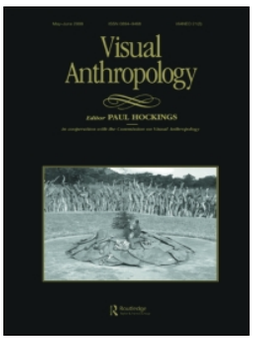

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Imagining the Real: The Photographic Image and Imagination in Knowledge Production

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Imagining the Real: The Photographic Image and Imagination in Knowledge Production

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The exploratory discussion in this article starts from the fact that it is the realism of photographic representations which enables them, in an indexical sense, to point back to a reality *beyond* themselves as images. In the same vein, it is as a metonymic space-time fragment that the photograph can indicate a continuation of reality *beyond* its own framing of the visible. Or, putting it differently, rather than constituting transparent representations, presence in photographs is evoked through absence of the real. What is not problematized in photographic theory and visual anthropology is that photographs thus depend on imagination for their interpretative connection to reality. My argument sees photographic practice as interference, which pushes the medium past the implicit positivist premise for visual knowledge production in anthropology. Furthermore, when understanding the ability to imagine as movements *in* reason, the separation between imagination and reason, presumed necessary for the scientific production of knowledge, is also challenged. Concerned with rethinking photography in visual anthropology, imagination's role in knowledge production will be explored through my photographic art project, *Houses/Homes*.

The discussion here explores the argument that photographs, despite their realism, depend on imagination for their interpretative connection to the real.[1] However, imagination's role in the interpretation of realistic photographic representations (still-images and films) has not been addressed in photographic theory or visual anthropology as an epistemological issue. The discussion

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Color versions of one or more of the figures in the article can be found online at www.tandfonline.com/gvan.

I now offer is grounded in an ongoing photographic project, *Houses/Homes* [Figures 1–20],[2] following my transition from the field of art photography to that of anthropology. The scrutiny of taken-for-granted representational correspondence in knowledge production, that was taking place at the time when the humanities and social sciences were shaken by a "crisis of representation" [Marcus and Fischer (1986) 1999], had also opened a window for thinking photographic representation anew [e.g., Lutkehaus and Cool 1999; Pink 1999]. This possibility was largely overlooked in mainstream anthropology, which continued to be primarily concerned with textual representation [cf. Mead 1975]. However, it did not pass unnoticed within the arts, where the last barrier to accepting photography as art had crumbled with the renouncing of photographic "truth." So, instead of developing another way of photographing that might have been considered more "scientific" [Mjaaland 2004, 2006], I continued to use the photograph as *beyondness*: as an indexical fragment of the real, always pointing back to a reality beyond itself as image and indicating, in a metonymic sense, a continuation of space and time beyond its own frame [Barthes 1993; Peirce 1958–60, 1998]. Posing a challenge to positivist notions of objectivity, it is this specific ability of photographic representations to evoke presence by what is in fact absent that forms the basis for discussing imagination's role in knowledge production in this article.

My argument challenges the ontological divide presumed necessary between imagination and rationality in an epistemological sense, by insisting on interference as a way of knowing. Photographic representation understood in terms of interference, also when depicting reality in a seemingly non-interfering way—as in my photographic project *Houses/Homes*—finds support in Karen Barad's discussion of quantum physics [2007], where she uses diffraction (interference) as an overarching trope. In what she terms "agential realism," which presumes the entanglement of matter and meaning, realism "is not about representations of an independent reality but about real consequences, interventions, creative possibilities, and responsibilities of intra-acting within and as part of the world" [*ibid*.: 37]. In Barad's perspective, where the knower and the known are always part of the same phenomenon, the boundary between the "object of observation" and the "agencies of observation" is neither fixed nor arbitrary. Rather, as long as the physical arrangement of a specific apparatus is not in place, this boundary is indeterminate [*ibid*.: 114]. It is the "agential cut" enacted by an apparatus, as a specific material-discursive device, and that I take to include the photographic camera, which forges a divide between the subjective and objective *within* the phenomenon in question. Knowledge production, from this perspective, is not dependent on *a priori* separateness of an objective world. Rather, as Barad states: "The entanglements we [in knowledge production] are part of reconfigure our beings, our psyches, our imaginations, our institutions, our societies" [*ibid*.: 383]. So why do separability from the object and objective transparency of representation continue to figure as the prevailing (albeit implicit) premise in anthropological knowledge production, so far as photographic representations are concerned?

Figure 1 Copenhagen, Denmark, April 2013. (© Thera Mjaaland/BORA)

Figure 2 Copenhagen, Denmark, April 2013. (© Thera Mjaaland/BORA)

IMAGINATION AS A "MISSING MYSTERY"

Newer knowledge on perception, and in particular on vision, leaves positivist notions of seeing in shatters. The eye is not a tiny camera, and perception is not a faculty of the brain that merely registers sense information (visual or other). Redefined as neural signaling and synaptic transmission, perception is understood as active and dependent on interaction with the world to make sense. In fact, action and perception are found to fire the same neurons in the brain, identified by the neuroscientist V. S. Ramachandran [2011] as "mirror neurons" (which also enable empathy). Having carried out research over several decades on the brain's imaging ability, Steven Kosslyn and colleagues have in a similar vein established that the same regions of the brain are in use when viewing a scene and when imagining it [in *ibid*.: 242]. While imagination has been found to reside in the neo-cortex and thalamus of our brains together with sensory perception, motor commands and spatial reasoning, consciousness (of which we seem to know equally little) and abstract thought, with a mutual influence presumed between imagination and memory, this knowledge does not necessarily tell us more about what imagination actually *is*. With a reference to Eva Brann's terming of the enduring scientific neglect of imagination as a "missing mystery" [1991: 3], Nigel J. T. Thomas notes that despite being at least implicitly assigned crucial cognitive and epistemological functions, imagination is not only rarely, but also not satisfactorily, explained [2003: 79]. Thomas suggests the following definition of imagination on his academic resource website:

> Imagination is what makes our sensory experience meaningful, enabling us to interpret and make sense of it, whether from a conventional perspective or from a fresh, original, individual one. It is what makes perception more than the mere physical stimulation of sense organs. It also produces mental imagery, visual and otherwise, which is what makes it possible for us to think outside the confines of our present perceptual reality, to consider memories of the past and possibilities for the future, and to weigh alternatives against one another. Thus, imagination makes possible all our thinking about what is, what has been, and, perhaps most important, what might be. [n.d.: no page]

One point of contestation in the literature has been on whether or not imagination always, and only, involves mental imagery or imaging. In his article, "The Multidimensional Spectrum of Imagination," Thomas [2014] proposes that imagination is at work not only along a continuum that includes both images and precepts, but across dimensions that range in kind from the mundane to dreams and hallucination. Earlier however Thomas had warned against slippages in the term *imagination* when taken to include "suppose," "believe," "pretend" and "visualize" [1997: 97]. Edward S. Casey [1976], who has argued for the autonomy of imagination as a mental activity, emphasizes that imagination must not be mistaken for perceptual error or hallucination, fantasy or delusion—or even memory. In concurrence with Jean-Paul Sartre's [2004 (1940)] transcendental perspective in his book *The Imaginary*, Casey links imagination up with freedom, as "imagining, more than any mental act, precedes proliferation: it is the primary way in which the mind diversifies itself and its content. Mind is free—is indeed

Figure 3 Samsø, Denmark, April 1998. (© Thera Mjaaland/BORA)

Figure 4 Cape Town, South Africa, April 2000. (© Thera Mjaaland/BORA)

Figure 5 Simonstown, South Africa, April 2000. (© Thera Mjaaland/BORA)

most free—in imagining" [1976: 201]. Furthermore, as an autonomous capacity, Casey presumes a distinction between imagining and being creative, as "imagining gives no guarantee or strict promise of creativity" [*ibid*.: 188]; a point that is crucial for the way I understand imagination (addressed in the next section). Assuming that there is no *inherent* connection between imagination and creativity does not however tempt Casey to conclude that creativity and imagination are not contingently related. Nevertheless creativity could be added to the list above of terms that confuse our understanding of what imagination is. Here I will consider the basis for this confusion, which relates to the ontological divide commonly assumed necessary in an epistemological sense between imagination and reason, also when interpreting realist photographs like those constituting my series *Houses/Homes*.

IMAGINATION AS MOVEMENT *IN* REASON

In his *Critique of Pure Reason* Emmanuel Kant asserts that, "[w]e must inquire for example, whether or not imagination (connected with consciousness), memory, wit, and analysis are not merely different forms [or manifestations] of understanding and reason" [Kant (1970) 1899: 481]. Despite this 19th-century insight, imagination still tends to be placed in opposition to reason; as something that, in an epistemological sense, misleads us. At issue here is the general uneasiness attached to imagination in the field of science. Lorraine Daston [1998], who in her article, "Fear and Loathing of the Imagination in Science," has analyzed imagination's role in art and science from the 17th century onwards, notes:

> Successful art could and did emulate scientific standards of truth to nature, and successful science could emulate artistic standards of imaginative beauty. But whereas in the eighteenth century both artists and scientists had seen no conflict in embracing both standards simultaneously, the chasm that had been opened between the categories of objectivity and subjectivity in the middle decades of the nineteenth century […] forced an either/or choice. […] At the crossroads of the choice between objective and subjective modes stood the imagination. [*ibid*.: 86]

By the last quarter of the 19th century, Daston asserts, psychologists who investigated creativity distinguished, as a matter of routine, between different species of imagination, including a differentiation between artistic and scientific imagination. Whereas the former was plastic and free to invent, the scientific imagination was, following the French psychologist Théodore Ribot, constrained by "rational necessities that regulate the development of the creative faculty" [in *ibid*.: 87]. While this art/science differentiation of imagination seems hard-lived, it is nevertheless implausible.

In line with the much-quoted statement attributed to Albert Einstein that "imagination is more important than knowledge" [in Habashi 2012: 121], it is accepted that scientific enquiry as a process of investigation requires imagination. However it continues, so far as notions of the "purity" of objective data are concerned, to be imperative that imagination does not tamper with the scientific "facts." Daston suggests that in an Enlightenment environment where subjective

art endured and objective science proved more and more fallible, the best hope for permanence in scientific achievement was to protect the sacred boundary of "pure" facts from being contaminated (or "polluted") by imagination [1998: 91]. Consequently what was (and continues to be) *imagined* is a direct link untarnished by imagination between "facts" and a rational mind. Developing Daston's perspective further by arguing for the integral role of imagination in the constitution of science, Richard C. Sha states, "insofar as objectivity required a suppression of subjectivity […], the imagination helped construct objectivity itself" [2009: 663]; a construct still upheld despite the enduring epistemological uncertainties and indeterminacies at issue in the scientific endeavor [cf. Downie 2001].

Based on a reading of different thinkers' treatment of imagination, like Plato, Aristotle, Descartes and Kant, Dennis L. Sepper [2013] asserts that there exists in their writings what he calls an occluded-occulted tradition, where the understanding that imagining was an intelligent activity has posed too great a threat to the sovereignty of reason. In his opinion, this occluded-occulted tradition holds a conception of imagination as a communal matrix or topographical power, which enables imaginative *movements* against or among different naturally or artificially articulated backgrounds, foregrounds, frameworks and fields [*ibid.*: 8]. As Sepper explains,

> Within the conceptual topology of matrixes, human imagination comes to appear as more about making and remaking, contextualizing and recontextualizing appearances than about envisioning and fixing them in mind [as images or precepts]. The foregrounds and backgrounds of imaginative contextualization and recontextualization are, in turn, the element of thought's mobility, flexibility, and amplitude. [*idem*]

Not denying that imagination can involve mental imagery (or, for that matter, other olfactory sensations like smell), for Sepper the discussion about whether imagination involves images or precepts (or both) misses the point. Set in motion by sense impressions resulting from our involvement with the world, more important in his conceptual topology of imagination as evocative, anticipatory, abstractional-concretional activity is his insistence that "without the matrixes of imagination there could be no *effective* reason" [*idem*, italics in original]. From Sepper's perspective, "Rationality without vigorous, wideranging imagination does not know enough to take another step" [*ibid.*: 487]. To understand imagination as "movement" (as opposed to a static faculty of the brain) does not however exclude the possibility that mental images or precepts are involved in the "move." Inspired by Barad's perspective, these moves could also be likened to the "quantum leaps" that electrons perform when abruptly moving from one energy level to another within the atom. What is important for my discussion here is that this move in perspective dissolves the positivist dichotomy that places imagination in opposition to reason (as if imagination were by default false and rationality is always right). Hence, it is as movement *in* reason that the role of imagination in knowledge production is discussed in this article.[3] In my opinion, it is also in this manner that imagination becomes entangled with the entanglement of matter and meaning, like in the realistic photographic images of houses presented here that seemingly are based on non-interference.

Figure 6 Bournemouth, UK, August 2013. (© Thera Mjaaland/BORA)

Figure 7 Bournemouth, UK, August 2013. (© Thera Mjaaland/BORA)

Figure 8 Harar, Ethiopia, November, 2012. (© Thera Mjaaland/BORA)

FILLING IN THE "GAPS" AND IMAGINING THE "WHOLE"

Objectivist notions of seeing continue however to form the underlying, if implicit, positivist premise for knowledge production in mainstream visual anthropology. Pursuing truth, Karl Heider's imperative of holism in his book *Ethnographic Film* (which continues to be influential), requires the inclusion of "whole bodies," "whole people," "whole interaction" and "whole acts" [2006(1976): 5]. This representational program does not incorporate the role of imagination in human cognition. For example, while we can only see a house from a maximum of three sides at the same time, this fact does not make us conclude that the house only *has* three sides. Relevant here is the cognitive theory of connectionism where thought processes are assumed to involve a continuous linking of fragmental building-blocks into loosely defined scripts or schemata [e.g., Strauss and Quinn 1994]. It is a connectionist understanding of cognition that informs Maurice Bloch's assertion that

> the concept of house is not a list of essential features (roof, door, walls, and so on) which have to be checked off before deciding whether or not it is a house. If that were so we would have no idea that a house which has lost its roof is still a house. It is rather that we consider something "a house" by comparing it to a loosely associated group of "houselike" features, no one of which is essential, but which are linked by a general idea of what a typical house is. [1994: 277]

From a connectionist perspective, which implicitly assumes imaginative movements in-between, there is no reason to underestimate the viewers' ability to fill in the "gaps" and imagine the "whole"— which constitutes the visual premise in the photographic series *House/Homes*. Conversely, Heider's objectivist program based on holism presupposes photographic representation as transparent, based on unequivocal correspondence. He also reinforces the view of imagination originating a century and a half earlier, when he asserts: "The creativity and imagination essential to good science, here including ethnographic film, are significantly different from the creativity and imagination essential to good art, here including most other uses of film" [Heider 2006(1976): 81]. If, however, imagination is an inherent aspect of how we perceive and reason, this distinction is spurious.

Furthermore observational ethnographic film, based on shooting and presenting the event in its entirety without imposing a filmic or narrative structure, under-communicates, according to Paul Henley, the "guilty secret" [2006: 377] that this proposed non-structure is a Western-based aesthetic device that continues to feed into positivist notions of knowledge production. Despite Anna Grimshaw's [2013] emphasis on distinguishing between observation and objectivity, ethnographic films can, based on what Henley terms their "empirical rhetoric" [2006: 378], continue to conceal their constructedness. While Marilyn Strathern has reminded us, in her short essay "Parts and Wholes," that textual ethnographies have "always been composed of cut-outs, bits extracted from context, brought together in analysis and narrative" [1994: 213; see also Høgel 2013], what continues to form an implicit premise in mainstream visual anthropology is, to follow Henley, that "the minimum of structuring would somehow afford the

Figure 9 Mekelle, Ethiopia, January 2013. (© Thera Mjaaland/BORA)

Figure 10 Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, November 2012. (© Thera Mjaaland/BORA)

Figure 11 Paris, France, April 2012. (© Thera Mjaaland/BORA)

maximum of truth" [2006: 396]. Henley quotes Dai Vaughan as having reminded us that "the antithesis of the structured is not the truthful, nor even the objective, but quite simply the random" [in *ibid*.].

Hence the answer to Heider's question, "Is the ethnographic filmmaker to focus on the events of the film or on the conventions of the cinematography?" [(1976) 2006: 81] is that photographic conventions cannot be avoided, as the photographic apparatus, as a material-discursive device in Barad's conception, is itself an enactor of conventions in terms of seeing and perceiving. So instead of securing objectivity, Heider gives ethnographic film *carte blanche* to continue concealing its constructedness. It might also be useful to note here, as Susan Sontag [1977] has reminded us, that in the early days of photography the difference between how cameras and the human eye depict and interpret perspective was often commented on; that is, before we became accustomed to a "photographic seeing" which, in reality, is not only distorted [*ibid*.: 97] but imagined. The task of the visual anthropologist is therefore not to avoid conventions (as if we could) but rather to account for them in the anthropological enquiry. The same goes for the inherent workings of imagination in the scientific pursuit, which, according to Sha, continue to go unacknowledged [2009: 668]. Daston [1998] suggests that the reason for the separating of artistic and scientific imagination reached beyond a scientific enquiry to the politics of science itself; to secure its position *as* science. These kinds of consideration continue to be important for anthropology too, to not lose its scientific credibility as an academic discipline.

ENTANGLEMENTS IN KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

The workings of imagination form an implicit premise in Rane Willerslev and Christian Suhr's discussion on the use of montage in visual anthropology. Their focus is on the revelatory power of the "gaps" or "extras" that the practice of montage produces (not unlike the cognitive dynamics presumed in connectionism); understood as an interphase where "the invisible becomes present as the absence of visibility" [2013: 5]. However, when they state that "[i]t is precisely from within the cracks [or gaps] of such unfinished, discordant knowledge-in-the-making that the invisible ground of human existence is most forcefully evoked" [*ibid*.: 13], imagination's epistemological role in this evocation remains unproblematized.

One way forward could be to understand the role of imagination in knowledge production in terms of what Barad conceptualizes as an *onto-epistem-ology*, encompassing the entangled relationship between the world and knowing [2007: 185]. One consequence of this perspective is that imagination has both ontological and epistemological implications, even when its role is not accounted for, or is right-out denied. Instead of clinging to an *a priori* separation of ontology from epistemology it is, therefore, in Barad's view, a study of practices of knowing in being that is needed. In her opinion, "Knowing requires differential accountability to what matters and is excluded from mattering. […] In an important sense, it matters to the world how the world comes to matter" [*ibid*.: 380].

Figure 12 Paris, France, April 2012.
(© Thera Mjaaland/BORA)

Figure 13 Oslo, Norway, July 2011.
(© Thera Mjaaland/BORA)

Figure 14 Isafjordur, Iceland, May 2008.
(© Thera Mjaaland/BORA)

Traversing the fields of art and anthropology with my camera, I found that doing anthropological research did not require me to do something qualitatively different than the processual investigations I was already accustomed to in my art practice. What differed first and foremost was the accountability that was required of me as a researcher, to make my investigative path transparent. Objectivity, in Barad's understanding, is not dependent on a pre-given divide between subject and object, but lies precisely in the accountability to the "agential cut" and consequently the different materialized becomings enacted by a specific material-discursive device [*ibid*.: 361, 391]; in my case, the photographic apparatus. Objectivity is therefore not renounced in her perspective. Rather, when based on diffraction, which moves reality from being understood as a fixed essence to an ongoing dynamic of intra-activity in an *onto-epistemo-logical* sense [*ibid*.: 206], objectivity is redefined in terms of accountability to the interferences made and the responsibilities following from intra-acting within and as part of the world [*ibid*.: 37].[4]

It is also important to remember here that the consequence of the either/or choice that was forged between the objective and subjective, as elaborated by Daston [1998], locked imagination up within subjectivity as private. Of significance for my discussion is therefore Arjun Appadurai's [1996] take on imagination as a collective property, moving imagining as a feature of how modern subjectivity is constituted across global contexts beyond the privacy of one individual person [see also Castoriadis 1997]. My photographic project *Houses/Homes* also implies a paraphrasing of what Charles Taylor conceptualizes as "modern social imaginaries" [2002: 91] when I focus on the middle-class home as a globalized idea in a visual sense. While David Sneath, Martin Holbraad and Morten Axel Pedersen [2009] are critical of the notion of a social imaginary since it, in their opinion, resurrects "culture" uncritically as an overarching template for thought and action, my line of argument resonates with what these authors have termed "technologies of imagination" [*ibid*.: 9]; as a set of emergent effects reliant on specific technologies (which I take to include the photographic apparatus as a specific material-discursive device) and through which imagination may be set in motion [*ibid*.: 19]. Inspired by Barad's concept of "agential realism," which presumes the entanglement of matter and meaning, and that, in my opinion, also entangles imagination *in* reason, I will therefore attempt to account for the "agential cut" I have forged with my camera when working with the photographic series *Houses/Homes*. It is important however to remind the reader that my discussion of these photographs is not based on how the people who live in these houses in different cultural settings perceive a particular house to be "home." What is at stake is the apparent presentation of these homes for viewers who, first, are passers-by like the photographer, and secondly, are viewers or audience of these photographs. It is based on Barad's perspective of diffraction (interference) as an underlying premise in knowledge production that I therefore can assert that imagination—as the ability to move between and across different levels and dimensions in unanticipated ways—becomes entangled with the entanglement of matter and meaning also in the case of photographic representation.

PHOTOGRAPHIC REALISM AS IMAGINED REALITY

My point of departure for interpreting photographs is that inherent in photographic seeing is both indexical and metonymic *beyondness*, which evokes presence by what is, in fact, absent [Peirce 1958–60, 1998; Barthes 1993]. Instead of understanding photographs as transparent representations of the real (as they still commonly are), it is more accurate, from this point of view, to say that reality is *imagined*. Hence what is implied is an epistemological move from how photographs are commonly viewed as realistic representations (or copies) of reality to being attentive to what the photographic image points to, and that must be imagined even when looking real.

In the photographic series *Houses/Homes* I dally with an "empirical rhetoric" [Henley 2006: 377]. Photographed (mostly) on sunny days in order to enhance color and contrast, my primary concern in these photographs has not however been objective documentation. Rather, I have sought to re-create the idyllic aura attached to the (Western) idea of the middle-class home, as one visual example of "modern social imaginaries" [Taylor 2002], traceable to middle-class neighborhoods in various parts of the world. By including objects left outside in well-kept gardens, an open window or door but no inhabitants, my intention has been to trigger *movements,* or "leaps" in the viewer's imagination, between presence and absence.[5] In line with a connectionist perspective on cognition, this pictorial strategy is premised on viewers' ability to make imaginative moves *in* reason in order to fill in the "gaps" in the representations of these houses and imagine the whole as a particular kind of "home" for people of a certain status. This visual strategy challenges a basic premise in Heider's holistic program for visual ethnographic representation that requires the inclusion of "whole bodies," "whole people," "whole interaction" and "whole acts" [2006(1976): 5]. However, we would also need imaginative moves *in* reason when interpreting holistically based photographic representations; that is, if social life fits into "wholes" at all.

At issue here too is that not allowing the filmed persons to look into the camera, a basic tenet of Heider's representational program, makes the photographing anthropologist "invisible as an observer" [Wolbert 2000: 325], and by implication prevents spectators of the ethnographic film (or photo) from becoming aware of their own gaze. It is the visual strategy of including the fencing—ranging from symbolic to more massive arrangements, in some cases involving armed response—which constitutes the viewer-position as outside the fence looking in. The chosen depth of field, which leaves the foreground slightly out of focus, draws the viewer's gaze over the fence and into these private spheres. In addition to an uneasy voyeurism, a feeling of exclusion from these homely spheres is also at stake here [Mjaaland 2013].

Implicit in the particular "agential cut" constituted by the photographic camera in my images of houses is therefore the intention to make "visible" a seeing from a specific position forced on the viewer by the photographer; as a voyeur who peeps into unknown people's homely spheres. Furthermore this particular positioning of the photographer points implicitly to the situatedness of what we see and know, which is commonly more "invisible" in textual anthropological

Figure 15 Isafjordur, Iceland, May 2008.
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Figure 16 Ban Phu, Thailand, July 1999.
(© Thera Mjaaland/BORA)

Figure 17 Ban Phu, Thailand, July 1999.
(© Thera Mjaaland/BORA)

Figure 18 Bournemouth, UK, August 2013. (© Thera Mjaaland/BORA)

Figure 19 Uppsala, Sweden, August 1998. (© Thera Mjaaland/BORA)

Figure 20 Uppsala, Sweden, August 1998. (© Thera Mjaaland/BORA)

representations. Hence, my positioning as a photographer is not (and can never be) neutral, even though the images can give the impression of being straightforward documentation. For example, contrary to architectural photographs that would be concerned with straight lines and sober compositions, it is the more careless framing in these images that draws attention to the photographer as an interfering subject. The question is whether the visual strategies applied in the photographic series *Houses/Homes* make these images irrelevant for a scientific enquiry in an anthropological context?

In these photographs of houses as material manifestations of the middle class in a visual sense, I have been concerned with evoking reflection on preconceived ideas about similarities and differences in affluence as they map onto the world. In fact it is the use of variations in the same formal composition from a specific viewpoint outside the fence that renders these photographs comparable; an analytical potential often forgotten in visual anthropology when dealing with still photographs from the field. The more-or-less explicit demarcations of space around these homes—in some cases merely symbolic and in others blocking not only insight but also access—point too to diverging needs for privacy and protection. However, the fact that these middle-class homes are in different places (a reflection of my own roving life), and also in locales not commonly thought of as "middle-class," is not directly discernible in the actual images. This visual strategy gives space for presumptions about the middle-class home to surface before potential preconceptions are challenged by the captions following each photograph and which pin the houses to specific places. These photographs therefore become one part of a much larger "whole" beyond its own frame in the process of generating knowledge.

When photographic images enter into the process of anthropological knowledge production it is, by following Barad's [2007] line of argument, the specificity of a particular "agential cut" that I, as a photographer, am accountable for in terms of the knowledge that is made to matter through my photographing interferences. In Barad's re-definition of objectivity as accountability reality is moved from being a fixed essence to an ongoing *onto-epistemo-logical* dynamic of responsible intra-activity [2007: 206]. In an earlier article I argued for moving the focus for interpreting photographs of what is seen to what is evoked [Mjaaland 2009]. With consequences for how we understand knowledge production in general, what I have discussed here is how evocation in an epistemological sense can be exemplified by way of imaginative movements *in* reason between absence and presence in photographic images.

CONCLUDING

In her reflections on fine art and anthropology, Amanda Ravetz proposes that, when dealing with the visual in anthropology, the role of imagination should be re-thought as an essential part of the ethnographic task [2005: 78]. In this article I have accounted for how imagination comes to matter for what matters in a visual anthropological enquiry. At the basis of my discussion is accountability to the diffractions that the camera as a material-discursive device always forges, even

when trying to be non-interferingly objective. Hence, pointing a camera at an object in a seemingly neutral way does not secure an objective representation of the object in question. It is precisely the ontologically entangled epistemological potential of imaginative leaps, based on imagination as movement *in* reason, that tends to be overlooked in visual anthropology when a supposedly "neutral" recording of an event continues to be understood as the best representational strategy for communicating the data (as if these two things are, or can be, the same). It might therefore be useful to remember here that the premise in art for getting a message through, which is "true" to human experience, is neither objectivity nor realism as such. Rather, a skillful use of aesthetic conventions and the epistemological presumptions implied is set in motion in order to move the viewer's perception in a specific direction (real or not).

Whether in art or in science, understanding imagination as movement *in* reason releases us from the remnants of a positivist paradigm, and opens up a possibility for experimentation with photographic representation in visual anthropology that extends the analysis of photographs from what can be seen to what can be imagined. As the cognitive ability to imagine as movement *in* reason is entangled with the constitutive practices that realties emerge through, imagination has an effect, not only on the practices we as anthropologists study in their becoming but for scientific practice and knowledge production itself. While photographic images can evoke presence by way of absence of the real, in the case of making *present* the "guilty secret" of imagination's entangled role in knowledge production, it continues however to be simply that—it is *absent*.

NOTES

1. Earlier versions of my argument have been presented at the NAF Conference in the panel "Art–Science–Anthropology," University of Bergen, May 2–4, 2014; and at the RAI conference, "Anthropology and Photography," in the panel "Reasserting presence: reclamation, recognition and photographic desire," at the British Museum, London, May 29–31, 2014.
2. An early version of this photographic series was published in *Houses/Homes* [Mjaaland 2000].
3. Movement is also central in Tim Ingold's argumentation, to understand the processes implied in different art practices in order to establish "an approach to creativity and perception capable of bringing together the movements of making, observing and describing [anthropology]" [2011: 2]. Rather than basing the anthropological knowledge production on description of what has already passed, a shift in the epistemological perspective that joins forces with forward-moving processes of investigation attuned to emergent knowledge is central [Ravetz 2011].
4. Barad's argument [2007] is linked to premises underlying feminist epistemologies, for example Sandra Harding's "strong objectivity" as based on strong reflexivity [1993], and Donna Haraway's "situated knowledges" [1988].
5. This is a strategy also used by other art photographers; e,g, Gregory Conniff's [1985] work in his book, *Common Ground*: *An American Field Guide Volume 1*, which has been inspirational for my own photographic work.

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