Barthes conceived the photograph as a literal ‘emanation of the referent’, from which radiant energy from once-present ‘real bod[ies], which w[ere] there’ links observers in present time to beings who existed in the past.¹ He referenced, here, the way in which Sontag envisaged these radiations to be much like ‘delayed rays’ from the stars, emanating through space and time; these rays — carrying not just proof of life, but life itself — reach observers far removed from their moment and place of existence, forming what Barthes called ‘a sort of umbilical cord’ linking ‘the body of the photographed thing’ to our gaze.² Like ethnographic recordings of voices from the past, the material object of the photograph, and light — which he called a ‘carnal medium’ — not only bring back the departed, but the milieu in which they lived out their lives. If the sonic conventions of the time are reproduced in voice recordings, photographs subtly convey the norms of personal posture and relationality to others, as well as the relationship between

² Ibid., p. 81.
one person to another, and to the external world — social, economic, political worlds. This ‘carnal medium’ of light arrives at the doorstep of our present moment, bearing evidence of whether our loved ones’ environments provided them with the stability necessary for sustenance, or made their lives precarious and unviable.

I suggest, in this essay that there is another facet with which we might engage when we look at photographs, especially when it comes to records of the past to which we have a personal attachment, those images containing narratives with which our own are inevitably entangled. This added dimension is especially palpable when the photographs are those through which immigrant, exiles, and otherwise dislocated persons make sense of their experiences of being ‘out of place’. When we see a photograph with actors and landscapes significant to our personal emotional geographies, we imagine, sometimes, that they have power to help us recreate our own fantasies of belonging. Often, these compulsive and repetitive re-enactments are an attempt to recapture moments of compromised power and loss. Through memory and creative re-creation, we conjure up stage-play worlds in order not only to revisit but to recreate otherwise inaccessible scenes from the past. These worlds we reconstruct serve as material locations onto which we can project idealised versions of our personal history, re-enacting scenes of damaged pasts, wilfully inserting ourselves as actors onto the scene.

Reading Sontag reminds us that the pleasure we experience in taking and looking at photographs is indicative of our ‘[p]oignant longings for beauty […] for a redemption and celebration of the body’; however, we know, from her writing, that ‘other, less liberating feelings are expressed as well,’ including the ‘compulsion to photograph: to turn experience itself into a way of seeing’.3 This desire to stage, distill, and record — an impulse that has become more obvious in this second decade of the 2000s than it was during Sontag’s lifetime — has linkages to displaced persons’ compulsive rituals of repetition. Whilst repetitions and revisitations of a task can be lauded as a conduit to a meditative state — part of the methodology of striving for completeness, for union with the task, and mindfulness — they can also be an indication of woundedness. Rather than a mindfulness and presence that lead to alleviation of anxiety, we (consciously or unconsciously) return ourselves to a damaged or

unresolved past precisely because it is the source of anxiety. Yet, we often find that our repetitive returns offer no clarity, alleviation from pain, or understanding. Rather than allowing us to find release through acknowledgment, our rituals are re-enactments of trauma, directing the choices we make in life and making us return, obsessively, to the source of pain.

If Barthes famously theorised that photographs have the uncanny ability to recall absent persons back to life, I — as a person currently living in another century, but intrinsically tied to the political and economic realities produced by the century in which Barthes’ and Sontag’s words were written — am interested in tracing the ways in which image repertoires work in our worlds, and how the discourses of transnationalism, migration, and displacement might be networked with their thoughts about photography. How might we, the remainders and reminders of the twentieth century’s upheavals, regard images of now-inaccessible worlds? How might these images act as conduits to self-re-fashioning, as we attempt to recreate and insert ourselves into narratives of belonging that have become unavailable to us?

It is these frameworks — the ways in which we return to image-worlds in order to articulate dislocation, as well as to re-stage home and belonging — through which I want to respond to Luso-Angolana photographer and video artist Mónica de Miranda’s photography and video work. The visual self-narratives that emerge out of her films, *An Ocean Between Us, Once Upon a Time, and Field Work*, in particular, become conduits to psychological and emotional explorations, wherein geographical travel, open oceanic vistas, ‘middle passages’ of canals connecting the ocean to rivers going inland, and tenders — boats used to transport goods and people to larger ships at harbours — are used as metaphors for precarious existences as postcolonial subjects, of life created in in-between spaces, of estrangement, as well as the powerful desire to recreate and reconstruct ‘home’ in the artist’s own terms. In addition, de Miranda uses various cinematic techniques, including fractured narrative styles, three-screen installations that play the same narrative with slightly different timing, and soundscapes that recall both the freedom represented by the ocean and the technologies of the state that attempt to control migratory bodies — including radar and satellite sounds — to mirror dislocation, desire for boundless freedom,
and the difficulties of economic and geographical mobility for many from the geopolitical Third World.

In my engagement with de Miranda’s video works, our desire to relocate our diasporic bodies and experiences through return — to investigate the emotional cartography of an imprinted ‘home’ location, and to ‘put to rest’ the voices, smells, and image hauntings we experience but cannot consciously identify — is read through my own experiences of dislocation and attempts to navigate myself through to a ‘homespace’ using images, words, and thought. I know that sometimes, after much time lost at sea, we may find eventual acceptance of what seems unacceptable in the beginning — not to long for one nation or physical location to call home, but to find belonging in unbelonging, to feel not-incomplete within a state of flux and formlessness.

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Among more privileged travellers, the act of photographing and the photographs themselves have long been used to narrate mobility, access,
and power. But for the ‘other’, less powerful communities, photographs are evidence of their dislocation and fracture. At the same time, they also assure us of a once-stable history — evidence of belonging and of belongings, ordinary customs and rituals repeated, of banal moments recorded as part of the story of rootedness in a geographical and cultural location. Our collections of familial and familiar circles are conduits to self, even when they do not depict us directly. They help us re-establish familiarity, belonging, self, and connection to those who we are no longer able to contact, creating a bond between our capacity for visualising belonging and stability. These acts of looking are indicative of our psychological need for returning to pasts that are no longer physically or emotionally available. Yet we know that images are not stable — physically, they deteriorate; and conceptually, socially, and politically, they shift meaning, confounding those who wish for photographs to contain stable, documentary narratives or confirm the past that they know to be ‘true’.

For those who came from families well-connected enough to networks of power and privilege — who had access to cameras, rolls of film, and even home movie-making equipment — there is an abundance of uncanny evidence, residuals of absent persons to whom we are narratively and genetically connected. We return to these images when we lose those in the images to death. Sometimes, we return to them during those instances when we lose our own tethering to our stable understanding of self. In mourning for a beloved other to whom we attached ourselves, and to recollect the beloved self — unmoored by pain — we return to our two-dimensional stockpiles that faithfully preserve worlds we can no longer access. For others, the photographic record is less abundant, or altogether absent. If there is a violent rupture in one’s history, resulting in disruption to family attachments to home spaces, there will inevitably be an absence of images.

The resulting lacunae in family image banks also result in ruptures to our pathways of imaginary return, creating estrangements between genealogical contact zones. Whereas friends from more stable political and national narratives will look to family and national albums to locate themselves, those whose histories were violently interrupted will have the added burden of longing for what is regarded as a completely ‘normative’ twentieth century experience: layers of photographs, moving from
sepia-toned, white-bordered and staged studio portraits to those taken at home using 35mm cameras and Polaroid Instamatics, each layer of images illuminating a family’s movement through visual technologies of the last century. That separation from ‘normative’ narratives of modernity leaves us with an abundance of longing; we recreate returns, and build image banks that signify the contradictions of displacement — to establish belonging and right of return, and the impossibility of return.

Marianne Hirsch, in her seminal article, ‘Past Lives: Postmemories in Exile’ — detailing the ways in which traumatic memory is transmitted in families of those who survived the Holocaust and the effects of that ‘received trauma’ on the second generation — named the phenomenon ‘postmemory’. Hirsch explains that this transmitted trauma, as well as the alienation created by not having been present there — and thus unable to share the experiences that caused and created one’s family’s upheavals and suffering — produces powerful longings in the generation born to survivors, who long to be a part of a world to which it is impossible to return, partly because of temporal shifts, but also because that world has been physically destroyed.

Children of survivors live at a further temporal and spatial remove from that decimated world. The distance separating them from the locus of origin is the radical break of unknowable and incomprehensible persecution; for those born after, it is a break impossible to bridge.

Hirsch explains that despite the geographical and temporal distances that separate the next generation from their parents’ ‘decimated worlds,’ the depth of trauma, ‘mourning and memory […] imparts […] something akin to memory.’ This ‘belated’ generation grows up ‘dominated by narratives that preceded their birth’, with their own experiences and narratives being ‘evacuated’ by the experiences of their parents; yet, despite their intricate connections with their parents’ trauma, they find that they are unable to fully understand the traumatic memories of their parents, or be able to recreate their worlds.

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6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.
Postmemory is a powerful form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation.\textsuperscript{8}

Hirsch points out that latter generations, who arrive post-trauma, are only able to access the ‘voids’ of disappeared worlds through creatively producing aesthetic works connecting their own longing to belong to what is, essentially, a received, and imagined version of the past; this hunger, she argues, produces ‘diasporic aesthetics of temporal and spatial exile that needs simultaneously to rebuild and to mourn,’ inventing in order to ‘relocate’ themselves in time and space.\textsuperscript{9}

Here, I wish to emphasise that I am not equating the experiences of Holocaust survivors, and those of their children, with those of other displaced people of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries; rather, I am attempting to note that there are fractured parallels, with varying degrees of separation, between the experiences of the ‘post-memory’ generation and the experiences of the children of other displaced people. This is especially true when it comes to their desire to insert themselves into their parents’ worlds, a desire that is heightened by photographs depicting their parents’ past lives. The children of postcolonial migrants — displaced as a result of ‘ethnically-motivated’ pogroms, systematic violence and state-sponsored brutality, and at other times from more difficult to identify structural and economic violence — similarly seek out visual evidence of the pasts that they cannot be a part of, but to which they feel powerfully connected. For the immigrant, the exile, and the displaced — whether that displacement is a result of economic, environmental, or violent political upheavals — repetitive returns to often idealised, lost locations, via images of family events in which they may not even have been old enough to be a part, is an act of circumnavigating the trauma of dislocation. Photographs and rarer collections of moving images become containers of emanations of the past, essential to narrating the condition of being post-violence, post-war, post-colonial.

Because of their desire to recreate the worlds they lost, postcolonial immigrants, refugees, exiles and asylum seekers are often accused of having ‘[t]oo deep an attachment to territoriality and locatedness’,\textsuperscript{10}

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\textsuperscript{8} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{9} Ibid., p. 664.
this inability to move beyond ‘nationalisms, essentialisms’ is regarded as a negative characteristic associated with immigrants.\textsuperscript{11} Attachments to territory and former identities produce unseemly fissures in their persons and identities when they relocate to new territories. These ruptures — material evidence of having been ejected violently, of not being able to mould the self into new social and physical geographies — prevent them from cultivating the desired native’s seamlessness; this appearance of having little to no apparent breakage — an idealised characteristic in the ‘native’ — is what the second generation often attempts to mimic.

Visual theorist Griselda Pollock named this uncanny, inexplicable existence of another place within our memory “‘natal memory’” — that is, the imaginary sense of belonging created by the familiarity of the first places that we learn to know before we learn their geographical, historical or national identities.’ Pollock suggests that although our conscious persons may not be able to identify the significance of a particular location to our being, ‘places, colours, smells, geology, vistas’ survive in us; it is ‘often unrecognized memory of place and space associated with where we are born [which we absorbed] without the fear of separation […]’ Thus it marks our earliest and slow emergence into a sense not of place as a topographical landscape but of emplacement in a phenomenological world.’ Because this imprinting is something that came into existence prior to our knowledge of and attachment to nation, ‘natal memory’ cannot, she argues, be associated with ‘the locus of any kind of nationalism.’ However, Pollock is cautious about over-romanticising our unconscious attachments, or pointing to natal memory as evidence of an ‘essential’ sort of belonging to a place; she points out,

[...]

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.
Thus, far from being a location of peaceful reflection and belonging, ‘natal memory’ is theorised ‘as a source of uncanniness and anxiety,’ and a form of imprinting that is formed when a rupture is experienced, or ‘only when dislocation effects a caesura between emplacement and location.’ It is this ‘uncanny anxiety’ that creates fruitful collaborations — if, ultimately, never providing a complete sense of belonging, ease, and ‘closure’ — between diasporic artists, writers, and the locations that they were forced to leave behind as children. The caesura created by migration and displacement — the long pause between consciously present memories firmly attached to a location, and the unconscious desire to return to an often-unidentifiable place — becomes the motivation for producing work that attempts to create a tangible homespace, or to investigate our uncanny anxieties that are a result of dislocation.

Fig. 38.2 Monica de Miranda, woman in front of a rusting ship (closeup). Still from Once Upon a Time, 2012–13. Image courtesy of Monica de Miranda, CC BY 4.0.

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Through her explorations of the Afro-Portuguese world, Mónica de Miranda’s works reflect on the history of contact between Portugal and its archipelago of (former) colonies around the world, filtered

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13 Ibid.
through her own fictionalised narratives and experiences. Using a net cast widely along the Lusophone archipelago, de Miranda maps currents that carried bodies, ideas, and emotions, hinting at the fact that most who were in the way of the tidal wave of empire did not have the power to change or affect history. The resulting disruptions are reflected in the elusive, fragmented, and reconfigured narratives that emerge in her films, *Once Upon a Time* (2012), *An Ocean Between Us* (2013), and the research project leading to the installation ‘Home Sweet, Sour Home’ (2013). For each project, de Miranda revisited locations significant to her family’s memory and her own search for belonging. Her films and installation work locate — through reflecting on personal and family narratives — the ways in which displacement, travel, and colonial and postcolonial violence on the body have triangulated across the Atlantic and Indian Ocean worlds, imbedded in the maps that determine physiological, psychological, and emotional makeup of her subjectivity. All three works are, in the artist’s words, a ‘search for home […] biographical work,’ in which she places herself ‘into the scene,’ combining ‘documentary work with fiction.’ Much like the works of the ‘postmemory’ generation of artists, who produced aesthetic works that were expressions of their longing to belong to disappeared and decimated worlds of their parents’ memory, de Miranda, too, rebuilds a narrative for herself; her works are a form of contemplating loss, mourning, and recreating in order to ‘relocate’ herself in time and space.

De Miranda’s films operate in the tradition of works about exile, dislocation, and displacement, as well as the less politically fraught genre of travel. Her mode of narrative sits strategically between fiction and documentary, exceeding the possibilities permitted by realism in order to get as close as possible to a truth that eludes traditional documentary and autobiographical practices. Her films are, thus, imagined autobiographies that narrate her experiences of being out of place, as well as the possibilities opened up by the enriching processes of contact. Various figures — sexual and romantic attachments, as well as de Miranda’s friends — who come in and out of frames also act as conduits to temporary homes, especially in the absence of the familiar, reflecting psychological and emotional considerations about the effects of being a product of amalgamation and erasure.

14 From a Skype conversation between M. Neelika Jayawardane and Monica de Miranda, 16 June 2017.
Fig. 38.3 Monica de Miranda, installation view of man looking at skyscrapers and greenery. Still from *Once Upon a Time*, 2012–13. Image courtesy of Monica de Miranda, CC BY 4.0.

Fig. 38.4 Monica de Miranda, installation view of man and woman on boat. Still from *Once Upon a Time*, 2012–13. Image courtesy of Monica de Miranda, CC BY 4.0.
Her methodology begs an interpretation of her use of moving image technologies to mobilise her declarations of agency, arrival, and presence, wherein the camera becomes part of her investigations and her mobilisation and self-exploratory processes. Where image banks establishing family lineages and belonging to landscapes are scarce, she creates a film — a mobile set of tens of thousands of stills, themselves composed of unstable digital pixels — set at sea, with momentary anchorings and disembarkations on landscapes, only to return to a central narrative of dislocation. It is through the processes of filmmaking that she engages in reconstructing belonging and resituating her own identity, inserting her presence into a series of oceanic and landscapes, each of which were created through the momentum of the Portuguese colonial project. In Once Upon a Time (2013), An Ocean Between Us (2012), and ‘Home Sweet, Sour Home’ (2013), she revisits locations significant to ‘memory and belonging’.

In her films, she relies almost solely on visual strategies to explore the significance of cityscapes, landscapes, and oceanic bodies to her project of remapping subjectivity and reconceptualising self through memory, imagined reconstruction, physical return, and creative production. Once Upon a Time offers the ‘emotion of motion’ in the form of a voyage, taking into account audience perceptions the visual elements of films, ‘such as light, shade, textures, and colors that contribute to the comprehension of the filmic narrative.’ The strong presence of nostalgia, ‘of a distant time, and a sense of disconnection to a space’ — communicated using ‘light, shade, textures and colors’ — almost becomes an identifiable character. De Miranda notes that her choices of ‘chromatic and light arrangements are important for the creation of the narrative and the viewer’s perception of the meanings and contents of the narrative.’ Together, these elements, along with her use of ‘long shots and takes’ reveal ‘memory [as] an archive of images’. They help us meditate on her experiences of

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16 Ibid., p. 22.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
navigating through personal spaces in which her family had once lived, or — in the absence of the physical home — the larger cultural and geographical environments they had occupied.

In both films, the sea, itself a location of anxiety and the meditative acceptance of impermanence, having form and formlessness, at once life-giving, and life-destroying, is often a metaphor through which artists and writers engage with the presence of dualities. De Miranda notes that, for her, the ‘ocean symbolically represents the unconscious desires, and the relationship represents the dualities within the self’. In her films, the sea — the entity that separates Portugal and its former colonies, and also creates a platform for connecting disparate landscapes — is developed as a metaphor for liminality. This water — blue as it may be in de Miranda’s imaginary — can also turn black with death; it is the body that permitted the voyages of colonial desire, camouflaging centuries of terror and swallowing so many African lives into anonymity. Yet, even as we recognise the sea as vast container of mourning that resonates with submerged narratives of painful separations and atrocity, de Miranda also regards it as a place in which one may find consolation, and even reconciliation.

‘An Ocean Between Us’ (2012), a high definition colour video with sound, is shown on a double split-screen. It is a narrative about migrants and immigration, caught in transitory, in-between spaces, and the nostalgia and longing created by being thus suspended between place and time. She writes that the film is ‘geographical (hi)story-telling that tells my stories of immigration and personal histories of diaspora. It is an exploration of having to live in ‘spaces of non-belonging and detachment’; she refers to these transit-spaces as ‘no (wo)man’s lands’ where she found little refuge, which became ‘a metaphor for my experience of immigration’. It begins with the sounds of the harbour, before images appear. The first image is of a ship at sea, on the right screen; then, on the left screen, we see de Miranda in white, standing, facing the ship and the vastness of the ocean. After this, we see the interior of the ship, and a male figure in a white, tropical suit and a hat walking past shipping containers. Later,

20 Ibid., p. 33.
on the left screen, we see the man on a boat, as the anchor is lifted in the right screen facing the sea; the largeness of the waterscape frames his body. We see de Miranda, also on the boat, alone in the space of a cabin — the walls of which are plastered with photographic prints. She is asleep at a table laid out for a meal — her head on the white tablecloth. The man and a woman walk up and down the stairways inside the boat, which is anchored — de Miranda says — in a canal ‘along the dock by the port of Lisbon, waiting for the “last call” to departure to Luanda [Angola].’21

Accompanying the long slow, shots of the boat, showing its two passengers as they stand facing the sea, or as they walk up and down staircases connecting the two stories of the boat, we hear sounds particular to a harbour. The soundscape of this film, in particular, is evocative of the ‘acoustic traces of travelling and migration.’22 On the top layer of sound, we hear boat engines, horns to warn other boats. But beneath those dominant sounds, we hear the sea, always present — so much so that it dominates the soundscape of the film. The boat, and the liminal space of the canal are the main locations of the film’s narrative, as well as the two main metaphorical strategies de Miranda employs. The space of the boat, de Miranda theorises, is ‘a discursive boundary; a subjective limit in the viewers’ eyes, a dual interrogation of self as spectator and self on screen.’23 She references Michel Foucault’s words about the metaphorical power of boats, wherein he theorised the vessels as ‘“a floating piece of space, a place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in, on itself and the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea.”’24

21 Ibid., p. 31.
22 Ibid., p. 32.
23 Ibid., p. 45.
38. Reconciliations at Sea

Fig. 38.5 Monica de Miranda, man on deck. Still from *An Ocean Between Us*, 2012. Image courtesy of Monica de Miranda, CC BY 4.0.

Fig. 38.6 Monica de Miranda, woman looking out from boat. Still from *An Ocean Between Us*, 2012. Image courtesy of Monica de Miranda, CC BY 4.0.
De Miranda specifies that the figure of the migrant is represented in the film by the meanderings of the couple — a man and a woman — both wearing white. They represent the colonial project’s construction of the ‘self’ and ‘other’, resulting in postcolonial subjects who struggle to reconcile the presence of both self and other within them.\textsuperscript{25} She writes that they are also, “companions [who] never meet physically as they are unconscious expressions, a love story and an inner relationship of the self”.\textsuperscript{26} We see these “companions” in frame after frame, situated in this liminal location of the canal — as well as the intersection of sea-faring history and the territories on which Portugal continues to maintain a footprint. They are both stationary and mobile, traversing in-between zones — anchored in the waterway between harbour and sea, the spaces of staircases connecting one story of the boat to another, and the spaces in-between each other. Yet the figures are not without power or agency; because some observers may recognise that the female figure is de Miranda, they may also realise that she is also the primary investigator and explorer, directing the narrative. De Miranda emphasizes, however, that in ‘An Ocean Between Us’, the actors “turn their backs to the camera” and guide us towards imagining a way of looking that is absent of an external gaze; instead, the “search is interior”, outside of time and “a recognizable location or a territory”.\textsuperscript{27}

The installation ‘Home Sweet, Sour Home’ explores her memories of her maternal family’s homes in Angola — as well as other homes in which they resided, however temporarily, in various locations in the Lusophone world, including Luanda, Lisbon, Rio de Janeiro and Mindelo, as well as in London, where the artist completed her university education. De Miranda ‘re-created’, through her imagination and through the act of drawing representational sketches of the houses and interiors, guided by stories she was told about those spaces; that this was an exercise in re-creation, of making ‘memory maps’ was especially apt for her mother’s and grandmother’s houses in Angola, which she never inhabited, and of which she therefore did not have first-hand knowledge.

Her ‘journey home’ began with her re-enacting her revisititation of each house or apartment building in which she and her mother and

\textsuperscript{25} From a Skype conversation between M. Neelika Jayawardane and Monica de Miranda, 16 June 2017.
\textsuperscript{26} Mónica de Miranda, ‘An Ocean Between Us’, in her Geography of Affections, p. 41.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., p. 43.
grandmother lived; she attempted to actually find some of these homes, going to each country and city, tracking down addresses. Some, she says, were easy to find; others no longer existed — demolished, and replaced by a new building. Because of those disappearances, she had to ‘recreate spaces’ that resembled the architecture of the time, in line with her mother and grandmother’s stories. Then, she began the process of making architectural sketches of the interiors.

Because the houses were represented through my memory, they were projections made of affections, where some of the proportions of the drawings were influenced by my relationships with the people with whom I shared the house. Some rooms in the work are larger than they are in reality, other rooms do not have doors or windows. I include corridors that do not connect rooms to one another, and represent fragmented places that symbolize fragmented relationships lost in space and time. These places codified in a language that was too personal and emotional, needed translation, therefore I contracted some architects to redraw my houses and translate them into architecture sketches, so I could understand the projection of my own emotions contained through the house drawings in a more rational way.\textsuperscript{28}

Altogether, she had twenty-five ‘maps’ of houses, including ‘squats, to temporary accommodations […] family houses and hostels with addresses in Angola, Brazil, Portugal and the UK.’\textsuperscript{29} These maps, rather than being to actual scale, ‘are architectural projections of [her] memories of the houses [she] passed through between childhood to adulthood […] [they] symbolise struggles and conquests, insecurities and securities, absences and presences, oscillating between feelings of belonging and exclusion.’ De Miranda tells me, in a conversation,

My mother’s homes […] I don’t remember or know what they looked like; I only know them through my grandmother’s stories. Bringing this out of memory was cathartic; drawing them involved connecting with the unconscious, coupled with the archetypal idea of a house. What I came up with, in my drawings, were emotional spaces; the rooms were often bigger or smaller than reality. They tell a lot about immigration, and my struggles to belong and find home.\textsuperscript{30}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{28} Mónica de Miranda, ‘Home Sweet, Sour Home’, in her \textit{Geography of Affections}, pp. 55–56.
\item \textsuperscript{29} Ibid., p. 53.
\item \textsuperscript{30} From a Skype conversation between M. Neelika Jayawardane and Monica de Miranda, 16 June 2017.
\end{itemize}
She understood, through this exercise, that the ‘imagined home’ is an emotional location, a ‘place of affections that exist as a powerful evocative space.’

Fig. 38.9  Monica de Miranda, Brazil. Architectural drawing from ‘Home Sweet, Sour Home’, 2013. Image courtesy of Monica de Miranda, CC BY 4.0.

Fig. 38.10  Monica de Miranda, London. Architectural drawing from ‘Home Sweet, Sour Home’, 2013. Image courtesy of Monica de Miranda, CC BY 4.0.
The houses that she ended up re-presenting, she realised, ‘are archetypes, remnants of memory that mark life events […] such as: birth, death and separation from parents, initiation, marriage and divorce. The transition from childhood to adulthood was registered here through a change of address and country of residence and a drastic change of accommodation (when we moved from a family home to a squat).’\textsuperscript{32} In attempting to trace and recreate ‘home’ through these imagined returns, she attempts to ‘return to lost origins’ and document her own memories, overlapped as they are with her mother’s and grandmother’s, as well as her ‘own personal myths and fantasies’; our ‘notions of home and family’ she found, through her research, ‘are a place of arrival and departure, a place of intersection, a place of rest, a commonplace but also a place of struggle and uncertainty.’\textsuperscript{33}

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\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., p. 59.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., p. 51.
Once Upon a Time is a three-channel, high definition colour video work with sound; the triptych installation creates a three-dimensional effect, with each screen streaming disconnected narratives that are, nonetheless, interconnected, pushing the narrative forward. The narrative begins with images of an airfield, a plane landing, and a control tower. Then we see a docked ferryboat, out of which passengers stream, rushing to their destinations. It is only after these images of arrival that we see de Miranda, in a white dress, standing at the seashore of an unnamed city, the silhouette of a mountain looming in the dark, against the backdrop of palms waving in the blustery night wind, the lights of the city pinpricks in the background. The embracing warmth and the moisture in the air are palpable. At times, her face is superimposed against the lights — they become stars in the black sky. Then, against a montage of scenes showing roadways and rushing vehicles, in the screen on the right-hand side we see a man, wearing a simple white undershirt and a white ‘plantation hat’ with a black band — the costumery of the tropics — facing us. His image fades, and we see more cars rushing, and his figure walking into distance in the middle screen. The montage of shots we see next are of the interior of a building; on one screen we see the man standing, facing an open-shuttered window, out of which early morning light streams into a dark interior. On the far right screen, we see de Miranda, standing against another window — this time, with no shutters — revealing a green land rising up to an escarpment, and a blue morning sky. The middle screen continues to show a long shot of a darkened roadway — speeding past from the interior of a vehicle; as the montages on the other two other screens fade, we continue to see the speeding roadway, conveying the sense of a continuing journey. Much of the remainder of the film contains a variety of interiors, showing de Miranda, other male companions, and her daughter as they sleep, awaken, walk through the space, and stand at windows to look out at the vistas before them, interspersed with sounds of speeding motor vehicles. At others, we see montages of greenery, horses being put through training, and even wild antelope — with de Miranda standing before them, observing. She wears white, and stands motionless, even as rain begins to fall. Another montage shows her on the centre screen, lying on the sand with her daughter lying on her stomach, whilst the two screens on the right and left show mirrored reflections of the sea.
breaking against the shore; in the next montage, we see her again on the seashore — but this time, she is alone, walking, then lying on the sand, facing the ocean. Before her, great, hulking ships list a little in the sea within reaching distance, rusting in the salt. This montage, in particular, indicates the ways in which memories we cannot call our own often hulk in our horizon, rusting, ever-present, powerful.

Fig. 38.12 Monica de Miranda, installation view of three frames of rusting ships. Still from *Once Upon a Time*, 2012–13. Image courtesy of Monica de Miranda, CC BY 4.0.

*Once Upon a Time* allows de Miranda to explore a different fantasy — to accomplish, as though in a ‘fairytale,’ the object of finding home. The film’s structure is based on archetypes of the fairy tale and the ‘hero’s journey’ that mirror our psychic impulse to journey towards self-discovery, indicating our desire ‘for personal growth and transformation’. However, she reminds us that her work also ‘engages with lived experiences and personal memories’ where she is able to explores her ‘inner fears and desires [using dark undertones conveyed by] forests, seas, abandoned buildings, shipwrecks, journeys through the wilderness’ that symbolise her psychological states, her unconscious, her ‘fears or repressed feelings.’ Because these are ‘stories that [she]

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34 Mónica de Miranda, ‘An Ocean Between Us’, in her *Geography of Affections*, p. 34
performed through the enactment of [her] life stories,’ the film is an expression of her own ‘collective unconscious’ and her own quest for ‘courage or for a sense of home’, of being in the Lusophone diaspora and trying to find belonging.\textsuperscript{36} It was a project that took three years, a time when she did not have much money in hand; she describes the feeling of making autobiographical work, especially from a precarious position, as process of unclothing oneself: ‘I was very naked, in a way […] It’s my story.’\textsuperscript{37}

The narrative structure of \textit{Once Upon a Time}, she notes, meanders ‘between cities, houses, airports and roads, private rooms, family houses, hotels, places of private life, in places of my own memories but simultaneously set also in those “nonplaces” belonging to no one.’\textsuperscript{38} She was able to revisit places in which she had once lived, or where her family had set roots: Portugal (where she was born, and lived till she was nineteen); Brazil (where some of her family had migrated; and Luanda, Angola (where her maternal family had its roots). The making of the film allowed de Miranda to make herself present, be in the flesh in locations that extended the territory of Portugal — a trans-oceanic territory over which the small Iberian country continues to cast a long shadow, and over which her own history is mapped. The process of filming — of returning to locations in which her family has made ‘home’, however transitional and precarious these homes may have been — itself becomes a tool of investigation; using the ‘play of time-space compression’ intrinsic to film-narrative structures, she creates metaphors of movement, flow, dislocation that echo her geographical displacements and lack of access to standard notions of belonging and locatedness for all diasporic people.\textsuperscript{39} The process of making films — as well as the narrative conveyed by the film and the material body of the film itself — thus allows her to use references to transitory spaces to ‘recreate a “third space”, a space that is related to concepts of landscape, territory and home defined through a self made fairy tale.’\textsuperscript{40}

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\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., p. 34.
\textsuperscript{37} From a Skype conversation between M. Neelika Jayawardane and Monica de Miranda, 16 June 2017.
\textsuperscript{38} Mónica de Miranda, ‘Once Upon a Time’, in her \textit{Geography of Affections}, p. 19.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.
De Miranda’s video work and stills form an unusual arc that warrants methodological attention to the complex ways in which she uses visual vocabulary to address the persistence of uncanny reminders and reminders of past encounters, and the ways in which these ‘remainders’ continue to make themselves present in both Portugal and its colonies. Portugal casts a shadow over a spectrum of the world, with large landmasses and islands becoming colonial possessions in what became Angola, Mozambique, Guinea Bissau, and Cape Verde Islands in Africa, Brazil in South America, as well as a slew of islands, smaller territories, and coastal cities in South Asia — Goa in India, Colombo in Sri Lanka, and Macao in China, among dozens of others. In each of these locations, the Portuguese disrupted existing trade linkages, monopolising sea routes. In de Miranda’s works, we see traces of the restless journeys that the Portuguese began making five centuries ago, resulting in amalgamated subjectivities onto whom these journeys of conquest continue to be superimposed. Sometimes we realise that this history imprints itself on zones of contact and conquest in ordinary and ubiquitous ways; at others, it brands them in more painful ways.

Despite the thread that speaks to powerlessness in the face of power, her work still positions the agency of the photographer at the centre of the narrative. She interweaves the larger discussion about migration of both people and practices with her own intimate experiences of being an in-between person — geographically and genetically speaking — in the world that unfolded.

If map making and navigation cultures were essential for fuelling imperial drives, de Miranda, too, becomes skilled at mapping and navigating not only physical landscapes and seaways, but the less charted territories of Lusophone subjects — and her own — interior selves. She explores the unfamiliar and the estranged, wilfully inserting all that is perceived as ‘other’ about herself — and the strange other within herself — into landscapes that do not quite recognise her as part of its definition of self. She deconstructs a relationship that was initiated and subsequently based on unequal power structures and violence, but also remakes that world into something approachable, as a landscape of experiences into which she can insert herself and make familiar.
On the surface, her work is a conversation about identity and belonging. In her video works, especially, the personal overlaps with colonialism and subsequent globalisation. But they also speak to the attempt to reconcile a history that is not altogether palatable, honouring fantasies and desires for unification that all who have experienced violent interruptions to their bodies and psyches undoubtedly imagine at some point in their lives. De Miranda’s interest in exploring the ‘self’ and ‘other’ imbedded within her person, the existence of a shadow person within her that follows her, is an important part of these narratives; a continuous thread of conversation about the existence of shadow selves — and reconciling those shadows with the self that one recognises and presents to the public — is imbedded into the structure of the stories. She uses the technology necessary for creating moving image works to converse with that shadow person, to bring ‘him’ to the present, and into the same spaces as she currently exists. These shadowy others who follow each other in the various landscapes appear in the form of female and male figures — beautiful, young people wearing white, gliding between doorways and windows of sea-facing apartments, and stepping up and down stairways connecting stories of large cargo vessels at sea.
When I look at de Miranda photographs, I see a visual reflection of all the ambivalence I experience as I attempt to tidy up my own memories of travel, migration, displacement, and attachment to things that are no longer there. Sometimes, I refuse reconciliation — theories about hybridity and the rich spaces of possibility created by liminal zones seem too glib, only available to the privileged immigrant.

Sometimes the nature of mourning renders us unable to look at images — either because death, destruction, and distance has made their subjects too terribly remote or because the complex and ambivalent anger that accompanies mourning leaves us too divided to know whether to weep for or rage at the beauty of the image.

The colour fields used by de Miranda — washed out blues and hazy greens — resonate with emotional vistas, drawing us to locations and conversations that exist only in intergenerational memory. These moving images are tableaux that help us ease estrangement and bridge geographical and temporal distances. ‘Home’ remains an unreachable location, a pinging reminder imprinted into our collective family and community memory; it remarks on the way that past attachments stay ever-present, indicating absences and melancholic presences that insistently wound our present.

We shape our survival narratives to surround and protect the wound of absence. The body contains nostalgia and longing; it tells a story about how we are all vulnerable in certain spaces, and how in such spaces, we attach ourselves fiercely, sometimes, to things that don’t deserve — and cannot bear — our love.
Bibliography


