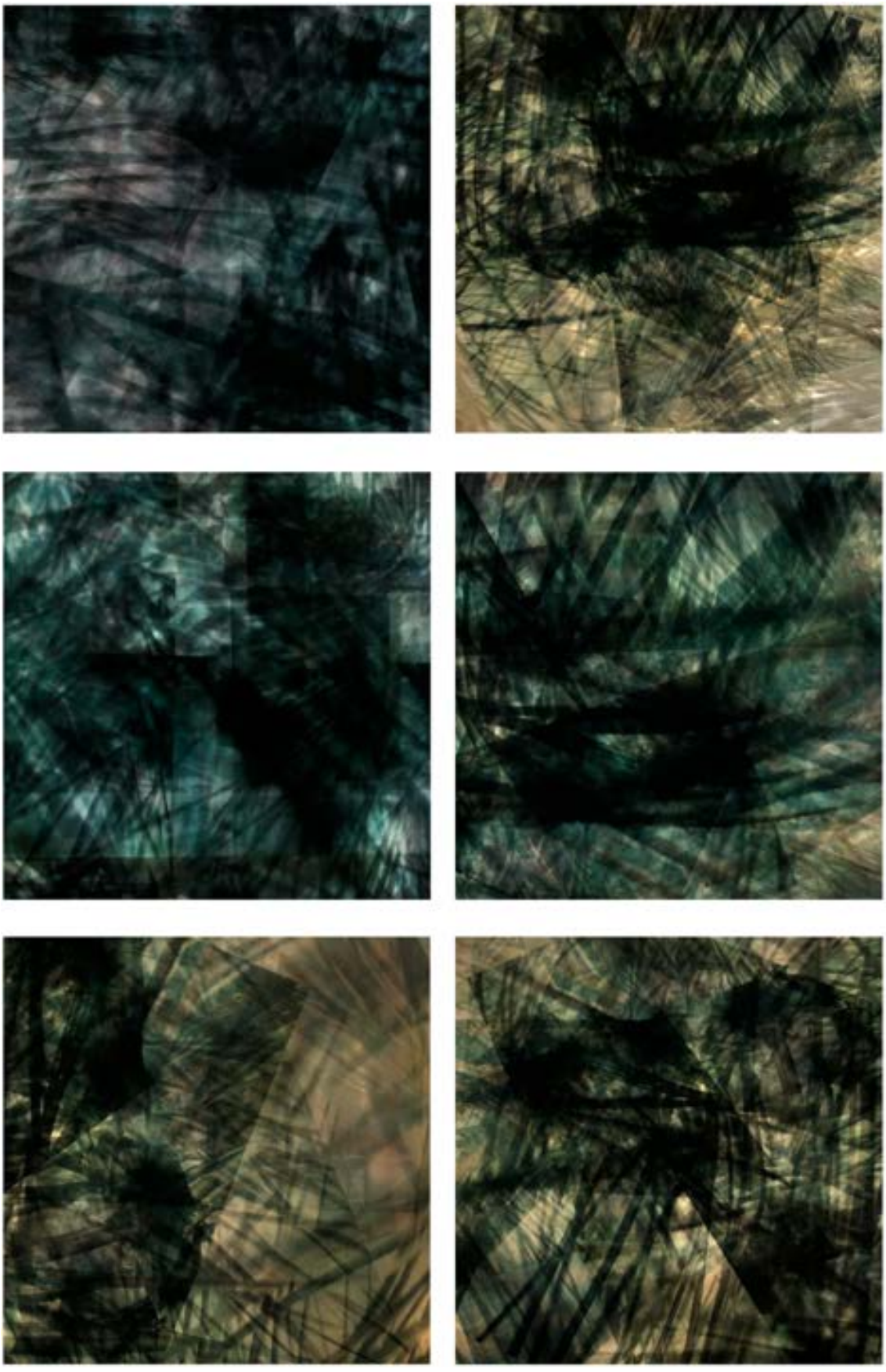
felt delight that the compositions meddled with the sense of scale—when outlines became blurred, and forms appeared disjointed. Through montaging I was able to externalise aspects of my internal world; I created uneven patchworks with visible joins. Seeing these dissonant home-forms articulate a self out of joint, reduced my sense of loss. Knowing that a unified home is an impossibility and oneness only a fleeting sensation, my artistic process cannot be about restoring wholeness but is, instead, about consolidating homes and selves: it is about mending roughly. Fascinated by the barely visible, I reflected on the dark areas in the composition. As my focus shifted to its boundaries, I realised that they were representing the fractures and loss embedded in my sense of self.

Montaging Oneness

As discussed earlier, my art practice aims to articulate the experience of gradual immersion to oneness that Ehrensweig identifies as beneficial for subjectivity reformation, my practice is about trying to make visible the ambiguous experience of dissolving boundaries between self and surrounding environments through a montaging process. Montaging is often used by artists with migrant and diasporic backgrounds to articulating their lived experience (Papastergiadis & Trimboli, 2017), the process is about a form of consolidation that gives their in-between-ness a presence. In more detail explaining how they take shape and hybridise culture, Papastergiadis and Trimboli (2017) uses Gilles Deleuze's (2006 [1993]) notion of *the fold* – an idea that sees folding as the overarching process of cultural production. More specifically, they suggest that the montages of migrants, diasporics and minority ethnics take shape through a folding together of their internal world of memories and dreams with the external environment (Bhabha, 1998; Papastergiadis & Trimboli, 2017). Essentially, Papastergiadis and Trimboli (2017) maintain that the folding process begins with disparate times and places associated with home being interwoven into composite mind-forms, mental compositions that are later materialised through a physical folding together of juxtaposed fragments and jumbled cultural signs (Papastergiadis & Trimboli, 2017, p. 566). Recognising the inclination for montage in my own practice, I reflected further on their subject matter and form. It was as if making visible my oneness in individual photographs was not enough and to in order to convey the many elaborations of home within my "homing desire" (Brah, 1996, p. 193), I needed to bring them together in composite forms.[28] Diasporic touch is a process that makes visible my gradual submersion in

[28] Earlier in Chapter Two I discussed how my nostalgia influenced the subject matter of the work, it focused me on the Falu-red house environment as it had become a substitute for home and self. I also highlighted how the losses that had become incorporated in my being seemed to emerge in the form of my work in erasure and concealment of visual information.

practice, it frames the experience of boundaries between self and world dissolving. For example, when developing the work *Pine Bleeding* (Figs. 46-51) I created photographic montages by layering transparencies on a lightbox, dark marks, clusters of complex lines and indistinct shapes appeared in the compositions. My art practice articulates my homing desire in a montaging process that brings together fragments of Falu-red house environment identified with the stereotypical narrative of home associated with the Swedish nation, and the representations of my moments of connectedness with the surrounding environment: it is the visualisation of these folds that hold my loss.



Figures 46-51 Sara Davies, *Pine Bleeding*, 2019

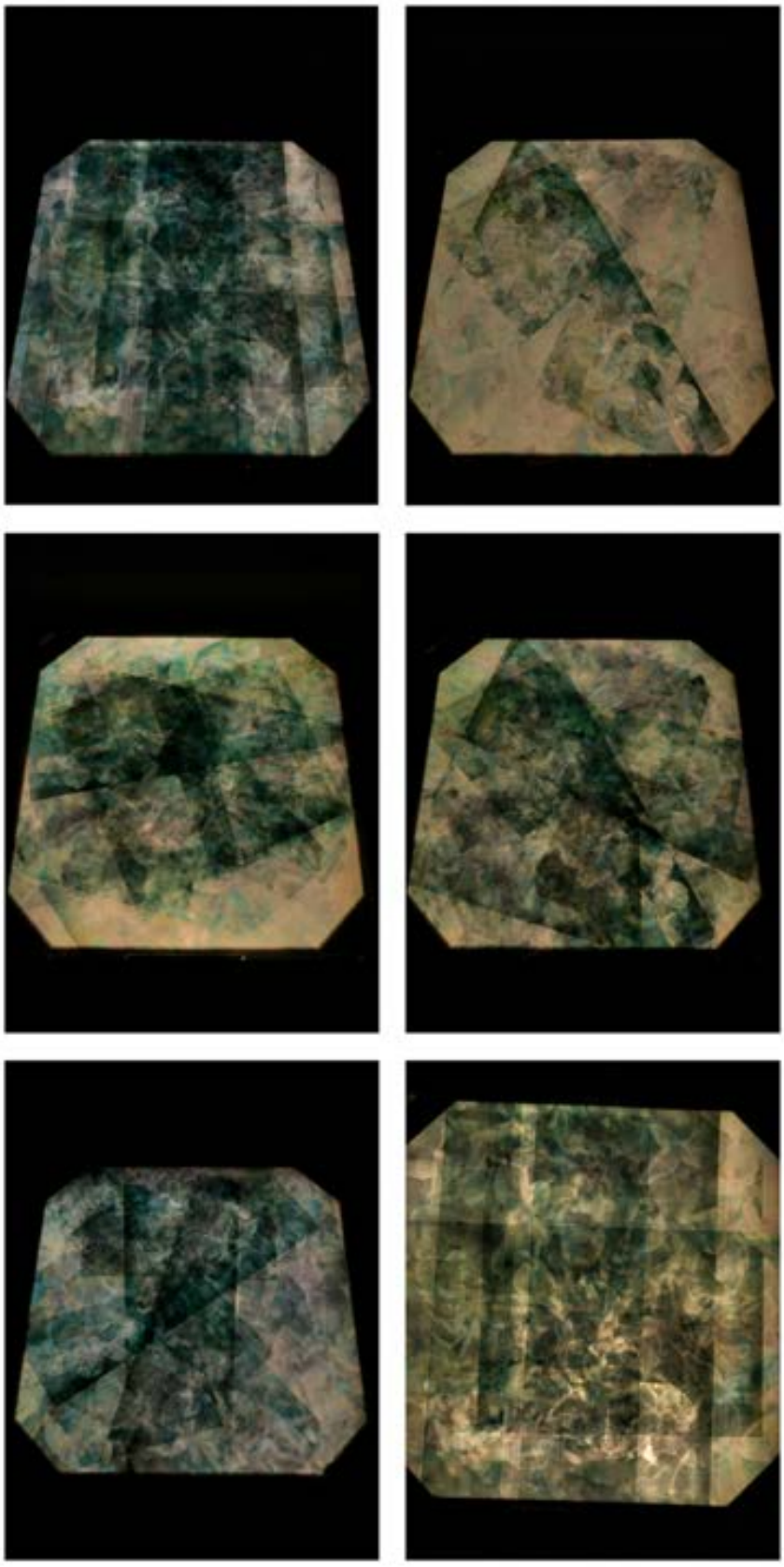
A Mourning Practice

In order to understand how loss settles in my artworks we need to further examine how feeling affects our bodies and what we do to cope. Studying how the body responds to loss – or the sense of discontinuity that comes *after*—Butler (2003) identifies how rather than engaging with narration and linear processes of making meaning, the body becomes involved in articulating itself through gestures. Drawing on Benjamin's idea of messianic temporality, she suggests that non-linear experiences like these are supplemented by a bodily movement that "has no direction", "is motivated by no causality" and "becomes its own kind of display" (Butler, 2003, p. 470). The sense of discontinuity associated with loss, rather than being made sense of through words, registers in our gestures. Loss emerges in the movements of our bodies, in gestures that can leave traces on the surrounding environment (Butler, 2003). Drawing on Freud's (2010 [1923]) later accounts of mourning and melancholia, where he associates them both as being part of the process of subjectivity formation, Butler (2003, p. 172) makes a distinction between how the body moves in mourning and melancholia. In mourning, she explains, the body sensuously engages with objects that stand in for what is lost, in this way overcoming grief, whereas in melancholia, where loss fragments self, the body moves without an object—it gestures without aim or direction, in response to a sense of discontinuity. It becomes, Butler argues, a changing, erratic, spatial performance. As loss is, like Butler says, inherent in the process of subjectivity formation, it is unavoidable, it marks us. She argues that for people with normative subjectivities, it results in a sensual engagement with an object that stands in for our known loss. Yet, for people with non-normative subjectivities, like migrants and diasporics, the body is propelled by loss itself, and results in a series of gestures.

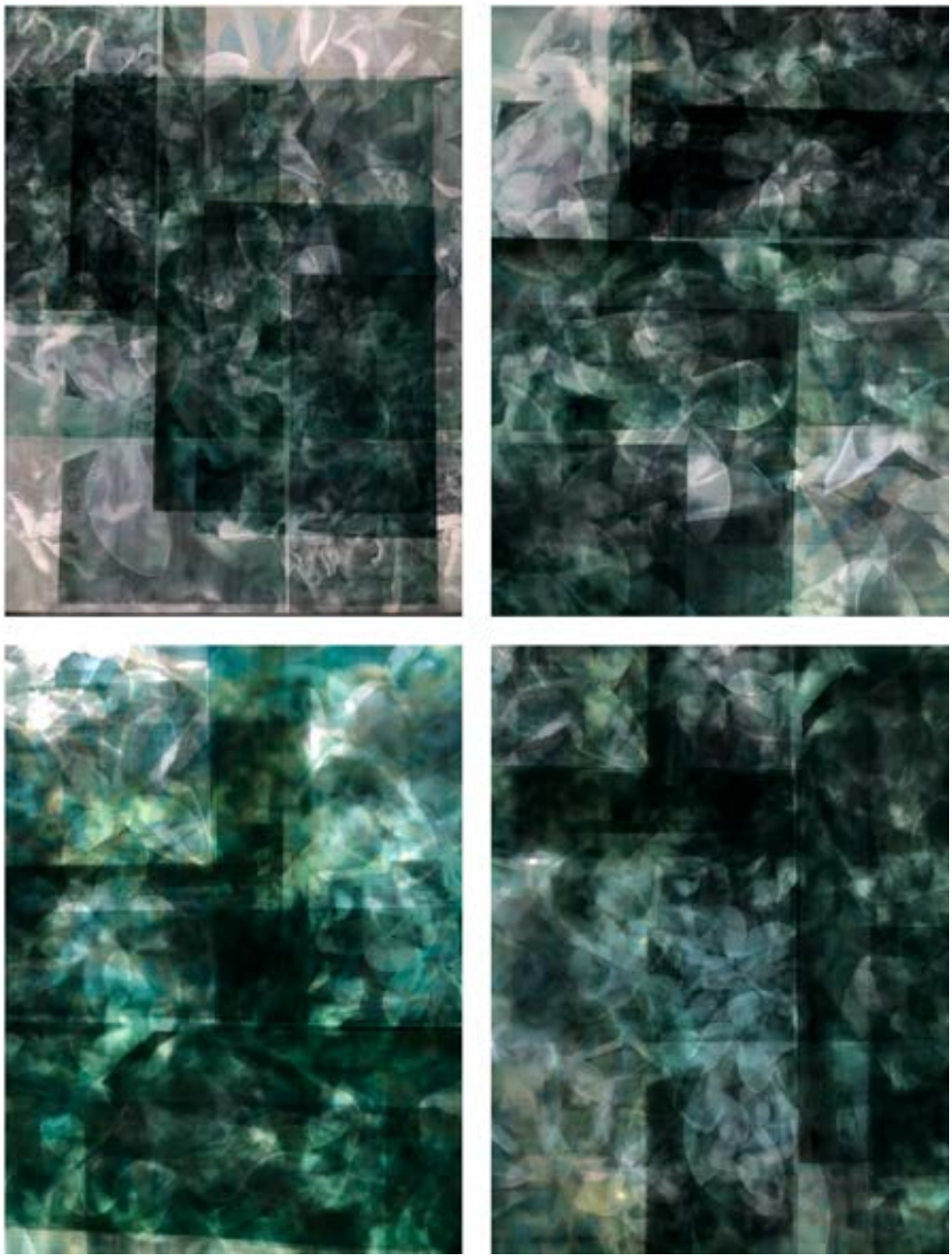
With this in mind I claim that my creative process is a performance of loss: that at times finds refuge in nostalgic substitutes yet, more often, my practice endlessly and aimlessly moves in response to my unknown losses. Butler highlights that these types of melancholic performance of loss are essential for migrants and diasporics, as not having loss would be like not having self. As melancholia is difficult to deal with, she suggests, migrants and diasporics share them in order to manage their self development—they share them through gesticulation and collective bodily displays. My research, however, has led me to understand how this process imbues my artistic practice. As I make work, a series of expressive gestures discharge into the work without my conscious intention. It evades portrayal, instead, occupying the form of the work, quietly moulding the content. Not knowing exactly what I had lost—something that is very common for migrants and

diasporics experiencing melancholic loss—I propose that my artworks give it a form. Drawing on Ehrensweig's (1995 [1967]) ideas, I argue that there is a way of sharing melancholic loss that has a reparative effect on self. Focusing on the idea that melancholic performances leave traces in the surrounding environment (Butler, 2003), I propose that art practice can be mobilised to capture these traces.

Although not producing narratives and linguistic meaning, I suggest that, artworks can hold loss in a different way, helping migrants and diasporics to become familiar with their unknown melancholic losses. My performances of melancholic loss leave residues that look slightly different in each piece of work. For example, as I was developing the piece of work *Lilac Seeping*—a process represented in Figs. 52-57 and Figs. 58-61—I noticed how the traces of loss emerged in the work as geometric shapes. They were formed by the edges of the transparencies that, when overlapping, obscured and complicated the subject matter. With each new composition they varied in shape, density and texture. It was as if I was pushing it to one place in the composition, then pulling it to another – sometimes making it denser and other times more translucent. I maintain that artworks can be mobilised as sites, where the traces of melancholic performances can be materialised, allowing them to settle in a unified artwork that has reparative effects. From my experience, melancholic performances result in traces that occupy the form of the work; loss becomes known to me (although still wordless) through shades, tones and textures. Art practice can transform the performance of melancholia into a practice of mourning, the process of binding them in artworks. Framing makes it possible for me to see the form of my loss. Agreeing with Ehrensweig (1995 [1967]), and adding to Butler's (2003) ideas, I propose that artistic practice can shift a state of mind characterised by self fragmentation—which is—similar to Freud's condition of melancholia—to one that is concerned with reparation, which is closer to Freud's process of mourning (2009 [1915]; 2010 [1923]). It is a practice that can transform the condition of melancholia into a process of mourning through the materialisation of sensations, with help from the body to make a thing out of a feeling, by transforming loss into a more manageable form.



Figures 52-57 Sara Davies, from the *Composite Lilac Bush Series*, 2019



Figures 58-61 Sara Davies, from the Composite *Lilac Bush Series*, 2019

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The aim of this chapter has been to further understand the link between creativity and migrant and diasporic subjectivity formation. It has also been a quest to find out more about the dynamics of diasporic touch. I explored these topics by carefully studying the process of making the photographic installation works, *Birch Shattering 1*, *Lilac Seeping* and *Pine Bleeding*. In the beginning of the chapter, I explored a particular experience when making

where I experienced self in spatial and visual way. I realised that my uncertainty resulted in a gravitation towards what Benjamin (2015 [1940]) identifies as an alternative experience of time that has transformative potential. It involved a non-linear, more spatial involvement with memories and dreams, similar to homing desire, and I came to understand that in my case, it was permeated by a particular palette of emotions. Bhabha links this transformation of temporality to migrant and diasporic liminal experiences and, through my research, I have come to know it as connected with diasporic touch. Later in the chapter I accounted for how loss is integral to the process of migrant and diasporic self formation (Butler, 1988). I realised that the uncertainty I felt was caused by the self fragmentation associated with the condition of melancholia and I noticed that when it became too hard to handle, I escaped into the realm of nostalgia. As I engaged in the process of taking photographs for my installation, I understood that migrant and diasporic uncertainty resulted in a preoccupation with loss, in a fluctuation between feelings of nostalgia – a substitute for my unknown losses, and melancholia—a condition where loss manifests as itself as self fragmentation. My research indicated that uncertainty and the sensorium associated with nostalgia and melancholia set in motion a move beyond nostalgia vital for migrant and diasporic self formation (Carter, 2004), namely the process of diasporic touch.

In order to further understand how and why diasporic touch counteracted uncertainty of self I explored the ideas of Ehrensweig (1995 [1967]) whose writing made me understand how artistic processes mirror the artist's psychic processes of fragmentation and unification. More specifically, Ehrensweig argues that the artistic process involves the artist taking established forms apart to mirror their fragmented sense of self, and later unifying the fragments in artworks to counteract their destructive tendencies. This physical process of unification, Ehrensweig argues, has a reparative effect on our subjectivity. Agreeing with Ehrensweig (1995 [1967]), and examining his ideas in relation to diasporic subjectivity formation, I suggested that the immersion in materials that occur in artistic processes can help migrants and diasporic people feel more settled in the surrounding environment. The open connectedness in artistic processes becomes a temporary home. In addition to this I understood that it was vital to make this experience of oneness visible to others.

Diasporic touch is the process that frames my moments of open connectedness. It creates an articulation of self wide open that has a soothing effect. Diasporic touch counteracts my sense of uncertainty of self by materialising my loss. Drawing on Ehrensweig and using information gathered when making, I was able to challenge Butler's claim that melancholic

loss stays embodied and presents itself in repetitive aimless performances—that it cannot be completely overcome. My research resulted in an understanding that artistic practice encouraged melancholic loss to work itself through the body and discharge as traces in my work. It gave my melancholia, although still wordless, a shape and a texture. It externalised it, something that made it more manageable. With this in mind, I claim that that diasporic touch can be harnessed to transform the experience of diasporic melancholia into a process of mourning.

CHAPTER THREE
In and Out of Frame

In Chapter Two, I explored what happens when self meets world in art practice, the exchange between inner processes and outer manipulation of materials that harbour diasporic touch. I examined how the process of diasporic touch frames the intimate moments of connectedness experienced whilst making, how this process gives my loss a form and how it has a reparative effect on my sense of self. In addition, the discussion acknowledged how the process of diasporic touch is linked with the dismantling of narratives of home and landscape associated with the Swedish nation. This chapter will change direction slightly and look at what diasporic touch can do in the wider social experience. What does diasporic touch do to the many frameworks that affect our experience? What does it do to ideas of national belonging? Reacting to the many material manifestations associated with these ideas, I have always felt a slight irritation and wonder when gazing at the sharp edges of digital images on my computer screen, a little annoyance but also fascination when encountering glass boundaries of museum display cases. As long as I can remember, when exhibiting artworks, I have allowed their form to tug and prod at the physical limits of the gallery space, at the same time questioning its framework. For example, I hardly ever hang my photographic work in rows at eye level but instead let them spread across walls in a dissonant way, my projections rarely sit central on a wall. I interrupt the stable order and traditional way of showing narratives in art by letting them wrap around architectural features and encouraging them to move through the dynamism of performances.

These contradictory feelings about physical containers reflect my borderline diasporic life where I sense the push and pull of different cultural and national frameworks. As discussed earlier this experience results in a sense of discordance and self uncertainty, however, I also know I need to work with these frameworks to live and adopt them to assimilate into society. To make my life experience visible in artworks, they need some sort of frame—they need to be demarcated. My uncertainty of self needs to have limits to be recognised, but on the other hand, the very idea of containing my subjectivity—or containment more generally—fills me with displeasure. The first part of this chapter will account for how my exploration of frames and frameworks began. It will explore my experience during an artist residency at the Sidney Nolan Trust where I developed a piece of work that led to a deeper

understanding about how my practice negotiates boundaries. It will examine the development of a performance titled *Sidney Nolan's Frames* (2017) that used picture frames, not as containers but as paths, to explore how this experience continued to influence my making. The first part of the chapter will also investigate the characteristics of the picture frame, exploring the relationship between frames, continuity and belonging, in addition to how the frame can be seen as a liminal space—a space of connectivity. Caleb Bissinger (2018, p. unpag) describes frames as both remarkable and inconspicuous—he notes how it commands you to look at the same time as it is a thing that we fail to notice. He proposes that "to frame something, in both literal and figurative sense, is to define it as an object; it may be limited or incomplete, but it stands on its own; it has a purpose" (Bissinger, 2018, p. unpag). With this in mind, I will examine the development of the theory around framing, how the frame was conceptualised by certain key figures during the height of modernism, and how this view was challenged by postmodernist/poststructuralist thinkers (Derrida, 1987). In essence, we will be exploring how the frame can be seen as container and a point of connection that ruptures actually its perceived stability. The chapter will then investigate how frames have become a particular focus in my artistic practice but, rather than taking them for granted I will examine how and why I question them.

The second part of the chapter will then more closely explore my methods and methodologies by looking at elements from the process of making the pieces of work *House Unravelling* (2022), *Gaps and Overlaps* (2017), and *Birch Shattering 2* (2021). It will examine how my engagement with frames is related to my complicated relationship with national belonging. This chapter accounts for how my diasporic experience—a combination of a desire for continuity and rupture (Hall, 1994, pp. 226-227), boundedness and mobility (Papastergiadis, 2005, p. 40)—shaped my artworks. It also explores how it plays out in my artistic process through an interplay between a range of performative strategies and the photography's frame, manifesting as continuous unframing and framing. For me the photographic frame has become a metaphor for place bound belonging—it stands in for the idea of belonging to nation (Anderson, 2006 [1983]), and my body's movement stands in for the experience of liminality. The chapter will explore how I use this process to intervene in narratives of home and landscape associated with the Swedish nation and how I defy the limits of national belonging by expressing my difference. It will examine how my artworks show alternative perspectives of the Falu-red house environment by questioning the validity of national homogeneity and challenging the perceived stability and continuity of national

histories (Anderson, 2006 [1983], pp. 11-12): the works harbour a dissensus that questions established orders.

It is important to note that the investigation will include thinking around more traditional framing devices, such as picture frames and display cases, but it will also take into account other types of frames, such as the physical edges of photographs. In addition to this, it will consider the frameworks of disciplines such as photography, the cultural frameworks that surround us or the boundaries of nations. In the context of art practice, I will explore the frame in an expanded way, bearing in mind that contemporary artworks do not always have the solid, imposing frames that operate in historical paintings, for example, instead I am concerned with frames that "sits in the ephemera that surrounds [the artwork]: the article in the arts section in the local newspaper, the didactic panels, floor sheets, and catalogue essays that accompany the exhibition, the art blog on the web, the journal article by a learned scholar , the images uploaded onto an online search engine" (Schilo, 2016, p. xxiii). It is not always a physical rectangular or square object that instructs and directs the viewer's gaze, but instead the frame can hold or describe a society's point of view. In some ways an artwork is always framed by society and its many institutions. Whether an artwork has a more traditional frame or is framed in a more complex and multivocal way as is common today, in ways I have just alluded to, frames can still contain and connect, they still fill me both with dissatisfaction and awe.

Figure 62 Sara Davies, *Sidney Nolan's Frames*, Site Specific Performance, 2017

Studio Reflection: Finding Sidney's Frames

I found the frames in a shed, adjacent to the large barn which was turned into makeshift studios for painting, music, film, photography and performance—a site full of conversation, so important for artistic practices. At first, I could only just make out their shapes, as they were stacked against a wall towards the back. Looking closer, I realised they were large, plain and wooden. Obviously unused for years, they were covered by dust and cobwebs. Some frames were worn out with deteriorating varnish; others were bare and smooth—as if someone had stripped them. As I was taking part in a residency at the home of a famous twentieth century painter, I presumed or speculated that the frames were once intended for use with Sidney Nolan's portraits. I was lucky to encounter his home, studio, and farm at a time when some areas were left untouched, unorganised, and uncatalogued. Farm equipment and general accumulated stuff engulfed them. Whether Nolan had placed the frames there, worked on them, planned for them, I will never know, but at that specific moment I imagined him *there*. I envisaged him measuring their length and height, removing varnish and gilding, using wire wool to make their surfaces silky smooth. At this moment, the fact that most of his paintings in the gallery were displayed frameless, did not register. I was carried along by the magic of the moment. I felt the presence of these frames on my mind and body, letting them lead the way. As the collaborative ethos of the residency—the many conversations between the artists

taking part in the residency and the materials in the surrounding environment—influenced my making, I decided to enquire about whether I could use the frames in a performance.

My explorations of frames and frameworks began at a residency hosted by the Sidney Nolan Trust, a charity registered in 1985 by the artist Sidney Nolan, to encourage artists to freely explore and find inspiration from his former home, studio and printmaking room, paintings and the working farm—a 250-acre estate. The trust, and presumably Sidney Nolan himself, were keen to support innovative arts learning (Sidney Nolan Trust, n.d.), and for a few years during the summer months they hosted a series of artist's camps to which groups of artists apply to join. Arts residencies are described by Harriet Hawkins (2013, p. 155) as specific and limited time spent away from everyday life, to research, reflect and make within an institution or organisation. The residency I attended, supported by the Manchester School of Art Research Centre, and organised by a group of postgraduate female researchers, emphasised collaboration and conversation, and each member was encouraged to share skills and hold workshops. The emphasis on artistic research and collaboration contributed to an environment that encouraged the open ended exploration of new ideas, methods and technologies. It was about moving away from our usual frameworks—artistic, familial, city, work—to see how connecting with a place and group of people affected our making. The residency was—as artist's residencies generally are—about stepping out of a frame to make new connections. Furthermore, the journey there—a process of displacement—seemed, in some subtle way, to mirror my migratory journey. Interestingly, the location of this residency at Sidney Nolan's former home at the Rodd farm on the border between England and Wales added something to my experience—it resonated with my sense of in-betweenness. I wondered if the residency's liminal position would benefit my art practice, making it easier for me to leave nostalgia behind and immerse myself in making. As a diasporic subject it was Rodd's position on a boundary that first interested me and I wondered if it was more than a coincidence that Nolan, originally from Australia (but with a very international life) came to acquire a home situated on a border where containment is more complicated, and you are not so much of a foreigner.

The performance piece I planned and showed during the residency at first seemed tangential to my main body of visual research; it was as if being away from my usual surroundings resulted in work that seemed a bit off course. Despite this, I soon realised that it was of vital importance to my investigation into diasporic creativity and subjectivity formation. Artistic residencies allow for exploratory inquiries that take artists in new

directions. The structure allows them the time and space to be more receptive to their surroundings. This openness—where activities, people, and materials are allowed to steer the making—is explored by Hawkins (2013, p. 165) through the notion of dwelling, a concept she associates with the idea of a place being in process open to forming connections.[29] Adopting the idea that places are vibrant entities that are jointly formed or even performed by human and non-human subjects (Cloke & Owain, 2001), Hawkins sees dwelling as a developing process where humans and place are bound together, with both affecting each other. For Hawkins, artists' residencies are understood through this idea of dwelling: a concept that, she suggests, explains how experiencing a place in an open and responsive way, through art practice, can affect an artist's process of making. This accounts for the unpredictable twists and turns that artistic processes take. For example, during the Sidney Nolan Trust residency, it can explain why I abandoned my initial plans to develop a piece of work involving a series of lanterns; why a photography and film workshop exploring the use of mobile phone cameras at the limits of their capability lingered in my mind; why early morning Tai Chi sessions and group walks through the forest seemed vital. It can also explain why, unexpectedly, the old frames, and the ideas they conjured up in my mind, came to fill my being. The environment around Sidney Nolan's former home—his studio and printing room, the gallery showing his work, the rural environment generally, the activities and collaborations I took part in—changed my practice and usual working methods. Although I had done artistic performance based work before, the conditions and circumstances of the residency led me to explore my body as artwork in new ways.

The residency was short: five days, culminating in an exhibition and event. This briefness felt both liberating and daunting. It spurred me into working more instinctively, making rapid decisions without forethought and planning. Finalising a piece of work for public display in a short time and curating an exhibition with others, however, seemed almost impossible. At the beginning of the residency, this structure seemed to impose itself on me and I felt rather blocked. The digital printing facilities were poor, so I felt somewhat restricted. It was only when I decided to move away from cameras (the discipline of photography, and its many frames that give stability and continuity (Schwartz, 2015, p. 20)) that things began to happen. It was only when I felt the atmosphere of the environment (when I opened up to the conversations, skills sharing sessions, and warm summer evening walks) that work began to take shape; and it was only then that I stumbled across Sidney

[29] Note that Hawkins (2013) here adopts Heidegger's (2023 [1951]) ideas of dwelling to explore artist's residencies.

Nolan's frames. This find resulted in me instinctively leaping into the realm of performance—an artistic discipline that is very much about intervening in frames and frameworks in order to reveal the mistaken idea that nature, objects and identity, can be contained (Jones & Stephenson, 1999). As I began working with the frames in the large project space located in an old grain barn, the possibility of using Sidney Nolan's old frames in an art performance was both challenging and exciting.

Although I could sense myself open up to the material process of making, this open responsiveness was situated within a firm frame, a structure set by the residency organisers. During the residency I sensed a clear tension between this openness—the free and experimental making—and the need to package up this experience in a piece of work for exhibition. Further exploring this tension, artist Anna Nazzari (2016, p. 10) describes artists' residencies as including two conflicting types of engagements with the world: an experience beyond the ordinary, and a more *worldly* existence where the artists operate within the constraints of society's frameworks. Explaining this in more detail, Nazzari (using Tim Ingold's (2000) two world perspectives of *building* and *dwelling*) suggests that during residencies artists negotiate a conflict between a perspective of the world where they are more detached from their surroundings, and an outlook where they are more connected with the environment. According to Nazzari "…the conflict in residency cannot be negated: each perspective operates in a permanent state of resistance…it is this involuntary cohabitation that spurs meaning" (Nazzari, 2016, p. 12); she believes that this conflict, and the artist's perception of it, forms the work. With this in mind, I believe my fixation and performative elaboration with and on frames during this residency expresses the conflict Nazzari identifies, where the performance results in a form of attachment *to*, and (in my case) a photographic detachment *from*, the environment. I recognised its combination of connectivity and framing from earlier works and the process of diasporic touch. Like my other work, the piece I made during the residency was about transforming my uncertainty of self, a condition associated with migrant and diasporic experience (Bhabha, 1990; Bhabha, 1994b), into a material threshold. During the residency and in subsequent thinking about frames and frameworks, however, I began to think about diasporic touch as the physical and material manifestation of a certain methodology in a more defined way.

Studio Reflection: Performing with Sidney Nolan's Frames

I moved the frames into the studio space and instinctively placed them on the floor. I spaced them out in different patterns—sometimes with space between them and other times quite close, creating compositions, some symmetrical, but more often not. Yet, it was only when I overlapped them that the work started to do something significant. I settled on a composition where an equal number of gaps and overlaps with smaller rectangles and squares sat within the larger form. The overall shape of the composition was uneven and asymmetrical but the components within it were different sizes. Working with the frames, I found my body circulating around them and the overall composition. I sometimes stepped into frames to place others in the right position. After a while this movement in and out seemed to make perfect sense, it was like a metaphor for my movement in and out of cultural frameworks. This understanding resulted in my decision to create a performance where I followed the edges of the frames—sometimes straddling and sometimes standing between. For me, the frames stood for cultural frameworks and a sense of belonging, the edges were the path my life needed to take—negotiating customs, traditions, and languages: sometimes neither path, sometimes both. The performance seemed to say something about boundaries: that they were not so straightforward as they seemed. The performance took about five minutes, but it felt like longer: it was improvised and raw. Only after conversation with members of the audience did I realise that it seemed like my body was confusing the edges of the frames. Perhaps it was because the gender makeup of the residency group was mixed, but mainly female, that the work took on another meaning. It could be interpreted as a feminist gesture intervening in the art canon and the privileged position of the white, male artist. It was a gesture partially aimed at Nolan himself but also encompassing a more general critique.

Continuity and Liminality

My decision to use frames from the shed felt important, if a little random. I instinctively drew parallels between the picture frames and the non-physical frameworks that govern our lives. Only later did I understand that we tend to contain things with boundaries to filter our sensory impressions so that our lives seem meaningful (Bateson, 2000 [1972]). Explaining this in more detail, Gregory Bateson (2000 [1972], pp. 187-188) suggests that we all have cognitive inner frames that help us understand what is going on in our lives to direct our focus. These inner frames, he maintains, are socially shared, and they are shaped in relation to other peoples' frames; they instruct us to approach things in a certain way and help us to communicate. Examining the staying power these types of frames, Stephen D Reese claims frames can be seen as the "organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world" (Reese, 2003 [2001],

p. 11). For me, the material picture frames that I found in the shed somehow stood in for my desire for continuity and belonging. Although it has been observed by poststructuralist thinkers that meaning changes over time (Belsey, 2002), it is clear that containers are necessary: they help us to transmit messages that others can understand. Interestingly, Bateson claims that frames were "added by human beings to pictures because these human beings operate more easily in a universe in which some of their psychological characteristics are externalised" (Bateson, 2000 [1972], p. 187). In this way, the connection he identifies between our inner psychological frames (that in turn shape and are shaped by society's frameworks) explains, to some extent, why I intuitively linked material frames with more non-physical bounded forms.

As highlighted previously, frames and frameworks are complex entities that instigate a sense of unity, stability and continuity, and are required for communication and sharing experience (Bateson, 2000 [1972]; Reese, 2003 [2001]). The boundaries of framing devices are also seen by some theorists as productive, liminal spaces and as points of connection (Bhabha, 1994a; Papastergiadis, 2005). Thinking about the picture frame as a unifying device, creating a sense of continuity was common in some aspects of modernist thought. Writing at the beginning of the twentieth century Georg Simmel (1994 [1902]) claimed that picture frames further stabilise artworks that already represented the world as constant and unchanging. Simmel believed that frames create a boundary between the artwork and the surrounding environment, instructing the viewer to approach the work in a certain way. Frames set artwork into a system that claims to stabilise meaning and value and, although clearly operating in very different spheres, both picture frames and national borders are part of a system that aims to create a sense of continuity. Questioning this way of thinking about frames, Jacques Derrida (1987) proposes that picture frames, as well as being boundaries of different kinds, are threshold-like spaces, simultaneously part of the entity they contain and, at the same time, part of the surrounding environment. Breaking down the idea of autonomy in artwork Derrida demonstrates how the picture frame—and also the non-physical boundaries between frameworks and disciplines—are both part of the picture and the space where they hang. Referring to the frame as the *parergon* (Derrida, 1987, p. 9), Derrida shows how, not just picture frames but all boundaries that enclose things, are unstable because they both divide and connect.[30] This fragility and ambiguity associated

[30] Exploring the nature of picture frames and frameworks more generally Derrida—influenced by Immanuel Kant—makes use of the term *Parergon* to highlight their ambiguity. *Parergon* is originally

with the frame is something that resonates deeply within me and, on reflection, is something that I think the piece of work *Sidney Nolan's Frames* explores. As a diasporic subject living life between frames, I am dependent upon them—or example the framework of nation provides me with a language and an ability to share experience—and yet these frames that are necessary for shared understanding also fill me with deep unease. Sensing the chasms and ambiguities, as frameworks clash deep inside, I question their solidity and validity.

My engagement with frames during the residency was a negotiation between a desire for unity (Hall, 1994), a sensation associated with migrant and diasporic experience which I discussed in previous chapters, and an urge to highlight their connectivity (Derrida, 1987). On the one hand I am drawn to them: when I encountered Sidney Nolan's frames in the shed, they spoke to me as markers of belonging; but on the other hand, my performance destabilised their promise of unity by highlighting their liminality. Developing Derrida's ideas and further exploring the liminality of frames in relation to artworks, Louis Marin (1996) noticed how, at the same time, they bring works into being and are additional to it. Marin argues that frames give stability and coherence to often non-linear and chaotic artistic practices, yet they do so without separating them from their surrounding environment. Marin claims the frame, rather than being an addition, forms the artwork, so that however dissonant and incomplete the artwork is, the frame gathers its "crumbling, abyssal, non-totalising edges" (Johnson, 1981, p. 130). In the *Sidney Nolan's Frames* (2017) performance, I use my body to question their ability to bind and contain: as I move along their boundaries my body changes their meaning; with every step I take, I destabilise things, I am making them leak. Walking along the boundaries of the frames that, for me, double up as markers of belonging, I am undermining their power and authority. The picture frame, (that for me extends to the sharp digital edges of a photograph) has become a metaphor for my paradoxical relationship to the idea of national belonging: it says something very interesting about my diasporic in-betweenness.

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an ancient Greek term meaning *beside, or additional to the work* but also contains the word *Ergon* meaning work. This helps Derrida think about frames as "neither work…nor outside the work" (Derrida, 1987, p. 9), how they both harbour an uncertainty and unify the work, how they divide and connect.

Figures 63-66 Sara Davies, *Sidney Nolan's Frames*, Documentation of Performance and Performance, Grosvenor Gallery, 2017

Studio Reflection: Returning to the Gallery

After the residency we exhibited the work at the Manchester School of Art's Grosvenor Gallery—a light and roomy space with parquet flooring and neo-gothic style windows. My contribution to the exhibition consisted of video documentation of my *Sidney Nolan's Frames* performance. It was displayed on a monitor at floor level adjacent to the pile of frames. During the opening evening, I

repeated the performance. Some documentation of the exhibition can be seen in Figs. 63-66. The performance involved moving the frames to the centre of the room, placing them in a similar pattern to the one I used in the performance at Rodd farm. I moved along their edges, along the thresholds between inside and outside. Although the performance followed the pattern used previously, it felt less powerful. In the grain barn, I could feel the tension of the audience, and sense their engagement. In the gallery, although still live, it seemed to have somehow lost its liveliness. Reflecting on the reasons for this, I wondered if it was because the frames were substitutes, repeating the work dulled my engagement or that the audience had different expectations. Could it be that the new location – at first seeming ideal—weakened its impact. It was as if the additional frames—the monitor screen, the gallery frame, the institutional frame and the text-labels—overwhelmed the trace of the residency, as if it swamped the sense of open connectedness that I felt previously.

Exhibiting the piece of work *Sidney Nolan's Frames* in Manchester School of Art's Grosvenor Gallery resulted in a different outcome than expected and I was beginning to think its new location within an art institution contributed to the piece's lack of connectivity. The Manchester School of Art, previously the School of Design, was founded in 1838 and is the second oldest art school in the United Kingdom (Manchester School of Art, 2023a). It moved to its Victorian purpose-built art school building at the All Saints site in 1881 (Barber, 2009), which has since then been used to teach art and design. The Grosvenor Gallery and the adjacent Holden Gallery are situated on the ground floor, taking up a large amount of space. Today, the Holden Gallery, the larger of the two spaces, houses Manchester School of Art's programmed and publicly accessible contemporary art exhibitions, live performances and public events (Manchester School of Art, n.d., p. 2023b), whereas the Grosvenor Gallery is a space programmed by Manchester School of Art students, that showcases the work of students and staff (Manchester School of Art, n.d., p. 2023c). Revealing the institution's historical links with power through their high ceilings, large open spaces, impressive pillars and stone arches, the two adjoining spaces were designed to create awe. Over time the spaces served the institution in slightly different ways: initially, in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the larger space—referred to as the Textile Court—and the adjoining smaller space—the Italian Court—accommodated a semi-permanent display of arts and crafts that were designed to aid teaching and inspire students (Boydell, 2023, p. in conversation). In the 1960s the larger space was used as an exhibition space for contemporary art—then called the John Holden Gallery—whereas the smaller space was turned into a lecture theatre (Special Collections Museum, 2023, p. primary source material).

At first, the Grosvenor Gallery, with its institutional affiliation, seemed like the perfect site for my work. As the viewpoints of institutions most often adhere to the dominant ideas in society (Derrida, 1995; Brown & Davis-Brown, 1998), it appeared to be an ideal location for my performance to react against, highlighting the permeability of such frames. I was convinced, however, that using the location within the Manchester School of Art reduced its power. Performing within the institution made it less personal; it was not so much about me and Sidney Nolan anymore, but about me challenging the power of the institutional framework: its traditions, its ideals and its written as well as its unwritten rules and regulations. The residency was about stepping out of a frame and connecting with a place and a group of people through making—it enabled experiences of oneness—encounters with home (Ehrensweig, 1995 [1967]) and with the surrounding environment and people that, I believe, fed into the original performance event. The residency was about connectivity and openness and by recreating the work in a different location with other meanings it felt as if some of this meaning and rich complexity was lost. The relationship between performative feminist art practices and art institutions has been explored by Angela Dimitrakaki and Lara Perry (2013[2015], p. 7) who claim that the way feminist practices subvert power relations often conflicts with the controlling tendencies of the art institution. Feminist interventions and performances, they argue, are to some extent negated or cancelled out by museums and galleries. I would therefore argue that, in a similar way, this happened when my *Sidney Nolan's Frames* performance, exploring my bi-cultural experience, was shown at the Gallery. Perhaps the regulated context of the educational institution decreased the effects of my call for fluidity and motion.

Even though the afterlife of the performance at the Sidney Nolan Trust was problematic, my experience there stayed with me. The exploration of the liminality of frames in a place situated on the borderlands between two entangled but distinctly different cultural frameworks—the English, and the Welsh—had a lasting impact on my practice. The parallel that, for example, Derrida (1987) drew between picture frames, non-physical frameworks and boundaries more generally, allowed me to think of the photographic frames in a similar way. That the four edges enclosing the photographic image were a threshold space:—both part of the work and part of the surrounding environment and—entangled in ideas of historical continuity and national belonging. If we were to apply Marin's ideas of frames as unstable entities to the boundaries of photographs, of nations and their histories, frames can be understood as both bringing into being stability while also harbouring instability,

existing as part of one thing and the other. Thinking about the containers as more mutable and unstable, questions the stability that Bateman's (2000 [1972]) and Reese's (2003 [2001]) assigns to inner and outer frameworks, it opens up the possibility for changes in meaning and understanding. My exploration into the boundedness, liminality and leakiness of frames and frameworks during and after the Sidney Nolan Trust residency deepened my understanding about my diasporic life experience. The liminal qualities of frames that Derrida (1987) and Marin (1996) identify—their threshold qualities—seem a perfect metaphor for my diasporic position between cultural frameworks: how I am dependent on enclosing structures to experience shared meaning or belonging, while also being between and somehow beyond those structures, because I can see and experience their limitations.

As discussed in previous chapters, my liminal life experience results in me dismantling stereotypical narratives of home and landscape associated with the Swedish nation to reflect my self uncertainty. It also results in diasporic touch, a desire to immerse myself in my practice and frame this experience. The Sidney Nolan residency and the experience of its aftermath made me think about how the photographic frame creates an illusion of stability and how I use photography as a means to articulate belonging. It also made me consider how performances and performative strategies highlight the instability of boundaries and how they challenge the idea of stability. In addition to this, the residency experience also propelled me to further investigate how and why a combination of photography and performative strategies seemed a particularly efficient way to diasporically touch: how it was very good at bringing forth and materialising my loss and counteracting my self uncertainty. Using the knowledge gathered during the performance at the Sidney Nolan Trust, I later explored the liminality of frames in photographic montages and installations (—something that I will discuss further in the second part of this chapter). I used a similar overlapping pattern to the one in the Sidney Nolan Trust performance, but instead of layering empty frames I layered photographs, extending and shrinking gaps and overlaps. In the next part of this chapter I therefore examine how, through a combination of photography and performative strategies, I deconstruct the image of the Swedish national home and how I question the Falu-red house environment and the authority of ideas of national belonging.

Boundedness and Mobility

In my art practice, through photography and performative strategies, I articulate the tension, in my diasporic life, between a desire for a sense of unity—of having a place—and a renouncement of that self same sense of national belonging. For me, the different perspectives on frames—the way they are seen as devices that stabilise things and liminal points of connection resonate with my experience. The former way of looking at them has become a metaphor for place-bound belonging, whereas the latter, perceiving them as liminal, is somehow articulating my in-betweenness. To some extent explaining why my art practice engages with boundaries in this way, Papastergiadis claims the artworks of migrants and diasporics emerge in "the interactions between the state of boundedness and the forces of mobility" (Papastergiadis, 2012, p. 137); he highlights how their making is propelled by the friction between a longing for unity and a desire to convey the mobility inherent in transnational experience.[31] I use the medium of photography to unify or bind things together and, through a series of performative strategies, interfere with both the physical boundaries of the photograph and the boundaries of the medium. The medium of photography, however, is tied to ideas of national belonging, its history is linked to the formation of nations (Caraffa & Serena, 2015) that makes my use of it particularly poignant. I will now proceed with examining my methods and methodologies in more detail; I will explain the links between photography and national belonging as well as outlining the reasons why performance or performative strategies can be used to challenge their perceived stability.

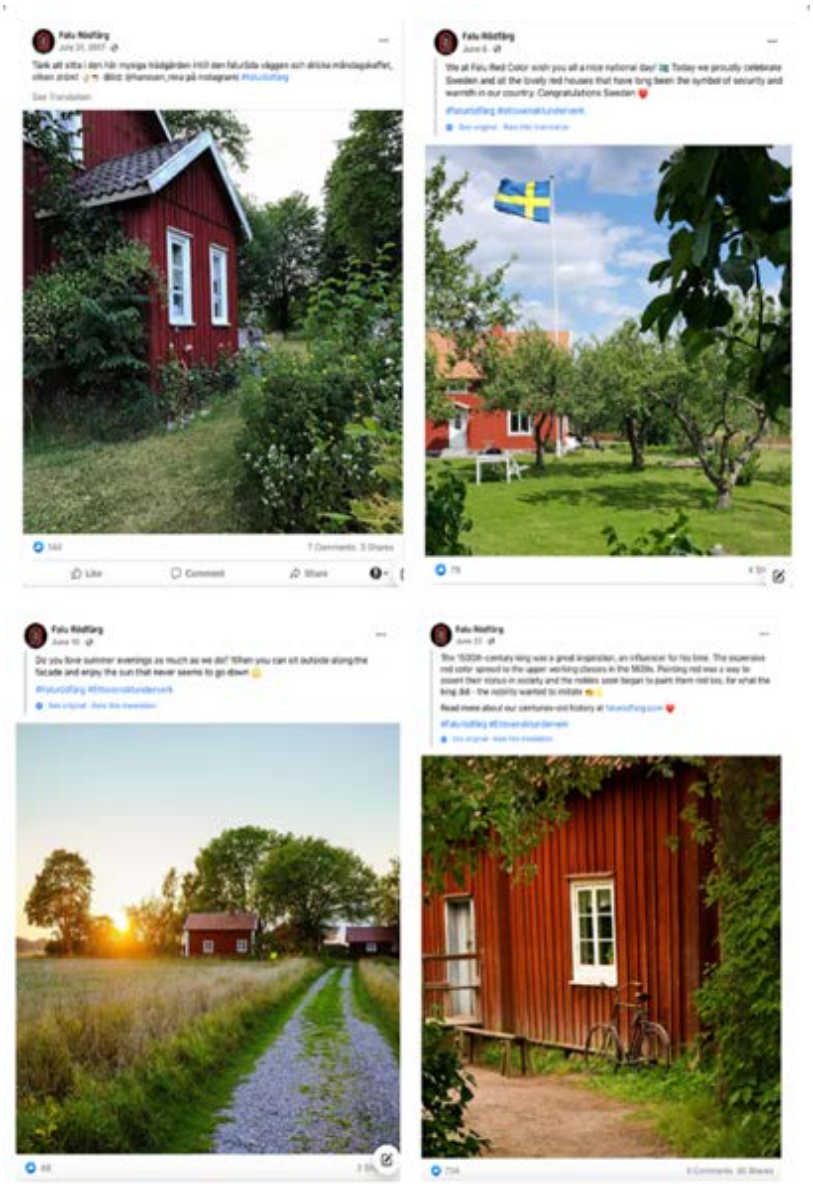
Studio Reflection: The Falu-red House Environment Online

After the residency at the Rodd farm, I decided to work more directly with the image of the Swedish national home. I developed a performance called *Gaps and Overlaps* (2017) where I used the same technique of overlapping frames, but this time using images of the Falu-red house environment. When practising the performance, I used images from my personal collection but soon realised that I needed a larger range. It was important to source images from my location in England and as red wooden houses were difficult to find in my local area, I used the Internet and social media. I searched for an image associated with the Swedish nation in a transnational realm and it was interesting to see the symbol of nation promoting

[31] Similarly, these states of mind can also be seen as entwined in the residency format Nazzari (2016) considers a form of open connectedness that becomes unified in artworks and stabilised by the institutional host.

stability being circulated online. The Falu-red house, the Swedish symbol of home, situated somewhere in the enormous, slowly evolving global Internet archive (Assman, 2018), known for its transience, had become uprooted. I collected suitable images, some which can be seen in Figs. 67-70 from a social media stream run by the company Falurödfärg that sells the special red paint used on the many wooden houses in Sweden. The stream consists of posts by members of the public mainly featuring photographs of their own Falu-red houses, with captions describing their love for them and the idyllic experiences of their surroundings. Interestingly (and mirroring my thoughts) the paint manufacturer, on the social media page, describes their products as "painting people's origins, family histories, childhood memories and future dreams".[32] The company clearly uses the red colour's association with ideas of nation to sell the paint. As I used the images in the performance, I reflected on their relationship to the nation: they painted a picture that I strongly felt I needed to change.

[32] This quote was originally in Swedish and translated by me. Here is the original: "Falu Rödfärg målar människors ursprung, släckthistorier, barndomsminnen och framtidsdrömmar".



Figures 67-70 From Falu Rödfärg's Social Media Page, Screen Shots by Sara Davies, 2022

Archives and Liminality

To understand how the medium of photography is linked with the formation of nations we need to look more closely at the structures that support their existence and promote their values. It has been argued that nations are validated by a system of national archives and museums that store the documents, objects, and visual material that evidence a certain narrative history that is used to instruct people how to live (Derrida, 1995; Merewether, 2006; Schwartz, 2015). Outlining this in more detail, Charles Merewether says that the system "constitute[s] a repository or ordered system of documents and records, both verbal and visual, that is the foundation from which history is written" (Merewether, 2006, p. 10) and public display spaces such as museums and galleries, that direct our knowledge and

understanding (Derrida, 1995).[33] The documents they hold and the stories they inspire, although promoted as *the truth*, actually convey a particular perspective (Schwartz, 2015, p. 20) that controls the production of knowledge (Derrida, 1995). Explaining this in more detail, Derrida maintains that "…there is no political power without control of the archive, if not memory" (Derrida, 1995, p. 4), and he goes on to identify how the archive-system is designed to support people in power by determining what we should remember and forget—how we should understand the world. The archive-system relies on power relationships staying the same, it favours boundedness and continuity— it orders, categorises and binds things to make them seem stable. The system advocates place-bound bordered belonging, that I, as a diasporic subject, both desire and question.

Arguably, the archive-system is a catalyst of memory that plays a central role in the transition of cultural knowledge in society (Carbone, 2020).[34] As discussed in Chapter One, nationality is formed through a peoples engagement with its narratives and material, and it is a "key site of translation, performance and consolidation" (Edwards, 2015, p. 326). It has been argued that the archive-system inspires day-to-day performances of nationhood that are essential to help to create and sustain its power structures (Anderson, 2006 [1983]) (Bhabha, 1990; Bhabha, 1994b). As identified by Bhabha, the nation is written or inscribed in a tenuous relationship between instruction and interpretation, between a national ideology and the multitude of different pronunciations or ways of expressing this ideology (1990, p. 297). He also identifies, however, that the idea of nation harbours a weakness that emerges between the values and beliefs put forth by the archive-system and a peoples' enactments of its narratives, so that change can take place. In a sense the archive-system helps stabilise the power relationships within nations, it binds things into categories and holds them in place in a set value system that favours society's dominant perspectives. Again noting what Derrida (1987) says about the liminality of bounded forms a system built on division and separation, however, is inherently unstable. The cultural memory that I articulate in my art practice mobilises an alternative perspective of narratives of home and landscape associated with the Swedish nation. My art practice destabilises the archive-system that supports the Swedish nation by dismantling the Falu-red house environment.

[33] In addition to national archives there are other types of archives, some subversive, that bring forth alternative perspectives, something that I will discuss further in Chapter Four.
[34] When making this claim Kathy Carbone (2020) talks specifically about archives but I suggest that museums and galleries also stimulate memory.

As previously discussed, my artistic process deploys photography to explore my desire for unity and belonging, but it also makes use of performative strategies to articulate my liminality. For me, photography has also become a way to place things, almost enter them into the archive-system, whereas the performative strategies I use unplace them again. For example, when preparing for the performance *Gaps and Overlaps* (2017), I printed the images of the Falu-red house environment found on the paint manufacturers' social media stream as transparencies and then layered them on a lightbox. It was as if I responded to the photographs' defined edges, the way they belonged within boundaries, by setting them in motion. Creating intricate and ambiguous montages (some documented in Figs. 71-74) it was as if my hands reacted to the stillness of the photographs by continuously moving them around. This time, my performative strategy transformed the Falu-red house environment into an ambiguous form that appears to be in flux, as if between one thing and another. I set the photographs in motion, I undermined the stability of the archive-system, I undermined the power of nationality. To further understand how, in my work, I use photography to link my work to ideas of belonging and performative strategies unravel the idea of nation and its supporting structure, we will look more closely at the two artistic mediums of photography and performance.

Photography

Historically, the medium of photography played a very particular role in the process of nation building and it is the prevailing closeness between them that I mobilise and undermine in my art practice. It has been argued that photography, nations and the archive-system are closely connected (Caraffa & Serena, 2015) and according to Eric Hobsbawn (cited in Caraffa & Serena, 2015, p7) they all started to emerge in the later nineteenth and early twentieth century. Photographs, together with other commemorative vessels such as paintings, prints and drawings: novels and poetry; travel guides and textbooks; stories, songs, and other monuments, distributed national narratives through time and across space, helping foster a sense of belonging (Schwartz, 2015, p. 24). According to Joan M Schwartz (2015, p. 25), however, photographs can additionally, with the help of the archive-system, be seen as the glue that holds nations together. Identifying how they do this, Elisabeth Edwards (2015) explains that they stimulate a sense of belonging through a combination of

the ability to evoke a deep sense of connection and their evidential qualities.[35] She describes how they "operate emotionally to create a sense of identification and coherence" at the same time as "their reality effect is endowed with the weight of certainty" (Edwards, 2015, p. 322). They bind people together with nation and validate national structures as *true*. When using photography, I am aware of its historic links with nation building and it is this connection between photography and nationality that encourages me to performatively unbind the photographic frame, in this way implicitly challenging the archive-system and the idea of nation.

Performativity

When making artworks I utilise a variety of performative strategies to express my liminal life experience. It has become a way for me to convey my continued journeying between cultures. Performance and performativity in an art context has long been used to question established world views (Bachman-Medick, 2016), and the idea that my performativity challenges the photographic frame by making it move felt increasingly important to my research. Part of a larger *performative turn* (Bachman-Medick, 2016) art performances and other performative art practices have affected the way we understand art. Moving away from the idea that artworks have set meanings anchored within them that could only be understood by experts, people invested in the *performative turn* believe that the meaning of artworks emerge in an exchange between the artist and viewer (Jones & Stephenson, 1999). More specifically, Jones and Stephenson explain that because the meaning of artworks are complex, partial, fluid processes that are "entangled in the intersubjective spaces of desire, projection, and identification" (Jones & Stephenson, 1999, p. 1), a performative approach to making has the potential to critique the long-standing "Euro-American formalist, loosely Kantian model positioning meaning as internal to (inherent in) the forms of the work of art as discerned by a trained yet objective interpretative eye" (Jones & Stephenson, 1999, p. 3). In essence, Jones and Stephenson suggest that meaning to be a process that is sensory and context dependant, a process where the movement of bodies in performance can challenge the idea of stability and fixed meanings. The performative strategies I use when making work transforms photography into a process that unfolds in time by destabilising meanings. More specifically, their movement and fluidity un-fixes the meaning of the narratives of

[35] I am aware that there is debate about whether digital photographic technologies change the photograph's evidential qualities. I agree with theorists like Tom Gunning (2008) and Elisabeth Edwards (2015) who point out that digital photographs are still indexical and efficiently validate past events. It is important to note, however, that today's nation states are weaker structures and that digital technologies and the Internet may have contributed to this (Edwards, 2015).

home and landscape my work intervenes in. In a sense, the performative strategies I use unbind the photographic frame, they unplace or displace the meaning attached to the categories of the archive-system and thereby undermine the idea of national belonging. I will now explore a couple of specific examples from my art practice where, in different ways, I performatively unfix meanings.

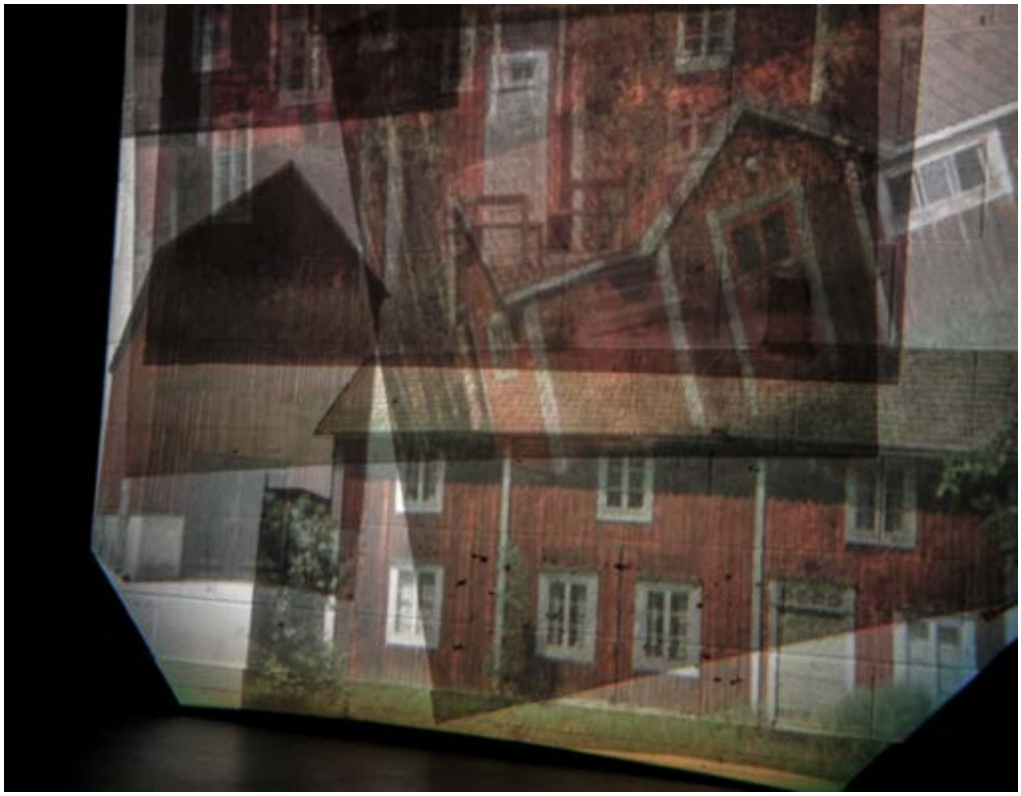
Figures 71-74 Sara Davies, From the *House Unravelling Series*, 2022

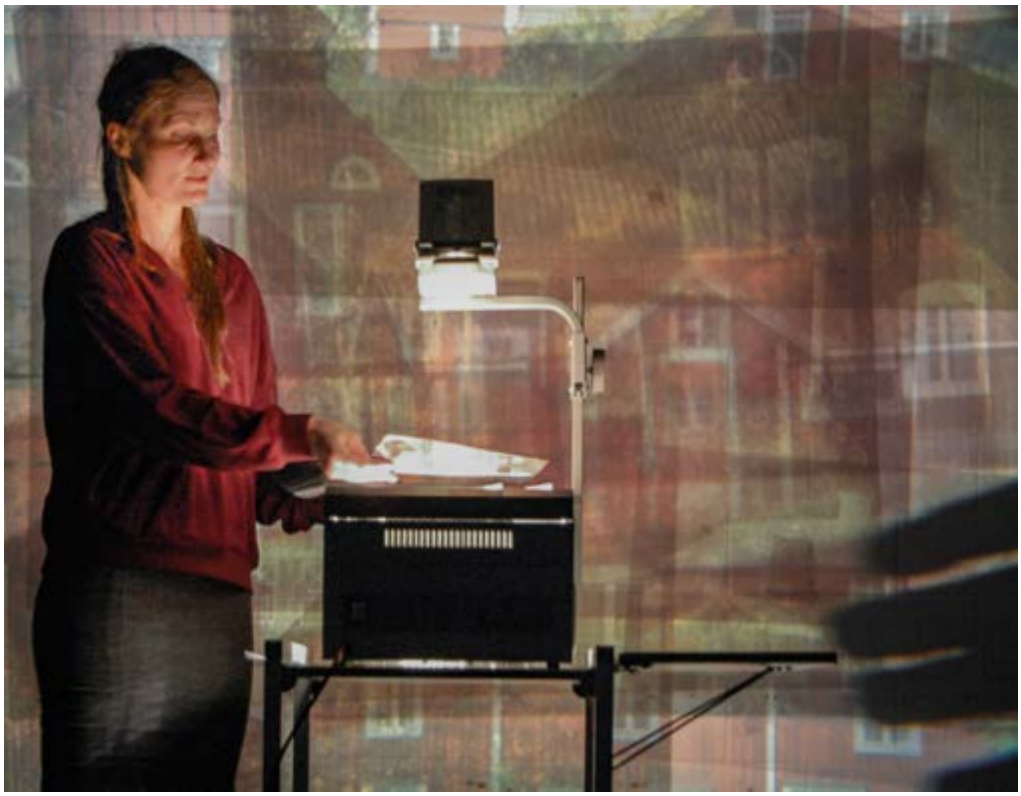
Studio Reflection: Extending Beyond the Frame

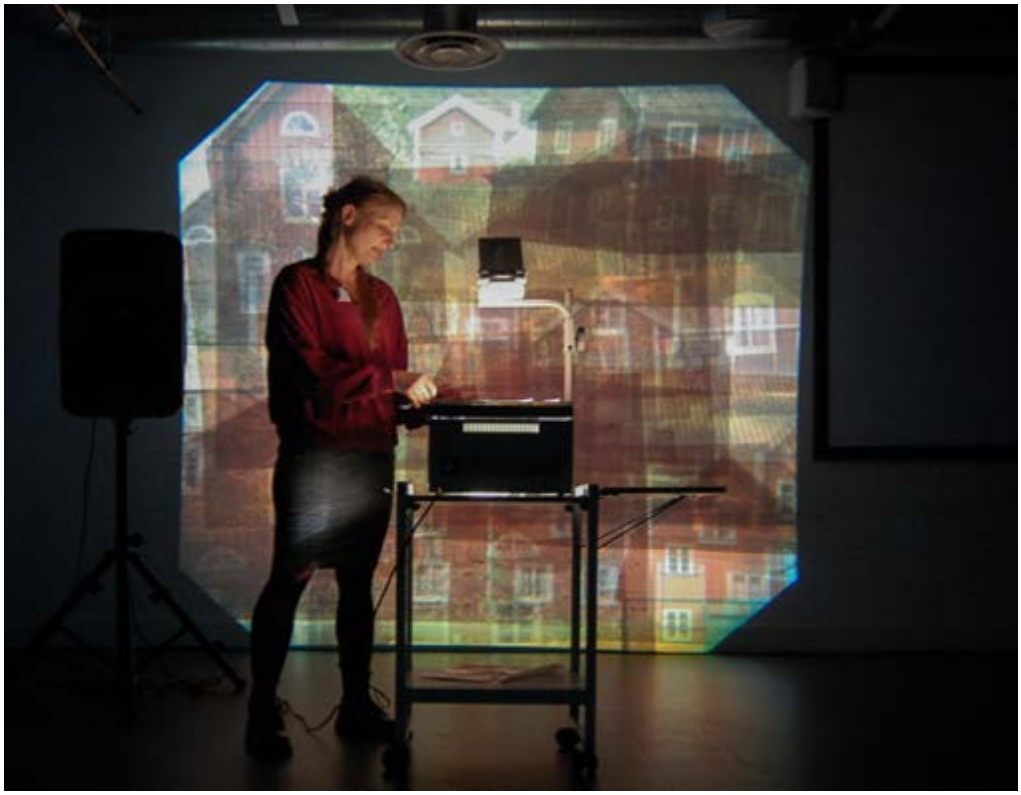
As I performed *Gaps and Overlaps* in front of an audience, I unfixed the meaning of the Swedish national home. I used an overhead projector to enlarge the changing montaged composition of Falu-red houses. As I moved the transparencies, the audience could see images coming in and out of focus and my hands moving across roofs, windows and doors. Using the same technique as at Rodd farm, I layered the images printed onto transparencies creating an asymmetric pattern. This time, in a similar way to *Birch Shattering 1*, *Pine Bleeding* and *Lilac Seeping*, I added images until the composition became increasingly complicated. Houses merged into confusing clusters of architectural elements with out-of-joint perspectives. By performing with photographs, I was able to extend beyond the traditional framework of photography that attempts to capture and fix. My performance turned photographs into an unfolding event. I moved them from the side of the overhead projector, holding them between finger and thumb—letting them sweep through the air, hover over the overhead projector, and settle in the composition. During the course of the performance the house meant many things, it became many, it became indistinct, it became lost. It mutated into forms with many complicated angles and overlapping windows. Fragments moved in and out of focus. They moved up and down the wall. The Falu-red house environment was unsettled, its meaning never pinned down.

One specific example from my art practice where I used a performative strategy to question the idea of national belonging is the performance *Gaps and Overlaps* (Figs. 75-77). During this performance I transformed a series of still photographs of the Falu-red house environment, a symbolic environment associated with the Swedish nation, into a process unfolding in time and space. My performative strategy added movement to the symbolic image and with every transformation, as highlighted by Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson (1999), unfixed its meaning. The process changed the symbols' appearance, it also changed its meaning with every movement. In a sense, my performative strategy enabled my own homing desire—my psychic elaborations of home (Rus, 2006)—to emerge. It resulted in artworks that convey ambiguous memories of little red houses, fractured summer days and the textures of childhood. Whether my thumb and index finger moved a transparency, or my foot changed position, the performative encounters made it part of my life narrative, it became a more personal account. Bringing photography into the realm of performance, makes it extend beyond its boundaries. In this instance, transforming photographs into performative processes changes the symbol of Falu-red house environment, the Swedish national home, into a process of becoming and at the same time blurs the boundaries of the

medium of photography. My practice subverts the medium of photography to undermine the archive framework and the validity of nationality.







Figures 75-77 Sara Davies, *Gaps and Overlaps*, documentation from 10-minute performance, 2017

Examples of Practice

In order to further understand how art performances and performative art practices can be used to challenge power structures and binary perspectives of the world I am changing approach slightly to study the practices of photographer Francesca Woodman (Tate, 2023b) and artist Ana Mendieta (Galerie Lelong & Co., n.d.), that, in a similar way to me, use strategies of performance and photography to make work. Woodman began photographing in her teens and took most of her over eight hundred photographs while still a student, before committing suicide at twenty-two (Tate, 2023b, p. unpag). In Woodman's photograph *From Space 2 Series* (1975-78), seen in Figs. 78, she uses self-staging to map her internal world in photographs, intertwining it with the external environment (Conley, 2008). The subject matter of Woodman's photograph depicts her body both inside and outside of a museum display case at the same time as the case is partially inside and outside the photographic frame. As I do, she explores thresholds and boundaries in a performative way, challenging established frameworks in society. Her performative approach to photography, and the way this performativity loosens the photographic frame results in it subverting the structuralist way of seeing the world as made up of distinct and neat categories that fit a stable system (Belsey, 2002). It has been claimed that she challenged the idea of how the camera fixes time

and space, something that had been understood as inherent to the medium (Tate, 2023b). The movement of her body registering as a blur, the unconventional way of framing—the subject matter askew and only partly within it, the use of deep shadows and bleached out highlights that render the subject matter incomplete—undermines the medium of photography. Her photographed body does not accept the usual position of bodies in photographs and in a similar way to my body in the triptych *Unbounded* (2017) discussed in Chapter One, it disappears. In this way, her work suggests also has the potential to challenge the archive-system that supports the nation state and fixes things in place.

Figure 78 Francesca Woodman, 1975-78. *From Space 2 Series, Providence, Rhode Island,* Gelatin Silver Print, 13.02 x 13.02, 1975-78

In a similar way to Woodman and I, Mendieta also uses performances and performativity to challenge binary thinking and societal frames, by exploring in between spaces. Migrating from Cuba to America when she was twelve, her work became a way for her to express her displacement and complicated relationship with belonging (Galerie Lelong & Co., n.d.). In the performance *Untitled: Silueta Series* (1976) documented in the photograph seen in Fig. 79, she leaves traces of her body's inscription in the landscape (Galerie Lelong & Co., n.d.). In this performance, specifically, she imprints her body on the shoreline, filling the hollow with

red pigments and letting it slowly disintegrate in the waves. Like mine, her work dwells on a sense of *home*, but she returns to an environment that reminds her of Cuba and engages with Mesoamerican traditions and myths (Tate, 2023c, p. unpag). In a similar way to my work, Mendieta's also speaks of uncertainty. Differently to me, rather than thinking of herself as finding home in the process of making art, Mendieta expresses how she is able to find a universal home in mother earth (Tate, 2023c, p. unpag). Her performances, captured in photographs, are encounters between the self and the surrounding environment where the boundaries between are blurred. I argue that in a similar way to my work the sustained effects of migration and the condition of diaspora, although emerging from different material conditions, result in an expression of oneness at the same time as they are about loss. In a similar way to Woodman and I, Mendieta's work uses performative strategies to challenge the photographic medium's claim to fixity and authenticity: our bodies, engaging with temporality and movement, challenge the power of the archive-system that holds things in place.

Figure 79 Ana Mendieta, *Untitled: Silueta Series,* 1976

Studio Reflection: Framing and Loosening the Frame

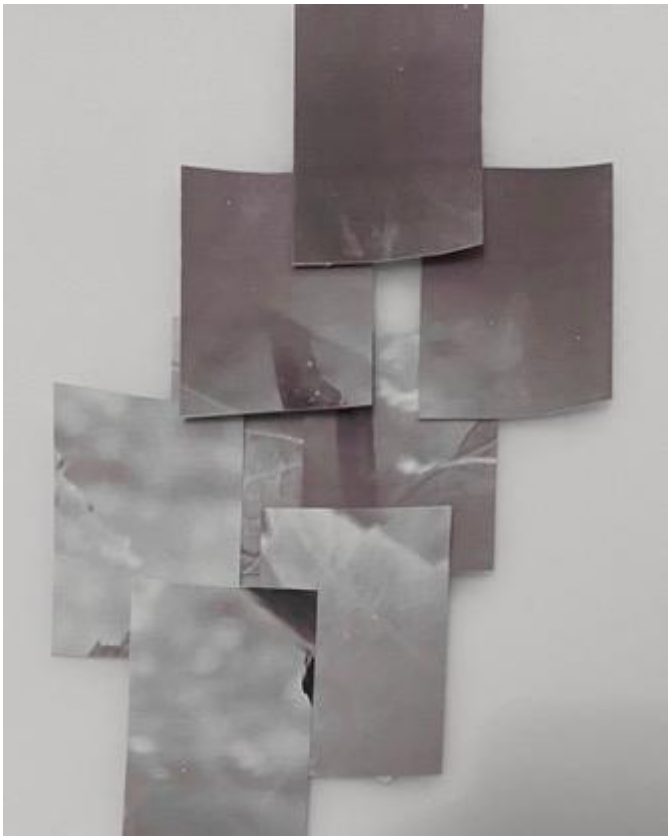
I continued to explore the photographic frame in the work *Birch Shattering* 2, a process documented in Figs. 78-81, however this time my performative strategy unfolded in my studio. I turned the photographs into a performative process by cutting each one into nine parts and spreading them across the wall. I overlapped the clusters in different ways creating a larger composition that evolved over time. The composition grew and was soon a large patchwork of small photographs in varying sizes. I hung the photographs so that they protruded from the wall, also bending them outwards so that they looked likely to fall off at any moment. I transformed the patchwork from an oval shape to something that looked like an explosion and finally settled on a tree-like shape. The process involved a tension between the activity of framing and unframing; the small photographs had defined boundaries but the overall work, although clearly a form, had undefined outer edges. It was as if I was binding subject matters using my camera then unbinding them again in performative gestures, I was framing and loosening the frame. Whilst working, I reflected on how the medium of photography seemed to dominate. Although my performative methods destabilised them, the way I was thinking about the medium as capturing and holding in place seemed to persist.

Figures 80-83 Sara Davies, Documentation from the process of making *Birch Shattering 2*, 2021

To some extent my art practice can be seen as an example of Papastergiadis' (2012, p. 137) idea that diasporic art practices emerge from a tension between a desire for boundedness with the experience of mobility. As mentioned earlier, my artistic process constructs a tension between the activity of photographing, that I associate with national belonging, and performativity, articulating the movability intrinsic to my transnational diasporic experience. For example, when making the work *Birch Shattering* 2 (Figs. 82-87), my performative strategy loosened the photographic frame through the use of montage. The process of cutting up photographs, placing them in different constellations, rather than representing specific places, created new composite places with no clear and single reference point in the surrounding environment. The performative elements in my artistic process, as well as making the photographs move, cut their tie to the past, I severed my photograph's

index.[36] By loosening the photographic frame through performative strategies, I undermined the photographs truth value, I destabilised the power of the archive-system and, in effect, nation. In some ways this tension between a desire for boundedness and the experience of mobility, between belonging and becoming, that in my practice plays out in an entanglement of photography and performance, is connected with diasporic touch—the process that frames my open connectedness. Performance enables a form of connectivity; a form of open connectedness and photography frames this activity and allows my loss to settle outside of myself in an external form.

[36] From the very early literature on the nature of photography it has been highlighted how the camera was able to objectively and truthfully represent things in the surrounding environment. It has been argued that "our confidence in the equivalence between photography and *truth* has also made it a privileged instrument in representations of the idea of nation" (Caraffa & Serena, 2015, pp. 8-9), and it is this truth telling claim that my art practice, amongst other things, subverts.



Figures 84-89 Sara Davies, Documentation from the process of making *Birch Shattering 2* (details), 2021

Studio Reflection: Rising to the Surface

It took a little while for the piece *Birch Shattering* 2 to take shape. As well as the composition slowly changing shape, it also fluctuated between porous and dense. Sometimes I left larger gaps between the images and sometimes I overlapped them. As I moved the images to different locations, my focus shifted from overall subject matter to details. I noticed a light spot on the dark background, the hazy greyness across the top corner and the fine lines, some sharp and others out of focus. Although I recognised some shapes as parts of catkins, bits of leaves or fragments of branches, the slowly transforming montage appeared as a patchwork of patterns, colours and shapes. Like my previous work it was not harmonious but uneven, seeming to articulate my uncertainty of self. On reflection, it was as if I was moving away from the idea of trying to create something with perspectival depth, instead, focusing on the surface. Engaging in the process of cutting and rearranging the photographs into composite forms somehow transformed the illusion of depth—so effectively created by the photographic medium—into something flat and textured (Figs. 88-91), even more so than the close-up photographs. It felt as if, by engaging in this montaging process, I was freeing myself from the past, letting go of the constraints of place bound belonging. As a diasporic subject living between frameworks I was also, perhaps, freeing myself from the worst effects of loss.

Figures 90-93 Sara Davies, Documentation of making *Birch Shattering 2*, (details), 2021

The performative element of practice challenged the photographic frame and also the idea of national belonging by making them move in different ways. In the works that followed *Sidney Nolan's Frames* this performativity took the form of montaging, an activity that, as well as articulating my diasporic self uncertainty and bringing forth my loss, also seemed to sever the photograph's indexical link with the past. Whilst developing the work *Birch Shattering 2* I realised that it transformed the illusion of depth that the photographs so efficiently create, into a composition that was all about surface. When studying the field of post-colonial photography and the way some practices of non-western photographers deal with perspectival depth, I began to see how practices emphasising a photograph's surface

said something about traditional ways of belonging.[37] The anthropologist and art historian Christopher Pinney (2003) highlighted how photography in non-western settings often adopted an approach that focused on the surface. This way of using photography, Pinney suggests, challenges the way colonial subjects were *held in place* by the colonial archive. Drawing on Bhabha's (1994a) ideas that identify the creative agency of colonial subjects, and explaining this in more detail, Pinney highlights how these non-western photographic practices "creatively deform the geometric spatialisations" (Pinney, 2003, p. 202) created and used by colonial powers to exert their power. These practices subverted photographic technology, he explains, by rendering the surface of the photograph visible, and such rendering helped question the way people and objects were placed deep within a system that portrayed their identity as stable and fixed and made them other (Pinney, 2003, p. 203). Although emerging in a western context, my practice—similar to the post-colonial practices referred to by Pinney—also emphasises surface to challenge the system that holds people in place. I would argue that this approach is relevant in the context of national belonging; it can be a way to question the stereotypical identity types that Butler (1988) claims we negotiate and set our subjectivity free.

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The aim of this chapter has been to examine how artworks created by diasporic touch intervene in our societal framework, and how these artworks have the potential to change our established ideas of nation and national belonging. This chapter has examined how national frameworks, although more fragile due to processes of globalisation (Edwards, 2015), to some extent still affect how we perceive and understand the world. The boundaries of national belonging are questioned and contested within the context of globalisation, but they still govern our day to day lives. To articulate my migrant life and my diasporic experience, my artistic practice engages with the framework of nation in a continuous process of unframing and reframing. Through a variety of performative strategies, I dismantle stereotypical narratives associated with the idea of the Swedish nation at the same time as I re-frame these processes using photography. In the first part of the chapter, I

[37] I am aware that, although sharing the experience of living between cultural frameworks, the material conditions of my experience are very different from post-colonial subjects. Because of this some of the post-colonial theory I've referred to can help me understand my art practice and life, some elements of this scholarship would not be suitable to use. Writing this thesis has therefore been an exercise in working out which aspects of this theoretical field could be thought about in relation to the meeting of cultures initiated by more general migration.

looked at how my exploration of frames and frameworks began while developing the piece of work *Sidney Nolan's Frames* (2017) during a residency, and how this experience with a set of very particular frames triggered a wider investigation into the characteristics of frames and frameworks. I examined how physical frames and frameworks can, on the one hand, stabilise meaning which is necessary for communication and shared experience (Bateson, 2000 [1972]; Reese, 2003 [2001]) yet on the other, are inherently unstable entities that bind contexts together (Derrida, 1987). The chapter then accounted for how my diasporic experience resulted in a contradictory feeling towards frames and frameworks: how I simultaneously desire to belong or *be placed*, and try to free myself from them.

The exploration into frames and frameworks subsequently led to a deeper examination of the methods I use when making work, and their relationship to certain approaches and methodologies. It resulted in an understanding of why a combination of photography and performative strategies very appropriately and efficiently supported the process of diasporic touch. The second part of the chapter then explored the historic links between the medium of photography and the formation of nation; the critical strategy I then discussed and analysed was how unframing photographs through performative strategies undid the truth claim of photography that such attempts to homogenise nationality rely on. This analysis continued by demonstrating how migrant and diasporic art practices emerge in the intersection between a desire for bondedness and the experience of mobility (Papastergiadis, 2012), where the former arose from a desire for belonging and the need to understand self as part of a system, and the latter was a consequence of the sustained effects of migration and a transnational perspective. As my research progressed, I realised that employing this tension between photography and performance (where the use of photography, as a medium that efficiently places my loss in the external environment, and the liminal practice of performance that both undo fixed meanings and allows my loss to discharge into the work) very effectively supported the mourning process of diasporic touch.

By the end of the chapter, through examining the works *Gaps and Overlaps* and *Birch Shattering 2* in more detail, I understood how diasporic touch challenged power, by weaving together boundedness and mobility (Papastergiadis, 2005, p. 40). I recognised how, by using photography and performance, it was a model to question and undermine the archive-system that helped form and hold together flawed forms of nationality. I used photography to place things within the system, and each performative move explored that system's liminality. The performative element of my practice undermined the archive-system and, in

effect, the idea of a stable sense of national identity: by making the photographs move and loosening their frame it was possible to make images appear as if they were unstable. I recognised how the movement of my body questioned the photographs' presumed stability, creating montages that slowly evolved. I realised that my performative process of montaging severed the photographs' tie to the past, undermining their truth value (Edwards, 2015). Furthermore, and most importantly, I understood that it shifted the focus onto the surface of the photographs, reducing their ability to hold people and things in place (Pinney, 2003). I explored how the process of diasporic touch, that frames and makes things move, undermines the ideas of fixed meanings, turning the statement of nation into a question. It is as if my artworks attempt to set belonging free: I let it rise to the surface, trickle, seep and bleed out of frame.

CHAPTER FOUR
A Socially Engaged Practice

In previous chapters, I accounted for how my art practice articulates the complexities and contradictions of diasporic experience. I identified what diasporic touch is and what it can do in the wider social experience: that it has a reparative effect on the self uncertainty caused by migration because it materialises my loss, at the same time as the process results in artworks that reveal the fragility of the archive-system (Derrida, 1995) and undermine the idea of a fixed form of nation. I discovered how the methods I used in my art practice, a combination of photography and performance, very efficiently supported the mourning process of diasporic touch. We then went on to explore how the framing function inherent in the medium of photography binds, unifies and places the subject matter within the archive-system, whilst performativity reveals the system's fragility. In this chapter I will investigate the process of diasporic touch through an alternative model that ran concurrently to my individual practice. I will explore how I initiated and facilitated a collaborative project called the Anglo-Swedish Archive (2015), that allowed an exploration of diasporic touch in a collective setting. Through this project I realised that diasporic touch had the potential to be experienced by others and that the process might be transferable.

Recognising similarities between my own and my Anglo-Swedish friends' objects that remined us of home in Sweden, I created a socially engaged practice that mapped how a group of Swedish first-generation migrants in Manchester remembered Sweden together. The project created a repository that showed a collective image of *home in Sweden*: it helped us to feel a sense of community.[38] Choosing to collaborate with other first generation migrant female Swedish artists, resident in the UK for a long time, was intuitive. Yet, choosing to work with this group was vital for the project. It has been argued that, for migrants, the family replaces the nation as the frame of memory and self understanding. According to Anne Marie Fortier (2000, p. 166) migrants often, in a contradictory way, associate family with both painful separation and a sense of stability. In these circumstances women, more often than not, become "the historians, the guardians of memory, selecting

[38] The choice of collaborators is a representation of my current social connections. There were five people taking part in the project, although two participants contributed images in the first part of the project but did not want to take part in the meetings or reflect on the project in writing. As they did not experience all parts of the project, in this study I am focusing on the contributions of myself, Helena Lee and Ingrid Karlsson.

and preserving the family archive" (Holland, 1991, p. 9). I recognised this role from my own experience, being a daughter who migrated and a mother who, although hampered by the peculiarities and blind spots of translation, holds together our family archive and tries to convey the stories of my journey to our children. When choosing who to collaborate with, it was important that they also were guardians of family memory and that they took on the role of transmitting cultural knowledge.

Studio Reflection: The Book of Red Houses

I was drawn to a book in a local Swedish friend's house. The book featured photographs of the Falu-red house. It was in English, published by the paint manufacturer Falurödfärg, containing one hundred and thirty nine photographs by Olle Norling (Edenheim, et al., 2005), of traditional Falu-red houses in mainly rural settings (see Figs. 92 and 93). The book could easily have been one of my treasured objects. I reflected on how little knowledge there was of how Swedish migrants remember home and culture. There were no books, no newspaper articles, no exhibitions—only hunches and assumptions. Finding the book started a quest to find out if other Swedish migrants kept similar items to remind them of home. Were there any similarities between our psychic elaborations of home (Rus, 2006)? Inspired by the find, I explored different ways of discovering which items Swedish migrants use to remember home. As I formulated the Anglo-Swedish Archive project, I was looking for common cultural traits and as it unfolded, I realised that I was seeking affirmation.

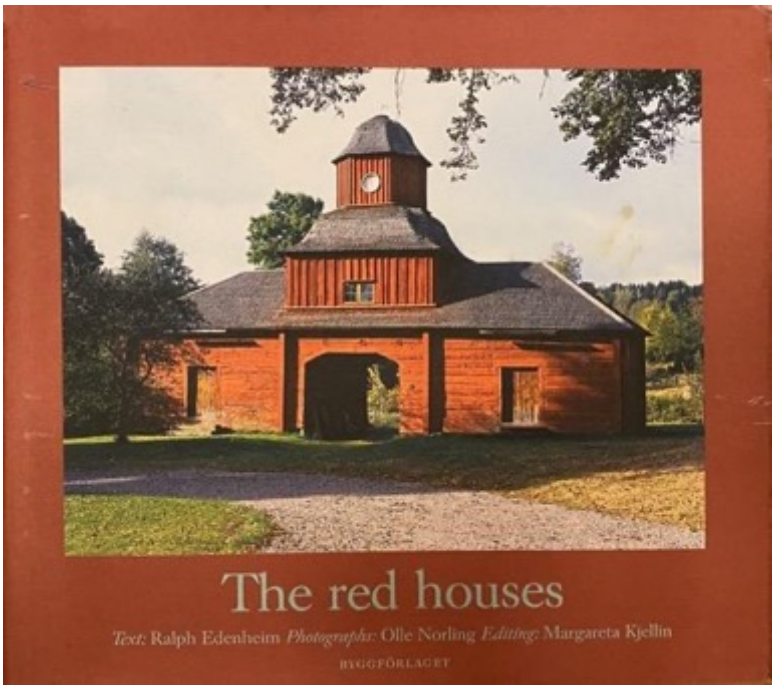


Figure 94 Ralph Edenheim, Olle Norling & Margareta Kjellin, *The Red Houses*, front cover, 2005

Figure 95 Ralph Edenheim, Olle Norling & Margareta Kjellin, *The Red Houses*, pages 96-97, 2005

The collaborative project emerged out of a desire to explore how some of the myths and stories of home that I carried within, corresponded with those of other migrants. It arose out of a longing to compare my homing desire with that of others. As part of my practice, I collected images of the Swedish national home, accumulating books, leaflets and films that depicted elements of stereotypical narratives of home and landscapes associated with Sweden. Yet, I had also noted how certain things in my surrounding environment such as trees, flowers, and old wood—elements from the Swedish national narrative—evoked memories of my former life. In essence, I was eager to know whether other Swedish migrants associated home with the Falu-red house environment, or were there other symbols of Sweden that became the focus of their childhood memories? Did their nostalgia, their retreat from the painful experience of displacement (Boym, 2007) and unknown melancholic losses (Eng, 2000), take different forms? As the project unfolded the focus shifted from what was entered into the archive, to documenting how we experienced the process of gathering material. The project provided a way for me to situate the process of diasporic touch in a wider context and establish whether its reparative effects were experienced by others.

A Subversive Archive of Diasporic Memory

The collaborative project, the Anglo-Swedish Archive, used an Internet platform to bring together material associated with home, childhood and Sweden. We created a digital archive partly so that we could see it evolving when we were apart and in our homes, and partly so

that it was easy for others to see. We shared images via social media – making them public then gathering them into an online repository so they could be seen together. Exploring digital archiving, Mambrol (2018) identifies how this form of repository is open and accessible. Digital archives provide a way for people to share their own life stories with others in a quick and easy way. More importantly and the reason why we decided to mobilise an online space to convey our diasporic memories, Mambrol highlights how the Internet creates a space away from, and beyond, nation and national archives and museums, for alternative life stories to be heard. By constructing the Anglo-Swedish Archive we aimed to establish how Swedish migrants re-imagine their former homes whilst in diaspora, to share our stories and myths of home and explore their similarities. Our archive formed a repository of memories – a site that held together our diasporic accounts of home. It collected our homing desires in a shared space, it formed an Anglo-Swedish diasporic imaginary (Axel, 2002; Quayson, 2013; Bader, et al., 2019). The project focused on things we collected, the experience of collecting, and how it affected our creative work. Using our phones, we photographed reminders of *home*, in our houses, in the surrounding outdoor environment and in reproductions (this was quite an ambiguous term but the one we used during the project). We uploaded them via social media to the archive helping us share perspectives and allowing people to add their input. We regularly met as a group to discuss our choices, our experiences and where we thought the project should head next. To record our thoughts and feelings during the process, we all contributed to a blog.

By naming our project the Anglo-Swedish Archive, it was deliberately subversive in characteristics using the word *archive* to conjure up ideas of the archive-system that is said to preserve national identity and maintain social stability (Derrida, 1995; Brown & Davis-Brown, 1998) and using it in a diasporic context.[39] In view of this, it is important to remember that our archive is not unique in its subversive nature. There are other kinds of repositories from which narratives are constructed and perspectives are formed. As discussed in Chapter Three, some archives are associated with state power and authority, containing documents, objects, photographs, and other material that help support dominant cultural narratives and nation (Derrida, 1995). Many others, however, are created by—for example—community groups that hold opposing views or families that try to create a sense

[39] When we began the collaboration the working title of the project was Anglo-Nordic Archive. We were, at this stage, thinking that some of the collaborators may be from other Nordic countries. However, the title was soon changed to Anglo-Swedish Archive, to better represent the life experiences of the participants. It is important to note that we are not of dual heritage but Swedish migrants living in England with Anglo-Swedish life experiences.

of continuity on a smaller scale. Similarly, feminist archives and artists' archives often serve as a space to question power and address gaps in dominant cultural narratives as do those created by and associated with minority cultures (Manoff, 2004, p. 15). We created the Anglo-Swedish Archive to explore a tension between our bi-cultural experience and the idea of homogenous identities, a disruptive archive that tugged at the authority of a fixed sense of nationality. To accomplish this, rather than giving our archive a rigid structure, we created an open and emerging form that challenged the idea of stability and certainty.

This open and emerging form encouraged our embodied cultural knowledge to surface, it enabled our selection process to be influenced by our diasporic palette of emotions, something that subsequently resulted in its subversive characteristics. To understand this further we need to more closely study the body's role in the creation and disruption of a sense of nation. As discussed in Chapter Three, the formation of nation relies on people's day to day performative engagement with the archive-system and national narratives it holds and exhibits (Anderson, 2006 [1983]; Bhabha, 1990), a structure including both storerooms of documents and display spaces promoting narratives formed by archival material (Derrida, 1995); it is a model that promotes stability and continuity but is inherently fragile, undermined by the emergence of people's embodied difference (Bhabha, 1990). Explaining the relationship between the archive-system and our bodies in more detail, Diana Taylor (2003) uses the concepts of *the archive* and *the repertoire* to analyse the relationship between archival and embodied transmission of cultural knowledge. She identifies how archival remembering separates the knower from knowledge, and memory resides in "documents, maps, literary texts, letters, archaeological remains, photographs, films and other items that are resistant to change" (Taylor, 2003, p. 19), and can get re-interpreted through time. Whereas embodied memory is intimately linked with the person knowing and transmitting it through performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance and singing, Taylor stresses (2003, p. 21) that today these forms of remembering are intimately interwoven when cultural knowledge is transmitted and, in regards to the formation of nation, it is this entwinement that harbours the potential for cultures to reform.[40]

[40] Taylor also proposes that our predominantly western way of using archives to write history in order to dominate has led to a tendency "to banish the repertoire to the past" (Taylor, 2003, p. 21). The emphasis on writing as providing the best and most accurate method of conveying past events across time and place, and the way it was subsequently used to provide evidence, rendered other methods of transmitting cultural knowledge as insufficient or unimportant.

In this way, our bodies, to a greater or lesser extent, hold our difference (Bhabha, 1990), and through the blended mode of transmitting cultural knowledge that Taylor identifies, bodies can shift and change society's narratives. When inscribed and made visible, our embodied cultural knowledge has the potential to disrupt narratives associated with nationality, undermine its authority and ultimately change power relationships. Recognising this potential and mobilising it, the collaborative project gathered and shared cultural knowledge by using two modes of remembering, while our embodied memories and cultural knowledge subverted archival material and national narratives. The Anglo-Swedish Archive project captured photographic documents for an online archive, and in this way both engaged with archival and embodied memory (Taylor, 2003). Our bodies or, more specifically, our diasporic palette of emotions, influenced our choices, contributing to its subversive characteristics; they contributed to unearthing a diasporic perspective of the Swedish nation. We engaged with our memories of childhood, formed by past encounters with national symbols and histories of Sweden, forming a diasporic conversation about home that was open, fluid and questioned the authority of national belonging.

In this way, our archive of diasporic memory can be understood not as an archive promoting stability, continuity, and national belonging, but as a structure that encourages connections and the formation of communities. The project adopted a living archive model which Amalia Sabiescu identifies as involving "practices and environments that connect the organisation, curation and transmission of memory with present-bound creative, performative, and participatory processes" (Sabiescu, 2020, p. 497). The Anglo-Swedish Archive project allowed us to share our diasporic perspectives of cultural traditions associated with Sweden; it let us deeply connect with objects and materials as well as form links between people. Rather than presenting facts that must be believed, like national narratives, Sabiescu suggests living archives are about creating dialogue between people and conversations within a community. They are about using memory to draw out differences, challenging established ideas about history, identity and belonging. Our collaboration was about bringing together our individual stories, in order to identify their collective characteristics. It was also about negotiation, drawing comparisons, encouraging interaction and allowing differences to surface. The collaborative project mobilised shared cultural knowledge and drew out our differences. We captured them in photographs and made them available to others.

Located in the transnational realm of the Internet, our living archive encouraged connectivity and formed a bridge-like threshold between nations and histories where our bi-cultural voices could be heard. However, making use of the borderless, accessible, online environment also had downsides. It may be a perfect site for making visible our diasporic experience, yet, as the Anglo-Swedish Archive slowly evolved, it proved to be temporary. Early in the project, our items were distributed via social media and brought together on a tagboard, using the hashtag #*theanglonordicarchive*. Unfortunately, our collection was erased as this technology only temporarily made them visible on the world wide web. Later we again used social media to share them, this time making sure that they ended up on a website. This repository, however, was also erased when the host website was rebuilt.[41] This showed us how ephemeral digital archiving is, how it is more of a gesture than a storeroom. It also, though, led to us repeatedly finding and losing home in an uncannily appropriate way. In retrospect, these unfortunate events have made me realise how the placement of the Anglo-Swedish Archive on the world wide web mirrored the uncertainty that migrants living with the condition of diaspora often feel in relation to their belonging.

Before we proceed to explore further details of the archive, it is important to summarise what we have covered in the first part of this chapter and the introductory account of how the collaborative project Anglo-Swedish Archive came together and how it harboured the potential to undermine the authority of nation identity. We have described how the project created a shared space that brought together our homing desires, and how it created a digital platform that helped us share our diasporic imaginary (Axel, 2002; Quayson, 2013; Bader, et al., 2019). We then went on to examine how sharing embodied cultural knowledge in dialogue with others in an online transnational space can alter peoples' perspectives and change power relationships. In the rest of the chapter, I will now examine how the project developed: I will discuss my own experience of the project but also analyse the experiences of the collaborators Ingrid Karlsson and Helena Lee. The remainder of the chapter is divided into three sections that follow the development of the collaborative project, as each section deals with a stage of the process. Firstly, we each photographed seven items from our homes that reminded us of Sweden; secondly, we photographed objects and sites in our local area that we associated with a sense of belonging; and then thirdly gathered the same number of

[41] As the project unfolded, we struggled with the technical aspects of our method. A tagboard is a temporary holding place for hashtags so during the project we saw our hashtag #theanglonordicarchive being collated and disappearing. Because of this, I uploaded all the images in the exact order they appeared online, onto a website. As this website was accidentally erased, I am now in the process of rebuilding it.

reproductions that evoked memories of home. One final note that is important to emphasise is that throughout the next stage of the discussion I will also describe how some of the findings from the project indicate that the process of diasporic touch may be transferable.

Anglo-Swedish Archive: Part One

Studio Reflection: Items That Touch

We selected seven things in our houses that reminded us of home, childhood and Sweden, then uploaded them via social media to a tagboard. I realised that many of my choices for the Anglo-Swedish Archive were keepsakes. There were (Figs. 94-100): a pair of red children's shoes from my childhood – gifted by my mother; a bodice from a traditional Swedish costume – made by and gifted by my maternal grandmother; a pair of homemade white pillowcases once belonging to my paternal grandmother; a selection of traditional Swedish winter gloves or *lovikavantar* and knitted baby socks gifted by family members; a pair of traditional Swedish clogs with hand painted *kurbits* pattern – a recent birthday present; and a selection of Dalecarlian horses – some passed onto me by my mother. Most of these items evoked childhood memories, they allowed for that non-linear, alternative experience of time that Benjamin (2015 [1940], p. 104) talks about, an experience that encouraged an immersion in practice. The red shoes reminded me of my mother in the 1970s with long dark hair and flared denim trousers; the bodice made me think of holding my grandmother's hand during midsummer celebrations; the pillowcases evoked memories of childhood waking up in an old fashioned extendable child's bed in my grandparent's bedroom; the winter gloves reminded me of playing in the snow; and the clogs made me remember the sound of my grandfather's footsteps. My choices of objects were deeply personal, they were about family connections, something that Quayson (2013) discusses as an important element of the diasporic imaginary. Yet, as expected, the items were also elements of the Swedish national narrative—I wondered if my collaborator's objects would be similarly both personal and linked to nationality.





Figures 96-102 Sara Davies, Helena Lee & Ingrid Karlsson, *Anglo-Swedish Archive Part 1: Finding Home in our Houses (Sara's Selection)*, 2015

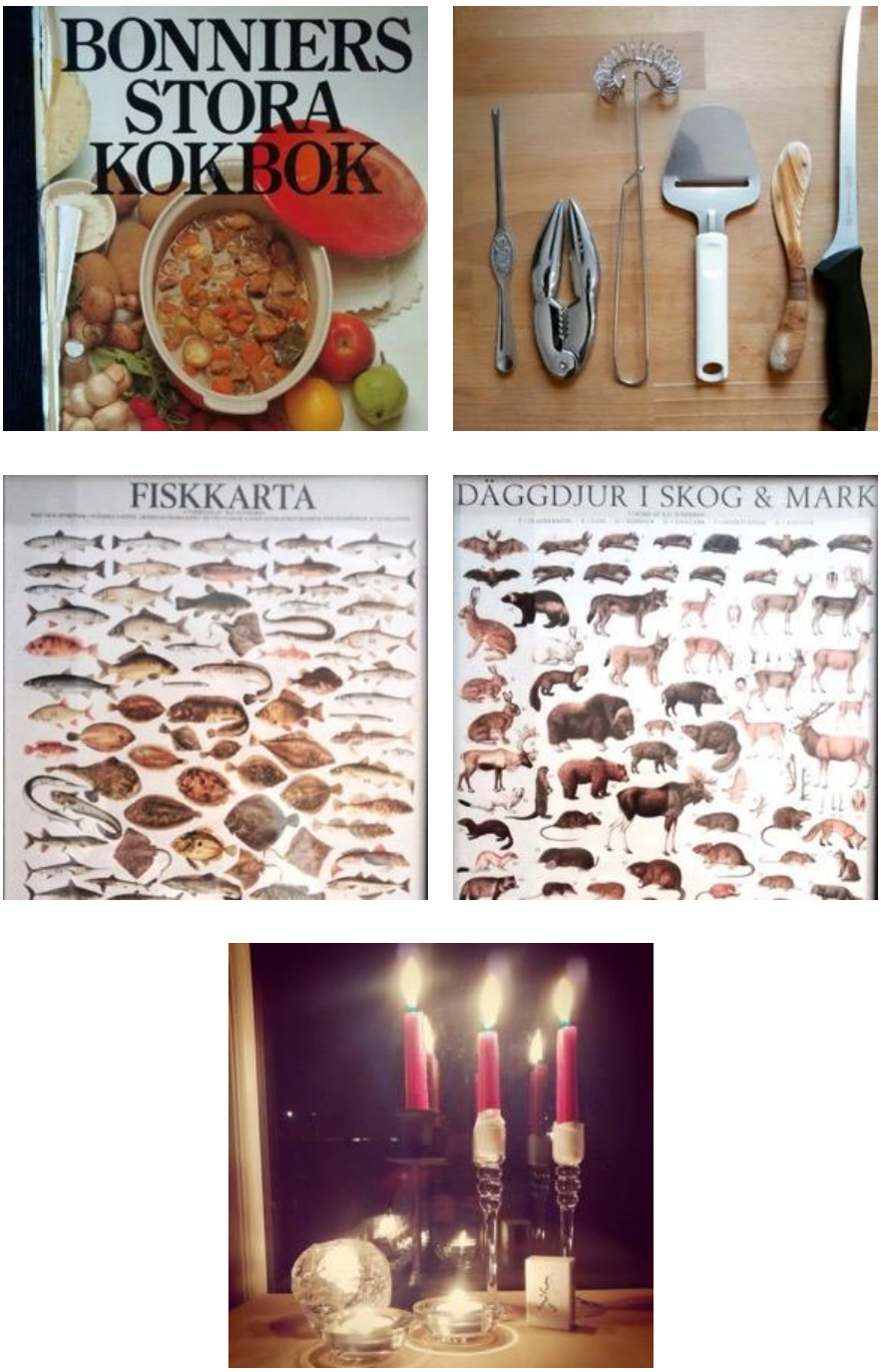
Coming Together and Making Connections

My desire to discover whether my memories of home resonated with other Swedish migrants in Manchester indicates that collective memory is still relevant for migrants and diasporics. Although not fully invested in the idea of national belonging, there was still a desire to share common traits. Collective memory is said to bring a sense of stability to families and friendship groups, as well as forming a sense of national continuity (Halbwachs, 2011 [1950]). One of the first people to explore notions of collective remembrance was Maurice Halbwachs who identified that memory was an evolving process where "the mind reconstructs its memories under the pressures of society" (Halbwachs, 2011 [1950], p. 51). In other worlds, our individual memories were moulded in collective settings as we conform to social groups. For example, family memory connects us with a past that we have no experience of, whilst larger frameworks of kinship like shared religious and national memories also influence us and contribute to a sense of continuity and belonging (Halbwachs, 2011 [1950]).[42] However, in a world characterised by mobility and migration (as discussed in Chapter One) it has been proposed that memories are leakier, they break out of the containers of the nation state (Assman, 2018, p. 67) taking on new composite forms (Silverman, 2015 [2013]). As we migrate and travel, virtually and physically, memories are shaped by our movement, they draw together experiences from multiple cultural frameworks into complex memory forms often emerging in hybrid media form. Reflecting a global networked environment, Eric Ketelaar (2005) argues how today's mediated memory texts, rather than forming isolated communities, create commonality in networks that enable people to see links between groups and allow them to better understand their shared memories contexts. The Anglo-Swedish Archive project demonstrated that even though we did not fully invest in the idea of nation, it was still important for us to construct a community feeling through shared experience. By creating a networked composite memory form similar to the ones Ketelaar describes, however, our emphasis was on dialogue. Connecting with people beyond our immediate circle led to us seeing our similarities in context.

When collecting material for the first part of the project we realised that it was important that it linked to our personal lives at the same time as it was associated with ideas of nation. In retrospect I realised that my entries: the red colour of the shoes, the bodice from the

[42] Interwoven in our project was the collective memory structures of family – the recollections that bind our families together across national borders, and what could be seen as a loosely tied together kinship framework involving Swedish migrants in the UK.

traditional Swedish costume, the lace adorned pillowcases, the traditional winter gloves, the clogs and the Dalecarlian horses, could all be associated with narratives of home identified with the Swedish nation. One collaborator, the artist Helena Lee (2015), described first making a short list with some items being more souvenir-like, others more personal and some entries trying to capture "something more obscure and quintessentially Nordic – light falling on the corner of a bookshelf, our layout of furniture or feeling of home" (Lee, 2015, p. unpag). Describing how the process of narrowing down her choices was affected by the fact that the images were going to be shared, Lee decided that her entries (Figs. 101-107) should have a personal connection and resonate with other Swedes. The items needed to be personal, but because it needed to make sense to others, Lee aligned her choices with established narratives of Sweden. We soon realised that our choices were romantic, often linked with old traditions, to some extent confirming Robin Cohen's (2008) suggestion that people in diaspora construct and share idealised myths of home. Later, when we met to discuss the project's first instalment the symbolic material associated with the Swedish nation generated lively discussions. We noticed our personal memories varied depending on age, interests and which part of Sweden we were from but, not surprisingly, the Swedish symbolic material, often national in character, joined us together. This symbolic material became a vital vehicle in the formation of a collective understanding of our Anglo-Swedish diasporic cultural identities. It was clear that even though we viewed our former culture from a distance, these symbols of nation enabled our collective remembrance, they were still important to us.



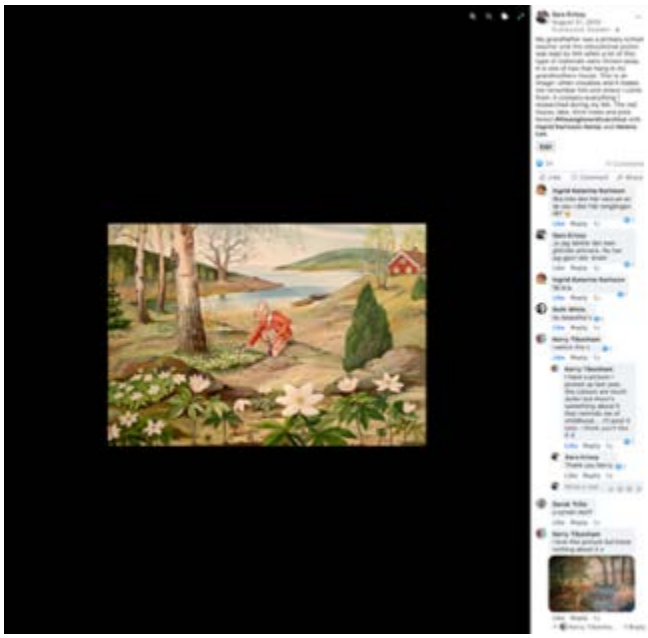
Figures 103-109 Sara Davies, Helena Lee & Ingrid Karlsson, *Anglo-Swedish Archive Part 1: Finding Home in our Houses (Helena's Selection)*, 2015

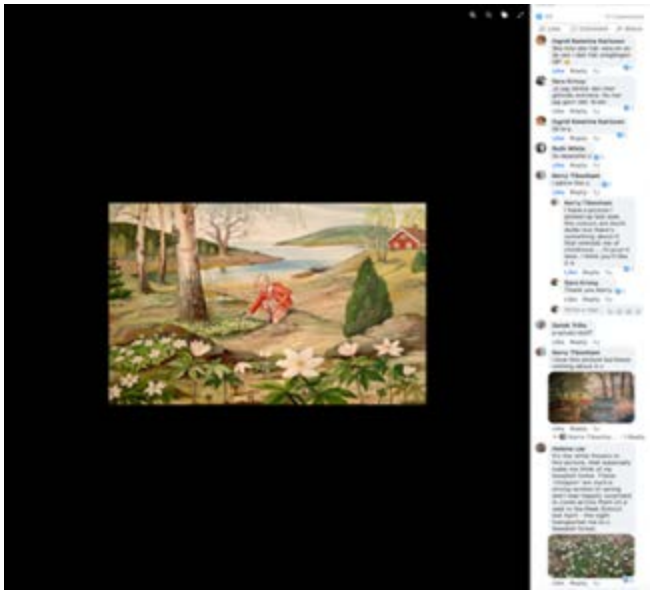
Significantly, at the same time as the project created a sense of togetherness between us collaborators it also, to a certain extent, seemed to embody aspects of Ketelaar's model of dialogical collective memory: the ties between us strengthened and sharing our chosen items in social media created new connections, it established links with the wider community. We followed the method of capturing things in our homes that reminded us of Sweden in photographs and introducing them to the world by letting them drift through social media

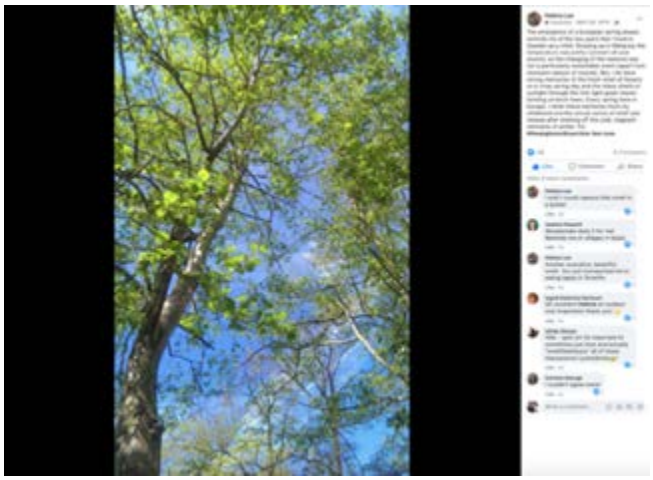
platforms with short captions, and subsequently being brought together on a website. When reflecting on the project in a blog post, Lee observed how some posts on social media accumulated threads of comments with questions, reflections, amusing anecdotes and other users posting images of similar items (some examples of this can be seen in Figs. 108-112). With these thought provoking words, she reflected on how the process of creating the Anglo-Swedish Archive had resulted in her feeling a deep sense of affinity. Lee noted that:

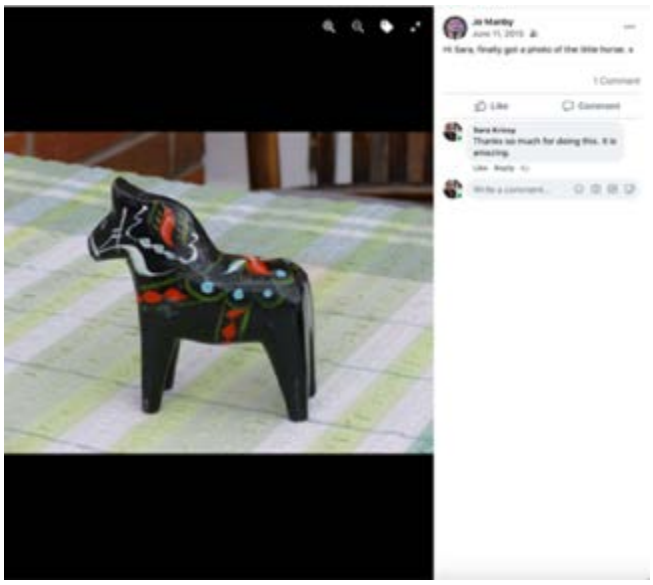
> Having completed this task, I feel a sense of connectedness with everyone who has contributed; that we have all come at the task from different angles, come up with an interesting collection of objects – some are so clearly Nordic symbols, others resonate as similar Swedish experiences. (Lee, 2015, p. unpag).

On the one hand, Lee here refers to a sense of kinship with other Swedish migrants in the UK living in diaspora. At the same time she also considers the network of connections that formed around social media posts, linking with people from other cultures. It is impossible to know who the people contributing were and whether they were migrants and diasporics, however, they were most certainly affected by the general mobility of our globalised world. I would therefore propose that our project brought us collaborators and a wider community together in a shared longing and loss of home. I would argue that our homing desire somehow fluidly and ephemerally spread in the virtual environment, linking people from different cultures together.









Figures 110-114 Sara Davies, Helena Lee & Ingrid Karlsson, Screenshots of the *Anglo-Swedish Archive*—archive entries on social media creating conversations, 2015

The archive materialised our Anglo-Swedish diasporic imaginary (Axel, 2002; Quayson, 2013; Bader, et al., 2019), it was a shared space that articulated our homing desire. The Internet platform we created, in the manner Ketelaar (2005) identified, revealed both our collectivity and connectivity. Although there were common themes, our archive's open and evolving transnational network structured varying perspectives. Often our entries generated a string of comments from other social media users. Our Internet archive transformed the bounded category of nation and the monumental characteristics of national remembrance, into a gestural network structure that, rather than excluding others, bridged cultural differences, between us and the wider community. The living archive model allowed us to feel a form of togetherness, not through homogeneity like in the context of nation, but through our differing individual accounts of nation – through our homing desires. In a way, we were spreading the idea of nation beyond its boundaries, and the dialogues we created disturbed its homogeneity and undermined its authority. Although examining the process of making the Anglo-Swedish Archive in this last chapter of the thesis, it preceded much of my individual work, explored in the previous chapters and inspired many of my methods, comparing the processes has been invaluable to my understanding of the process of diasporic touch. As in subsequent work, we used photography and performativity to gather and capture material. Rather than mobilising a process of framing my immersion in materials like I later did in the research, however, the

living archive model enabled a different kind of connectivity: we connected with materials, but we also linked with people as well.

Anglo-Swedish Archive: Part Two

Studio Reflection: Sweden in my Locality

Later in the project, we found reminders of home in the local environment. We each photographed seven items in our local area that reminded us of Sweden, then uploaded these to the archive. Whilst photographing, I realised that my subject matter was explicitly tied to the Falu-red house environment, the Swedish national home. I photographed the bark of a birch tree, a Swedish flag on a meatball advert in the local supermarket, a pine tree branch in a local park, an Ikea advert featuring a traditional red painted house, and a close up of a lilac bush in my garden (Figs. 113-119). The process of photographing Sweden in my locality subsequently developed in my individual practice. The sites, similar to my *Little Gems of Sweden*, evoked my homing desire – my psychic elaborations of home (Rus, 2006, p. unpag). For example, the lilac bush in my garden evoked fleeting, fragmented memories—impressions maybe—of enjoying their sweet scent when walking home from school in spring. It reminded me of the old traditional Swedish saying naming the time between the blooming of bird cherry and lilac is most precious and I recall its many appearances next to a Falu-red house in children's books. In a similar way to experiences in my individual practice, the lilac bush (an element of the Swedish national narrative) in my mind created constellations of memories from many times and places (Benjamin, 2015 [1940]), and I wondered if my collaborators had similar experiences.




Figures 115-121 Sara Davies, Helena Lee & Ingrid Karlsson, *Anglo-Swedish Archive Part 2 – Finding Home in our Local Environment (Sara's Selection)*, 2015

A Collective Performance of Nostalgia

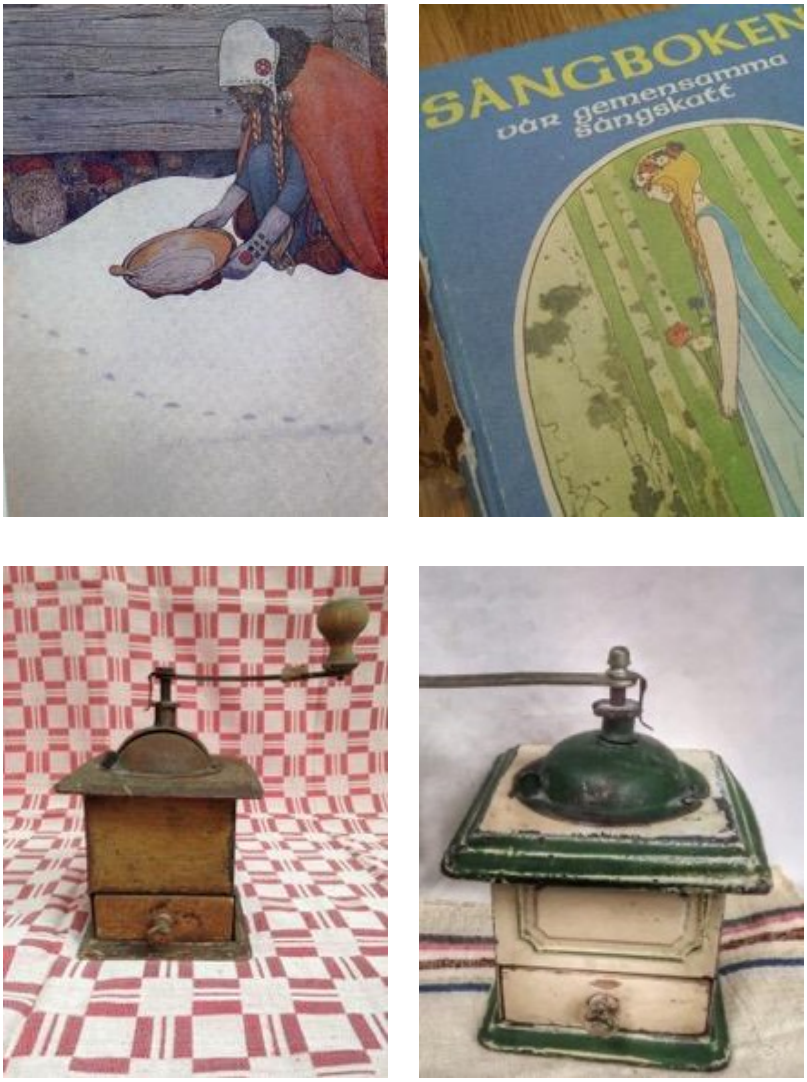
The things we gathered for the archive had souvenir-like qualities, they were either already kept in our houses as reminders of our former homes or we added to our personal collections by photographing things in the surrounding environment. Exploring in more detail how migrants and diasporics engage with objects, Gillian Swanson (2000) describes how they assign special significance to ordinary objects letting them stand in for their past lives and former home and culture. Swanson describes how their self uncertainty brings about a continued seeking of connections, intimate encounters that she says result in a sense of consistency and continuity. In a similar way, although calling these significant objects diasporic souvenirs, Boym (2002, p. 336) explains how, rather than helping migrants to reconstruct narratives of the nations they came from, they speak of their displacement. Rather than purely being about loss, however, they are about making conversations and new connections (Boym, 2002, p. 336). In a way, the collaborative process we engaged in—the activity of gathering things for our archive—can be seen as a quest for intimacy, it could be seen as a search for consistency. As previously mentioned, the archive itself is a place of dialogue and conversation: it could be argued that it is a repository of the objects Boym calls diasporic souvenirs. As we uploaded our selections of items that took on particular significance for us to social media, they started conversations. It is a place from which our psychic elaboration of home (Rus, 2006, p. unpag) can unfold, where our diasporic renditions of home are accumulated and circulated. For us, seeing each other's objects appear on social media platforms, there was a sense that we completed each other's stories. We commented on each other's posts with phrases such as "that item was on my list too" and "I identify with the item you picked, we need it in the archive" (Karlsson, 2015, Lee, 2015 p. in conversation). During our meetings we shared our personal accounts of the items in the archive and reflected on how doing this helped us to remember. As our image gallery of home came together on a webpage, we were beginning to see what the collective body of our diasporic homing desire looked like.

Our archive was making visible what types of objects, places, and materials were of particular significance to us. It pieced together a picture of how, from our position in the diaspora, we understand *home in Sweden*. As the items in the archive accumulated, we began to see similarities between them: there were many duplicated objects and repeated details, some which can be seen in Figs. 120-131. Lee (2015) expressed in one of her written reflective passages how enjoyable it was to see recurring themes emerging, how certain food items, traditional ornaments and certain aspects of the natural environment repeated themselves. I

was amazed when I realised that the artist and collaborator Ingrid Karlsson (2015) also photographed a spruce tree in her garden – mirroring my photograph of the pine tree branch. Lee photographed the crowns of two birch trees, in her written reflection expressing how she has "strong memories of the…sharp shafts of sunlight through the first light green leaves forming on birch trees" (Lee, 2015, p. unpag), an entry that corresponded with my photograph of birch bark. Another time, Lee uploaded an image of a wooden fence, in reflection expressing how the experience took her to "carefree summers spent at our family summer place in Sweden [where] the heat of the sun would bring out the smell of the wood, that was untreated or sometimes treated with Faluröd paint" (Lee, 2015, p. unpag), resembling my choice to upload a Swedish traditional wooden house. However, it was when I discovered that Lee and I had entered an almost identical picture of a lilac bush that I realised the importance of these recurrences. Although we are of varying ages, and the actual locations we grew up in Sweden and our personal interests resulted in differences between our homing desires, the items themselves that we entered into the archive were often something that might be seen in a Swedish national romantic painting from the beginning of the 1900s and linked to the Falu-red house environment. On reflection, I suggest these similarities show that there is a form of shared and partly subconscious Anglo-Swedish cultural memory.





Figures 122-133 Sara Davies, Helena Lee & Ingrid Karlsson, *Anglo Swedish Archive*, Some Recurring Themes, 2015

In our meetings, discussions moved from talking about our archive entries to reflecting on the process of collecting and it was during a discussion about the activity of gathering material during the second part of the project that a valuable finding was generated. It was, however, only in retrospect that I fully realised how it related to the process of diasporic touch. As we compared our experiences and reflected on how, as we moved through our local areas, certain places could— for a brief moment—connect us with our embodied Swedish-ness. We noticed that these encounters evoked strong and often multiple memories of home. Describing this experience in her written reflection, Karlsson (2015) expresses how her internal world of memories and dreams seems to shape what we saw and how we saw it. She suggests that:

> when searching out and finding the seven exterior 'places' in the spring I was amazed in a different way at how much my viewing of fairly familiar surroundings was affected by my Swedish 'lens'. I began to see how memories and connections were influencing the reality I was looking at, surprisingly often from my roots in Swedish landscapes (Karlsson, 2015, p. unpag).

Karlsson observes here how, on a regular basis, her embodied memories of rural childhood in Sweden direct her viewing. Karlsson described herself as having a Swedish lens, a filter, that somehow makes her see one place in another (Figs. 41-47), an experience that corresponded with my encounters of at-once-ness (and in turn mirroring Benjamin's (2015 [1940], p. 104) alternative perception of time discussed in Chapter Two). I would argue that the experience Karlsson describes is suggestive of the experience of non-linearity and immediacy which, I have learnt, precedes the process of diasporic touch.

In this way, and in a similar manner to my individual practice, our nostalgic encounters with objects, our engagement with our diasporic souvenirs (2002, p. 336), were linked with a subsequent immersion in material and technologies. The process took over and we seemed to lose ourselves in the material. For example, Karlsson (2015) described how, during the first part of the project, the activity of initially selecting fifteen items that were later narrowed down to seven generated excitement and provoked activity.[43] She explained the experience and her feelings in this way: "It was overwhelming, I ran up and down the stairs, in and out of rooms, rummaged in boxes and cupboards, bringing more and more things out…one thing led to another, I kept adding and worrying that I had overlooked something really important" (Karlsson, 2015, p. unpag). She found the process invigorating; it somehow took on a life of its own. Lee (2015) similarly expressed how finding items for the archive was a pleasurable challenge. Doing or inscribing our homing desire created a great energy that exceeded our expectations. Lee wrote that the project presented her with an

[43] This was a collaborative project with a small number of participants, so rather than giving conclusive evidence of the type of material Swedish migrants in the UK think about when they remember Sweden, it gave us an indication of what a collective *home in Sweden* looked like for us Swedish migrants affected by the condition of diaspora living in Manchester. As we approached the end of our collaborative project, we reflected on how much more research could be done. The archive could be extended to give a more comprehensive picture. For example, we had a sense that conducting the instalments at different times of the year would create a better overview. Perhaps Swedish migrants in the UK would select different entries depending on where they currently lived in England and a group of male participants may select different material. As the project progressed, I realised that our emotions during the unfolding of the project were equally important to the items we collected.

opportunity to focus on her own practice and, throughout the project, Karlsson produced new work inspired by the experience; I similarly felt a great desire to work with my selected items on an individual basis.[44]

The findings encouraged me to draw parallels with my individual practice and think of the photographic process we engaged in when capturing our reminders of home, childhood, and Sweden; it was another way of framing our connectivity and the construction of memory. It allowed me to consider the archive as a form of collective montage. We believed that the process had a beneficial effect on our sense of self, it was a soothing experience; however, the composite visual structure that we created online did not, as my individual artworks, bear the marks of loss. There were no erasures, obscurity or blur. Although archives, by holding a partial perspective, always harbour loss (Derrida, 1995), I could not see our diasporic sadness materialising on the surface of the Anglo-Swedish Archive. It was as though the soothing quality of the collaborative project stemmed from a different kind of oneness formed through connectivity with people. Was it possible we sidestepped our diasporic melancholia and engaged in a collective performance of our lesser nostalgic loss? Interestingly, the collaborative project stimulated our individual making, we all expressed a desire to transform the material in the archive in our work. Some ideas came into fruition and others did not, but we all expressed a longing to create composite forms and photographic montages. It made me wonder if, in a similar way to me, Karlsson's and Lee's immersion in montaging practices might aid their melancholic loss to settle in artworks. The knowledge gathered from the project was inconclusive and more research needs to be conducted, however, there are some indications that the process of diasporic touch could be transferable and experienced by others.

[44] Interestingly, we were at this stage all engaged in ideas of collage or montage. Ingrid Karlsson is an artist who uses collage as part of her practice, Lee was at this stage planning to create collages of images from the archive, and I also engage in making photographic montages.






Figures 134-140 Sara Davies, Helena Lee & Ingrid Karlsson, *Anglo-Swedish Archive Part 2 Finding Home in our Local Environment (Ingrid's Selection)*, 2015

Other Living Archive Projects

In order to understand the context that our archive operated in and further grasp how living archives subvert established histories I am now going to change focus and explore two examples of practices that can be seen as living archive projects. First, I am going to explore an ongoing collaboration called *Les Archives Súedoises* (ongoing) initiated by Swedish artists Anna Ekman and Cecilia Järdemar in 2016 and later the collaborative project *Éireann and I* (2020) initiated by artists and activists Beulah Ezeugo and Joselle Ntumba.[45] The project *Les Archives Súedoises,* in a similar way to our collaborative project, explores the transmission of memory in a creative, performative and collaborative way with an aim of challenging omissions in histories and unjust perspectives (Sabiescu, 2020). Describing the project Järdemar (2020, p. 110) explains how the idea for the project emerged during an artist residency at a Swedish Missionary Church where the artists involved in the project found a collection of decaying historical dry-plate glass negatives depicting people and places in the Congo of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, during the country's colonisation by Belgium. Documenting people and places around the former missionary in Kingoyi, the photographs were sent to Sweden to raise funds for the mission (Järdemar, 2020, p. 111). Realising that descendants of the people pictured had no access to the archive of images, and that their history was in Sweden, the artists began the process of bringing a digital repository of negatives back to the Congo, to reframe them and change power relationships (Järdemar, 2020, p. 111).[46] Although not dealing with issues of colonialism but articulating a

[45] Ekman's and Järdemar's collaborative project *Les Archives Súedoises* has also been described as *The Swedish Archives* and *Svenska Arkiven* (Järdemar, 2020).

[46] The Swedish missionaries in a contradictory way both tried to capture the landscapes and cultures in the Congo, at the same time as their customs and beliefs changed these cultures and sometimes even destroyed them as part of Christianisation (Granquist cited in Järdemar, 2020 p. 111).

diasporic perspective of nations, I recognised this desire to reconstruct established perspectives and question power through collective action. To understand how to deal with the found images from both a Swedish and Congolese perspective, the artists initiated a collaborative project with villagers, art students and the contemporary Congolese artist Freddy Tsimba. They collaborated in projects that repurposed and repositioned the colonial photograph to create alternative meanings. In the Congo, they created an art installation in a church (Fig. 132) and restaged the scenes in the photographs in the original settings (Fig. 133) and created a collaborative exhibition with sculptor Freddy Tsimba who grew up near Kingoyi (Järdemar, 2020). Tsimba's sculptures help to reframe the colonial photographs by highlighting the materiality of the suffering during colonisation and its aftermath. For example, a sculpture by Tsimba *Lokolo (leg)* (2017), seen in Fig. 134, made of bullet casings collected from the Congolese battlefields, reflects the violence of the region's colonial past and photography's role in it (Tsimba, n.d.). The project *Les Archives Súedoises* encouraged me to think about how collaborative art practices allow a multivocality that brings forth alternative perspectives. Although *Les Archives Súedoises*, unlike my project, deals with the racist ideologies and colonial history, it furthered my understanding of how the dialogical qualities of living archives can challenge dominant perspectives and established histories.

Figure 141 Anna Ekman & Cecilia Järdemar, *Porter – Kingoyi Church,* Original photograph by Josef Öhrneman (date unknown)*, 2016*

Figure 142 Anna Ekman & Cecilia Järdemar, *Monument to the Porters of Kingoyi,* Original image by unknown photographer (date unknown), 2016

Figure 143 Anna Ekman & Cecilia Järdemar, *Man in Grass*, Original image by unknown photographer (date unknown), with Freddy Tsimba *Lokolo (leg)*, Centre for Photography, Stockholm 2017

In a similar manner to the project *Les Archives Súedoises,* the collaborative project *Éireann and I* (2020) (Fig. 135), initiated by artists and activists Beulah Ezeugo and Joselle Ntumba,

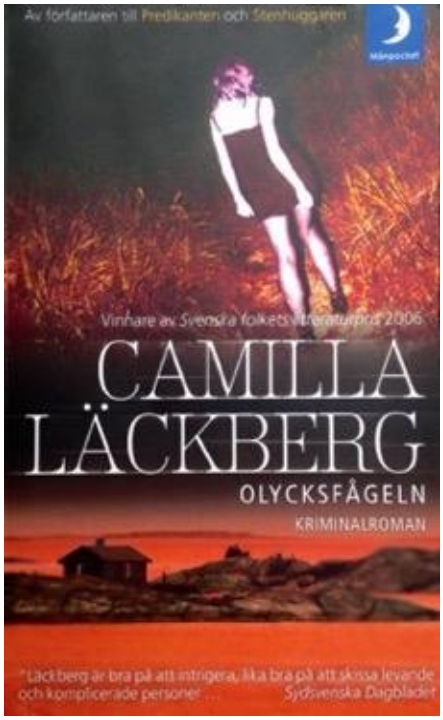
subvert traditional archive models and ideas of nation by conveying a form of multivocality. The *Éireann and I* project, in a similar way to our Anglo-Swedish Archive, very efficiently uses an online platform to convey its message. The project is about the "black diaspora in Ireland [documenting] friends, families, and communities while navigating Black postcolonial identities" (Stuart, 2020, p. unpag). Collating photographs, audio recordings, and artworks from members of the black diasporic community in Ireland and organising them under the themes: *community, protest, heritage,* and *solidarity*, it is both a personal and political endeavour (Ezeugo & Ntumba, 2020). In a similar way to my project and *Les Archives Súedoises*, it follows a living archive structure: it creatively and collaboratively curates' memories and transmits cultural knowledge to subvert established perspective (Sabiescu, 2020). Unlike my collaborative project, however, both *Les Archives Súedoises* and *Éireann and I* deal with colonialism and its aftermath. Despite this, studying the project helped me to understand how the Internet can aid the telling and sharing of transnational and diasporic experiences. It made me understand how an online environment can be utilised to connect a network of perspectives together, how it can become a site able to hold together collective, diasporic "homing desires" (Brah, 1996, p. 193). In a similar way to my archive, *Éireann and I* is an online repository aiming to transmit bi-cultural memories to future generations, however, it also, like my project, transforms the idea of nation and national identity from a statement to a question.

Figure 144 Beulah Ezeugo & Joselle Ntumba, *Éireann and I*, Screenshot from Webpage, 2022

Anglo-Swedish Archive: Part Three

Studio Reflection: Not Fully Fitting

In the last stage of the project, we found things that reminded us of home, in printed media, online publications and other forms of reproduction. I selected many images that pictured aspects of the Falu-red house environment (see Figs. 136-142) and knew that I was hoping for my collaborators to do the same. I chose a still from the Ingmar Bergman Film *The Virgin Spring* (1960) picturing a man next to a birch tree, a front cover of a book by Camilla Läckberg featuring what I imagine to be a Falu-red house in a remote location, an illustration by John Bauer picturing a winter scene with a girl by a wooden wall, a photograph by Einar Erici picturing people dressed in white sitting in a circle next to a traditional wooden barn, an illustration from a children's book titled *King Elk* picturing a traditional Falu-red house by a pine forest, and an educational poster by Maja Synnergren from 1940, picturing a girl picking wood anemones and a Falu-red house in the distance. This stage in the project, for me and the others, resulted in more romantic material and national symbols, our entries were less personal. For me, this part of the project evolved with ease. I already had a collection of this type of material and was accustomed to the contradictory feelings it evoked, the desire for belonging but also a deep unease about what this vision of nationality stood for. I knew that dealing with this kind of material was difficult, as a migrant encountering national material, but at the same time as it held my memories, it evoked a strong sense of misalignment, of not fitting in Sweden anymore.



Figures 145-151 Sara Davies, Helena Lee & Ingrid Karlsson, *Anglo-Swedish Archive Part 3 Finding Home in Reproductions (Sara's Selection)*, 2015

In the third part of the project, we gathered reproductions and other material, for example, photographs, films, paintings and textiles that reminded us of home. As we reflected in writing we expressed hesitancy, thinking that it might be harder to gather and share more stereotypical items associated with the idea of nation. It was as if the migrant's sense of not fully fitting—of partaking but not fully identifying with narratives linked to the Swedish nation—created our contradictory feelings towards the material. In retrospect I think I was hoping for a particular outcome, I wanted to see the Falu-red house environment appear more clearly in the archive, however, although most definitely there, its appearance was allusive. To further explain this, I want to examine Lee's and my response to an image that she gathered for the archive in a London department store (Fig. 152). The image depicted a display of modern crockery with simple functional designs, reminiscent of Nordic design from the 1960s. What really moved her, however, was the way the crockery was arranged on a display unit that reminded her of a long white table she associated with traditional Swedish garden furniture usually seen in Falu-red house settings. The display unit situated by a large backlit photograph of a forest environment reminded her of summers spent in Sweden at her family's traditional, red-painted summer house. In a similar way, when I later encountered Lee's photograph, it evoked strong memories of my former home in Sweden.

I also immediately associated the department store display with the Falu-red house environment. For example, Lee's image *Swedish Summer at Heals* (2015) reminded me of a photograph I once took picturing the forested hills of Dalarna (Fig. 153), Sweden, an area often associated with the Falu-red house environment. The long white display unit with crockery reminded me of a very popular image by national romantic painter Carl Larsson titled *Breakfast under the Big Birch Tree* (1895) seen in Fig. 154 that incorporates traditional red painted houses in the background. This example eloquently shows what often happened when we gathered objects for the archive and when we found things that reminded us of home more generally: we somehow saw allusions of elements from the Swedish national narratives in our local environment. Often, we noticed renditions of the Falu-red House, the Swedish national home or associated objects, as we went about our daily lives in England.

Figure 152 Helena Lee, *Swedish Summer at Heals*, 2015

Figure 153 Sara Davies, *From Back Home in Dalarna (The Dales)*, 2016

Figure 154 Carl Larsson, *Breakfast Under the Big Birch Tree (Frukost Under Stora Björken)*, Photo: Erik Cornelius, 1895

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The aim of this chapter has been to explore the Anglo-Swedish Archive, the collaborative project that I facilitated to explore the process of diasporic touch in a collective setting. The collaborative project emerged out of a desire to know more about how other Swedish migrants in the UK living in diaspora remembered and imagined home. I wanted to know if my memories, ideas and sensations relating to home were shared by others. The chapter accounted for how the project progressed, how we collected images that reminded us of home in Sweden inside our houses and in our surrounding local environment. Utilising the living archive approach (Sabiescu, 2020), we engaged creatively with the curation and transmission of cultural memory to tease out a diasporic perspective of nationality. Selecting objects that were both personal reminders of home and, simultaneously, could be understood as Swedish by others, the project constructed a shared space that brought together our homing desires, it created a digital platform that helped us share our diasporic imaginary. The research indicated clear similarities between the material we entered in the archive, particularly when our memories of home in Sweden became entwined with national themes, but there were also many differences depending on where in Sweden we were from, our differing ages and diverse interests. The chapter examined how the Falu-red house environment permeated the archive; it verified its importance to Swedish migrants

living in diaspora. Because of our diasporic outlook, however, the way nation and national identity circulate in our mind as questions, the presence of this image and memory in our archive was often allusive. From the research it was very evident, though, that there were many similarities between our psychic elaborations of home (Rus, 2006). It indicated that there was a collective, partly subconscious, Anglo-Swedish body of memories and dreams.

The chapter continued by exploring how the Anglo-Swedish Archive evolved as a collaborative project, and how it resulted in a sense of belonging—or togetherness— that challenged the sense of authority associated with nation. It looked at how we utilised the Internet, a transnational space enabling connectivity, to accommodate our archive and share our collective idea of home with others. The first part of the chapter therefore placed the collaborative project in a context: it accounted for its emphasis on dialogue, and how the connectivity of the Internet allowed us to form a collective experience that was not exclusive. The research resulted in an understanding about how the evolving, open networked structure we created both encouraged a form of togetherness and created an image of home in Sweden that was different to the established narrative of home associated with the Swedish nation. It portrayed nationality and belonging as infinitely more multifaceted and complex. More specifically, rather than creating a group identity through commonality that excluded difference (Halbwachs, 2011 [1950])—often done in the context of national belonging—Anglo-Swedish Archive constructed a networked form that held our shared traits together yet also connected them to the web of cultures in a broader range of surroundings. It made sure our commonality was understood in context (Ketelaar, 2005), through their relation to other ideas and visions of home. The chapter then examined how establishing the Anglo-Swedish Archive in an online transnational environment opened up a space where the idea of nation could be explored in dialogue across cultures. It explored how we formed a cultural collectivity that is also connective in characteristics, that reached out to others, encouraging dialogues about belonging that, just by being two-way conversations, undermine the authority of a stable or fixed form of nation.

As the project evolved my attention shifted from focusing on the items we collected to the process of collecting and this change resulted in an understanding that diasporic touch may be experienced by others. When studying our accounts describing our experiences when gathering items for the Anglo-Swedish Archive I realised that the collaborative project was, in part, an escape into the realm of nostalgia. I began to see similarities between Karlsson's (2015) account of having a *Swedish filter* that allowed her to simultaneously encounter her

current surroundings and memories of Sweden, and my experience of at-onceness. At this stage, sidestepping diasporic melancholia (Eng, 2000) Karlsson experienced a non-linearity and immediacy similar to Benjamin's messianic temporality (Benjamin, 2015 [1940], p. 104): it appeared as if she encountered the nostalgia that preceded the process of diasporic touch. However, the archive, unlike the montages I later created, did not bear the traces of inner fragmentation, it showed no signs of diasporic melancholia marking its surface. The Anglo-Swedish Archive was a small study and the knowledge gathered during the project is inconclusive: in retrospect, I realised that I should have pushed this project further and paid more close attention to the artworks that emerged from the experience, as I believe that they would further substantiate the transferability of diasporic touch. In our reflective accounts we all expressed a desire to transform the archive material in our individual practices, we all made or planned to make composite forms such as collages and photographic montages based on our experiences, and because of this it is tempting to think that these practices would articulate our self fragmentation. They would encourage our melancholic loss to work itself through our body and leave traces in the compositions.

CONCLUSION

This exploration began with one sensation: an encounter of touch that is integral to my process of making. It is a form of open connectedness linked with the production of visual images that is key for diasporic self formation and the renewal of cultures, a form of proximity that I named *diasporic touch*. During the PhD journey, my practice moved from engaging in self-staging to using the camera in a performative way by letting it become an extension of my body. My early photographs depicted ambiguous environments where the boundaries between *me as photographic subject* and the environment in the picture began to blur. They portrayed my body dissolving and merging with things. Continuing to work with the idea of dissolving boundaries but letting it play out in the relationship between *me the photographer* and the surrounding environment, I produced a range of photographs that captured my closeness with things without my body inhabiting images. This method created close-up, surface bound, textural images that both placed the subject matter within the photographic and subsequently the archive-system (Caraffa & Serena, 2015) and challenged the idea of belonging through destabilising effects of my embodied approach (Jones & Stephenson, 1999). In my early work I lost *myself—me* in the photographs dissolved—and in my later work, loss settled as dark marks in the work. In the research that followed my first encounter with diasporic touch I developed a range of strategies that furthered my understanding of what diasporic touch is, what role it plays in diasporic subjectivity formation and what it does to the surrounding cultural fabric. It soon became clear that the sensation I named diasporic touch was in fact a process negotiating proximity and framing that dealt with loss. It was also evident that the visual images created through diasporic touch portrayed narratives of nations as uncertain, as questions rather than statements.

Overview

Art practice develops in a non-linear way, many times during my research journey I worked on more than one piece of work at the same time. The continuous move from one piece of work to another, one process to another, changed my thinking and developed my ideas. Often art practice emerges from a state of *not knowing* (Fortnum, 2013), it follows the embodied knowledge of the artist and the inherent properties of materials, where things of importance only become clear in retrospect. My arts practice based research project generated data from making but it was only in reflection, when noticing repeated tropes,

patterns, and other qualities, that I began to understand its meaning. As my research project developed, I made the findings sit within a linear four-chapter structure. The first chapter established the context of my arts-based research and accounted from the early developments of diasporic touch and its relationship to uncertainty. The second chapter mobilised object relation theory (Ehrensweig, 1995 [1967]) (Winnicott, 2005 [1971]) (Melanie Klein Trust, n.d.) to delve deeper into what diasporic touch is and what it does to self. The main focus of chapter three was to establish the effects the process of diasporic touch has in society, yet it also accounted for the links between the methods I use and methodologies I adhere to. The fourth and final chapter explored the development of the Anglo-Swedish Archive, a collaboration with other Swedish artists based in Manchester that generated knowledge that indicated the possible transferability of diasporic touch.

Development of Research

With the information gathered through my artist practice, I answered the research questions "what is diasporic touch" and "what does diasporic touch do to self and in society". In addition to this it also provided partial insight into whether diasporic touch is transferable and if the process can be experienced by others. Although examined in the fourth and last chapter the collaborative Anglo-Swedish Archive project was initiated very early in my research journey. It ran alongside my individual artistic practice and the two informed each other. Initially, I was more concerned with the things we collected, however, as the project unfolded our focus shifted and we became more interested in the characteristics of our process of collecting, something that I later realised seemed to confirm that some aspects of diasporic touch may be transferable. At the start of my PhD journey, I envisaged the collaborative project as either involving more people or running for a longer period of time, in effect being a larger part of my overall project. Instead, the project was smaller in scope, and although providing interesting information, it was not always as rigorous as I would have wanted. The project did result in a desire to explore things further in my individual practice and in retrospect, I believe the complexity of the information it gathered and my initial inability to fully understand contributed to the shift in my research. Another reason for the shift in focus was the discovery of diasporic touch. The experience of this special touch in my individual practice resonated deeply with me and led to a long and detailed exploration. In the beginning, in a similar way to the Anglo-Swedish Archive project, I associated diasporic touch with nostalgia. However, I soon realised that there was more to it, that nostalgia in terms of a longing for home was a smoke screen for other more obscure

or even unknown losses that had become incorporated into my being. I knew that finding out if and how diasporic touch engaged with these losses needed more privacy.

My preoccupation with loss increased in the aftermath of Britain's exit from the European Union. The changes that occurred deeply affected my day-to-day life and contributed to significant changes in the way that I saw myself in the world. I was suddenly Swedish, Nordic and European in a much more definite way. At the time, my intention was to use my art practice to intervene in the situation in a political way, however, instead I seemed to solely engage with the heightened sense of loss that it caused. I explored what diasporic touch is and what it does to self and how it is connected with diasporic subjectivity formation for some time, particularly focusing on its reparative characteristics (Ehrensweig, 1995 [1967]). For a while, the investigation overlapped with the exploration of what diasporic touch does in society, however, the latter took over from the former during a residency at the Sidney Nolan Trust when forming a performance using a series of old picture frames. The performance led to a preoccupation with frames in subsequent works which resulted in an understanding of the connection between picture frames, the medium of photography and national belonging. It also made me reflect on how my artworks challenged the authority of national narratives by making visible the complex nature of boundaries. The trajectory of my PhD followed my art practice, it took some unexpected turn that resulted in some vital insights. As a result of this, its context also shifted, something that led me to revise earlier writing on more than one occasion. In retrospect, I believe a more rigorous approach during the Anglo-Swedish Archive project may have resulted in more definite findings in terms of the transferability of diasporic touch. However, the shift towards my individual artistic practice and a preoccupation with loss resulted in an important understanding of diasporic touch as a mourning practice that aids diasporic subjectivity formation.

How my Research Intervenes in the Field

Previous research done on the Anglo-Nordic experience in the north of England is historical in character, it gives a general historical narrative of Scandinavian migrants in the north of England (Lee, 2008a; Lee, 2008b). Collating facts from archives to create a written account, this research fails to say much about people's experiences and feelings of living between cultures. In contrast, it has been argued that visual images are liminal, threshold-like spaces that are able to connect contesting and contradictory ideas (Bhabha, 1994a). My practice

contributes to filling this gap in knowledge, and about the unfolding practices of belonging (Abebe & Saha, 2015) undertaken by Swedish migrants in the UK in diaspora. Additionally, my artworks also add to the shared but heterogenous space that has been named the diasporic imaginary (Axel, 2002; Quayson, 2013) where memories and embodied cultural knowledge has been transformed into complex and ambiguous visual forms. They enter into cross-cultural conversations about home in a way that is both formative of transnational, migrant, and diasporic subjectivities, and challenges the ideas of a place-bound, national form of belonging. The process of diasporic touch has made me understand Anglo-Swedish identity in a different way. It made me recognise that, although Swedish migrants in the UK usually have a fairly easy time in their new country and assimilate well, their day-to-day experience is still defined by loss—their lives are still defined by melancholia. Going forward, I can see the process being used to materialise and understand the collective dimensions of Anglo-Swedish diasporic melancholia and open up new conversations about the role of loss in the diasporic imaginary.

Chapter One Summary

The main focus of Chapter One was to examine how my artistic practice is situated in relation to my embodied experience of migration and the related condition of diaspora. The first part of the chapter gave an overview of the theoretical field my art practice based research intervened in. It accounted for how our globalised interconnected world, defined by an increased movement of goods, migration of people and circulation of information (Appadurai, 1996; Larsen, et al., 2006), has affected the way we understand our position within it. I examined how it has caused an uprooting of people's sense of self and a general sense of uncertainty. More specifically, the chapter accounts for how the uncertainty emerged from the tensions between the demands of national structures and the complexity of transnational experience (Bhabha, 1990; Papastergiadis, 2012)—the tension between the written and unwritten rules of society and a sense of fluidity. With a focus on the sustained effects of migration on subjectivity and the condition of diaspora, the chapter explored how migrants—instead of identifying with a geographic place and national identities—can establish a sense of self through creative endeavours (Bhabha, 1994a; Hall, 1994; Papastergiadis, 2007 [2000]). It accounted for how they create composite memory forms that connected rather than divided cultures (Silverman, 2015 [2013]) and explained how these material manifestations together form a shared but heterogenous space called the diasporic imaginary (Axel, 2002; Quayson, 2013), that challenges national form of belonging. After this, the chapter continued to identify how my art practice intervenes in the field by

articulating my particular experience of migration and diaspora; it explores my tendency to dismantle stereotypical narratives of home and landscape associated with Sweden to articulate my self uncertainty. It shows how, by mobilising and materialising my diasporic homing desire—my psychic elaborations of home (Rus, 2006)—my art practice visualises the ambiguity within the idea of nation, subsequently questioning its authority.

The second part of the chapter accounted for how diasporic touch first emerged during the process of making and how it was connected to my self uncertainty. It focused on particular examples from my art practice that articulated my sense of misalignment by creating a series of projected photographic montages dismantling Swedish stereotypical narratives of home and landscape. Importantly, it recognised how the process of taking them apart set in motion diasporic touch. While engaging in my artistic process, I realised that diasporic touch opened up a form or aspect of the process of making that had a soothing effect. Realising that this finding had the potential to add to existing accounts dealing with diasporic subjectivity formation, I focused my investigation on psychoanalysis and diasporic subjectivity formation. Bhabha (1998) recognises that the art practices of migrants, diasporic and minority ethnics can be understood as transitional phenomena (Winnicott, 2005 [1971])—an entwinement of inner and outer worlds—that aids self formation. However, Bhabha's account lacks detail and he does not fully engage with what happens to the mind and body during these creative encounters. The desire to add to Bhabha's account led me to further study diasporic self formation with the help of psychoanalysis. I began to explore object relation theory (Melanie Klein Trust, n.d.; Winnicott, 2005 [1971]) and the reparative qualities of art making (Ehrensweig, 1995 [1967]) to further understand the soothing qualities of diasporic touch on my uncertain sense of self.

Chapter One: Findings about Diasporic Touch

My research established that the initial sensation was in fact a process with a transformative capacity. My research answered my first research question 'what is diasporic touch' by identifying that diasporic touch is a part of the process of my overall art practice that helps me work through my self uncertainty by combining proximity and framing. Very early on, I realised that diasporic touch was linked to diasporic subjectivity formation as it seemed to have a soothing effect. Through my research I identified that the open connectedness of diasporic touch—the simultaneous experience of touching and being touched—counteracted the uncertainty caused by migration and diaspora. As my research progressed I recognised how my research could add detail to Bhabha's claim that diasporic artists harness

transitional phenomena to develop their subjectivity. As an artist I could account for what happens in my psychic world during the process of making.

Chapter Two Summary

In Chapter Two, I set out to further understand the link between creativity and migrant and diasporic subjectivity formation and to establish an understanding of the dynamics of diasporic touch. Drawing on the data gathered during the process of making the photographic installation works, *Birch Shattering 1*, *Lilac Seeping* and *Pine Bleeding* I carefully explored its reparative qualities. The chapter explored how psychoanalytic theory (Freud, 2009 [1915]; Butler, 1988), especially object relation theory (Melanie Klein Trust, n.d.; Winnicott, 2005 [1971]), shed light on how artistic processes are linked with subjectivity formation. It examined how art practice generally has a reparative effect on self (Melanie Klein Trust, n.d.; Ehrensweig, 1995 [1967]) and how, specifically for migrants and diasporics, it can be harnessed to heal the effects of migration and the misalignment it causes. To begin with, the idea of diasporic touch was less clear, it seemed to encompass different forms of connectivity. However, as my work developed, I recognised subtle distinctions between my experience of connectivity, a difference between an emotional connection set in motion by a non-linear experience of at-oneness and connectivity propelled by my immersion in practice. Diasporic touch, I realised, was linked to the process of immersion, and was preceded by an experience of immediacy, spatiality, and non-linearity, similar to Benjamin's alternative and revolutionary messianic temporality (Benjamin, 2015 [1940], p. 104). As my research progressed, I understood that the uncertainty caused by the sustained effects of migration and the condition of diaspora resulted in a preoccupation with loss; it resulted in a fluctuation between feelings of nostalgia (Boym, 2007)—a substitute for my unknown losses, and melancholia (Eng, 2000)—as a condition where loss manifests as itself as self fragmentation (Melanie Klein Trust, n.d.; Freud, 2009 [1915]), and where the former is often an escape from the latter. Through an exploration of the process of making *Birch Shattering 1*, *Pine Bleeding* and *Lilac Seeping*, I realised that my nostalgia is conveyed by the subject matter and my unknown melancholic losses, settled in the form of the work. My research more generally indicates that my uncertainty resulted in a palette of emotions that instigated a move beyond nostalgia essential for diasporic self development (Carter, 2004). Through the data gathered from my artistic practice I could draw the conclusion that uncertainty, and the sensorium associated with nostalgia and melancholia that initiated this immersion, set in motion diasporic touch.

In the second part of the chapter, I continued to explore how and why diasporic touch had a soothing effect on self, how it frames my moments of open connectedness. After exploring psychoanalytic theory more generally to further understand diasporic subjectivity formation (Butler, 2003; Eng, 2000), I closely studied object relation theory (Melanie Klein Trust, n.d.; Winnicott, 2005 [1971]; Ehrensweig, 1995 [1967]) to understand the reparative characteristics of diasporic touch. Studying the ideas of Ehrensweig (1995 [1967]) I understood how artistic processes can mirror the artist's psychic processes that involve fragmentation and unification. More specifically, Ehrensweig argues that the artistic process involves the artist taking established forms apart to mirror their fragmented sense of self, and later that unifying the fragments in artworks counteracts these destructive tendencies. This physical activity of bringing things together, Ehrensweig argues, has a healing effect on our subjectivity. Art practice provided an experience of oneness with the surrounding environment that was beneficial for the process of self formation. More importantly for migrants and diasporics, it provided a home in art making that temporarily reduced the awareness of boundaries, borders and divisions, subsequently reducing my sense of displacement. The chapter accounts for how, as a first-generation migrant artist, I not only harness my art practice to experience oneness through diasporic touch, but also frame the experience so that I can share my moments of emplacement, of being at home in my art, with others. As my research progressed, I recognised that diasporic touch—the framing of my open connectedness—helped me externalise my loss. With help of Ehrensweig's ideas and the data gathered during the process of making *Birch Shattering 1*, *Pine Bleeding* and *Lilac Seeping* I was able to challenge some aspects of psychoanalytic theory, in particular Butler's claim that melancholic loss stays embodied and presents itself in repetitive aimless performances—that it cannot be completely overcome. With this in mind, I began to consider diasporic touch as a mourning practice that had a reparative effect on my sense of self.

Chapter Two: Findings about Diasporic Touch

Integral to the process of diasporic subjectivity formation, diasporic touch helped me deal with the heightened sense of loss caused by the sustained effects of migration and diaspora. My research demonstrated that melancholic loss works itself through the body and leaves traces in my artworks, it materialises in various kinds of erasures of visual information—for example in burnt out highlights, dark shadows, unclarity and scratches. The process of diasporic touch gave my melancholia, although still wordless, a shape and a texture: it made it external to self, and acknowledgeable and subsequently more manageable. My research

answered the second question 'what does diasporic touch do to self' by establishing that it is a mourning practice that simultaneously helped externalise my unknown losses and form new connections. My unique contribution to the field shows that, although still undefined in language, melancholic loss can become externalised and mourned. Even though I still could not articulate it linguistically, I could acknowledge it as part of a visual form and move on.

Chapter Three Summary

After establishing what diasporic touch, is and what it does to the self, I explored what images made from diasporic touch did in society. The aim of Chapter Three was to investigate how my artworks, made through diasporic touch, intervene in frameworks that govern our lives and how my very personal account of the experience of migration destabilised ideas of national belonging. My artworks made through diasporic touch are images depicting my melancholic self fragmentation, but they can also—by making visible my uncertainty and questioning stance towards nationality—alter established perspectives. I would argue that my artworks harbour the potential for cultural transformation. In order to understand how diasporic touch intervened in societal frameworks, I began a wider investigation into the characteristics of frames and frameworks. Triggered by the experience of a set of very particular frames found during a residency at Sidney Nolan Trust, I began to explore how, in my art practice, I engaged with frames and frameworks to articulate my diasporic experience. I accounted for how, in a contradictory way, frames more generally have been seen as both stabilising meaning—which is necessary for communication and shared experience (Bateson, 2000 [1972]; Reese, 2003 [2001])—and liminal spaces that bind contexts together and undermine stable meanings (Derrida, 1987). I accounted for how my diasporic experience contributed to a set of contradictory feelings towards frames and frameworks; how I simultaneously desired to belong or *be placed,* and to free myself from those selfsame frames and places.

The investigation into frames and frameworks led to a deeper understanding of the methods I use when making artworks and their relationship to a particular set of approaches to making and methodologies. It also resulted in an understanding of why the methods I used—a combination of photography and performative strategies—very efficiently supported the process of diasporic touch. The chapter accounted for how migrant and diasporic art practices emerge in the intersection between a desire for bondedness and the experience of mobility (Papastergiadis, 2012). Migrant and diasporic art practices arise through a tension between a desire for belonging, the need to understand self as part of a

system, and the way the latter is a consequence of the sustained effects of migration and the experience of a transnationalism.

Articulating my longing for boundedness I used the medium of photography, a technology that efficiently binds people, objects and places in a set value system (Pinney, 2003). To articulate my liminality and desire to break free from the idea of belonging, I used performance and performativity (Jones & Stephenson, 1999). Through my research, I identified that the performative strategies I employed challenged the sense of coherence and the truth value linked with the photographic medium: they destabilised the meaning of the photograph by severing the indexical link to the past. Considering the historic links between the medium of photography and the formation of nationality, I recognised how unframing photographs through performative strategies undid the truth claims of photography and, at the same time, challenged the idea of nation. I also realised that when shifting the emphasis from depth to surface, it was impossible to read them as *reality* (Pinney, 2003). To articulate my migrant life and diasporic experience, my artistic practice engaged with the framework of nation in a continuous process of unframing and reframing. Through a variety of performative strategies, I dismantled stereotypical narratives associated with the idea of the Swedish nation at the same time as I re-framed these processes using photography. As the research developed, I realised that employing this tension between photography and performance very effectively supported the mourning process of diasporic touch. The use of photography—a medium that very efficiently made things belong—also placed my melancholic loss in the external environment, and the liminal practice of performance that undid fixed meanings also aided the discharge of loss into the work.

Chapter Three: Findings about Diasporic Touch

Answering my third research question 'what does diasporic touch do in society' my research identifies how diasporic touch challenges the authority and validity of nationality by using my diasporic embodied cultural memory to make visible their underlying and often hidden complexity and disunity. Through diasporic touch, I transformed symbolic material linked with home, childhood, and Sweden, into ambiguous, disharmonious, montaged compositions: I dismantled stereotypical narratives of home and landscape associated with the Swedish nation. The research in Chapter Three shows how cultural memory can challenge narrative histories by mobilising embodied knowledge, and how images are liminal forms that bridge cultures and question texts. The chapter identifies how representations of diasporic experiences embedded in the fabric of society can undermine

the idea of a homogenous nation, a stable national identity and place bound belonging. This is something that is increasingly important in the aftermath of Brexit as the experience of unbelonging and loss for diasporic people in the UK has increased.

Chapter Four Summary

In Chapter Four, I explored the socially engaged practice that I started very early on in my research and that unfolded parallel to my individual practice. The collaboration involved a group of Swedish, migrant, female artists living in the UK and emerged from a desire to know more about how other Swedish migrants in the UK living in diaspora remembered and imagined home. I was interested to find out if there were any similarities and differences between our homing desires—our psychic elaborations of home (Rus, 2006). The first part of the chapter accounted for the structure of the project and how it evolved: how we collected images that reminded us of home in Sweden inside our houses, and in our surrounding local environment and how we reflected on our choices in a group setting. Utilising the living archive approach (Sabiescu, 2020) that engaged creatively with the curation and transmission of cultural memory, we formed a subversive archive that offered an alternative migrant and diasporic perspective on national identity. From the research it was evident that there were clear similarities between the material we entered in the archive, particularly when our memories of home engaged with national themes, but there were also many differences determined by where in Sweden we were from, our differing ages and diverse interests. The Falu-red house environment permeated the archive, but because of our diasporic outlook it was often allusive. Overall, the project confirmed that there was a collective, partly subconscious, Anglo-Swedish body of memories and dreams. It created a dialogue of home in Sweden that was different to the established narratives of belonging associated with the Swedish nation; articulating it as infinitely more multifaceted and complex.

The chapter also explored how the Anglo-Swedish Archive circulated and shared our diasporic ideas of the Swedish nation in the transnational space of the Internet; it explored how our dialogical approach challenged the idea of nation. The project, instead of creating a group identity through commonality that excluded difference (Halbwachs, 2011 [1950]), constructed a networked form that held our shared traits together and also connected them to a web of cultures through its online environment. The chapter examined how we made use of the transnational network structure of the Internet to accommodate our archive and share our collective idea of home with others. It was a collective experience that, rather than

solely creating communality through similarity, emphasised dialogue between the collaborators as well as the wider community so our cultural memory could be understood in a wider context (Ketelaar, 2005). Our project opened up a space where the idea of nation could be explored in dialogue and across cultures. It encouraged dialogues that have the potential to alter peoples' perspectives and change power relationships.

Chapter Four: Findings about Diasporic Touch

In retrospect, I realised that the findings from the collaborative project indicated that diasporic touch may be a transmissible process. I began to see the familiar pattern arise in the process that was impossible to ignore, indicating that the Anglo-Swedish Archive might be read as an escape into the realm of nostalgia. When revisiting our writing that reflected on the collaborative project, I began to see similarities between Karlsson's (2015) account of having a *Swedish filter* that allowed her to simultaneously encounter her current surroundings and memories of Sweden, and the experience of at-onceness. At this stage, sidestepping diasporic melancholia (Eng, 2000), Karlsson experienced a non-linearity and immediacy similar to Benjamin's messianic temporality (Benjamin, 2015 [1940], p. 104): the nostalgia that preceded the process of diasporic touch. Continuing to explore the transferability of the process of diasporic touch I recognised that we all experienced an overwhelming creative energy and wanted to use the items gathered in the archive in our individual practices (Karlsson, 2015; Lee, 2015): it seemed like we wanted to engage in the process of diasporic touch. When we all expressed a desire to use collage and montage (Karlsson, 2015; Lee, 2015), I realised that the idea of diasporic touch might be experienced by others. It was tempting to think that this montaging process could allow our self fragmentation, our unknown melancholic losses, to settle in the artworks. The Anglo-Swedish Archive was a small study and can only give an indication that the idea of diasporic touch might be transferable. In future, however, it might be interesting to further explore the transmissibility of diasporic touch, either by studying the artworks of Swedish artists in the UK or other artists with other migrant and diasporic backgrounds.

Conclusions, Significant Contribution to the Field & Wider Relevance

The process of making artworks has become a way to feel *at home*, I also use it to share my Anglo-Swedish experience. Part of this process is *diasporic touch*, an activity that counteracts the self uncertainty arising from diasporic experience. My arts-based research makes a unique contribution to knowledge about the links between creativity and bi-cultural subjectivity formation. I created a distinctive body of work that visualises Anglo-Swedish

identity: work that interweaves colours, patterns, symbols, textures that relate to my *uncertain I*. It also said something significant about how migrants and diasporics develop a sense of self more generally. Providing important knowledge to the field of Scandinavian migration and diaspora studies, my research generated a striking body of work that visualises my Anglo-Swedish experience, yet it also highlights the challenges that national belonging presents for migrants and diasporics. The work intervenes in national histories by materialising my experience of liminality. It simultaneously claims space for me and my fellow Anglo-Swedes within the space of the nation and transforms the validity of nationality. The body of work materialises my homing desire, it veils the Swedish national home with my diasporic palette of emotions, my sensations of longing and loss. It offers a unique and specifically Anglo-Swedish rendition of a diasporic perspective of *home,* as multiple, partial and ambiguous. However, the body of work also contributes significantly to the knowledge of the visualisation of diaspora more generally.

As my research progressed, I discovered that diasporic touch has a soothing effect on my uncertain self. I realised that it was a process that not only seeks out the moments of connectedness or oneness that Ehrensweig (1995 [1967]) identifies as a type of dwelling or *home*, but also captures or frames this experience in artwork. The process of diasporic touch combines the use of photography with various performative strategies to articulate the tensions between my diasporic desire for bounded belonging and a deep sense of mobility; it places things and makes them move. Diasporic touch significantly transforms the understanding of diasporic subjectivity formation. The knowledge gathered by this artistic process intervened within and extended the theory discussed in Chapter One. It helped me to understand why externalising my diasporic psychic life in artworks has a reparative effect. My research extended Bhabha's (1998) theories identifying diasporic subjectivity formation as a transitional phenomena (Winnicott, 2005 [1971]), an entwining of inner world and outer environment that simultaneously renews migrants' selves and culture. It has expanded Papastergiadis and Trimboli's (2017) ideas that this entwinement between inner and outer world is characterised by folding and results in montage forms. By making images through diasporic touch, I discovered that through the process of entwining my inner world in the external environment, I materialised my diasporic melancholia. My losses worked themselves through my body, marking the surface of my artworks and seeing them outside of self, which had a reparative effect. The research has led me to a position where I can challenge some aspects of psychoanalytic theory, in particular Butler's account of melancholic loss discussed in Chapter Two. Instead of diasporic melancholia being

impossible to overcome, as Butler (2003) claims that it stays in the body revealing itself in gestures, my work has shown that art practice can transform this objectless loss into a process of mourning. Although still undefined in language, melancholic loss presents itself as self fragmentation that can settle as marks in artworks, thereby becoming externalised through the performative processes. By using the process of diasporic touch to make work—then studying the outcome—I understood how art practice, by instigating a process of mourning, can help migrants and diasporics to work through their difficult palette of emotions.

The trajectory of artworks formed by diasporic touch—my string of e*mplacements*—takes a route through the grid-like structure that underpins our national frameworks: it creates a meandering line that explores the betweenness of its many boundaries. Diasporic touch creates artworks that challenge the validity of national narratives by highlighting how cultures connect. The images of belonging that I create through these means are montages, I bind different times and places together into composite forms. Gathering fragments that remind me of Sweden, in my surroundings; I photograph elements of the Falu-red house environment—worn wood, birch trees, pine needles and lilac bushes—and join them together in compositions that play with scale and juxtapose textures without an indexical link to the past (Edwards, 2015). Diasporic touch makes visible the spaces between cultures and rather than being neither nor, they are materially both. It transforms the neither-nor-uncertainty I feel when living in-between cultural frameworks, into artworks—material forms that show how the in-between is in fact a liminal, threshold-like, place where things are connected. In my images, however, the dominant cultural narratives affecting my life are not evenly represented. The compositions created through diasporic touch almost exclusively deal with transforming the narratives of Sweden. They form uneven patchworks made from raw materials gathered in England—my artworks claim a space for my Swedish-ness in the local environment.

My research has also led me to understand how images can be revolutionary (Benjamin, 2015 [1940]; McLaverty-Robinson, 2013), how they can materialise my bi-cultural experiences that fall between languages and challenge the validity of homogenous national histories. It shows how there is a between: rather than writing about my life experiences in either Swedish or English, my art works are not of this culture or that, picturing this country or that, referencing this history or that; instead it holds both cultures, both countries and both histories at once. This work is urgent, as nationalism or even far-right nationalism seen

in Sweden is on the rise and acceptance of difference is reducing. It is also timely as the aftermath of Brexit continues to transform our identities. My images of belonging, created through diasporic touch, are of rural Sweden, but they are also of my local environment. They reconstruct my past but are taken here and now. My images of belonging created through diasporic touch are constellations (Benjamin, 2015 [1940]) that can bridge cultures (Papastergiadis, 2007 [2000]), they transform established ideas about belonging and nations. My artworks fill a world full of uncertainty with new possibilities, they materialise the space between.

Further Research

Building on findings in my research, I would like to undertake further research in relation to the process of diasporic touch. Some aspects of these investigations would examine and extend the process itself; some would explore if and how the process occurred under different conditions or circumstances; and another potential strand of this future research would look more closely at the visual forms it produces and the prevalence of loss within those new visual manifestations. Directly addressing a limitation in my research regarding I would like to expand the scope of the Anglo-Swedish Archive project. The aim here would be to get more conclusive evidence about the transmissibility of diasporic touch and I would like to further explore whether the activity, for other Swedish migrant artists in the UK, can transform melancholia into a process of mourning. For example, using the methods from the Anglo-Swedish Archive project I could study the artistic practices of other Swedish migrant artists in the UK to find out how they articulate memories of home and how their self fragmentation and loss enter into and reside in their artwork.

The exploration into whether the process of diasporic touch can be experienced by others can be extended to include artists with other migrant and diasporic backgrounds: it could, for example, map the distinct qualities of their loss. Specifically interesting to me would be a further examination of how the process unfolds in a post-Brexit context where ideas of self and place have undergone dramatic changes. This research would contribute to an emerging post-Brexit identity discourse and add important information about the role of art making in the formation of diasporic subjectivities after Britain's exit from the European Union. Information about the prevalence of diasporic touch could be gathered by examining the artistic practices of people affected by Brexit with the specific qualities of their loss unearthed by studying their artworks. Future research might also, for instance, draw on Winnicott's (2005 [1971]) understanding that transitional phenomena occur not just in art

making but in life more generally, which would therefore lead to an examination of whether the process of diasporic touch can be experienced by migrant non-artists that undertake creative endeavours to reform their subjectivities.

Overall, extending the research about if and how diasporic touch is experienced by other people would further evidence its transmissibility; it would also gather knowledge about the role of loss in migrant and diasporic imagination and subjectivity formation. Contributing to a deeper understanding of how loss permeates the diasporic imaginary (Axel, 2002) (Bader, et al., 2019), the implications of this current study could reveal its shape, density and texture. Examining how diasporic touch is experienced by other people and how it manifests in different cultural context, future research might establish possible variations in the prevalence and qualities of loss. In addition to this, it might be possible to explore how diasporic touch emerges and unfolds in a post-Brexit cultural context leading to the opportunity to map the associated changing attitudes to self, and the uncertainty and heightened sense of loss it causes. This research should therefore be understood as a key step in the process of gathering information about the collective dimensions of post-Brexit diasporic self fragmentation and melancholia.

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