

Chapter 24

The Frame and the Fold: Violent Autobiography, Photography, and Unfurling From Flatness

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ABSTRACT

The author has a crackly relationship with photography. In fact, they have at times struggled to see eye to eye. Photography has seemed awkward, with its sharp, obvious, physical boundaries and flat, printed surface. Yet, as an artist, the author has come back to photography again and again. When making autobiographical work, the author brought the camera with me to places where there has been pain. But the author has often wondered if photography cannot offer enough. In this chapter, autobiography is fragmented and messy. It includes sexual violence, and moreover, the folding of these experiences into the self. The aim is to discover if and how these experiences alter interactions with hierarchy but also influence artistic vision and methodology.

INTRODUCTION

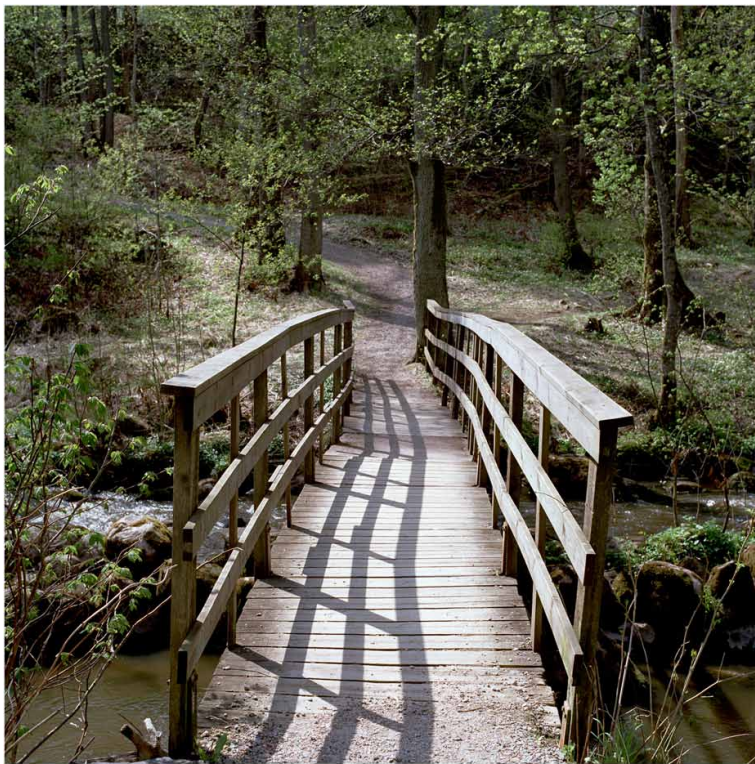
I have a crackly relationship with photography, but in my work as an artist, I have been drawn to use it to talk about my biography. I have used photography to create evidence, from memory, of some of the things that continue to pain me. In doing so I have asked photography to come with me into complex and violent narratives. Me and the camera travelled to rural Sweden for the work *Prologue* (2013). We drove through thick and dark forest, then walked along the same tracks that I walked along years ago, only the last time what awaited me when I arrived was sexual violence. I remember it was springtime the last time I came here too, it must have been just after the turn of the millennium. We would have a few months earlier thought that, somehow, life would be so different in this new era. We entered the 2000s with a mixture of fear and excitement, unaware of what the new year might bring. More so this year than any other year it seemed. Violence has become the subject matter of much of my artwork after

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Prologue. I am reflecting now on how these experiences of violence sit within my artistic practice as subject matter but also the way it has impacted *how* I make work.

I am in the south-west of Sweden, in a place where the tarmacked roads give over to ones that are hard packed with dirt and tufty grasses and weeds growing between the wheel tracks. In the summers the roads erupt in dusty clouds as cars pass through, heading on to somewhere else but rarely stopping. On weekends, on the brink of teenagehood, we drank moonshine with coffee in dimly lit cottages. Then we moved along to the lake on mopeds and tractors, our voices and laughter echoed into the forest night.

Figure 1. Prologue (© 2013, Elin Karlsson.)



It was in the springtime and he had only been my boyfriend for two days. It didn't last for long; for some reason he broke up with me a few days later. I couldn't help but feel I was to blame for it all.

That particular day, in springtime 2000, I asked my mother if I could go to his house after school, it might have been a Tuesday or a Wednesday, and she promised she would pick me up after work. As I revisit to take the photographs, I am face-to-face with the past, which seems folded into one with the present right here. I am back in the place that I have spent my life running away from, having been brought here by memories that seem more dreamlike, well nightmarish, than real. But after a decade or so of being in a state of amnesia about the whole thing, the anger and disgust that had lingered around intimacy and trust found its true harbor and hence, I am now back on this dirty road.

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