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PICTURE THIS:
THE PHOTOGRAPHIC IMAGE AS CONTEMPORARY ART

Blair French

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree Doctor of Philosophy.

2003

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ABSTRACT

This study addresses the photographic image as a dominant discursive model within Australian contemporary art over the decade 1992 to 2002. It identifies an ascendant tendency towards evidently transcriptive or realist photographic images as works of art that function not only to picture and presence but to organise material and social experience in relationship to the imperatives of a spectacle culture. It traces and reveals the specific forms of relationships between the photographic image, avant-garde practices, commercial and popular visual culture, and conceptions of the real as they are generated and articulated within the work of key Australian photo-artists.

A set of detailed micro-analyses is undertaken concentrating upon specific sets of images produced by Brenda L. Croft, Bill Henson, Rosemary Laing, Tracey Moffatt, Jon Rhodes and Anne Zahalka. These analyses are informed by references to broader considerations of spectacle culture, as well as to a proposed notion of critical realism. They pursue ways in which specific sets of work may both participate within yet maintain some self-identifying space from the dominant representational and social conventions of an all-pervasive visual realm. In doing so they challenge more professedly authoritative and mono-dimensional critical models that dominate the general treatment of such work, three of which are explicitly refuted: a naturalist version of photographic realism; a negation of photographic criticality within a ‘culture industry’ critique; and an unbridled relativism associated with the world of the simulacrum.

This study does not set out to celebrate photo-based contemporary art’s cultural efficacy, nor to dismiss photography’s capitulation to the promotional imperatives of commercial visual culture. It seeks and arrives at modulated understandings of how individual works of photo-based contemporary art are generated and to what effect they function within society as both discursive modes of representation and aesthetic objects.
INTRODUCTION

It is time to replace cowardly stylizing interpretation with the spiritual fact of reality. Applied to pictures this means pictures are not fictions but rather practically effective energies and facts... Thinking and viewing flow into us as a means of creating reality. (Wilfried Dickhoff)

In this study I examine the photographic image as a dominant discursive model within Australian contemporary art practice over a decade from 1992 until 2002. Whilst the photographic image is deployed within contemporary art in a myriad of ways, I concentrate here upon an ascendant tendency in this period towards the deployment of the photographic image in apparently transcriptive or depictive guises. In the work examined in this study, the photographic image is rarely just one amongst a number of representational sources, strategies or constituent elements contributing to the complex intertextuality of the work of art, as was generally the case within conceptual art and quotational postmodernism (or appropriation art) of the 1970s and 1980s. Rather, in much contemporary art during the 1990s the singular image took on the full form and function of the work of art, even when images have been supplemented by text or organised within sequences or series. It has become an arena in which the world is organised and, via the use of ever more sophisticated production technologies, reproduced in infinite variations. Despite its hermetic character and this seemingly independent and inexhaustible productivism, the photographic image has been utilised by artists over this decade as a means to readily access, represent and articulate the quality of external everyday experience.

In this regard, representational conventions that reach back through the history of so-called ‘straight’ photography—portraiture, documentary and landscape for example—provide

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2 My study encompasses a wide range of image forms as objects of analysis. It is not, however, absolutely exhaustive in its treatment of Australian photo-based contemporary art over the period in question. There are important strands of recent practice—although I would argue not as prominent as those identified here—that fall outside of my area of analysis. For example, a taxonomic or systems-based photographic practice that has emerged from conceptual art and predominantly engages with historical systems of representation and classification has a significant, if often critically undervalued place in Australian art of the past decade. Similarly, an amateur snapshot aesthetic that can again be partly traced back to conceptual art, but also to ‘confessional’ or diaristic’ documentary practices of the 1970s and 1980s has re-emerged in Australian art of the late 1990s, including as a component within installation practices.
crucial touchstones for many contemporary photo-artists. The efficacy of such conventions within contemporary art contexts has survived challenges posed by strands of poststructural criticism and appropriationist practices. This survival, however, does not signal a return to earlier modernist notions of photography's intimate relations with the real, but to a further developmental stage in the dynamic interrelationships of photographic image, avant-garde practice, commercial and popular visual culture, and conceptions of the real that run right through the history of modernity to the present day.

In this study I trace and reveal the specific form of these relationships as they underpin key bodies of Australian photo-based contemporary art, within specific art-historical and cultural contexts. Photography has become an all-pervasive mode of contemporary art practice both in Australia and internationally during the period in question. This can be partially attributed to its ubiquitous presence in the broader world of popular and commercial culture. Photography is a means of locating the forms and concerns of art practice firmly with the broader realms of social and material experience. This study revisits an old question associated with modernity: to what extent does this use of the photographic image signal a new integration of artistic practice and mass culture? Does the photographic image serve as art's claim to social relevancy? Or does its usage risk art's absorption within a commercial culture of infotainment? These questions have new urgency at a time when photographic, electronic and digital media-based images are so extraordinarily ubiquitous on a global scale serving multiple functions as modes of information, entertainment, commercial persuasion, commodity product, critical analysis and aesthetic immersion. These functions are by no means exclusionary and are increasingly difficult to identify and isolate from one another. Photography, therefore, is the crux upon which contemporary art's relationship to all these image functions depends, as well as the means by which the very identity of art in the current age may be pursued.

In addressing these issues, this study provides a set of detailed micro-analyses concentrating upon the particular qualities of specific images. It does not set out to celebrate photo-based contemporary art's cultural efficacy, nor does it dismiss photography's inevitable capitulation to the promotional imperatives of commercial visual culture. Rather, in this study I seek to understand how individual photo-based works of art
are generated and function within contemporary society as both discursive modes of representation and aesthetic objects.\textsuperscript{3}

By virtue of their shared usage of apparently transcriptive images, a diverse range of contemporary photographic practices have been coopted to critical arguments asserting new or reinvigorated forms of realism.\textsuperscript{4} Recent appeals to 'photographic realism' are not simply rejoinders to the proliferation of digital imaging technologies that elide indexicality as a defining condition of the photographic. This notion of photography as primarily a realist representational practice appears in the wake of a postmodernism of quotational appropriation within which photography was figured as both medium and act of image transmission, as well as a network of transactional codes. This particular manifestation of a realist position incorporates a conventional critical assumption that photography offers not only a unique means by which to engage directly with material and social experience, but also to manipulate (even fabricate) the 'reality' of that experience. In this regard such an exposition of photography's supposed fundamentally realist character has formed at a tangent to earlier nineteenth- and twentieth-century debates regarding the fundamental truth (or untruth) of photography's representational relation to its subject. As Allan Sekula writes: "Somehow the desire for deontic certainty, for clarity and precise descriptive limits, peacefully coexists with the desire for semantic multiplicity, ambiguity and irreducible excess.

\textsuperscript{3} The phrase 'photo-based contemporary art' is used throughout to denote a relation of photography's presence within and influence upon contemporary art practices. The perhaps more usual 'contemporary photo-based art', by contrast, would suggest a contemporary version of a modernist notion of photographic art. Whilst such a relation has some place in the work under review here—primarily as one source of models for contemporary practice—it does not so aptly account for the whole field of practices that this study encompasses.

\textsuperscript{4} Curator Heinz Liesbrock, for example, wrote of the massive exhibition \textit{How You Look At It: Photographs of the Twentieth Century} (held at the Sprengel Museum in Hanover, Germany in 2000) that, 'the strand of photography predicated on visible reality [is] the mainstream of the medium and the heart of its contribution to the history of art in this century. Heinz Liesbrock, 'The Barely Visible Visible Perspectives on Reality in Photography and Painting', transl. Hugh Rorison, in Liesbrock and Thomas Weski eds, \textit{How You Look At It: Photographs of the Twentieth Century} (exh. cat.) (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000) 42. \textit{How You Look At It} was one of a number of major international exhibitions held towards the end of the twentieth century that not only focussed upon photography's centrality to the changing cultural conditions, communicative and epistemological structures and self-regard of twentieth-century modernity and postmodernity, but that did so from within a moment of the photographic image's absolute centrality to and ubiquity across contemporary art practices. One key impulse of these exhibitions, taken as a general group, appeared to be an attempt to retrace genealogies for (or delineate the historical conditions of) the present-day pervasiveness of the apparently realist photographic image not only in contemporary art but fashion, advertising and media industries. Such exhibitions also appeared therefore to revisit their nominated genealogical sources in light of the multitude of ever-regenerating contemporary forms of the image. See for example, Judy Annear, \textit{World Without End: Photography and the Twentieth Century} (exh. cat.) (Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2000).
Everyone wants to have it both ways. To paraphrase Sekula, neither truth nor untruth hold as absolute standards of meaning in contemporary photography. Rather, each operates as registers of arbitration that operate within a volatile field of judgement.

Various notions of 'realism' and the 'real' therefore permeate this study. I treat realism broadly as a productive representational and critical platform. The modes of practice examined here are considered 'realist' insomuch as they visualise 'real' conditions of contemporary material, social, psychological and imaginative experience. Therefore, I do not think of realism as a rigid structure of dependent relation between image and world. It does not necessarily trace back to photographic transparency as a defining principle. Rather, it signifies something of the purchase of the photographic image upon the exterior world, and consequently upon the viewing consciousness as a manifest form of encounter with that world. It is, in part, a rhetorical effect. Photographic realism, as detailed further in Chapter 2, is formed in relations between individual images and the material, social, psychological and imaginative conditions of both their production and reception. Realism is a dynamic term, partly activated in the relationship of individual images to existing image conventions formed through the history of photography; to received theoretical precepts that identify the photographic image as a place of language, discursive process and social interaction; to significant trajectories within both art history and contemporary art; and to other representational forms and sites (including advertising, film and television). By closely scrutinising these relationships and their effects it is possible to understand how, within an omnipresent contemporary culture of visual spectacle, photography "looks like the academic painting of our time." Equally, it becomes possible to recognise the potential of the photographic image to engage cogently and productively with such an apparently stupefying cultural context from within.

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Picturing

Two actions of the photographic image in contemporary art are central to this study: *picturing* and *presencing.* For the purposes of this study, I treat the term 'picturing' in a straightforward manner. Photographs are by their definition pictures. It was once commonplace to think of them as constituting an epistemologically simple register of picture. W.J.T. Mitchell summarises Ernst Gombrich's resemblance-dependent critical model as: "Photographs just look like the world: we can see what a picture is of without having to learn any codes." \(^a\) More recently photographs have been treated through structuralist and poststructuralist frameworks as complex forms of visual codings. Critical orthodoxy now has it that photographs draw from (and offer) multiple and often contingent pictorial registers — registers dependent to varying degrees upon explanatory linguistic frameworks. The work under review has been produced during a period when the ability of language to offer full explanatory models of photographic operation and meaning has come under increasing question. Mitchell characterises this as the "pictorial turn" in cultural production and criticism, asserting that it

is not a return to naïve mimesis, copy or correspondence theories of representation, or a renewed metaphysics of pictorial 'presence': it is rather a postlinguistic, postsemiotic rediscovery of the picture as a complex interplay between visuality, apparatus, institutions, discourse, bodies, and figuration. It is the realisation that *spectatorship...may be as deep a problem as various forms of reading...and that visual experience or 'visual literacy' might not be fully explicable on the model of textuality. Most important, it is the realisation that while the problem of pictorial representation has always been with us, it presses unescapably now, and with unprecedented force, on every level of culture..." \(^b\)

It is this condition of the picture—or this pictorial condition of the world—that underpins the work examined in this study.

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\(^a\) In the work examined here the latter depends upon the action of the former. Picturing, however, need not necessarily evoke presence in the efficacious forms that concern this study.


In this context, photographic 'picturing' refers to the processes by which social, psychological and imaginative experience are represented and conveyed in pictorial form — specifically, in a unified, seamless pictorial form. 'Picturing' provides the means of staging and conveying both contemporary social relations and the conditions of representational practice in the narrative forms that so dominate photo-based contemporary art. Indeed, much of the work discussed in this study depicts human figures staged within real material environments, often 'caught' in mid-action or interaction and so drawing on the narrative connotations of cinema (as if the images were film stills) as well as upon the forms of directorial tableau photography so popular within postmodernism. 'Picturing' is an apt concept here for it connotes both the creation of a pictorial form existing in a relation of apparent resemblance to an anterior world and the creation of an internally coherent visual structure. 'Picturing' is thus distinct from 'depicting' — it infers a (partially) constructive process not solely bound to denotation and transcription.

Of related significance here is the hugely increased capability of photographic imaging processes — the proliferating technologies used to generate complex photographic pictures. This does not only include digital imaging hard and software, but also those technologies of material production that have fostered the production of increasingly large photographic pictures with extraordinary resolution and colour saturation, and in material forms suitable for presentation in environments other than the gallery.

Digital imaging technologies have heightened the range of pictorial possibility within photography. The ongoing development of such technologies clearly constitutes the most significant impact upon the forms, processes and ontological identity of the photographic image of the past decade. But these technologies have not rendered a broad notion of photographic realism obsolete (since such notions are not in any case to be located fundamentally within photographic indexicality). Nor have they served to incontrovertibly delineate an analogue (or transcriptive) practice entirely distinct from 'digital photography'. The relations between modes of picture making and their accompanying epistemologies are far more complex than this. Digital imaging technologies, for example, enable apparently indexical photographic images to aspire to 'ideal' forms. They serve to extend the range of photographic possibility. Digital imaging technologies enable every image to be made anew, simultaneously both (and therefore neither) original and (nor) copy. Every picture is potentially distinct in visual form from every other, existing in a particular relation to forms of
experience it seeks to represent and convey. Resulting critical models must therefore incorporate digital imaging technologies, analogue photographic technologies and conceptualisations of realism and realist relations between image and world as non-exclusive, interdependent realms of activity and understanding.

**Presencing**

W.J.T. Mitchell denies that a "pictorial turn" in culture implies a returned authority of the "metaphysics of pictorial 'presence'" (see above). By "metaphysics of pictorial 'presence'" Mitchell refers to the picture's capacity to transport a viewer to a state of being that both precedes and elides language. According to Mitchell, the picture cannot exist outside of the symbolic realm. It must exist in a world of "complex interplay between visuality, apparatus, institutions, discourse, bodies, and figuraiity." Following Mitchell, my references to 'presencing' in this study are to processes by which particularities of experience (material, social, psychological and imaginative) are made manifest within photographic forms, specifically within pictures. Such 'presencing' occurs when pictorial form appears to transcend a state of graphic semblance and acts as a space where image and anterior world intermingle and cohabite.

Throughout its history photography has been treated as a means of presencing anterior (thus already formed) subjects. It is commonplace to treat the personal photograph in particular as memory incarnate – as metonymic presence of an absent subject. On the other hand, photographic presence may usurp memory in its constant insistence upon the here and now: upon the ever-renewing presence of images in and as the world. If the photograph authenticates what has been, it only does so through its own ongoing presence (and thus that of its pictorial subjects) in the ever-perpetuating present.

'Presencing' frequently revolves around conceptions of viscerality in the work under review. It connotes the construction and conveyance of the viscerality of human experience in visual form, not simply the appearance of a human figure in pictorial form. It is a means of deploying the photographic image to insist upon the real historical experience of pictured

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6 Nor is this 'presencing' a pure phenomenology of the image drawn from recent art histories—of minimalism for example—for it is neither solely dependent upon nor solely formed within the encounter of viewing subject with the work.
subjects.¹¹ It is thus, as Terry Smith has argued, a process in which both representational subject and form are indissolubly melded in a form of resistance to the dominant paradigm of an image-saturated age. Under such a paradigm the image is the antithesis of embodiment.¹² But it is precisely this state—the impossibility of the image as a form of embodiment—which Smith believes is being challenged within new image forms. Presence, according to Smith, is "tangibility against the prosthetics of cyberbeing."¹³ It is "persistence against the call...to sheer media" or "toward dematerialisation, repetition, degeneration, fade, towards the state of infinite replay which is the horror at the heart of postmodernism."¹⁴ For Smith, this "drive through surface, screen and photogeny..."¹⁵ characterises the most engaging art practice of the present day.

In this study I adopt and adapt such a notion of 'presencing' as a critically reflexive action. I treat it as an appeal to real and particular experiences through their embodiment within image forms (rather than through their rupturing of those forms). This provides a way of looking the photographic image as a space of embodied encounter with the real (rather than a place of purely visual encounter with accurate depictions of the anterior world). In its insistence upon the photographic image as a site of engagement with experiences and subjectivities themselves formed in active engagement with historical (social and representational) contexts, this conception of presencing is at odds with and resists what Andreas Huyssen describes as "the delusion of pure presence,"¹⁶ an absolute representational independence from all external referents within the material world as well as language and memory. "Pure presence" describes a fundamental condition of cultural amnesia. It is both symptom and re-iterative action of de-historicised modes of


¹² Within this paradigm the image is figured as transient and lacking either substance or cogent relationship to material experience.


¹⁴ ibid.

¹⁵ ibid., 7

representation produced within the relentless encroachment of a commodity culture of the spectacle. There are certainly instances of this within the work examined here, but in this study I focus upon identifying more productive modes of presence that operate to disrupt and critique exactly these amnesiac tendencies of a culture of visual spectacle from within.

**Critical Frameworks**

Picturing and presencing are two key *processes* at play within the work examined throughout this study. The manner in which they are deployed in the production of apparently significantly different images provides one means by which to articulate the shared qualities of this work.

There are three key *frameworks* within which the work discussed here is produced: first, the role of 'the photographic' as a core developmental condition of contemporary art from the 1960s onwards through to present-day conceptions of digital media and the 'post-photographic'; second, the relationship between Australian culture and art practices and dominant overseas models; and third, the ascendant spectacle forms of contemporary culture. The first two are backgrounded in Chapter 1. The third, however, is most important to my work. It is discussed in Chapter 2 then further alluded to and analysed throughout the study.

My study also addresses a number of discrete representational *strategies* or *conventions* evident within photo-based contemporary art. They operate within the frameworks noted, and with reference to the key processes of picturing and presencing. They include traditional forms of social documentary photography, the photo-essay and landscape and panoramic photography; conventions of photographic record and documentation of physical gesture and performance inherited from conceptual art; cinematic and moving image conventions; tableau modes of constructed image associated with advertising and lifestyle media photography; models of scientific taxonomy and record; and the cultural ubiquity of digital technologies as a means to manage and presence information flows as well as visual and spatial environments. The most sophisticated practices under review operate within a dynamic matrix of these strategies. They require a reading of the

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documentary image as necessarily intertwined with and drawing upon social convention for its cultural purchase; an analysis of cinema as a significant determinant of both individual and collective imaginary; a consideration of the various forms of accord between performance, gesture and the photographic image; a discussion of photography's navigation and interrogation of cultural location; reference to photography's persistent relationships with conceptions and experiences of memory and trauma; and finally, constant attention to the use of the photographic image to access and presence various manifestations of the real in pictorial form. No one related critical model should be privileged as a means to explicate the operation of contemporary photo-based art across various image forms. Rather this study emphasises the value of subtle coalitions of sources and approaches. For discursive clarity, however, I introduce different approaches one at a time throughout this study. Thus a layering of critical models begins to develop, so acknowledging persistent and necessary interleavings of critical approaches and reflecting the manner in which most of the works discussed draw from and so invite consideration through a multiplicity of representational and accompanying critical models.

Such an approach challenges more professedly authoritative and mono-dimensional critical models that have come to dominate the appraisal (in Australia and internationally) of work such as that under review. There are three such models that require discussion. First, a naturalist or naïve reflectionist version of photographic realism in which photography as a cogent, discursive form of representation is ignored in favour of a notion of the photograph as transparent 'window' onto exterior material and social reality. Second, a negation of photographic criticality within a 'culture industry' critique that treats the image as grist to the mill of commodity culture. This approach claims that the critical capacity of the photographic image, particularly within the commodity and promotional structures of the contemporary art world, has been entirely neutralised via the image's absolute colonisation by or absorption within a contemporary culture of the spectacle. Third, an unbridled relativism associated with the world of the simulacrum that in its most evangelical form celebrates the image-realm as sole constituent reality of any value.¹⁶

As I discuss in further detail throughout this study, each of these three models tends towards a restrictive dogmatism that either ignores or suppresses the discursive efficacy of the photographic image. At a moment in time when social and cultural spheres are so

¹⁶ This model is extended by certain forms of theory accompanying digital imaging culture.
flooded with photographic imagery, the need to closely examine the operational actions and cognitive effects of the photographic image within both art and popular visual culture is particularly urgent. To automatically celebrate or dismiss the overwhelming presence of photographic images within contemporary art in terms of a simplistic conflation of artistic practice and mass culture—as each of these models do—is to imply a final elision of difference amongst forms of visual production as well as the redundancy of the 'visual' as a cogent term in 'visual' art.

Yet elements of each of these models may be usefully brought into play with other approaches to provide nuanced critical studies of photo-based contemporary art. This study acknowledges points of value within dominant critical models, whilst also highlighting their inadequacies. It identifies certain alliances between different approaches as means towards productive engagements with the complexities of particular sets of images. At the same time, my study does not claim that all the work under review is so conceptually astute. On occasion the work is merely reflective of, absorbed by or reiterates the conditions of rigidly authoritative cultural formations, such as those of corporatised media culture, or institutionalised international contemporary art. Just as it can provide critical modes of visualising the conditions of contemporaneity, so too can the photographic image as contemporary art embrace existing structures of social and representational power.

Photography and Contemporary Art at the End of the Twentieth Century

Many of the trends identified within the work under review can be traced back to earlier photographic forms associated with social documentary, editorial photography, factography, ethnographic photography, surrealism, view photography as well as family and other modes of amateur photography. They are also an extension of more recent strands of development within contemporary art and photography (and this is discussed further in Chapter 1). In addition to this embedding within histories of the photographic, the relation of photo-based contemporary art to the representational conventions of other art genres (history painting for example, or portraiture) is important to its understanding. But even more crucial are image forms developed within (or adapted to) other cultural and economic realms such as advertising, fashion, media, television, video, computer games, the world wide web, and the cinema. They not only provide formal models for photo-based contemporary art but are also
highly significant in the formation of a shared cultural imaginary and modes of spectorial encounter.

Developments in the practices under review are historically and culturally embedded in addition to being invigorated by shifts in critical energy, the ever-renewing representational and economic conditions of the international art world and its institutions, and the broader purview of a voraciously popular visual culture. They are closely aligned to broader cultural forces, even when on occasion they appear to be capricious, self-interested critical moves seeking out the latest trend in the economic-intellectual interest of new 'product'. An apparent emphasis upon pictorial forms of the photographic image in contemporary art bespeaks a desire for practices that partake in dominant contemporary cultural paradigms, whether for the sake of developing career profile (or market visibility), or in a search for critical acuity and cultural relevancy.\textsuperscript{19} Thus the practices discussed in this study are without doubt developed in full awareness of the centrality of photographic images within a globalised world. Photographic images encompass an expanding set of representational and communicational forms easily transmitted, internationally legible and readily consumed across a wide spectrum of cultural sites.

Much of the work under review takes very distinct and precise material forms that are crucial to its experience as 'art'. The large size of much of the work that I discuss is crucial, as is the prevalence of colour rather than black and white and the wide range of specific printing technologies used to produce the works. These images are quite particular forms of object. They are generally highly finished, seductive, financially valuable commodities. In this and in their apparent claims to both aesthetic and high cultural value, such photographic works have attained a status as 'museum art' not unlike that of the large scale painting associated with late Modernism (and its replication in various international 'neo-' painting impulses of the 1980s).\textsuperscript{20} This has occurred despite (or even partly due to) both the role of editions and the links between such work and more overtly commercial spheres of image production. The fact that such work is produced by new commercial technologies may suggest that the work has a certain up-to-date quality or cultural currency, just as readily as

\textsuperscript{19} These two motivations are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

\textsuperscript{20} This reference is made to an international context here and the status of the work of artists such as Andreas Gursky, Tracey Moffatt, Cindy Sherman, Thomas Struth and Jeff Wall to name but a small handful.
it may serve arguments claiming the capitation of photo-based contemporary art to commodity culture. The reproduction of images through diverse forms of media rarely detracts from the 'aura' of the image in its material 'high art' manifestation. It is thus important to recognise the basic (and generative) contradiction of present day photography: it simultaneously describes a category of highly prized aesthetic object, and a critically mobile conception of a representational form dispersing visual images through all spheres of cultural activity. Recognition of this tension is central to any nuanced understanding of the photographic image in and as contemporary art.

Existing Literature: Photo-Based Contemporary Australian Art

In this study I present detailed analyses of key bodies of work by six senior Australian photo-artists: Anne Zahalka, Brenda L. Croft, Tracey Moffatt, Jon Rhodes, Bill Henson and Rosemary Laing. These case studies do not represent a full historical narrative of recent Australian photo-based contemporary art, nor provide complete accounts of the total range of work produced by each of these photographer-artists. Focus is on sustained analysis of images within a context of clearly outlined and interwoven cultural, art-historical and epistemological frameworks. This approach is generally lacking in the current literature on the work under review.

The bulk of Australian contemporary art writing takes the form of short magazine texts, generally singular artist features and cursory exhibition reviews, and/or is limited by the exhibition catalogue context. The journal Photofile, published by the Australian Centre for Photography since 1983, is a crucial vehicle for analysis of photo-based contemporary Australian art. However, given the otherwise dwindling range of Australian contemporary art periodicals, exhibition catalogues and gallery-produced publications are the primary sites

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22 Arttext relocated to Los Angeles in the late 1990s, Globe-E and World Art both launched and folded during the 1990s, Like Art began in the late 1990s and folded in 2001, whilst ArtAsiaPacific, also
for textual discussion of recent work.\textsuperscript{23} In terms of recent survey material, the catalogues accompanying the major \textit{Photography is Dead! Long Live Photography!} exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney along with that from \textit{The Power to Move: Aspects of Australian Photography} exhibition at the Queensland Art Gallery (both 1996) are important, but perhaps most useful as sources of information on the work of individual artists.\textsuperscript{24} The most recent substantial catalogue publication is that prepared by Bernice Murphy to accompany an exhibition of contemporary Australian photo-based art presented in Germany in 2000. This exhibition, \textit{Zeitgenössische Fotokunst Aus Australien}, featured the work of fifteen artists including Bill Henson, Rosemary Laing, and Tracey Moffatt. Murphy's lengthy accompanying essay traces aspects of contemporary Australian photo-based art's genesis in 1970s conceptualism, particularly performance art, and in the impact of radical social movements from the same period such as feminism. In addition the essay attempts to articulate significant differences in the passages of photography into both the practices and institutions of art from those mapped in North American and Europe. Focussing upon issues of identity formation (and reclamation) in its discussions of many of the individual artists launched during the 1990s, was bought by a new North American proprietor and relocated to the USA in 2003.

\textsuperscript{23} Unfortunately, the catalogue form binds critical analysis to the structure of the exhibition, itself determined by a web of factors external to the work including economic resourcing and cultural status of the organising institution, its audience demographics and its promotional imperatives as well as the severe time constraints under which exhibition research and writing is generally undertaken. It also often results in a checklist form of explication writing that constrains any potential for sustained critical analysis or speculation. Furthermore, media-specificity has had a declining presence as a definitional trope for both contemporary art practices and their arrangement into exhibition forms through the 1980s and 1990s. Thus exhibitions and texts whose prime \textit{subject} is photographic media are rare. Rather, photographic forms have been key means through which 'issued-based' art has developed over this period, offering as they do both such immediate access to the realms of material and social existence, and such an apparent ease of representation of aspects of these realms within an art context. The photographic image has been central to the engagement of contemporary art with issues of private subjectivity, gender formations and relations, social identity, post-colonial and other recent cultural and political frameworks. Much reference to contemporary photo-based art therefore exists within texts dedicated to other subjects. Without wishing to (re-) fetishise the medium, this study does identify the image as its core \textit{subject}. But this is undertaken so as to make opaque the position of the photographic image within contemporary art as core means of both partaking in and critiquing dominant representational and cultural formations.

\textsuperscript{24} Anne Kirker and Clare Williamson eds, \textit{The Power to Move: Aspects of Australian Photography} (exh. cat.) (Brisbane: Queensland Art Gallery, 1995); Linda Michael ed., \textit{Photography is Dead! Long Live Photography!} (exh. cat.) (Sydney: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1996). The high number of artists included in the exhibitions means that these reasonably large accompanying catalogues are restricted in terms of depth and scope of content; each artist is represented by at most a couple of images whilst the accompanying texts are by and large limited to brief contextualising sketches. Furthermore, the Queensland publication is both limited to work collected by the host institution and stretches to encompass work spanning the last three decades of the twentieth century.
work, the essay does little to articulate a productive relation between practices of the 1980s and those of the 1990s and beyond, nor does engage in any detailed manner with the possible generative intellectual and social contexts for work of the present day, either within Australia or internationally.\textsuperscript{25}

One further small survey catalogue looking at contemporary Australian photo-art has appeared since Murphy's \textit{Zeitgenössische Fotokunst Aus Australien}. This was also produced on the occasion of an international exhibition, \textit{Photographica Australis}, organised by the Australian Centre for Photography in 2002 at the Sala de Exposiciones del Canal de Isabel II in Madrid to coincide with the focus on Australian art at the major international art fair ARCO in Madrid. This exhibition featured the work of eighteen artists, including senior figures such as Brenda L. Croft and Anne Zahalka along with a number of less celebrated and early career artists. Like the exhibition, the catalogue is organised into broad subject areas with texts that simplify and restrict interpretative frameworks in order to introduce the work to an overseas audience. Neither the work nor the culture it emerges from is subjected to any substantial analysis.\textsuperscript{26}

Apart from these four catalogue publications there has been little in the way of significant survey publishing on current Australian photography since the exhibition-linked publications \textit{Australian Photography: The 1980s} of 1988 and \textit{Twenty Contemporary Australian Photographers from the Hallmark Cards Australian Photographic Collection} of 1990.\textsuperscript{27} One key exception is the recent book, \textit{Second Sight}, published by the National Gallery of Victoria on its Australian photography collection.\textsuperscript{28} A small book emerging from the

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[25] See Bernice Murphy, 'Contemporary Photographic Art from Australia', in \textit{Zeitgenössische Fotokunst Aus Australien} (exh. cat.) (Heidelberg: Edition Braus, 2000) 154-83
\item[26] See Alasdair Foster ed., \textit{Photographica Australis} (exh. cat.) (Sydney: Australian Centre for Photography, 2002)
\item[28] Isobel Crombie and Susan Van Wyk, \textit{Second Sight: Australian Photography in the National Gallery of Victoria} (Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria) 2002
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Art Gallery of New South Wales exhibition What is this thing called photography?: Australian Photography 1975-1985 was published in 2000. However, work of the 1990s was obviously outside of its purview. Outside of the exhibition context, the 1999 issue of the British photography journal History of Photography dedicated to Australian work provides an important resource, as does the anthology Photo Files: An Australian Photography Reader, and the collections of lecture transcripts published by the Centre for Contemporary Photography, Melbourne: Shot, Post: Photography Post Photography: A Small History of Photography, and Value Added Goods: Essays on Contemporary Photography, Art and Ideas. Again, however, whilst extremely valuable resources, each of these remains limited in scope and somewhat unfocussed in terms of critical trajectory.

Significant monographic publications exist on the work of two of the six artists whose work is discussed here: Bill Henson and Tracey Moffatt. The work of Brenda L. Croft,

Although the exhibition did include early work by Bill Henson, the book studies developments in photography as a critical, social and artistic practice that precede and inform the conditions and work that are concerns of this study. See Ewen McDonald with Judy Annear eds, What is this thing called photography? Australian Photography 1975-1985 (Sydney: Pluto Press in association with Art Gallery of New South Wales and the Trans/forming Cultures Research Group, University of Technology, Sydney, 2000). Further material on work from the 1970s can be found in catalogues accompanying exhibitions of selections of the Phillip Morris Collection of Australian Photography at the National Gallery of Australia. See James Molisson ed., Australian Photographers: The Philip Morris Collection (exh. cat.) (Melbourne: Philip Morris, 1979); Aspects of the Philip Morris Collection: Four Australian Photographers (exh. cat.) (Sydney: Australia Council for the Arts, 1980) and Gael Newton ed. On the Edge: Australian Photographers of the Seventies, from the Collection of the National Gallery of Australia, Philip Morris Arts Grant (exh. cat.) (San Diego: San Diego Museum of Art, 1994). Catriona Moore's book Indecent Exposures: Twenty Years of Australian Feminist Photography (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1994) also provides an invaluable account and analysis of a particular trajectory within Australian photography through the 1970s and 1980s.

History of Photography 23/2 (1999)

Blair French, ed., Photo Files: An Australian Photography Reader (Sydney: Power Publications and Australian Centre for Photography, 1999). This publication includes short essays on bodies of work by Bill Henson, Rosemary Laing, Tracey Moffatt, and Anne Zahalka. Those on Henson and Zahalka date from the 1980s, and only the essay by Bruce James on Moffatt's Up In The Sky work of 1997 discusses a body of work examined within this study. (See Bruce James, 'Tracey in Timbuktu', 291-97.

All four publications were edited by former Director of the Centre for Contemporary Photography, Stuart Koop. The full titles and dates of publication are: Shot (1992); Post: Photography Post Photography (1995); A Small History of Photography (1997); and Value Added Goods: Essays on Contemporary Photography, Art and Ideas (2002).

Over the past five to ten years there has undoubtedly been more writing produced on the work of Moffatt than upon that of any other contemporary Australian artist. Much of it, however, has been (and continues to be) produced outside of Australia, limiting the likelihood of such writing addressing the relation of Moffatt's work to other practices emerging from within or in dialogue with the sphere of Australian contemporary art. See: Lynne Cooke ed., Tracey Moffatt: Free-Falling (exh. cat.) (New York: Dia Center for the Arts, 1998); Régis Durand and Marta Gili eds, Tracey Moffatt (exh. cat.) (Barcelona and Paris: Fundación la Caixa and Centre National de la Photographie, 1999); Martin Hentschel and Gerald Matt eds, Tracey Moffatt (exh. cat.) (Stuttgart: Cantz Verlag, 1998); Tracey Moffatt and Gael

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Rosemary Laing and Anne Zahalka has been subjected to varying degrees of critical discussion within magazines, journals and catalogues. I draw on some of this material in the following chapters. However, there is far less material extant on the work of Jon Rhodes, perhaps reflecting the artist's very different attempts at negotiating spaces for professional activity between the worlds of editorial photography, documentary and contemporary art.

There are no existing doctoral or masters theses that undertake sustained analysis across multiple sets of work by any combination of these artists. Nor are there any Australian theses investigating this broad tendency in photo-based contemporary art practices. This study is unique within both current Australian art criticism and the history of photo-based contemporary Australian art.

Chapter Structure

As I have already asserted, photo-based contemporary art draws upon a wide range of theoretical and representational models and is highly responsive to changing social and economic circumstances. This study therefore weaves back and forth between direct discussions of selected bodies of work and considerations of broader conceptual and cultural frameworks. The frameworks, representational models and conditions discussed here are not so


34 The work of Brenda L. Croft and Rosemary Laing has featured with increasing frequency in major exhibitions both in Australia and abroad from the late 1990s onwards and so the amount of critical material available on their work is increasing rapidly. (See for example René Block and Barbara Heinrich eds, Das Lied von der Erde / The Song of the Earth (exh. cat.) (Kassel: Museum Fredericianum, 2000) accompanying the international exhibition of the same name in which both artists participated. Both Jon Rhodes and Anne Zahalka were featured in a three person exhibition of Australian work in Wales in 2000 accompanied by a substantial catalogue; see Christopher Coppock, Journeys in the Dreamland (exh. cat.) (Cardiff: Fotogallery, 2000). Catalogues accompanying the most recent solo exhibitions of Rhodes and Zahalka are also of sufficient import to warrant mention here. See Jon Rhodes, Whichaway? Photographs from Kiwirrkura 1974-1996 (exh. cat.) (Thora: Jon Rhodes, 1998); and Anne Zahalka, Leisureland (exh. cat.) (Sydney: Manly Art Gallery and Museum, 2000).

35 This assertion is based upon extensive searches of Australian university theses listings and library catalogues.
clearly delineated in practice as they may appear laid out in this study. Whilst considered in depth within just one of the following chapters, a particular model may in fact apply across a range of other work under review. I signal these links across chapters as my discussion develops.

The key frameworks for this study are detailed in some length in the first two chapters. Chapter 1 looks at selected key models for recent photo-based contemporary art developed in art practice and theory from the 1960s. It also briefly introduces photography’s negotiation of the relation between Australian and international art practice. Chapter 2 discusses the place of the photographic within spectacle culture, and backgrounds a model of critical realism as a means of identifying photo-based contemporary art’s potential critical efficacy within this cultural model.

The subsequent six chapters examine selected bodies of work by individual practitioners utilising a range of specific critical models.

Chapter 3 extends an initial analysis of the relation between the photographic image and spectacle culture through close discussion of Anne Zahalka’s Fortresses and Frontiers (1993) and Leisureland (1998). In this chapter I also introduce issues regarding the relation of staged and documentary modes of photography and the importance of cinema as a representational model. The chapter ends with a discussion of Zahalka’s Open House (1995) – large-scale colour interior group portraits concentrating upon the formal means by which notions of individual subjectivity may be signified via photographic style and the accumulation of pictorial detail.

These concerns are revisited in the Chapter 4 discussion of Brenda L. Croft’s Conference Call (1992) and The Big Deal is Black (1993). Here I argue that Croft as an Indigenous artist deploys forms associated both with hegemonic economic and social formations—corporate and museum cultures, for example—as well as with photography’s intimate and informal registers in order to confront the very assumptions of selfhood and social identity that commonly give rise to and are reinforced by Western society.

Chapter 5 extends an analysis of the representation of familial relationships and domestic environments into the terrain of the photo-essay – or more accurately, the utilisation of the rhetorical effects of the documentary photo-essay within the fictional image/text vignettes of Tracey Moffatt’s two Scarred for Life series of 1994 and 1999. A number of subtle transformations and rearticulations of representational tropes that characterised quotational postmodernism and appropriation art are evident in this work. Thus this work exemplifies a form of passage between key tenets of 1980s and early 1990s
photo-based contemporary art and those associated with practice over the subsequent decade. I discuss three key subjects: the use of tableau or staged narrative forms; the image/text model of the work as being, like the tableau, sourced in part within preceding postmodernist models; and most crucially the allusion to the historical form of the photo-essay in documentary photography as a means of appealing to a social consciousness of the 'real'.

Chapter 6 is the only chapter in which the work of two artists is discussed. Here in a comparative analysis of work by Moffatt (Up In The Sky of 1997) and documentary photographer Jon Rhodes (works from his Whichaway? Photographs from Kiwirrkura 1974-1996 exhibition) I examine how two apparently polar practices draw upon similar representational conventions sourced in documentary photography as well as film and cinema in order to make a rhetorical appeal to a collective cultural concept of social realism.

Chapter 7 features a closer examination of models of cinematic staging within the singular photographic images of Bill Henson from 1997 onwards. In this chapter I discuss the apparent cinematic construction of the scene of the photograph as well as the relationship of Henson's images to models of fashion imagery and their role in the generation of aesthetic and social resonance within the work.

Chapter 8 continues this analysis of performative, gestural bodies in photo-based contemporary art through analysis of Rosemary Laing's brownwork (1996/97), airport (1997), flight research (1999/2000) and bulletproofglass (2002) in the light of conceptual art's legacy of photographic documentation. I contrast the instantaneous visibility of Laing's images to the more complex temporal dimensions of Henson's work, suggesting that Laing's pictorial stagings often become symbolically coded gestures lacking in discursive or psychological effect. I assert a strong relationship between the visual and semiotic structures of Laing's work and those of advertising photography, so returning this study to a final consideration of photo-based contemporary art's potentially critical, potentially complicit relationship to the broader realm of contemporary visual culture.
CHAPTER 1
Photography and Contemporary Art: Notes on Genealogies

In this chapter I establish an immediate and crucial context for the consideration of key bodies of work produced by Australian photo-artists between 1992 and 2002.

Contemporary art often exhibits a high degree of historical consciousness. Definitions are difficult, and not absolutely crucial to this study, nevertheless Terry Smith's identification of contemporary art as that produced, "in the wake of the Pop-Minimal-Conceptual or 'postmodern' moment, especially art that rehearses or replays that moment,"\(^1\) will serve as a useful basis for discussions throughout this study.

In its widest purview photo-based contemporary art evidences an extensive range of precedents and genealogical influences within the recent history of photography's complex relationship to avant-garde artistic practice.\(^2\) This chapter introduces those most important to the work under review and the conditions within which it has been generated. The point is not to attempt a history of the photographic image from its inauguration as a representational and discursive presence within progressive art practice from the late 1960s onwards, but rather to identify moments and frameworks that most contribute to the work

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\(^1\) Terry Smith, 'What is Contemporary Art?: Contemporary Art, Contemporaneity and Art to Come' (Sydney: Artspace, 2001) n.p. In this published lecture Smith proposes three models through which contemporary art might be defined: an infrastructural one; a philosophical one; and an art-historical one. Through these he narrows his own classification of contemporary art significantly to practices engaged with the qualities and conditions (social, economic, cultural, intellectual) of 'contemporaneity' and working always in anticipation of its own future – in anticipation, that is, of art to come. Furthermore, he points to a temporal complexity that he wishes to embed in the term 'contemporaneity'. The qualities and conditions of contemporaneity are not solely linked to the temporal present. Rather, as in the case of Jean-Luc Nancy's sense of repeated completion and vanishing, in Smith's model qualities and conditions of contemporaneity may passage or repeat through time in more significant, more socially efficacious manners than allowed for by Danto. Smith here calls upon Jean-François Lyotard's claim that (in art) "we must admit a multiplicity of current times." (See Lyotard's 'Philosophy and Painting in the Age of Their Experimentation: Contribution to an Idea of Postmodernity', trans. Mária Minich Brewer and Daniel Brewer, in The Lyotard Reader, ed. Andrew Benjamin (London: Basil Blackwell, 1989) 186

\(^2\) There are of course a wide range of precedents and influences outside of contemporary art ranging from the importance of documentary imagery to early twentieth-century avant-gardism through to more recent models found in aspects of commercial visual culture including popular modes of entertainment. These are discussed in greater detail in the following chapters.
under review. Conceptualism and postmodernism are therefore key subjects within this discussion.\(^3\)

The work of major critics including John Roberts, Jeff Wall and Tony Godfrey amongst others locates photography at the heart of conceptual art's resurgent influence upon the present. Most crucial for this study is Wall's assertion that conceptual art was vital to the establishment of 'the picture' as both a model for and a discursive problem within contemporary art. I discuss this at some length, before moving on to a short discussion of photoconceptualism within Australia during the 1970s, in particular its political dimensions and mediating relationship between activist social documentary and deconstructive representational practices.

The second half of this chapter details the centrality of photography to critiques of authorship, originality and the determining social and institutional frames of art practice at the heart of particular North American strands of criticism associated with 1980s' postmodernism. This is pursued in order to highlight photography's place in a critique of the institutions of art, or of art as itself an institutional frame. The chapter concludes with an even more important introduction to the central role played by the photographic image within so-called appropriation art prevalent within Australia through the 1980s and early 1990s.

**Conceptualism and the Photographic 'Picture' as Contemporary Art**

Over the past decade significant critical attention has been paid to unravelling the nexus of conceptual art and photography.\(^4\) There are two broad issues at stake in this work. The first

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\(^3\) The term 'conceptualism' is often used within the discussion as it encompasses both the forms and tenents of conceptual art as well as their continued impact as an analytical framework to art production as a socially and intellectually discursive proposition.

is the manner in which a thorough critical examination of the role of photography in conceptual art serves to shift the emphasis of the recent history of the photographic medium itself as a critically reflexive, politically engaged practice, and its entry (or re-entry) into the realm of art as a set of neo-avant-garde (or postmodern) practices during the 1970s. As Joanna Lowry recently claimed:

...what is taking place is an attempt to rewrite the recent history of contemporary photographic practices, focussing on this moment—the moment of conceptual art's ascendency in the late sixties and early seventies—as the one which represented the fundamental break with the trajectory of what has been a widespread view that the rupturing of a dominant set of beliefs and assumptions about the nature of photography occurred somewhat later under the impact of two major theoretical and critical initiatives: one centring on the impact of Marxist theories of ideology, psychoanalysis and Post-Structuralism, beginning in the mid seventies—a series of debates which were dominated by writers like Burgin, Tagg, Sekula, and which fuelled a very differently theoretically inflected practice—and the other on the emergence of photography as the quintessential post-modern medium in the early eighties—represented by artists like Cindy Sherman and discussed in, for example, the writings of Douglas Crimp, Rosalind Krauss and Abigail Solomon-Godeau. Now it seems we are seeing a displacement of these two theoretical moments from the centre stage and an attempt to push that moment of rupture slightly back in time and to see it in a slightly wider art historical context.¹

Lowry focuses upon both the critical history and the theoretical conception of photography itself (and its place within a recent critical history of representation). Jeff Wall also does so, albeit in a different manner, within his important essay, "Marks of Indifference": Aspects of Photography in, or as, Conceptual Art, which begins:

This essay is a sketch, an attempt to study the ways that photography decisively realised itself as a modernist art in the experiments of the 1960s and 1970s. Conceptual art played an important role in the transformation of the terms and conditions within which art-photography defined itself and its relationships with the other arts, a transformation which established photography as an institutionalised modernist form evolving explicitly through the dynamics of its auto-critique.²

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¹ Joanna Lowry, in Green and Lowry, 'Revisiting Conceptualism', 36. The discussion here between Lowry and Green goes on to cover some important territory with regard to the relationship of contemporary photographic practice to conceptualism, particularly in terms of photography's relationship to understandings of the 'real' and the 'everyday', both the materiality and aesthetic qualities of contemporary practice and what Green characterises as a "theatricalisation of banality".

² Wall, "Marks of Indifference", 247. Another recent text, Lucy Soutter's 'The Photographic Idea: Reconsidering Conceptual Photography' (see note 4), also addresses the place of conceptual art in the relationship of photography to Modernism, but in a very different manner to Wall's approach. Here Soutter attempts to disturb, or smooth over, the distinctions between the strategies apparent in a conceptualist utilisation of photography, for example in the work of Dennis Oppenheim, and in the work
Both Lowry and Wall treat photography itself as the dominant subject in a relation with conceptual art.7

A critical reappraisal of photography's function within conceptual art processes helps us to understand such radical refiguring of art's cognitive, epistemological and social forms (i.e. its avant-garde status). Photography was central to conceptual art's critiques of the institutionalisation of art as an autonomous realm (the modern condition of art); the critical, activist reintegration of art into social life; and its culmination of the historical narrative structure of art. As Wall states, "many of conceptual art's essential achievements are either created in the form of photographs or are otherwise mediated by them."8 While this area of investigation is not crucial for my study, conceptual art is central to the development of an understanding of the photographic picture as both a representational investigation of social formations as well as a self-reflexive pictorial questioning of just this assumed function of the image. As John Roberts has argued, photography, "allowed conceptual art to reconnect itself to the world of social appearances without endorsing a pre-modernist defence of the pictorial."9 Rosalind Krauss puts it slightly differently. Most conceptual art had "recourse to photography" she claims, because the art "interrogated by conceptual art remained visual".10 Photography, therefore, was a means of "adhering to the realm of visuality" whilst in fact remaining "nonspecific".11 Photography was a means by which the visual could be interrogated from within, all the while pertaining to the general condition of 'art' rather than the (impossible) specific condition of 'photography', for as Krauss states: "Photography was

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of 'fine art' photographers such as Lee Friedlander working contemporaneously to conceptual art: "Conceptualists and fine art photographers shared common attitudes: neither was content continuing reliance [sic] on the transparency of the photographic index or on the naturalness of familiar photographic conventions." 10.

7 This emphasis is apparent even within the chapter 'Looking at Others: Artists Using Photography' in Tony Godfrey's recent Conceptual Art (see note 4).

7 Wall, "Marks of Indifference", 253

7 John Roberts, 'Photography, Iconophobia and the Ruins of Conceptual Art', in The Impossible Document. 9


11 Ibid.
understood...as deeply inimical to the idea of autonomy or specificity because of its own structural dependence upon a caption."^{12}

This identification of the 'pictorial' as the crucial hinge on which the relationship of conceptual art to photography is formed not only necessitates a fundamental re-thinking of previously espoused assumptions regarding "linguistic or analytic conceptual art [as] largely an attack on the primacy of the visual",^{13} (or at least assumptions regarding the failure or otherwise of such a project), it also provides a key thread linking the photographic image to the socially interventionist or activist potential of contemporary or 'post avant-garde' art. Indeed, David Green ponders the distance traversed between pictoriality in contemporary art provided by photography and "the concerns that motivated an earlier generation of artists [conceptual artists] to turn to photography as a means of testing and interrogating the very notion of the visual."^{14}

This issue of the visual or the pictorial is one crucial legacy of conceptual art. How has the interrogation of the autonomy and authority of the visual in conceptual art's utilisation of photography come to serve as basis for a resurgent visuality in contemporary work such as that under review? One answer lies in the way many contemporary photo-artists reprise a visualisation or photographic depiction of the forces, conditions and actions of earlier conceptualist critiques of the visual. In this study I ask whether this reprise capitulates to the commodity condition of the spectacle or provides an interventionist mode of critique.

A second legacy is explored in Wall's aforementioned essay in which he seeks to identify a more complex, even ambivalent, relation between photography within conceptual art and a preceding modernist tradition of the 'art' photograph. For Roberts the depictive, pictorial aspect of photography enabled conceptualism's reintegration of art and the social in a direct,agitprop manner that elided a conservative cooption of this 'documentary' function under a positivist framework. Thus conceptualism evidenced a rupture with a modernist conception of both art and photography, and one which sought to forge a bond

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^{12} ibid.

^{13} ibid.

^{14} Green and Lowry, 'Revisiting Conceptualism', 39
between the (second) neo-avant-garde of the 1960s and 1970s and the historical avant-garde of the 1920s and 1930s.\(^{15}\)

By contrast, Wall claims that a greater bond between avant-garde (use of) photography and the developing status of 'art' photography in 1950s and 1960s is to be found within conceptualism. According to Wall, photography was not rescued from this modernist aestheticisation by conceptualism.\(^{16}\) Rather, conceptualism made this aestheticisation of photography as an art form both possible and visible.\(^{17}\) Photography's acceptance as art, according to Wall, was led by conceptualism; it occurred within a framework that privileged photography as a medium (an 'art' medium) exactly because it pressured the very conception of art (as autonomous, bourgeois, collectible).\(^{18}\) The conceptualist use of photography, according to Wall, was not fundamentally anti-formalist, nor anti-subjectivist, but rather a logical extension of photography's double character as reportage and 'art'. Photoconceptualism was not only art photography par excellence but it set the stage for a revival of the drama of reportage within avant-gardism.\(^{19}\)

Wall's discussion openly inverts key aspects of Peter Bürger's influential *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, in which any separation of art from life under a formalist model within Modernism—or separation of art from apparently avant-garde intent and function—is neither final nor absolute. In fact, for Bürger not only do conceptions of each (the avant-garde and modern art) in a sense define themselves in relation to each other but the latter, in particular, only evolves in a form of mutation of the former. Bürger conceives, then, of post-war modernist art as an institutionalisation of the historical avant-garde—as a "neo-avant-


\(^{17}\) See Wall, "'Marks of Indifference", 250-52

\(^{18}\) See ibid., 252

\(^{19}\) ibid., 251
garde", which in such institutionalisation "negates genuinely avant-gardist intentions." Wall, however, specifically, claims that in constituting aestheticism as a key object of its critique the avant-garde actually "re-established Aestheticism as a permanent issue" for or within art. And so, Wall's argument follows, the aesthetic aspects of photography (or photography as a particular aesthetic model) and their critique are fundamentally intertwined as determining conditions of the medium itself through all its guises.

In fact, to stretch Wall's line of reasoning, might not photography be defined as this unshakeable, absolutely intertwined co-existence of an aesthetic of imaging, picturing, visualising, and its critique? This would assist in addressing photography's appearance within conceptualism as both overt manifestation and destruction of its own modernist identity. It would further assist in explaining how and why contemporary practices so steeped in conceptualist strategies and intent pursue these through the photographic image (photography's aesthetic mode). Indeed, Wall views photoconceptualism as "the last moment of the pre-history of photography as art." That is, he views it as a (revolutionary) failure to break photography's double-relation to artistic radicalism (to a social critique always first grounded in an auto-critique) and to the history of the western picture as the source of

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1. Wall, "Marks of Indifference", 250-51
2. Norman Bryson's recent outline of this dialectic of social relations and the picturesque within the work of Andreas Gursky is briefly discussed in Chapter 2. See Norman Bryson, 'The Family Firm: Andreas Gursky and German Photography', art/text 87 (1999-2000) 76-81
3. Wall, "Marks of Indifference", 266
its representational character in a history of mimetic representation. Photoconceptualism fails to divide and disrupt this fundamental double character, but this failure is revolutionary, according to Wall, for it ultimately re-establishes the concept of the picture (as a critically reflective, socially embedded) category for contemporary art. If conceptual art involved a discursive critique of not only the constitution of objects, representations, actions and ideas as art, but also the very conditions within which art may be conceived, and perceived, then Wall claims that the photographic image—the picture—emerges from this critique as one of art's key or ongoing (future) sites (or conditions).

Thomas Crow ascribes this identification of the 'picture' as a key site of art post-conceptual art by Wall more in terms of a radical negativity. According to Crow, the picture is for Wall a space in which to re-embrace the larger sphere of visual culture after the failure of conceptual art to do so. Crow reads in Wall's overall commentary on conceptual art a disappointment in its limited achievements. Crow argues that this failure, for Wall, results from the fundamental isolation of conceptual art – specifically its inability to configure an alternate audience or public beyond the parameters of its own intellectual community. Furthermore, the radically transformative moves of conceptual art could not find a space outside of burgeoning economic structures and cultural bureaucracy, and thus could not "generate subject-matter free from irony". Therefore, Crow continues, Wall's "pessimistic verdicts on the achievements of conceptual art", like those of Charles Harrison, "have led [him] to embrace monumental pictorialism as the most productive way forward, a move that sustains the idea of an encompassing visual culture as the ultimate ground of discussion."25

The revival of the drama of reportage is important to this overall positioning of Wall's argument. It provides the hinge between the aesthetic and the social—a hinge present within the visual—upon which a cogent and politically viable idea of the image or picture depends. According to Wall, under a modernist mode of art photography, photographers developed a conventional and recognisable transcriptive structure via mimicking photojournalism. In doing so they arrived at a concept of the photographic 'picture' that not only enabled photography to be presented as a mature, unique modernist art form, but


25 ibid. (Emphasis added.)
further in its complex relation of the mimetic, the constructed and the socially interventionist
created of photography a paradigm model for (contemporary) art. Under conceptualism,
Wall claims, "the gesture of reportage" incorporated within this structure "is withdrawn from
the social field and attached to a putative theatrical event." Thus, conceptualism, via
notions of performance or drama (in the documentation of performance, for example, or
indeed the staging of performance for the sole purpose of photographic documentation)
brought about a new relationship between photography and the staged image. “The
inscription of photography into a nexus of experimental practices," writes Wall "led to a direct
but distantiated and parodic relationship with the art-concept of photo-journalism." According to Wall, it is thanks to conceptualism that studio photography and reportage no
longer occupy polar positions. On the contrary, studio photography became a form of
reportage of the new drama of the studio, a space itself being "reinvented once more as a
theatre, factory, reading room, meeting place, gallery, museum, and many other things." This is evidenced in a number of the images discussed in later chapters.

The 1970s in Australia: Theory and Practice

During the 1970s Australian art developed within a framework of increasing exposure to
European and Anglo-American art of that Pop-Minimal-Conceptual nexus noted by Terry
Smith (see above) as well as its associated modes of critical theory. This was also a time in
which conceptual and overtly political art practices sought engagement with forms of

26 Wall, "Marks of Indifference", 253

27 ibid.

28 This is affirmed also by John Roberts. Conceptual art, Roberts claims, embraced the culturally
disruptive aspect of photography, but withdrew it from the social world. The photographic document of
what Roberts terms the 'art event' (performance, happening, temporary installation or structure) re-
adjusted conceptions of the real in photography (that is, shifted the conception of 'the real' away from
daily, social life and its material conditions to whatever happened to be placed, performed or staged
before the camera). This, in turn, prefigured the staged or directorial photographs of 1980s' art

29 Wall, "Marks of Indifference", 253

30 ibid., 254. Wall goes on here to locate the studio as the crucial space for photography's own avowal
of its double-condition of fact and fiction: "The two reigning myths of photography—the one that claims
that photographs are 'true' and the one that claims they are not—are shown to be grounded in the
same praxis, available in the same place, the studio, at that place's moment of historical
transformation." 254.
discourse, representation and cultural production beyond those previously associated with art. The movement of photography into the modern institutions of art was both partnered and counter-pointed by the development of photographic practices predicated upon socially interventionist intentions. Various modes of broadly documentary-based practice manifested awareness of current sociological theory, of the application of Marxist critiques of production to visual or cultural practices, and in particular of feminist thought. These were largely driven by a neo-Brechtian conception of realism predicated upon the camera's perceived ability to reveal otherwise invisible or hidden social conditions. Thus, the photograph was treated as a tool of existing structures of social and economic power that could be turned against such orders. The photograph began to be treated as a constitutive site of power in the burgeoning representational critiques of social power undertaken by such politicised documentary practices. It became, in Victor Burgin's phrase, a "place of work" in the production of meaning.

Various instances of photoconceptualism developed concurrently with this politicised documentary practice. Some involved the documentation of art events or performances (or the shift of such into fundamentally photographic forms). Others related to the language or

31 This professionalisation or institutionalisation occurred through the development of photographic departments at the State Galleries and of dedicated photography galleries in both public and private sectors. For outlines of these developments see Judy Annear, 'What is this thing called Photography?', in Ewen McDonald with Judy Annear eds, What is this thing called photography?, 11-15; Deborah Ely, 'The Australian Centre for Photography', History of Photography 23/2 (1999) 118-22; Anne Kirker and Clare Williamson, The Power to Move: Aspects of Australian Photography (exh. cat.) (Brisbane: Queensland Art Gallery, 1995); and Gael Newton, Shades of Light: Photography and Australia 1839-1988 (Canberra and Sydney: Australian National Gallery and Collins, 1988).


33 The fuller passage reads: "Counter to the nineteenth-century aesthetics which still dominate most teaching of photography, and most writings on photography, work in semiotics has shown that a photograph is not to be reduce to 'pure form', no 'window on the world', nor is it a gangway to the presence of an author. A fact of primary social importance is that the photograph is a place of work, a structured and structuring space within which the reader deploys, and is deployed by, what codes he or she is familiar with in order to make sense. Photography is one signifying system among others in society which produces the ideological subject in the same movement in which they 'communicate' their ostensible 'contents'." Victor Burgin, 'Looking at Photographs', in Thinking Photography (London: Macmillan, 1982) 153

34 The work of John Lethbridge is exemplary here, along with some of that of Mike Parr and Peter Kennedy (although in their work the shift from photo-documentation of performance to performative photography is less pronounced - the fidelity of the autonomous performance lingers in a way that it does not in Lethbridge's work.) For a detailed discussion of the photographic elements of both Parr and
textual conditions of visual representation, or at least to the potentially determinate relation of language to visual forms.35 Others incorporated traditions of social documentary with this interrogation of representational limits in order to deepen their respective modes of social critique.36 Whilst a final set pursued the points at which art might collapse (back) into life, or into some altered structure for daily perception and action via quasi-indexical and taxonomic forms of (often personal) photographic documentation.37 All of these provided important trajectories of development into the thought and practice of the 1980s. They also indicate how important the 1970s were as a period of increasing consciousness and concern regarding the issue of photography's epistemological and ontological condition as a set of socially interventionist representational practices. By the beginning of the 1980s, photography within Australia not only constituted a burgeoning set of sophisticated practices supported by an expanding education and exhibition infrastructure,38 it had also itself become a crucial subject of representational, political and cultural debate. Even within the institutions of the art world the key issue pertaining to photography was no longer

Kennedy's practices see Bernice Murphy, 'Contemporary Photographic Art from Australia', in Zeitgendsische Fotokunst Aus Australien (exh. cat.) (Heidelberg: Edition Braus, 2000) 154-83.

35 See for example aspects of the work of Peter Tyndal and Imants Tillers during the 1970s, little of which is explicitly photographic but all of which draw upon concepts of subjectivity formed in acts of looking and imaging, and in modes of repetition and reproducibility dependent upon photographic discourse. For further discussion of such work during the 1970s see Charles Green, 'Living in the Seventies', in Jennifer Phipps ed., Off the Wall/In the Air: A Seventies' Collection (exh. cat.) (Melbourne: Monash University Gallery, 1991) 5-19, and Green, Peripheral Visions: Contemporary Australian Art 1970-1994 (Sydney: Craftsman House, 1994). Later, more explicitly photographic work of a related vein includes Peter Lyssiotis' Look and Learn (1980) and Sandy Edwards' A Narrative of Sexual Overtones (1983) series, both published in part in Coventry ed., Critical Distance.

36 See for example aspects of the work of Helen Grace, published in both Coventry ed., Critical Distance, and Kurt Breereton et al. eds, Photo-Discourse: Critical Thought and Practice in Photography (Sydney: Sydney College of the Arts, 1981); also Virginia Coventry's Here and There: Concerning the Nuclear Power industry (1979) published in Critical Distance, and Whyalla—Not a Document (1977-81). For further discussion of the relevant work of both Grace and Coventry see Catriona Moore, 'Photos of My Generation', Photograph 50 (1997) 8-15, as well as Moore, Indecent Exposures: Twenty Years of Australian Feminist Photography (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1994).

37 See for example the photo-sequence works from the 1970s of Robert Rooney and of Sam Schoenbaun, along with Micky Allan's My Trip (1976) work. For a detailed discussion of Rooney's photo-conceptualism and its importance to developing photographic practice in Australia see Green, 'Avoiding art, desperately seeking photography'.

38 For a recent and far more comprehensive consideration of the issues at play in the work and associated critical enterprises of this period see McDonald with Annear eds, What is this thing called photography?
whether it qualified as an art form, but in what forms and manners would it develop as both artistic and broader cultural practice: to what effects and to whose ends?

These developments in practice evidenced an accelerating assimilation of strands of Continental and Anglo-American structural and poststructural textual and cultural theory (including Marxist and psychoanalytical approaches to the production and reception of images). Texts such as Roland Barthes set of semiotic image analyses published in English in *Image-Music-Text* in 1977, his hugely influential *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* published in English in 1984, and Susan Sontag's *On Photography* of 1977 all had significant impacts on photographic theory and practice in Australia. Whether encountered in original form or via filtration of their key tenets through the work of Anglo-American poststructural theorists, the work of twentieth-century Continental writers such as Walter Benjamin, Michel Foucault and Jacques Lacan, to name just a few, all had impact upon developing conceptions of images as generative forms of psychological and social power. Two particularly important anthologies, the non-photography specific *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation* edited by Brian Wallis and published in New York in 1984, and Victor Burgin's *Thinking Photography* published in London in 1982, respectively exemplify the poles of North American postmodern critique of artistic originality and authorial authenticity—what John Roberts terms a critical deconstructionism—and British poststructural critiques of social power relations and the production of gendered subjectivities. These two crucial strands of critical theory were thoroughly adopted into local


40 Roberts, *The Art of Interruption*, 4

41 Brian Wallis ed., *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation* (New York, Cambridge Mass. and London: The New Museum of Contemporary Art and The MIT Press, 1984) and Victor Burgin ed., *Thinking Photography* (London: Macmillan, 1982). These anthologies served to link earlier twentieth-century texts crucial to poststructural modes of criticism of the 1970s and 1980s, as well as to postmodern conceptions of and practices within the visual arts, with celebrated contemporary writing. So in *Art After Modernism* texts by both Benjamin and Jorge Luis Borges, two writers whose work had become so crucial to postmodern critiques regarding the elision of both determining authorship and the authority of the original, were presented alongside both the subsequent theorisation of a culture of the copy and the simulacrum by Jean Baudrillard and the work of contemporary American critics. Douglas Crimp, Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Craig Owens and Abigail Solomon-Godeau. This had the effect of both arguing for the centrality of such positions to the condition of contemporary culture and teasing out the subsequent ramifications of such for contemporary art practice. The texts by each of these five published in *Art After Modernism*—Crimp's 'Pictures'; Foster's 'Re: Post'; Krauss' 'The Originality of the Avant-Garde: A Postmodern Repetition'; Owens 'The Allegorical Impulse: Towards a Theory of Postmodernism'; and Solomon-Godeau's 'Photography After Art Photography'—were all enormously
critiques of the photograph’s representational authority. Precedence was given to the
discursive deployment of the photographic image within a broader critique of a culture of the
image and thus, concurrently, to self-reflexive critiques of the image’s cultural contingency.
Put simply, by the early 1990s this had resulted in a key turn to the ‘textuality’ of the
photograph in Australian contemporary photo-based art practice and associated criticism.

These discussions and new critical emphases were propagated and advanced in
Australia from the late 1970s onwards within an expanding local critical and theoretical
publishing base either devoted to or certainly deeply interested in the photographic. Light
Vision, published from Melbourne under the editorship of Jean-Marc Le Pechoux survived
for eight bi-monthly issues during 1977 and 1978. Light Vision was fundamentally
entrenched within a formalist aesthetic of photographic Modernism, seeking to champion
photography as a discrete fine art form. Yet portfolios of work by young photographers such
as Christine Cornish, Sandy Edwards, Bill Henson, and Fiona Hall, along with texts such as
excerpts from Max Kozloff’s "A Problem of Photographic Perception", indicate a degree of
interest in opening up the field of fine art photography.

Edited by Matthew Nickson and Euan McGillivray, the occasional Working Papers on
Photography (or WOPPOP), was quite different. It set out to foster a critique of photography
located at the intersection of various cultural and critical practices. Photography, as figured
within WOPPOP, was a set of multi-faceted modes of visual communication functioning at the
heart of contemporary culture. The tone for this serious-minded, cheaply produced
publication was set with the opening editorial in which a list of critics—Benjamin, Barthes,

influential and significant texts in the theorisation of postmodernism as the culture of the copy
insomuch as such a conceptualisation was tied to the mass reproducibility of the photographic image.
Art After Modernism also printed Laura Mulvey’s important 1975 essay on the construction of gendered
subjectivity within the filmic image, ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’. A Benjamin text, ‘The
Author as Producer’, served as an introduction to a materialist form of image critique in Thinking
Photography, just as Umberto Eco’s ‘Critique of the Image’ served as an introductory text to semiotic
image analysis. The anthology’s following texts served to introduce various inflections of British
photographic theory (one text by a North American writer, Allan Sekula, featured), including
structuralist, semiotic and psychoanalytic modes of analysis strongly inflected by a Lacanian-based
approach to film studies closely associated with the film culture journal Screen, as well as Marxist and
subsequent Foucauldian models of power analysis stressing social contexts of production,
transmission and reception, and treating the image as a dynamic site of power relations.

42 All of these artists went on through the 1980s and 1990s to produce work in a diversity of fields
rather than adhere to any rigid conception of a fine-art photographic aesthetic.

43 Nine issues were published between 1978 and 1983.
Marshall McLuhan, John Berger, Burgin, Sekula, Sontag and Stuart Hall—was cited in order to associate the publication with the burgeoning international field of poststructural photography theory. Similarly, an important one-off publication produced in 1981 by a group of artists, photographers and writers associated with Sydney College of the Arts, Photo-Discourse, drew attention to new theoretically engaged modes of photographic practice in Australia.44

Art & Text, edited by Paul Taylor, was also launched in 1981. This journal quickly became immensely influential in its advocacy of poststructural modes of art criticism and theory and their application to the Australian context. Its early issues, for example, promoted a Baudrillardian discourse regarding reality's displacement by the image-world—the world of simulacra—that was so fundamental to Taylor's own critical claims regarding an art of (or as) appropriation.45 Another visual art journal, Art Network, began publishing in 1979, two years prior to the appearance of Art & Text. Both these journals were then joined by On the Beach (1982/3), Tension (1983), and the photography-specific journal Photofile (1983).

Together these journals acted as the sites for the development of modes of critical discourse largely adopted from overseas models, adapted to and deployed within the

44 Photo-Discourse included the work of artists and photographers of the moment, incorporating photographic images, projects and series alongside critical texts. The work of Roland Barthes, Walter Benjamin, Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari, Jacques Lacan, and Susan Sontag appears in the footnote references to some of the texts published in Photo-Discourse, indicating the degree to which both photography theory and theoretical material from other disciplines had come to be read and incorporated into Australian photography writing by the early 1980s, in no small part through the aegis of WOPoP.

45 Jean Baudrillard's essay 'The Precession of Simulacra' was first published (in English) in Art & Text 11 (1983) 3-47. A review of Photo-Discourse by George Alexander in issue five of Art & Text referred to the Baudrillardian world, which, Alexander claimed, occasioned such a publication, "Is there life before photography?" he asked. "The photographic syndrome (chronic, acute and terminal) is congenial to our culture. Today, reality follows the image, not vice versa. It gives us our society's characteristic hysteria: what Jean Baudrillard calls, 'the striking resemblance of the real to life itself.'" George Alexander, 'On Photo-Discourse', Art & Text 5 (1982) 82. Alexander echoed his own text fourteen years later in another essay accompanying the exhibition Photography is Dead! Long Live Photography! indicating not only the consistency of his own position perhaps but also the manner in which critical ideas regarding the photographic image developed within postmodernist discourse of the early 1980s have remained embedded in contemporary thinking. Alexander asked again, "Was there life before photography?" And furthermore stated, "Photography has the Borgesian power to displace perspectives of the external world to the point where reality follows the image, not vice versa. It gives us postmodernism's prominent feature, what Jean Baudrillard calls "the striking resemblance of the real to itself."" Alexander, 'Frieze + Revive + Die', in Linda Michael ed., Photography Is Dead! Long Live Photography! (exh. cat.) (Sydney: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1996) 13
particular cultural, historical and representational formations present in Australia and Australian art practice at the time.

**Postmodernism and the Museum: Douglas Crimp and Abigail Solomon-Godeau**

The centrality of photography within the current range of practices makes it crucial to a theoretical distinction between Modernism and postmodernism. Not only has photography so thoroughly saturated our visual environment as to make the invention of visual images seem archaic, but it is also clear that photography is too multiple, too useful to other discourses, ever to be wholly contained within traditional definitions of art. Photography will always exceed the institutions of art, will always participate in nonart practices, will always threaten the insularity of art's discourse. (Douglas Crimp)\(^6\)

In North American criticism of the early 1980s the notion of photography's constant contact with life outside of art underpinned photography's centrality to postmodernist modes of representation (and criticism), and crucially, its importance to a critique of the institution of art as embodied by the art museum.\(^7\) Key critics Douglas Crimp and Abigail Solomon-Godeau claimed that one of the fundamental actions of photographic postmodernism at this time was its discursive disruption of art's institutional formation within the (art) museum.\(^5\)

For Crimp, the art museum was historically synonymous and co-existent with the modern conception of art itself, and thus the postmodern critique of this institution (via photographic work) was a crucial mode of social criticism.\(^9\) Crimp wrote that "art as we think

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\(^7\) And so, it must be noted that as productive and now historically significant as this mode of analysis is, it is very specifically sourced in a North American and to a lesser extent European cultural model where modern art museums were, and continue to be, far more ubiquitous and culturally esteemed than in Australia. The 'museum culture' of the modern Western world, at least so far as 'art' was concerned, was far more powerful in social and economic terms in North America and Europe than in Australia, although a slightly different mode of institutional hegemony might be said to have developed in Australia—based upon this modernist model—from the late 1970s, and certainly early 1980s onwards.

\(^9\) This formation—which for Crimp was Modernism—was that of: first, a cause and effect historical narrative based on the succession of styles; second, signs of authorial authority and vision; third, claims to universal value; and fourth, the autonomy of both individual works and the general field of art.

\(^5\) As Crimp pointed out, the institution as discursive system provided a mask or cover of its own discursive function under Modernism by installing in its place the idea of an autonomous, authorial subject—the artist. See Douglas Crimp, 'Photographs at the End of Modernism', in *On the Museum's Ruins*, 13. Here Abigail Solomon-Godeau's extension of the notion of institution to encompass "all the discursive formations—canons, art and photography histories, criticism, the marketplace—that together constitute the social and material space of art," should be allowed. Abigail Solomon-Godeau,
about it only came into being in the nineteenth century, with the birth of the museum and the discipline of art history, for these share the same time span as Modernism (and, not insignificantly, photography). Thus, art’s natural end was the museum, "that idealist space that is art with a capital A. The idea of art as autonomous, as separate from everything else, as destined to take its place in art history, is a development of Modernism." But whilst photography might have come into being at a similar time to the museum and the modern conception of art it was excluded from both the museum and its model of art history throughout Modernism (other than to function as its tool), as it always pointed to something outside of itself, and so to a "broader discursive dimension" outside the history of art. For Solomon-Godeau, photography was fundamentally based upon exactly those properties disavowed by Modernism: it was functional and it acted as mediator of the empirical world; its role was that of "principal agent and conduit of culture and ideology." Photography’s meanings were not secured by its authorial subjects, but rather, according to Crimp, "by the discursive structures in which it appeared." And so, for Crimp (and Solomon-Godeau), the moment at which photography was admitted to the museum as one of its

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50 Douglas Crimp, 'The End of Painting', in On the Museum’s Ruins, 98. (First published October 16, Spring 1981.)

51 ibid.

52 André Malraux wrote of photography’s functional centrality to modern art history in its making available all art in image reproduction form, thus facilitating stylistic analysis: "The world of photography is, unquestionably, only the servant of the world of originals; and yet, appealing less directly to the emotions and far more to the intellect, it seems to reveal or to ‘develop’—in the sense in which this word is used in photography—the creative act; to make of this history of art primarily a continuing succession of creations." (Malraux, however, here and elsewhere in this text hinted also at the manner in which this irrevocably altered the spectator’s relation to the work from one of learning to one of admiration.) André Malraux, Museum Without Walls, transl. Stuart Gilbert and Francis Price (London: Secker & Warburg, 1967) 148

53 Crimp, 'Photographs at the End of Modernism', 13. In Crimp’s writing photography is something akin to Andreas Huyssen’s claim upon the fundamental interdependence of art and mass culture, where mass culture is conceived as "the repressed other of Modernism, the family ghost rumbling in the cellar." See Andreas Huyssen, After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986) 16

54 Solomon-Godeau, ‘Photography After Art Photography’, 104

55 Crimp, ‘Photographs at the End of Modernism’, 15-16. Significantly, Crimp’s writing here intersects with that of other, materialist or Foucault-influenced poststructuralist critics of the 1970s and early 1980s such as John Tagg and Allan Sekula.
subjects was the moment that the "epistemological coherence [of the museum, of modern art and its history] collapses", for the outside world had been let in, the institution opened up to other modes of discourse.\textsuperscript{56} This, for each, signalled the advent of postmodernism.

Both Crimp and Solomon-Godeau identified the use of photographic elements or components in Robert Rauschenberg's assemblages of the 1960s along with Andy Warhol's recourse to pre-existing photographic images as the source material for his 1960s photolithographic canvases as key starting points of this photographic contamination of the museum's purist art-historical narrative of modern art. Solomon-Godeau claimed that these artists utilised photography for its pre-existing status as cultural artefact along with its mass reproducibility, each of which fundamentally bound it to mass culture. Photography, according to Solomon-Godeau, was utilised as an "already made" by these artists.\textsuperscript{57}

Crimp's analysis was similar, but focused more upon the institution of the museum. Rauschenberg's use of photography was crucial, he claimed, "not only because it spelled the extinction of the traditional production mode but also because it questioned all the claims to authenticity according to which the museum determined its body of objects and its field of knowledge."\textsuperscript{58} Both Crimp and Solomon-Godeau grounded their analyses of the work not only of Rauschenberg and Warhol, but also that of the subsequent photographic artists whose work they treated as emblematic of late 1970s' and early 1980s photographic postmodernism (for example Sherrie Levine, Robert Longo, Richard Prince, Cindy Sherman), in a Benjaminian discourse regarding the photo-mechanical withering of the artwork's aura, along with a form of Barthesian structuralism that proclaimed 'the death of the author'.\textsuperscript{59}

The work of Crimp and Solomon-Godeau is central to any theorisation of the impact of photography in the hands of artists upon the modern institutions of art, and particularly the museum, during the 1970s and early 1980s internationally. But of course, art museums, or more specifically their cultural (and economic) status, whilst critiqued and within certain

\textsuperscript{56} ibid., 14

\textsuperscript{57} Solomon-Godeau, 'Photography After Art Photography', 104

\textsuperscript{58} Crimp, 'Appropriating Appropriation', 134

\textsuperscript{59} Crimp: "Through reproductive technology, postmodernist art dispenses with the aura. The fiction of the creating subject gives way to a frank confiscation, quotation, excerption, accumulation, and repetition of already existing images. Notions of originality, authenticity, and presence, essential to the ordered discourse of the museum, are undermined." Douglas Crimp, 'On the Museum's Ruins', in On the Museum's Ruins, 58. (First published October 13, Summer 1980.)
intellectual and artistic circles severely refuted by this interventionist, discursive practice neither disappeared, nor lost their cultural authority.

Both Crimp and Solomon-Godeau implicitly acknowledged this whilst writing from within the historical moment of 1980s postmodernism. Solomon-Godeau discussed how as fundamentally market-orientated institutions,\textsuperscript{60} art museums played a role in rapidly transforming an avant-gardist, critical postmodernism into an institutionally assimilable style.\textsuperscript{61} Crimp recognised how new aesthetic activities and categories, that could once "not be contained within the space of the museum or accounted for by the museum's discursive system," would eventually find their discursive space and resting place within that same institution.\textsuperscript{62} They had, after all, been created in the shadow of, or literally within, the museum. The museum, as both site and system of productive discourse, responds to its critique within such work by expanding, evolving and finally absorbing the agent of criticism.

What was the effect of this? Did this evolution of the museum out of Modernism neutralise the critical element of this postmodernist work via an absorption of it as a museum (or 'institutional') practice or style? (This would correspond to Crimp's statement that, by becoming a site for postmodern appropriation, the museum ensured that "the strategy of appropriation becomes just another academic category—a thematic—through which the museum organises it subjects.")\textsuperscript{63} Or, to consider the potential avant-gardism of mass culture for a moment, is it true, as Jessica Evans claims, that "the full implications of photography in mass culture have to be denied in order for the postmodern avant-garde to exist as such"?\textsuperscript{64}

Perhaps a more productive position can be adopted, one deriving from Crimp's warning in

\textsuperscript{60} Institutions predicated on the attribution and celebration of value.

\textsuperscript{61} Abigail Solomon-Godeau, 'Living with Contradictions: Critical Practices in the Age of Supply-Side Aesthetics', in Photography at the Dock, 124-48. (First published, Screen 28/7 [1987].) There was only a three year period between Solomon-Godeau's supportive detailing of a critical photographic postmodernism in 'Photography After Art Photography' published in 1984, and this critique of commercially assimilated postmodern aesthetic in 1987.

\textsuperscript{62} Crimp, 'Appropriating Appropriation', 134. These categories came about during the 1960s and 1970s from the collapse of art and non-art practices into each other.

\textsuperscript{63} ibid., 135-36. Again, as in the case of Solomon-Godeau, Crimp raised this issue of institutionalisation of postmodernism in 1982, only shortly after his first positling of its critical radicality in 1979. See Douglas Crimp, 'Pictures', October 8 (1979) 75-88


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his subsequent introduction to On the Museum's Ruins, written from the perspective of the early 1990s, that "the institution does not exert its power only negatively—to remove the work of art from the praxis of life—but positively—to produce a specific social relation between artwork and viewer." Perhaps a critical analysis of art's relation to its institutions can extend its focus beyond the reductive, polar terms of this particular relation. If so, how, when encountered spectorially might this relation between artwork and the institutional framing of art produce meaning in a social sense? Perhaps photography associated with performative conceptualism provided the most productive litmus test through introducing an aesthetic practice in material form to the museum, one that disrupted all the structured categories of Modernism (including photography), but also, in this very introduction to the museum rapidly shifted from the status of something that both stood in for and disrupted art, to the status of art itself. In its staging anew of a present (but absent) relation between action and spectator, made possible by the museum, might such photography have produced a new form of social relation between artwork and viewer?

This critique of the museological framing of art as and through the photographic image was quite transparent within Australian postmodern practices of the 1980s. The fundamental principle here that photographic meaning is formed within (and contributes to) discursive structures surrounding the image and assisting its transaction was crucial to the work of the period, and to a certain degree remains so.

65 Crimp, 'Photographs at the End of Modernism'. 27

66 In chronological terms another set of essays sit between Crimp's writings on photographic postmodernism and this introduction—three essays based on specific examination of the museological institution (thus including exhibition) in the latter half of the 1980s. In 'The Postmodern Museum' in particular, Crimp acknowledged that a new conception of the museum within postmodernism is, in fact, based upon a conservative postmodernism—one associated with his earlier notion of an appropriation of style (thus occurring within a pre-existing, hegemonic system), rather than an interventionist, discursive mode of appropriation. Crimp wrote ruefully: "In the culture at large, it is this development that has come to be associated with the term postmodernism—the development that repudiates the politicised, materialist practices of the 1960s and 1970s, 'rediscover[s] national or historical lineages, and returns us to an uninterrupted continuum of museum art. The resurgence of art that comfortably fits within the museum's space, both physical and discursive, the return of easel painting and bronze-cast sculpture, the renewal of an architecture of master builders—it is this that is now known as postmodernism." Crimp goes on here to oppose this postmodernism which eclipses political practices to that he had valued in the early-1980s which sought "to reveal the social and material conditions of art's production and reception—those conditions that it has been the museum's function to dissemble." Crimp, 'The Postmodern Museum', in On the Museum's Ruins, 286-87. (First published Parachute 46, March-May 1987.)

67 See Crimp, 'The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism'
Australian Art in the 1980s: Popism, Photography, Appropriation

This study considers work of the 1990s and present day within a productive and inclusive rather than reactive relationship to appropriation art and photographic postmodernism in Australia during the 1980s and early 1990s. In order to the manner in which present-day practices draw from earlier theoretical models and practices, the following section focuses primarily upon Paul Taylor’s concept of ‘Popism’ introduced in the exhibition he curated of the same name for the National Gallery of Victoria in 1982.

Here is Taylor writing in accompaniment to that exhibition:

The act of picturing in these works is the act of reference and cross-reference; framing, scale and reproduction are effected without necessary consideration either to natural, pre-mechanical appearances or to a description of the Order of Things. Rather than either taking images from the natural, perceived world (realism) or inventing them within a “pure” language of form (abstraction), these works use pre-existing images as ‘givens’ (Popism).68

Whilst rightly questioning the very possibility of identifying foundational instances of (art works), occasions for (exhibitions), or frameworks underpinning (texts) appropriation art, Rex Butler signals the centrality of Taylor’s Popism exhibition to subsequent Australian art of the 1980s and early 1990s by placing this essay as the first of those anthologised in his 1996 book What is Appropriation?: An Anthology of Critical Writings on Australian Art in the ’80s and ’90s.69 The significance of earlier (1970s) practices noted above notwithstanding, Popism now appears as a crucial marker in the development of the relationship between photography and contemporary art in Australia, or in the movement of contemporary art towards the conditions of the photographic. In this context—in specific reference to Australian art of the 1980s as photographic—appropriation art can also be characterised as quotational postmodernism. Not all the works in Popism were, or comprised photographs, but all, according to Taylor, were indebted to photography. That is, they were all somehow involved in the quotational reproduction of existing images. The exhibition as a whole could


therefore be considered "of the photographic".⁷⁰ Soon after the exhibition Taylor published another essay claiming "the rhetoric of photography, rather than painting, as the bearer of a specifically Australian utterance."⁷¹ Photography, for Taylor, was the medium which most exemplified the postmodern impulse in Australian culture to exploit a condition of alienation from the centres of Western culture as an artistic, critical, "multi-national" strategy; the impulse towards an art "born in mediation...gestated within the camera where things are naturally upside down and...expressed in a carnivalesque array of copies, inversions and negatives."⁷²

Butler treats Popism,⁷³ along with another exhibition which ran concurrently, Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction organised by Judy Annear at the George Paton Gallery, University of Melbourne,⁷⁴ as key points of recognition that "Australia is not so much anything actually represented as the very medium of representation itself."⁷⁵ This is the reason, Butler goes on to claim, for photography becoming so critical to Australian art at this moment:

...before being itself a specific medium, photography is the very passage between or confusion of all media. Photography, like Australia, is not so much a particular content or style, does not determine what kind of image is to be made, but is rather the medium of transmission for any and all images.⁷⁶

Pre-existing images, forms and representations could be re-imaged and re-presented in photography in such a way as to "make it impossible thereafter to distinguish the original

⁷⁰ Taylor was very specific regarding this categorisation of the works: "Of the thirty-six works in Popism, twelve are of photography (still photographs and films), fourteen utilise other forms of photographic or mechanical reproduction (reproductions from books, sound-recordings, silk-screens), two combine both forms and the remaining eight are otherwise indebted, I would argue, to photographic representation." Taylor, 'Popism', 75-76


⁷² ibid.

⁷³ Here Butler's reference to 'Popism' is as much to Taylor's theoretical conception laid out in his two essays as much as it is to the exhibition.


⁷⁵ ibid., 20

⁷⁶ ibid.
from the copy, the territory from the map." Appropriation, it was claimed, fundamentally re-defined Australia's imprisonment within relational centre/periphery models of metropolitan/provincial culture. And appropriation itself was both made possible by and in turn sought to re-define photography. Photography, therefore, opens up the possibility for Butler's suggestion (with regard to "the Popist artists") that "the original itself is only an effect of the copy, that European and American art must be read in terms of Australian." But what of photography itself within this formation? If photography provides the principle form (or anti-form) for representation within (of, or as) Australia, then might it not be possible to productively invert this relation and posit that 'Australia' must provide unique determining conditions for 'photography'? 

As the "passage between media"—not simply the medium but the very act of image transmission—photography, in all its rapidly expanding technological and cultural guises during the 1980s provided the perfect means for artists to access all corridors and corners of culture: to access, intervene in, manipulate (even fabricate), and to emit and exchange as visual information the very fabric of material and social life. Thus, photography was increasingly treated as a set of transactional languages. It rapidly became the primary representational means by which to engage in critique of those very cultural forms constituted around and by it: critique, for example, of so-called media culture; of the mass (and 'high art') representation of gender and sexuality; and of inter-cultural and racial stereotyping. It served as a means to reflect upon and/or revel in the image-saturation of contemporary culture. As an existing field of endlessly reproducible reproductions, photography provided access to and thus acted as a mechanism for the re-evaluation of aspects of history. Yet in this ubiquity is an indeterminacy; in this presence is an absence. If 'photography' became code for the transmission of visual information or an increasingly electronic state of visual exchange, then it did so hand in hand with the elision, disintegration, and dispersal of any sense of its own ontological certainty.

This is what Rosalind Krauss perceptively characterises as photography's passage from historical or aesthetic object to theoretical object. Photography, in this passage,
"loses its specificity as a medium." It is therefore a passage emblematic of conceptual art's shift of the ontological condition of art from the specific to the general, as claimed by Joseph Kosuth.

In Butler's conception, appropriation is less a period style or mode of practice than an "all-encompassing logic" which "swallows" all works of art and elides all specificity. It is not only present in every act of producing, but of thinking about, looking at and writing art in Australia for it is, as Butler infers, the very language of being in Australia. Butler does not write against specificity as such, nor against a potential political viability and agency for art production in Australia. Rather he attempts to identify the particular conditions that, in questioning such viability (in terms of authorship, historical authority, originality, singularity) actually make a politically efficacious practice again possible.

Butler's writing on appropriation is anticipated in an earlier text co-authored with Keith Broadfoot in 1990, 'The Fearful Sphere of Australia'. In this text Broadfoot and Butler discuss Paul Foss' argument in his important 1981 essay 'Theatrum Nondum Cognitorum', that "Australia was only ever an invention, an other projected by the Northern Hemisphere as a stabilising fiction." They state that Foss' essay presented a claim upon the manner in which the map (or the plan, the form, the representation) of Australia preceded the actuality (and thus brought it into being). Foss' argument, openly indebted to Jean Baudrillard's conception of the 'precession of simulacra', claimed an inversion of the Antipodean relation whereby the peripheral (the unknowable, the empty, the other, the fiction), in this slight lag in the import of this move into the Australian context is discussed below in the following section of this chapter.

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80 ibid., 292
82 Butler, 'Introduction', 42
85 'The Precession of Simulacra' was the title of a Baudrillard essay Foss himself translated into and published in English. (See note 45.)
case Australia, takes possession of the centre, infuses all cultural consequences, and finally defines culture and identity.\textsuperscript{66} This Antipodean inversion is the first logic Broadfoot and Butler identify in Foss' text. However, they go on to claim that Foss' conception retains a narrative cause and effect model of Australian cultural development.\textsuperscript{67} They perceive a paradox in Foss' inversion, for

it cannot be said that the image produces the real here until the real is in fact produced. The map does not precede the real until after the real itself. Thus, if it can be said that the simulation comes before the real, it also cannot... Rather than the priority of one over the other, it is the very \textit{simultaneity} of the image and the map that must be—impossibly—imagined here.\textsuperscript{68}

This \textit{simultaneity}, then, is the "second logic" they identify at work in Foss' text. It is based not in the inversion of determining conditions of Australian history, but their indistinguishability. Moreover, Broadfoot and Butler claim, rightly, that Foss' text, whilst most grounded in the former logic, "hints" throughout at the latter,\textsuperscript{69} and that, indeed, the coexistence of and movement between each is a crucial determining factor in the construction of Australian (art) history: "\textit{Australia exists not so much in either one of these registers as such but in the very passage between them.}\textsuperscript{70}

Broadfoot and Butler then turn to the question of an Australian art history. They claim that this passage between "the Antipodean (Australia as the other to Europe or even Europe as the other to Australia... )" and "Antipodality (the impossibility of distinguishing between the two... )" is exemplified by the passage between the painting of Sidney Nolan and that of Fred Williams. "The history of Australian painting," they write, "would be by

\textsuperscript{66} And of course, insomuch as Australia is the void—or voided—other at the edge of Western culture which comes to define that culture, so this very same model, particularly given its topographical schema, might be said to apply internally to cultural relations, history and identity within Australia itself. Indeed, the inversion of an Antipodal model of Western history in which Australia is a component might be said to only be possible in symbiotic relation to that same inversion taking place within Australia as an historical model of cultural organisation itself.

\textsuperscript{67} This might be thought of as the inversion of a modernist model—a relational, narrative model—of history, the inversion being an action typical of an early or even nascent postmodernist impulse to turn this cause and effect model back upon itself: a sort of culmination that leads to its disintegration.

\textsuperscript{68} Broadfoot and Butler, 'The Fearful Space of Australia', 6

\textsuperscript{69} ibid., 8

\textsuperscript{70} ibid.
necessity always suspended between these alternatives, always in the passage from, the Antipodean to Antipodality – an impossible history. Or, more enigmatically, we might say that the history of Australian painting exists in the very impossibility of its narration... "91

In Butler's subsequent work this "impossible history" becomes the history of Australian art written through a logic of appropriation. A few years later Butler evocatively figures appropriation as a logic imbued throughout Australian art as an absent presence. Appropriation, like photography, is a form of dependency upon and a constant calling forth of an absent presence. And again, like photography, it can only be identified at the point of its own withdrawal or disappearance (for photography's identification demands its own withdrawal from presence in favour of its referent). 92 This is not to suggest the interchangeability of 'appropriation' and 'photography' so much as their interdependence.

In this book introduction Butler attempts a history of appropriation in Australian art of the 1980s and early 1990s insomuch as one can be attempted. He even ascribes a three-phase historical development to appropriation: an iconoclastic denial of originality (and attendant authority) in art via the copy whereupon meaning becomes entirely dependent upon, or an effect of context (appropriation's "activist, social, aggressive" phase, exemplified by the Popism exhibition); a more conservative, iconic ("aloof, personal, withdrawn") phase where the copy acts as validation of its source; and a simultaneity of original and copy that is both a form of banality and also the end of any history of appropriation because it is the very foundation of all appropriation: "It is that to which art itself is subject."93

In structuring a history of appropriation Butler also finds a means by which to most aptly account for appropriation's traversal through and complete transformation of Australian art history, a means by which to express the impossibility of distinguishing appropriation from Australian art history, and to claim the impossibility of there being an 'after appropriation'. Except that by attempting a historical purview Butler has by necessity constructed and therefore reached the end of a narrative of appropriation (or reached a point where appropriation escapes his narrative). In this sense, it is possible to think of an Australian art

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91 ibid., 11. (Emphasis added.)
92 See Butler, 'Introduction', 40-41
93 ibid., 38
after appropriation art as an Australian art after the narrative of appropriation (or the era of the narrative of appropriation).

We may echo this with regard to photography. It is the medium that makes possible and in a sense is itself made possible in Australian art by appropriation. And whilst still fundamentally conditioned by the logic of appropriation it exists in changing forms after the narrative of appropriation. As chapters 3 through to 8 of this study indicate, photography exists within Australian contemporary art in forms which question again whether in fact it may, even given its dispersals and disappearances, be able to intervene practically in our world.
CHAPTER 2
Spectacle Culture and Critical Realism

The relationships between the discursive field of photography and the discursive field of artistic production are reconfigured within each artistic generation according to the needs and laws governing social specularity. (Benjamin Buchloh)

Cultural production and reproduction concern not only the shifting cosmetic surface, but the underlying foundation that any given society proposes and assumes as its reality. (Norman Bryson)

So flooded with photographic imagery has contemporary culture become that it (culture) itself is best described as fundamentally *photogenic*. All cultural manifestations and representations (and in the field of art this spans across painting, sculpture and installation), aspire to or actively partake in the *look* of the photographic. Such cultural conditions make the task of examining whether and how the photographic image may exist within, but also operate in critical relation to a contemporary culture of the spectacle particularly urgent. There is, however, a danger that any investigation claiming a direct relation of the photographic image to anterior reality may also infer a passive relation between photo-based contemporary art and the conditions of social and material life. It may appear to suggest that photography must always follow and may only reflect (or visualise) pre-existing social and material conditions, rather than intervene in and effect their development. This

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1 Benjamin Buchloh, 'Allan Sekula: Photography Between Discourse and Document', in Allan Sekula, *Fish Story* (exh. cat.) (Rotterdam and Düsseldorf: Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art and Richter Verlag, 1995) 190


3 So rather than speaking of discrete manifestations, of discrete cultures within the larger, it may be most accurate to recognise the bounding of culture in general as photographic.

4 See Terry Smith, 'Introduction: Enervation, Visceralty – The Fate of the Image in Modernity', in *Impossible Presence: Surface and Screen in the Photogenic Era* (Sydney: Power Publications, 2001). This use of "photogenic" is somewhat more expansive than that described by Douglas Crimp in an early text where he intended "a play on the literal meaning of that word, wherein something...is itself purely positive-negative and therefore a suitable negative for the photographic process." Douglas Crimp, 'Photographs at the End of Modernism', in *On the Museum’s Ruins* (Cambridge Mass. and London: The MIT Press, 1993), 3. It would now be difficult to write so definitively of either the (singular) photographic process or its identifiable basis in a positive-negative relation.

5 Douglas Crimp, in regard to his own writing, warns of this danger of implying "that art is merely reflective, not productive of social relations" in his introduction to *On the Museum’s Ruins*. See Crimp, 'Photographs at the End of Modernism', 21
model of passive image-culture relation is epitomised by what I refer to later in this chapter as a 'naïve reflectionist' mode of analysis aligned with a naturalist version of photographic realism.

Two further critical perspectives are frequently brought to bear upon work such as that under review in this study. The first is a negation of photographic criticality within a 'culture industry' critique that treats the image as grist to the mill of commodity culture. The second is an unbridled relativism and self-referentiality found in the world of the simulacrum, in which the image-realm is celebrated as sole constituent reality. Each is more complex and plausible than the naïve reflectionist position. Each gives rise to valuable questions regarding the relationship of photo-based contemporary art to spectacle culture. Yet in their more dogmatic manifestations, each suppresses the potential social agency of the photographic image. The first of these is addressed in some detail below and referenced throughout the following study. The second is less obviously crucial to this study, given its closer alignment with 1980s postmodernism. Nevertheless, the residual notion of images as productive condition of the real threads through analysis of various bodies of work in this study.

In this chapter I introduce the concept of the spectacle and key ideas regarding the photogenic condition of contemporary culture, noting some of the questions these pose regarding the appearance of the photographic image in and as contemporary art. The general tenets of the 'culture industry' approach to visual culture are then detailed, with particular reference to the work of theorists Theodor Adorno and Fredric Jameson. This is followed with a preliminary outline of a form of 'critical realism', approached with reference to the writing of Geoffrey Batchen but concentrating upon its development in texts by John Roberts. In contrast to Jameson's negative view of contemporary photographic practice's potential for independent criticality in the face of spectacle culture, Roberts' work threatens to act as something of an apology for spectacle art. Benjamin Buchloh's movement between the polar positions occupied by Jameson and Roberts is also tracked. I end the chapter with a discussion of the primacy of appearance in photo-based contemporary art as a means of introduction to the analyses of Australian work that comprise the bulk of this study.
The Pictorial Turn and Spectacle Culture

Whatever the pictorial turn is, then, it should be clear that it is not a return to naïve mimesis, copy or correspondence theories of representation, or a renewed metaphysics of pictorial "presence": it is rather a post linguistic, post semiotic rediscovery of the picture as a complex interplay between visuality, apparatus, discourse, bodies, and figularity. It is the realisation that spectatorship (the look, the gaze, the glance, the practices of observation, surveillance, and visual pleasure) may be as deep a problem as various forms of reading (decipherment, decoding, interpretation, etc.) and that visual experience or "visual literacy" might not be fully explicable on the model of textuality. Most important, it is the realisation that while the problem of pictorial representation has always been with us, it presses inescapably now, and with unprecedented force, on every level of culture, from the most refined philosophical speculations to the most vulgar problems of the mass media. (W.J.T. Mitchell)⁶

W.J.T. Mitchell's identification of a so-called "pictorial turn" in contemporary culture and cultural theory was first published in 1992 and then again in the form above in 1994. On one hand, Mitchell makes a critical move from a poststructural 'textual' treatment of images within which linguistic structures provided dominant epistemologies, towards a more transparently visual register of knowledge and communication acts within the amorphous realm of present day visual culture. On the other hand, he is careful to recognise the long history of visual representation as a continuum within which this recent "pictorial turn" marks a shift of emphasis. Mitchell's ascription provides a useful touchstone for those trajectories in photo-based contemporary art discussed here. But it is also a rhetorical device, for the underlying cultural condition it presupposes—the ubiquitous presence of images within and as dominant modes of social organisation and cultural expression—reaches deep into human history.

Even a focus upon the latter half of the twentieth century reveals wide-ranging critical engagement with this notion of an all-enveloping, even determining realm of images. "We consume images at an ever faster rate...", wrote Susan Sontag near the end of her final essay in On Photography, "...and images consume reality."⁷ Sontag began this essay, 'The Image-World', with reference to a history of Platonic thinking whereby images are at once


means of apprehending and representing reality, but necessarily also subservient to that same reality. Such a history, Sontag claimed, is inverted within modernity as reality understood by the means or forms of images gives way to a conception of reality as a world of images. Photography is the representational realm upon which this massive epistemological shift takes place. Photographic images are "able to usurp reality because first of all a photograph is not only an image...an interpretation of the real; it is also a trace, something directly stencilled off the real, like a footprint or a death mask." Furthermore, photographic technologies dissipate the distinction between original and copy upon which the Platonic order depends. Eventually, claims Scott McQuire of Sontag's critique, in such a world we begin to experience ourselves not only via but as images: "Representation is no longer shaped to fit what is real; instead, the world is called on to live up to its images." Moreover, like Walter Benjamin some forty years earlier, Sontag emphasised a connection between photography and capitalist modes of production and consumption within modernity:

The final reason for the need to photograph everything lies in the very logic of consumption itself. To consume means to burn, to use up—and therefore, to need to be replenished. As we make images and consume them, we need still more images; and still more...like all credible forms of lust, it [the lust of the camera] cannot be satisfied: first, because the possibilities of photography are infinite; and, second, because the project is finally self-devouring. The attempts by photographers to bolster up a depleted sense of reality contribute to the depletion.

The technologies, forms and contextual conditions of the photographic image have undergone phenomenal change in the quarter of a century since Sontag published this text, most significantly in the continued elision of indexicality as a defining condition of the photographic by digital imaging technologies. Nevertheless, the general condition asserted

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8 ibid., 154

9 This echoes Walter Benjamin in his influential 1936 essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', however in Sontag's concentration upon photographic indexicality the qualities of original and copy were ascribed to reality and image respectively. See Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in Illuminations: Essays and Reflections, ed. Hannah Arendt, transl. Harry Zohn (New York: Schoken, 1969) 217-51. (First published, 1936.)


11 Sontag, 'The Image-World', 179
by Sontag, that of the fundamental colonisation of the material world and social experience by the photographic image, has become a commonplace assumption of contemporary life.

If extended beyond the purview of specifically photographic images, this general condition may also be described in terms of the spectacle or spectacle culture. Spectacle here references a pervasive social condition where all forms of relationships (including between individuals, between individuals and the material world, and social relationships and structures) are mediated in the form of images. Alienation is central to the concept of spectacle. Individuals are taken to be fundamentally alienated from others, from the material world about them, and from social formations, as all modes of experience and contact are in effect second-hand: subjects are isolated by the all pervasive realm of images. Guy Debord, in his celebrated 1967 publication Society of the Spectacle defines spectacle as the dominant form of "social relation among people, mediated by images," where "everything that was directly lived has moved away into representation."13

In its general application across the realms of cultural theory, spectacle has more recently come to infer a commodification of the image, particularly within overtly commercial arenas such as advertising. Equally, it draws upon another primary meaning of the word to connote the large-scale, 'spectacular' productions of corporate and entertainment cultures (such as cinematic visual effects for example).

The interconnection of all these within contemporary art is encapsulated by Hal Foster in his 1983 essay 'Contemporary Art and Spectacle' in which he writes of the "irreality of contemporary capitalist culture."14 Such a culture, Foster claims, is posited and formed on a symbiotic relation between spectacle with the loss of the real. The real is mediated, then displaced by, and finally entirely sublimated within a commodity form (of which the image is exemplar). Foster writes:

...unlike a typical representation which works via our faith in its realism, spectacle operates via our fascination with the hyperreal, with 'perfect' images that make us 'whole' at the price of delusion, of submission. We become locked in its logic because

12 Within a spectacle conception of culture social formations themselves are taken to be founded upon structures of alienation.

13 Guy Debord, Society of the Spectacle (Detroit: Black & Red, 1983) epigrams 4 and 1

14 Hal Foster, 'Contemporary Art and Spectacle', in Recodings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics (Seattle: Bay Press, 1985) 79. (First published as 'The Art of Spectacle', Art in America, April 1983.)
spectacle both effects the loss of the real and provides us with the fetishistic images necessary to deny or assuage this loss. Our fascination with spectacle is thus even more total than it is with commodity. If in the commodity-form 'a definite social relation between men' assumes 'the phantasmagoric form of a relation between things' (Marx), in spectacle it assumes a relation between images. (In spectacle even alienation is turned into an image for the alienated to consume; indeed this may stand as a definition of spectacle.)\footnote{ibid., 83}

For Foster the image becomes both agent of the loss of the real and its fetishistic (false) remedy. Faced with the loss of reality, the loss of a sense of both authenticity and authority, "...our culture resurreets—morbidly, hysterically—archaic forms....in order to recover at least the image of authority or a sense of the real."\footnote{ibid., 84} According to Foster, social subjects are caught within a double-bind of spectacle "as both a symptomatic effect of reification and its supposed antidote"\footnote{ibid., 92} whereby fascination with the image is experienced simultaneously with a sense of loss and a sense of unreality.

Key modes of critical response to this double-bind are detailed in the following section.

**The Culture Industry Mode of Critique**

Now suddenly a hitherto baleful universal visibility that seemed to brook no utopian alternative is welcomed and revelled in for its own sake: this is the true moment of image society, in which human subjects henceforth exposed...to bombardments of up to a thousand images a day...begin to live a very different relationship to space and time, to existential experience as well as cultural consumption. (Fredric Jameson)\footnote{Fredric Jameson, 'Transformations of the Image in Postmodernity', in The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983-1998 (London and New York: Verso, 1998) 110-11}
aesthetic judgement something of a misnomer. Jameson depicts this culture of the spectacle in bleak terms, claiming a complete colonisation of social space by the image. For Jameson, all modes of social relation and production have been made visible and so transformed into the "culturally familiar". Jameson's position echoes that of Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo who claims in his essay 'The Death or Decline of Art' that art no longer exists as a specific phenomenon, "but has been suppressed and ablated...through a general aestheticisation of experience." Jameson does not believe that the image can ever again be the province of a critical avant-garde (which, according to Vattimo, has itself disappeared). As far as Jameson is concerned (and this is the note upon which he finishes his essay):

...what characterises postmodernity in the cultural area is the supersession of everything outside of commercial culture, its absorption of all forms of art high and low, along with image production itself. The image is the commodity today, and that it why it is vain to expect a negation of the logic of commodity production from it, that is why, finally, all beauty today is meretricious and the appeal to it by contemporary pseudo-aestheticism is an ideological manoeuvre and not a creative resource.

Even the potential for a critical image practice (as understood in terms akin to those of dialectical Marxism) has, for Jameson, been evacuated by the commodity status of the image.

Douglas Crimp raised a similar issue in his 1982 essay 'Appropriating Appropriation'. Reflecting upon how the radical potential of postmodern photographic strategies was effected by their rapid rise to cultural prominence, Crimp wrote: "If all aspects of the culture use this new operation, then the operation itself cannot indicate a specific reflection upon

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19 Ibid., 100
20 Ibid., 111
22 Jameson, 'Transformations of the Image', 135. Rosalind Krauss references and confers with this text in the published version of her Walter Neurath Memorial Lecture. In fact her whole argument throughout is predicated upon identifying practices (with that of Marcel Broodthaers posited at exemplary) that reject what she describes, in agreement with Jameson, as "the international fashion of installation and intermedia work, in which art finds itself complicit with a globalisation of the image in the service of capital." Rosalind E. Krauss, 'A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1999) 56
the culture."23 In Crimp's terms, a critical distance had been lost in popular and commercial culture's wholesale adoption of the strategies and styles of photographic postmodernism.24

But this is, in fact, the very problem of art's dual character. On the one hand it is required to undertake a meta-function: its avant-gardist role of critical relation—"beyond the here and now, against what it is"—to the very culture it emanates from.25 On the other hand, it must remain "indistinguishable from its time (certainly not 'ahead'); simple to do; easy to understand..."26 As Theodor Adorno stated in Aesthetic Theory: "Art's essence is twofold: on the one hand, it dissociates itself from empirical reality and from the functional complex that is society; and on the other, it belongs to that reality and to that social complex."27

Thomas Crow posits exactly this problem at the heart of an understanding of Modernism originating in the mid nineteenth century. As he writes: "From its beginnings, the artistic avant-garde has discovered, renewed, or re-invented itself by identifying with marginal, 'non-artistic' forms of expressivity and display—forms improvised by other social


24 In her 1987 essay 'Living with Contradictions: Critical Practices in the Age of Supply-Side Aesthetics', Abigail Solomon-Godeau also reflected upon this loss, or more specifically in her case active pacification of the critical edge of postmodernist photographic strategies, within what she referred to as a second wave or generation of postmodernist photographic artists of the mid 1980s (in the United States of America) who turn the critical strategies of an earlier group into a self-referential style (and are abetted in such by accompanying criticism. Writing at a time of extreme social conservatism in the USA—the late 1980s—Solomon-Godeau warned of the potential co-option of all art practices to the dominating market structure via concentration upon authorial style. This is exactly that focus associated with the Modernism that early postmodernism sought to refute. Citing Peter Bürger's critique of the avant-garde, where art is figured as an institution within society and thus its own self-reflexive critique a valid mode of social criticism, Solomon-Godeau nevertheless warned that: "Once the decision is made to operate within the institutional space of art rather than outside it, critical writing and critical art are alike caught up in and subject to the very conditions such work attempts to contest." Abigail Solomon-Godeau, 'Living with Contradictions: Critical Practices in the Age of Supply-Side Aesthetics', in Photography at the Dock: Essays on Photographic History, Institutions, and Practices (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991) 146-47. (First published in Screen 28/3, Summer 1987.)


26 ibid.

groups out of the degraded materials of capitalist manufacture."^{28} Photography, clearly, could be posited here as such a "degraded material". The tension Crow locates at the generative core of Modernism anticipates exactly that underpinning the work under review here. He continues:

For both Manet and Baudelaire, can their invention of powerful models of modernist practice be separated from the seductive and nauseating image the capitalist city seemed to be constructing for itself? Similarly, can the impressionist discovery of painting as a field of both particularised and diffuse sensual play be imagined separately from the new spaces of commercial pleasure the painters seem rarely to have left, spaces whose packaged diversions were themselves contrived in an analogous pattern? The identification with the social practices of mass diversion—whether uncritically reproduced, caricatured or transformed into abstract Arcadias—remains a durable constant in early Modernism.^{30}

According to Crow, the avant-garde, in seeking oppositional relations to cultural norms is forced instead to shelter from the ever-encroaching advance of mass culture within the autonomous representational realms of art.^{30} This autonomy is figured in an "evident formal coherence" (within Modernism) that stands "against the empty diversity of the culture industry, against market expediency, speculative targeting of consumers, and hedging bets."^{31} Yet Crow suggests, in fact, that an oppositional relation to mass culture may be achieved "most successfully by figuring in detail the character of the manufactured culture it opposes."^{32} At the present moment the photographic image is the most potentially efficacious vehicle for this figuring.

In this study I therefore treat as urgent the need to attempt an analysis that moves beyond the limits of a profoundly pessimistic position such as that of Jameson, but without simply serving to re-authenticate the hegemony of the visual within commodity culture. For if the image is a determining condition of culture today, then surely the image must bear

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^{29} ibid.

^{30} Crow's "mass culture" incorporates all the representational practices that fall within the realms previously described as popular and/or commercial culture.

^{31} ibid.

^{32} ibid.
potential means of critique from within. As Crow writes: "Art may have been overtaken by the universal commodity form, but it was (and remains) clearly a commodity with a difference that makes all the difference." And there are historical precedents. Scott McQuire identifies just this trajectory in the work of earlier twentieth-century theorists Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer, responding to which he writes:

If the image-world has today swallowed the 'real world' to produce a mutant state of being which is neither real, nor yet simply imaginary (at least as those terms have been customarily understood), it is naive to envisage a political critique which could be located entirely outside the world of images.  

Jameson's proclamation regarding the commodity status of the image and the absolute absorption of all forms of cultural (including image) production by commercial culture sits firmly in the tradition of a 'culture industry' critique of representational practices formulated within the post-WWII Frankfurt School of cultural theory, and in particular within the work of Adorno. But within Adorno's formulation, realist art in particular was treated as inseparable from a commodity character. Adorno believed that bourgeois society within modernity had "integrated art even more completely than any previous society." Realism, or indeed representational art was, for Adorno, inextricably intertwined in inevitably cyclical acts of capitulation to and reiteration of the conditions that produced social alienation from empirical reality. Furthermore, the point at which art itself appeared as reality (or as standing in for some exterior reality), marked for Adorno the final liquidation of any opposition on behalf of art to reality, and thus the moment also at which art's self-parasitic character betrayed

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34 Scott McQuire, Visions of Modernity, 101


36 Adorno, Aesthetic Theory, 320

37 A stepping stone of sorts perhaps to the 'spectacle' of Guy Debord and an early postmodernism of image replication and regurgitation anticipated in the photo-based work artists such as Andy Warhol and Robert Rauschenberg.
itself. In response Adorno called for an art of opposition and resistance to social formations; an art that refused to represent, imitate, or adopt mass cultural forms: "By congealing into an entity unto itself—rather than obeying existing cultural norms and thus proving itself to be 'socially useful'—art criticises society just by being there." Moreover: "Art will live on only as long as it has the power to resist society...What it contributes to society is not some directly communicable content but...resistance. Resistance reproduces social development in aesthetic terms within directly imitating it."

Recent decades, however, have seen the exhaustion of any notion of cultural resistance within an art positioned in absolute separation from social structures. Recognition of the specificities of social context and of the generating forces of representational presence have dissipated the oppositional potency of professedly autonomous modes of art practice. Current conditions require that the specificities of each example of artistic practice be considered in terms of a space of relation between the artwork (or art action) and the empirical world. Both the presencing and picturing of this relation need to be considered as potentially generative and constituent elements of the work of art itself. This may allow criticism to sidestep an almost nihilistic revelling in the effacement of a material real by an image realm in which endless difference and disorientation is celebrated as emancipatory.

Vattimo adopts such an attitude of almost grateful resignation in response to the commodification of experience:

If the proliferation of images of the world entails that we lose our 'sense of reality', as the saying goes, perhaps it's not such a great loss after all. By a perverse kind of internal logic, the world of objects measured and manipulated by techno-science (the world of the real, according to metaphysics) has become the world of merchandise and images, the phantasmagoria of the mass media.


39 Adorno, Aesthetic Theory, 321. (Emphasis added.)

40 ibid.

41 Gianni Vattimo, The Transparent Society, transl. David Webb (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1992) 8. Vattimo is here describing what Guy Debord claimed as the third and final form of the spectacle—the integrated spectacle—where spectacle has utterly infiltrated, even assumed the mantle of reality. In the late-1980s Debord wrote: "For the final sense of the integrated spectacle is this — that is has integrated itself into reality to the same extent as it was describing it, and that is was reconstructing it as it was describing it. As a result, this reality no longer confronts the integrated spectacle as something alien...The spectacle has spread itself to the point where is now permeates all
This "perverse logic" may indeed be in operation today, but even if this world of "merchandise and images" (one in which all history is reduced "to the level of simultaneity" via the mass media) is now "becoming ever more real" (is becoming, in fact, the real), then the need for identification of its critical relations to the worlds of material and social experience of which it is part but not the complete whole, is ever more important. To claim the loss of this experience as not so great might, on one hand, be to pressure the self-proclaimed authority of rational positivist claims to universal knowledge and truth, as well as the imperial and repressive ends which they have serviced. But it is also to risk once again dismissing whole strata of specific social and historical experience that Vattimo seeks to liberate under the proliferating confusions of "dialect" (or the local).43

As I suggest below with regard to the writing of Benjamin Buchloh, and in Chapter 4 with regard to the work of Brenda L. Croft, taking account of the specificity of the 'local' conditions for representational practice is a crucial means of resisting an across-the-board dismissal of the critical or avant-gardist potential of work by a dogmatic culture industry mode of critique. But before turning to this discussion, an introduction to certain concerns regarding 'realism' is pertinent.

Realism Beyond Positivism

Photography and all other modern realisms partake of the same "dialectic of enlightenment" by which modernity both reduces the real to visible appearances and

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42 Vattimo, The Transparent Society, 8

43 ibid. 9-10. Most notably absent from The Transparent Society is some more detailed exegesis of the determining and controlling interests underpinning the "mass media" that Vattimo claims as the defining condition of postmodern society. Vattimo avoids asking just what exactly the mass media is; or specifically how it produces images; or, further, just what particular registers these images occupy, and what functions they serve. In this sense, in its lack of what might be described as ethical concern for the effects and functions of the mass media's displacement or colonisation of the real, that Vattimo's critique of media society is far less valuable and convincing than that of Jean Baudrillard, for example, in The Gulf War Did Not Take Place, transl. Paul Patton (Sydney: Power Publications, 1995), or 'Mass Media Culture', in Revenge of the Crystal: Selected Writings on the Modern Object and its Destiny, 1968-1983, eds and transl. Paul Foss and Julian Pefas (Sydney: Pluto Press and Power Institute of Fine Arts, 1990) 63-97.
is then able to use its consequent control over both objects and images to produce entirely new realities. (Don Slater)\textsuperscript{44}

Truth, certainty, and knowledge are structurally connoted in realistic representation: they constitute the ideology or automatism necessary for it to construct a reality. That is why realism is such an apt vehicle for spreading lies, confusion, and disinformation, for wielding power over mass publics, or for projecting fantasy. The great achievements of modern technologies of representation—propaganda, advertising, surveillance—are scarcely conceivable without modes of realistic representation. (W.J.T. Mitchell)\textsuperscript{45}

In Burning with Desire: The Conception of Photography, Geoffrey Batchen wraps his account of the cultural pre-history of photography in a detailed analysis of claims upon photography’s ontological principles. Batchen identifies two key theoretical camps: formalists and postmodernists. But in describing their fundamental differences he does not affirm postmodern contextual contingency over intrinsic formalism, as may have been expected given the basis of his own methodology in a Derridian notion of significatory instability and play. Rather, he criticises the tendency of both models to figure photography within unyielding binary structures of identification. Further, he questions the motives and value of any attempt to identify and fix photography’s determining qualities and characters. \textsuperscript{46}

In the introduction to his subsequent book of essays, Each Wild Idea: Writing, Photography, History, Batchen affirms the cognitive significance of the photograph’s material form and internal structure to its ongoing play with cultural context. Photography, he states, "is inevitably an 'impossible' implosion of before and after, inside and outside." He continues, "I want to articulate photography as something that is simultaneously material and cultural, manifested as much in the attributes of the photographic object as in its contextualisation."\textsuperscript{47}

\textsuperscript{44} Don Slater, 'Introduction to "The Object of Photography"', in Jessica Evans ed., The Camerawork Essays: Context and Meaning in Photography (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1997) 91


Batchen, like John Roberts, is critical of tendencies within postmodernism towards the elision of a productive relationship between photography and real social and material formations. Both writers, for example, criticise John Tagg's analysis of photography's implication in the operations of social power for assuming photography's mere utilisation in the reinforcement of pre-existing structures of power, and thus, in a sense, for denying photography real representational agency. Although Tagg's historicist approach asserts that realism in photography is defined "at the level of signification", Batchen claims that Tagg tends to treat photography as "a mere vehicle for the transfer of power from one place to another." He criticises Tagg for implying that photography conveys, or reinforces, a pre-existing condition of cultural production rather than recognising how it initiates or intervenes in new acts of production.

In Tagg's model of analysis, according to Batchen, "Photography has no power of its own. It is instead temporarily vested with the power of the apparatuses that deploy it."

In *Burning with Desire*, Batchen offers an alternative reading of photography's purchase upon cognition within the lived world, via a Derridian reading of the play and indeterminacy of the image's signifying actions. Roberts, by comparison, promotes a notion of critical realism over what he considers to be Tagg's problematic positivism. Roberts believes that a true understanding of realism must acknowledge both its dialectical structure and the manner in which "it is able to 'speak back' through the voices of its subjects in ways other than those ascribed by a theory of dominant ideology." The problem of any conflation of realism with positivism, he claims, is reflected in

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49 Batchen, *Burning with Desire*, 188

50 Although John Roberts in particular criticises the work of Victor Burgin along similar lines, Burgin does make quite clear that the "pre-photographic" is both actively engaged by photography, and is but one stage in the production of photographic meaning: "Objects present to the camera are already in use in the production of meanings, and photography has no choice but to operate upon such meanings. There is, then, a 'pre-photographic' stage in the photographic production of meaning that must be accounted for." Victor Burgin, 'Photographic Practice and Art Theory', in *Thinking Photography*, 47. (First published, *Studio International* 190/976 [1975].)

51 Batchen, *Burning with Desire*, 188


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the two main tendencies of the social power model: the insertion of the photograph into an inflexible 'regime of power', and concomitantly the weakening of the causal connection between the photograph and what it is actually of. Because the naturalistic or documentary image is constructed as truth, it is argued, then the relationship between the photograph and the pre-photographic event is considered irrelevant, or beside the point.

He continues:

From this perspective this writing tends to reproduce the binary philosophic opposition at the heart of bourgeois culture: the constant oscillation between determinism (the fundamentally closed nature of meaning) and pluralism (the fundamentally open nature of meaning). The social agency of cultural producers is always being subsumed under the dominant power relations, or disconnected from them in the name of the "free-floating signifier". As a result there is a loss of specificity about the complexities of intention and use.\(^{53}\)

Equally, according to Roberts, the social agency of the viewer is overly determined by contextual power relations within a social power model of photographic analysis.\(^ {54}\) If meaning is determined in the pre-existing conditions of reception, so the relation of image to both its originating subject and its visual referent must be fundamentally passive: it must be realist only in a discursively redundant naturalist sense.

Roberts is here criticising what I have already described as a 'naïve reflectionist' position. A particular example provides a succinct means of encapsulating this approach. Elizabeth Sussman's essay 'The Invisible Pencil of Queen Mab' in the catalogue accompanying Jurassic Technologies Revenant, the 10\(^{th}\) Biennale of Sydney (1996) curated by Lynne Cooke, is concerned with the relationship between photo-based contemporary art practices and modernist exemplars. In doing so it promotes a simplistic 'return-to-the-document' analysis of photo-based contemporary art.

Sussman treats contemporary deployments of the photographic image in realist or documentary guises as arguments for the evidentiary and unassailable nature of photographic transcription. In doing so she pitches an unquestioning faith in photography's fundamental positivism against the orthodoxy of a postmodernism best described by Abigail

\(^ {53}\) Ibid., 4-5

\(^ {54}\) See Ibid., 151-52
Solomon-Godeau in 1987 as the "now fully familiar strategies of appropriation and pastiche; its systematic assault on modernist orthodoxies of immanence, autonomy, presence, originality and authorship; its engagement with the simulacral; and its interrogation of the problematics of mass-media representation". Nine years later Sussman, in stark contrast to Solomon-Godeau, claimed that the work of contemporary photo-artists evidences a recognition "that this is the moment to witness and report, to tell stories, to leave the internal debates about art and its future and instead address the present."

Sussman's approach is mired in nostalgia and serves only to offer up the notion of a passive, neutralised, indeed compliant pictorial realm to the service of conservative ideology trading in assertions regarding cultural 'truth'. "As the millennium approaches," she writes, "photography seems paradoxically liberated from the avant-garde, free to plunder its past and present, and vaguely nostalgic in returning to some of its roots." Sussman thus attempts to separate photography's representational engagement with social reality—the lived world—from a critique of photographic representation itself. She grants photography an agency autonomous from the dynamics of social and cultural forces and from any participation in the critiques of representation, communication and knowledge central to experiences of modern or contemporary life.

Sussman's phrase, "to tell stories", is revealing. She celebrates a narrative conception of photography whereby the photograph is conceived of as both container and purveyor of anterior narrative action and form. Sussman's argument therefore becomes less about an apparent opposition of past and present, than an opposition between photographic practices engaged in representational deconstruction and those concerned with the construction and presentation of coherent narrative moments (although she also implicitly decries this act of discursive agency). In her 'naive reflectionism', Sussman insists upon separating photographs out from the world in which they are formed, the world through which they transact.

50 Solomon-Godeau, 'Living with Contradictions', 125
50 Elisabeth Sussman, 'The Invincible Pencil of Queen Mab', in Lynne Cooke ed., Jurassic Technologies Revenant: 10th Biennale of Sydney (exh. cat.) (Sydney: Biennale of Sydney, 1996) 27
57 ibid., 32
Roberts' proposed approach is vastly different from that of Sussman. True realism is, for Roberts, formed in a dialectical method in which representational understanding and recovery of the world is based upon the socially produced and self-qualifying nature of signification, in which things and their relations and representations are in dynamic movement and tension...Realism, essentially, is a fallibilistic account of the transitive, stratified and differentiated world; it is not a window on a homogeneous and present or phenomenal reality.58

There is nothing radically new in Roberts' conception of critical realism. Forms of this dynamic and reflexive relation between representation and world can be traced in particular to socially progressive, even politically revolutionary modes of early twentieth-century documentary practices in both photography and film (as well as earlier back into nineteenth-century painting and photography). Nevertheless, its assertive adaptation into the contemporary situation is important. Indeed, in his 1998 book in which he lays out these arguments, The Art of Interruption: Realism, Photography and the Everyday, Roberts restates claims for a contemporary critical realism already made in an earlier (1990) book, Postmodernism, Politics and Art. Here Roberts wrote that "although we actively create concepts which correspond to the world, this does not mean that we create the reality we contemplate."59 Nevertheless, for Roberts the subject remains necessarily implicated in this reality, and so he asked: "How can we define objective truth when we stand in internal relation to the reality we seek to replicate? Or rather, how can we claim that our theories correspond to the world when they are themselves part of it?"60 Roberts continued by noting how 'conventionalist' theories of realism treat the subject's concepts as contributing to the production of the real. He then moved towards advocating an alternative to both "the 'objectivism' of the reflectionists and the relativism of the post-structuralists" in the form of an "internalist or fallibilistic realism."61 He stated:

58 ibid., 5


60 Roberts, Postmodernism, 35

61 ibid., 37
We may not be able to speak of the real separate from conceptual schemes and the interpretative instabilities of the sign, but this does not prevent us from arguing that what does get said or represented is real up to a point, or to the best argument available.

Let us be clear here. In talking about realism in art we should dispense with any latent commitment to talk about the truthful rendition of an event or state of affairs as a "window on the world". We should not conflate meaning with correspondence, as was the case with the socialist realist tradition, as if certain contents, irrespective of the partiality of signs, could 'show things as they really are'. On the contrary, if the real is transitive and contradictory and therefore unavailable outside of conceptualisation, then art's possible realism lies in the articulation of those asymmetries, antagonisms, hiatuses and conflicting relations which constitute this process...One begins from the assumption that there is no such thing as immediate knowledge. The question then is immediately one of defining the real at the same time as it is laid claim to. In these terms the place and discussion of the real in art involves a moment of "truth" and its simultaneous denial; or possible extension.  

Eight years later Roberts condensed this into the principles of a critical realism significant to this study:

Realism is neither an 'outmoded' pictorial style nor an untheorised account of representation. On the contrary, it represents a continuing philosophical commitment to the application of dialectical reason to the problems of cultural production. We should not confuse the term, accordingly, with a defence of empiricism, although, of course, knowledge by acquaintance must play a part in any adequate realist epistemology.

As Norman Bryson has stressed, this knowledge by acquaintance occurs within terms of reference themselves formed in the conventionalisation of experience. That is, as Bryson puts it, a basic conception of realism lies in a coincidental relation (an acquaintance)

between a representation and that which a particular society proposes and assumes as its reality; a reality involving the complex formation of codes of behaviour, law, psychology, social manners, dress, gesture, posture - all those practical norms which govern the stance of human beings toward their particular historical environment. It is in relation to this socially determined body of codes, and not in relation to an immutable "universal social experience", that the realism of an image should be understood.

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52 Ibid. (Emphasis added.)
53 Roberts, The Art of Interruption, 11
54 Bryson, Vision and Painting, 13
This being the case, clearly the relation of acquaintance must flow cogently in both directions: the image must retain the potential to play some part in the determination of these codes that give form to reality. Via recognition of such flows (of signification) it is possible to reconcile an appropriationist logic with a productive sense of a critical realism. The question remains, however, as to whether the real figured as or within pre-existing fields of representation can effect any form of relation beyond a nostalgia for its earlier, foundational moments when presented in the photographic image.\footnote{After all, as Linda Nochlin has stressed, artistic realism is an important means of expressioning and advocating contemporaneity as both genesis and subject of artistic practice. The realism that Nochlin has claimed as a socially efficacious practice forms in the interplay of description (of material or visual presence) and analysis (of underlying conditions). Yet it is always inextricably bound to the concept of the here and now. See Linda Nochlin, \textit{Realism} (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971) 28. Nochlin also notes the significance of photography in intensifying a notion of present or contemporary experience within artistic description, or, as she puts it, of creating an "identification of the contemporary with the instantaneous."}

Bryson's painting-specific discussion pays great attention to the concealment or the suppression of this historically determined play of codes and coincidence within an ideology of realism. Notions of both reality and the real must be naturalised in order for "the image to be accepted as a reflection of a pre-existing real", and furthermore it is the image itself that in folding this relation back over plays a significant role in 'naturalising' the social order.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}} The success of this symbiotic relation depends, therefore, on the degree to which the image is treated as fundamentally tied to or determined by an exterior world: or, as Bryson puts it, "the degree to which the image remains unknown as an independent form."\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 55-56} As Bryson writes: "The realist image disguises or conceals its status as a site of production; and in the absence of any visible productive work from within, meaning is felt as penetrating the image from an imaginary space outside it."\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 14}

On one hand, this concealment of active signification perfectly describes the photograph's indexical act. On the other hand, however, this very indexicality replaces an imaginary space of meaning with the material space of the visible and tangible world. Thus the displacement of a transcendental order of eternal value within representational
structures finds particular purchase. Theorists in recent decades have looked to indexicality as the code "specific to the material signifying practice" of photography.  

Bryson focuses upon such specific material practices of signification (in painting) to complicate both a "resemblance" theory of unmediated representation, as well as overly socially deterministic theories of representation that evacuate cognitive agency from the image. Bryson therefore outlines a symbiotic, mutually dependent relation of image and world. This relation acts neither to suppress the visibility of nor to naturalise this significatory play between image and world, realism and reality.

Roberts' concern in The Art of Interruption is to advocate a relation of image to material world in which each might be discerned as distinct yet necessarily formed (or ever-forming) in constant interplay with each other. Thus, in addition to demanding a critical alertness to the separation of realism from positivism, Roberts rejects the particular strand of postmodernism that either claims the realm of the image as the only real (what Roberts refers to as the strange aestheticism of a world "conscious to the subject purely through the play and effects of consumption"), or wholly conventionalises the relation between iconic image and world in an indeterminate play of signification. For Roberts, both formations block any political or social purchase the photographic image might have on the world. Roberts' resistance to what he figures as a "weakening of photography's cognitive relationship to the real world", involves, in part, an allowance of a certain function of resemblance between photography and the material world that precedes decoding. (This may be linked also to understandings of the index.) Resemblance theory, according to Roberts, may therefore assist in understanding photography's triggering of recognitional abilities, but does not stand-in entirely for processes of signification.

That the two (world and image) are held in tensile relation—a somewhat precarious yet productive balance—is a key feature of contemporary photography or image theory where pictorial realism is exposed as rhetorical; as, in W.J.T. Mitchell's terms, "representation

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66 ibid., 16

70 Roberts, The Art of Interruption, 160

71 ibid., 168

72 ibid., 163

73 See ibid., 167
plus a belief system...”

Heinz Liesbrock conveys this relation in writing on the so-called Düsseldorf School of photography with its influential predilection for apparently objectivist large-scale colour images. Liesbrock recognises that the persuasive power of these images lies as much in visual affect as in perceptual veracity. So, despite the fact that much of this work might appear to confer to a realist pictorial model, or is fundamentally descriptive, he acknowledges the manner in which it displaces or even corrupts any concept of visual truth at a fundamental level. Liesbrock’s claim upon photography as a realist practice is not unlike that of Sussman, but he concedes the need to seek this within a critique of the image as a social-conceptual nexus. And in so doing he is led to acknowledge the complexity and “conceptual contradiction” of the sort of work Sussman merely appeals to as unassuming witness to the exterior world. According to Liesbrock, apparently realist photo-based contemporary images “rely on the power of the visible while simultaneously questioning it...the ability to appear sensual while actually undermining the immediacy of the picture or its reliability as representation seems to lie at the heart of the appeal of these pictures today.”

Realism in a Corporate Age: John Roberts and Benjamin Buchloh

A more specific aspect of John Roberts’ idea of a contemporary critical realism requires comment here and comparison with a position adopted by Benjamin Buchloh.

As noted above, in The Art of Interruption Roberts pursues a realism that seeks to understand the manner in which the photographic image both emanates from and feeds back into an active, critical relation to the social forces about it, so resisting capitulation to

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74 Mitchell, ‘Realism, Irrealism, and Ideology’, 356


76 Liesbrock is clearly thinking here of the work such as that of Thomas Struth or Andreas Gursky.

77 Liesbrock, ‘The Barely Visible Visible Perspectives’, 40. (Emphasis added.)
and reinforcement of a culture of consumption and commodification. In Roberts' thinking the 'realist' character of photography may evidence a level of criticality beyond that immediately apparent in a present-day reconciliation of advertising culture and history painting. In fact, Roberts' conception of critical realism allows for the possibility of an integration of advertising culture, cinema and history that visualises the social conditions of a contemporary culture of the spectacle. It stands, therefore, in direct contrast to Fredric Jameson's negative culture industry critique, yet is based in a similar initial identification of irrefutable bonds between commercial visual culture and contemporary art. The real visualised in such a realism is, in one sense, simply a set of coded relations between viewing subjects and those visual networks of contemporary society; the visual presencing apparent in advertising, television, cinema, video, computer graphics, magazines and other commercial media. This is also claimed by Roberts as a mode of realism in which an artistic act of photographic visualisation takes place in a dynamic, mutually constitutive (and semiotically generative and discursive) relationship with social and material life. Roberts develops this line of argument with particular reference to the large-scale colour lightbox scenes of Jeff Wall. These are evidence, according to Roberts, of a new form of realism generated in direct relation to spectacle culture. In contrast, Benjamin Buchloh treats exactly this model of practice as in fact reinforcing that "universal condition of consumption and commodification," which as already discussed is so indicative of spectacle culture.

Buchloh is particularly interesting in this context, for his critical attitude sits somewhere between Jameson's dismissively negative critique and Roberts' championing of a contemporary critical realism for a corporate age. Writing in 1995 on the work of Allan Sekula, Buchloh was critical of this "universal condition" which saw photographic forms derived either from avant-garde montage (transformed into design aesthetic) or genre painting—each strand developed in "productive symbiosis with advertising"—accorded the highest status within an artistic hierarchy, whilst traditions reflecting "the legacy of the

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76 Roberts, *The Art of Interruption*. See in particular 'Introduction: Realism, Contradiction and Interpretation', 2-13

79 This is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3 with regard to the work of Anne Zahalka.

80 Buchloh, 'Allan Sekula', 191
documentary photograph" were kept at the lowest level of such hierarchy ("unless they succeed in spectacularising the victims of their operation").

Five years later Buchloh returned to the subject of the photographic image as an exemplary model of contemporary art practice in the Introduction to his book Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry: Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1975. Here he describes "a certain lightbox photoconceptualism" as a "vacuous 'international style'" of contemporary art that, along with an academicised minimalism or installation art

now produces a techno-lingo of the image that can pride itself on being the first to have fully absorbed the very technologies that made the culture of spectacle and the production of advertisement imagery a monolithic global power. Such affirmative mimesis makes it seem inescapable that artistic practices would, if not actually pave the way for, at least finally succumb to the powers of spectacle culture to permeate all conventions of perception and communication without any form of resistance whatsoever. It implies that even the mere thought and the slightest gesture of opposition appear dwarfed and ludicrous in the face of the totalitarian control and domination by spectacle.

Despite the apparent despair in this characterisation of the cultural moment, Buchloh does suggest a possible form of resistance via a "negative theology" resulting from a crisis of subjectivity brought about by the public sphere of the spectacle invading private consciousness. This marks a return to a conception of art as a secularised experience of the sacred.

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81 ibid., 190
83 See Buchloh, Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry, xxii. Rosalind Krauss has made a similar observation regarding current accords between contemporary art and corporate capitalism, however she seeks a path beyond this bind in the form of practices of "differential specificity" – practices that seek to reinvent the very act of artistic production via tactically calibrated matches of deployed media to social-cultural occasion (or releases of such media into specific social-cultural contexts). See Krauss, 'A Voyage on the North Sea', 56
Buchloh's earlier text anticipated his later dismissal of a "lightbox photoconceptualism" as a pretended reconciliation of advertising culture and history painting. Against this he posited the possibility of a critical realism located in the oscillation of contextual and referential conceptions of photography (and exemplified by the work of Sekula). The potential agency of such a practice is absent from his later text, as if this too in its mimetic function has subsequently come to seem "ludicrous" as a form of resistance to the commodity culture of the spectacle. Whilst Buchloh pays far greater attention to the specific conditions within which art arises and touches upon social reality than does Jameson for example, his later position dismisses a swathe of photo-based contemporary practice on the primary basis of media. In doing so, Buchloh infers a domination of artistic form or medium over the discursive potential of content. By his reckoning the generally assumed absorption of the large-scale colour photograph (especially when presented in lightbox form) within commodity culture effaces any cultural specificity regarding either the image forms of the work or the specific sites of its production and display.

The Primacy of Appearance

Having introduced some core critical frameworks, I end this chapter by turning to specific examples of contemporary image analysis in order to highlight the centrality of appearance within photo-based contemporary art.

The image in photo-based contemporary art frequently seems contrived so as to appear seamless and unified. It appears as a hermetic form, constructed so as to visually suppress any sense of a composite structure of disparate components. Rarely is the image predominantly deployed so as to emphasise intersections and exchanges between discrete elements as themselves visual subjects. Digital technologies facilitate this in new ways. The hermetic form of the image is frequently resolved as an aesthetic field via its composition as a network of visual data. Appearance becomes a rhetorical force where pictorial form presenced across the surface of the image takes precedence over any discursive revelation

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84 Buchloh's phrase "lightbox photoconceptualism" may be read as shorthand for a wide range of large- or mural-scale colour photographic practice found within international contemporary art today.

85 See Buchloh, 'Allan Sekula', 195
through the actual means of image production. Montage, for example, is utilised more frequently as a basic technical process than as a critical 'language'. Photo-based contemporary art, across a diversity of image forms, re-emphasises surface, spatial arrangement and composition as the organisation of visual units of information. It stresses the integrity of the exemplary image form, even when incorporating otherwise disruptive, performative gestures. Within this process of visual organisation two key trajectories can be identified, although they constitute, in effect, two sides of the same coin.

The first is an arrangement of visual data across the plane of the image as a perfectly refined informational screen. Models for this tendency can be located within a tradition of photographic montage, but also within the arena of both screen-based image production and large-scale visual advertising. These are dependent upon shorthand concentrations of visual effects, and upon the direction of a viewer's eye across the surface connecting key points of information rather than upon direction through the component features of a monocular perspectival space. McKenzie Wark touches on this in attempting to view an Andreas Gursky stockmarket floor photograph, an image he describes as "a textured motie of bodies." According to Wark: "The whole frame is active, the edges as resonant as the centre, so the centre blurs under the weight of repetitive figuring."  

Alex Alberro makes similar observations regarding Gursky's work in a recent Artforum article. For Alberro this controlled illusionism is "excessive", and results in critical problems regarding the relation of Gursky's images to the social conditions of the worlds that they

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66 In The Vision Machine Paul Virilio identifies this importance of appearance—of the reality effect—across knowledge spheres within the digital age. He writes: "To my mind, this is one of the most crucial aspects of the development of the new technologies of digital imagery and of the synthetic vision offered by electron optics: the relative fusion/confusion of the factual (or operational, if you prefer) and the virtual; the ascendancy of the 'reality effect' over a reality principle already largely contested elsewhere, particularly in physics." Paul Virilio, The Vision Machine, transl. Julie Rose (London and Bloomington: British Film Institute and Indiana University Press, 1994) 60

67 McKenzie Wark, 'Andreas Gursky/MOMA, Julian Schnabel/Before Night Falls, Olafur Eliasson/Your Only Real Thing is Time/ICA, Boston', www.mediaculturebooks@yahoo.com, accessed 16 March 2001. Wark does not name the specific photograph being discussed, but it is almost certainly Gursky's Chicago Board of Trade II (1999) (Illus. 2:1). Wark's characterisation recalls Paul Virilio's description of contemporary pictorial space as screen space: "The vanishing-point of the original perspective (geometric optics) of real space of the Quattrocento, is superseded by the vanishing of all points (pixels, data bits) in the second perspective (physical optics) of real time of the Novocento." The implication, for Virilio, is that "information" becomes "the final relief of reality, a reality as calculable as the surface of the painting once was for the original perspectivists, a virtual reality that offers every one of us the considerable advantage of being both more 'real' than imagination and more easily controlled than concrete reality." Paul Virilio, Open Sky, transl. Julie Rose (London and New York: Verso, 1997) 66

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tend to visually organise rather than represent. According to Alberro, "in the pictorialist aesthetic advanced by Gursky's meticulously calculated images, the primacy and permanence of fine-art photography is reasserted." Under this reading, Gursky's attempt to render visible the structural principles at the heart of the concrete world" feed only into a naturalising tendency – a desire to fuse nature and technology (and thus lead, perhaps unwittingly, to an effacement of the nuances and contradictions of material and social experience). Gursky's "representations of labour," Alberro writes, "are creatively transformed into elegant visuals self-consciously offered for the eye's consumption." Later in this essay Alberro writes of Gursky's valorisation of the fetishized high art object, and of the "fusion" of his work "with advanced forms of advertising." He concludes:

Rather than reveal something about the unsettling nature of globalisation and the social and economic forces that govern and create the sites and objects he photographs, Gursky, in his ultimately nihilistic way, is clearly more interested in another game – a pictorialist celebration of style, craftsmanship, and the perfect photographic image.

Alberro takes a negative view of what he considers to be Gursky's fundamental disengagement with social context. He is distrustful of the manner in which Gursky's images reinforce ideological underpinnings to the 'reality' they appear to picture, but do so under the veil of aestheticism. They offer an aesthetic self-image to that ideological sphere by supplanting social conditions with the conditions of image, and hence disguise the complexities of real experience. Alberro's analysis is redolent of Frankfurt School modes of cultural theory, and in particular the work of Theodor Adorno. But crucially his critique is founded in detailed description and analysis of a number of Gursky's works, whilst also paying due attention to the social and representational contexts of the works' production.

80 Alex Alberro, 'The Big Picture: Blind Ambition', Artforum (January 2001) 109
81 ibid., 110
82 ibid.
83 ibid.
84 ibid.
85 ibid.
86 ibid., 114
87 ibid.
and spectatorial encounter. All this suggests the potential value of a subtly modulated 'culture industry' mode of critique when dealing with work that falls within the gambit of this first tendency. The organisation of the photographic surface as a coherent, seductive network of visual effects can indeed result in images that appear to be little more than fields of visual play or advertisements for their own spectacular presence. 94

The second trajectory involves an arrangement of the picture to conform to what Jeff Wall refers to as a perception of "spatial continuity".95 The Artforum interview from which this phrase is drawn describes an exemplary instance of a combined use of digital and analogue technologies in order to create an image both formally seamless and existing in an apparently direct relation to the external world that it pictures. In this interview Wall reveals the complex processes behind his conception and production of a single image. The final work—depicting a flooded gravesite in which a marine ecosystem flourishes—is literally uncanny in its melding of photographic transcriptiveness and 'real' improbability (see Illus. 2.2). Wall explains how the final work is an amalgam of three different photographic images: one of a Vancouver cemetery that provided the desired visual setting or scene, another of an empty grave dug in another site,96 and the third a studio shot of the marine ecosystem established within a tank exactly replicating the form and volume of the actual empty grave. Moreover, as Wall also infers, each of these three images may themselves be a digitally

94 Norman Bryson has made similar comments regarding Gursky's work, identifying a tension between an impulse in Gursky's images towards a Frankfurt School-like mode of cultural critique and an impulse towards the picturesque, as well as a strain placed upon indexicality by their poetic exaggeration. According to Bryson, Gursky's images resonate with all the various modern means of understanding the macro conditions of life - the quasi-sciences, which like Gursky's images deploy totalising frameworks or panoramas. As exercises in the mapping of social relations Gursky's images attempt a picturing of the interconnectivity of all sectors and experiences simultaneously, within individual images. But they sit at a fold between criticality (or the social) and the picturesque (or the aesthetic), and so for Bryson the key question is whether this contradiction, this double trajectory damages the work, or does it "express[ing]—deliberately or symptomatically—a wider uncertainty about the intelligibility of the social as such." Bryson's conclusion, however, is similar to that of Alberro and echoes both Fredric Jameson and Benjamin Buchloh regarding cultural aesthetisation, or what might be thought of as a culture of the photogenic. "The aesthetic field" Bryson concludes of Gursky's work, "seems to swallow the rest of the social field." See Norman Bryson, 'The Family Firm: Andreas Gursky and German Photography', art/Text 67 (1999-2000) 81

95 Jeff Wall in Jan Tumlir, 'The Hole Truth: Jan Tumlir talks with Jeff Wall about The Flooded Grave', Artforum (March 2001) 115

96 As one could not be dug within the first cemetery in the exact spot in which Wall wished it to appear in the final image.
constructed composite of a number of 'shots' taken of each site or element. The requisite attention to detail in the construction of this single large-scale image is extraordinary. Responding to a comment by his interviewer, Jan Tümllir, regarding the imperceptible seams between composite images (Tümllir specifically mentions the relation between the flooded interior and edging of the grave) Wall states:

If you could tell [where the different images merge], I would have failed. The picture would be a failure if it permitted any doubt that the two worlds were one, physically. The idea of a picture having to render a physically continuous space is a central part of the Western pictorial tradition. Photography has, if anything, intensified that. A picture has to account for our experience of the continuity of space, for the knowledge that we have gained from the experience and activity of all our senses, the almost certain knowledge that, for example, the earth in the wall of the graves bends over at the top and goes on without interruption into the lawn and so on. You could use the same digital montage techniques to question that, to introduce discrepancies that don't correspond to the idea of spatial continuity I've just described. But I'm not interested in that.'

On one hand, this notion of "spatial continuity" could be applied also to particular instances within the earlier trajectory of visual arrangement across a screen or surface. In such instances the continuity would be fundamentally two-dimensional. Wall, however, clearly locates this notion of "spatial continuity" at the very core of structural conventions of the

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97 This is certainly the case with the last of the three images – the marine ecosystem constructed in Wall's studio.

98 Wall in Tümllir, 'The Hole Truth', 115

99 Bernice Murphy locks something like these two trajectories into a relation between "the photographic mural" and "the photographic tableau". According to Murphy: "The contents of the photo-mural image are normally discrete or laterally dispersed, according to varying viewpoints, scales, orientations or points of emphasis..." In contrast, the photographic tableau "delivers its contents from within a common space, oriented towards a frontal plane and the anticipated viewpoint of a stationary, en-face spectator." Murphy continues by ascribing an allegorical import to the tableau, however it is her formal distinction that should be noted here. Bernice Murphy, 'Contemporary Photographic Art from Australia', in Zeitgenössische Fotokunst Aus Australien (exh. cat.) (Heidelberg: Edition Braus, 2000) 176. Unlike Murphy this study does not structure such a formal distinction within the terms "mural" and "tableau". There are two reasons for this. In the first place, the former trajectory, associated with an arrangement of visual data across a photographic surface evidences, in part, a potential transformation of the very spatial structure of Murphy's tableau. Second, and more significant, the distinction in physical spacial relation to each form described by Murphy appears to be unwritten by a notion of the mural image as a form existing in public space with different, multitudinous movement flows about it. The implication here is that the mural image is identified not only by scale but by the enabling of movement flows about it by that very same scale. The contention of this study is that in much contemporary photo-based art the scale (and concomitant potential for a physical multitude of points of viewing emphasis) associated with external mural images in public space has been transposed into an interior gallery or museum setting. Thus references throughout to mural scale images acknowledge the potential of this transposition and do not preclude tableau forms.
picture developed within Western representational traditions, including photography. In simple terms, "spatial continuity" refers to the unification of all pictorial elements within one coherent visual space organised according to the perspectival illusionism of monocular vision. Wall's concern is the development of convincing pictorial forms based upon illusionistic conventions of perspectival 'depth'. Wall's aspiration to both the replication and regeneration of this pictorial convention in contemporary photographic images is a means to maintain the urgency of the relation between the material world and representation. By constantly arranging the material (and social) world within this convention of "spatial continuity" Wall seeks to make legible and convincing 'pictures'. He seeks to make images that conform to and partake of the conventions through which we have come to recognise, negotiate and decipher the world about us. Perhaps most crucial here is Wall's almost blithe treatment of the constructed nature of "spatial continuity" within a pictorial tradition. He simply assumes not only that "spatial continuity" is entirely conventional, but that it is also generally understood as such. However the fact that such continuity has evolved within the conventions of representation does not lessen what may be termed its 'reality effect'. Rather, if anything, Wall's position appears to be that the basis of the Western picture in consensus is exactly what grants it cognitive and social efficacy.

Again, Wall's notion of spatial continuity operates in a manner not entirely dissimilar to that first trajectory of overt two-dimensional composition, for in that instance, an argument may be made for the approximation of the image to socially conditioned modes of seeing. It could be argued that the seamless arrangement of visual components across the picture surface creates an image that correlates to the visual landscape of our corporatised world, especially the mural-scale picture surfaces of billboards and cinema screens. Thus it is the image's very sourcing in representational convention that drives its appeal as both component within and image of an everyday visual reality. This is the 'realism' of a commodified image culture pursued by John Roberts and reconsidered with regard to the work of Anne Zahalka in the following chapter.
CHAPTER 3
The Pictorial Scene: Anne Zahalka

In this and the following chapter I deal in part with work that sits within Benjamin Buchloh's designation of "lightbox photoconceptualism" discussed towards the end of Chapter 2. However, Anne Zahalka's Fortresses and Frontiers (1993) and Brenda L. Croft's Conference Call (1992) contrast significantly in terms of subjects, pictorial structure and relationship to the broader sphere of international practice to which Buchloh refers, despite both comprising images of figures staged within and against inner-city Sydney environments.

This chapter begins with a discussion of three key works from Zahalka's Fortresses and Frontiers. Each features a figure staged in a state of everyday action against an urban environment acting as pictorial setting. The relationships of the work to representational models found in cinema as well as international contemporary art practices are noted, whilst reference to the apparent pictorial staging of urban alienation anticipates a more detailed discussion in Chapter 7 of such a strategy evident in the work of Bill Henson.

I then consider images from Zahalka's ongoing series Leisureland (1998-). Again the relationship of the work to conditions of spectacle culture is crucial. Like the Fortresses and Frontiers works under discussion, these also hinge upon relationships between figures and urban environments. Here, however, individuals are generally subsumed within the public mass and the depicted relationships of figures to place are structured by the social pursuit of leisure. This section of the chapter questions whether Zahalka's images reduce all social arenas and actions to the depthless experience of the photographic, and whether viewers merely replicate acts of visual consumption viewed within the images.

I end the chapter with a detailed analysis of another core strand of Zahalka's practice—a form of formal portrait photography concerned with the exploration of individual subjectivities and steeped in the formal and iconographical traditions of both photographic and pre-photographic portraiture. Discussion of Open House (1995) enables an extension of this chapter's interest in the forms of pictorial scenes constructed by Zahalka and their consequential modes of spectorial encounter. It also provides an important point of comparison for the analysis in Chapter 4 of the portrait form in Croft's work.
Fortresses and Frontiers: Figures of Detachment

Like Brenda L. Croft's Conference Call photographs discussed in the following chapter, the three photographs from Anne Zahalka's Fortresses and Frontiers discussed here are early instances of the colour lightbox form in Australian photo-based contemporary art. Each depicts figures staged by the artist within scenes of urban alienation.¹ Indeed, city environments in these images function as mere stage backdrops or sets. Untitled #1A (Illus. 3.1) depicts a man in a linen suit and hat pictured from behind carrying a suitcase as he walks over a freeway overpass towards the city skyline bathed in orange twilight, its glass-clad buildings glowing like sheets of reflective light. In untitled #4 (Illus. 3.2) a woman dressed in a business suit and carrying a briefcase appears to pause mid-stride and glance over her shoulder as she walks again along a road bridge. The bridge this time cuts across the frame of the image with the city skyline once more acting as backdrop. In untitled #2 (Illus. 3.3), a woman is pictured pushing a stroller with two small children in it along a footpath in a rather depressing area of urban wasteland, with one factory façade still standing in the background amongst a demolition site. Three uniform towers of housing commission flats dominate the mid-ground.

These protagonists have little subjective presence. Their fundamental purpose is to act out alienated forms of relationship to the city environment. But these images cannot simply be accounted for in terms of their conveyance of a set of psychological experiences of Sydney as an urban environment. They constitute forms of pictorial coding dependent upon an audience's recognition of these coded forms via representational convention, not simply limited to photography. (Jeffrey Smart's spare, hard-edge paintings of figures in the urban environment provide one key Australian precedent.)² More important is the manner in which Zahalka's images reference and mimic international practices – both cinematic forms

¹ Twelve Fortresses and Frontiers works were first exhibited at Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne in 1993, each between approximately 100 x 150cm and 125 x 190cm in dimension.

² Smart's Approaches to a City III (1968-69) featuring two figures painted from behind walking up a curving raised expressway towards a schematic rendering of a city is strikingly similar to Zahalka's untitled No. 1A, whilst his well-known The Cahill Expressway (1962) featuring a man dressed in a suit standing beneath an entrance ramp to another curving, raised expressway again with a stark city backdrop, grim shadow and lines of menacing lamp-posts condenses exactly that sense of urban alienation that Zahalka's images appear to strive for.
and in particular the photographic practice of Jeff Wall. This is not intended as an entirely negative claim. For this staging of alienated relationships to and within urban environments as generic manifestations of spectacle culture, particularly within forms associated with the spectacle, may be a key means by which dysfunctional social relationships within spectacle culture can be conveyed. As noted in Chapter 2, John Roberts forcefully asserts just so in regard to the work of Wall:

In moving a factographic, archival concern for the naturalistic look of things and people into the theatrical space of the staged photograph, he moves photography into the popular spaces of capitalist spectacle. This is a 'realism' of the cinema, of the advertising hoarding and corporate photograph, those apparatuses of spectacularised absorption in the image that define the public forms through which modern capitalism reproduces itself ideologically. In this respect, a photography of the 'everyday' for Wall is about not simply 'shared meanings', but the shared conditions under which we experience and read the technologies of modern culture.³

This may be treated as a rejoinder to the fundamental pessimism of a 'culture industry' critique as it appears in the writing of Fredric Jameson and Benjamin Buchloh. Zahalka's images, for example, were generated from within the image-experience of the spectacle. Just as Roberts claims Wall's work as evidence of a new realism operating to "move photography into the popular spaces of capitalist spectacle", Zahalka's images were in fact initially intended to be presented as lightbox images within Sydney bus-shelters. The late twentieth-century city—key site of the capitalist spectacle—was to host its representational double.

But what image of the city is presented back upon itself here? Or more accurately, what state of the city as image is presented in these images?

In both untitled #1A and untitled #4 the city is a desocialised entity—a horizontal plane of gleaming glass, concrete and steel structures. This is the city as a space of imaginative projection, a kind of fantasy world that appears to pulse with a self-generated energy and luminescence that draws people towards it. This effect is intensified by Zahalka's use of the lightbox format, particularly in untitled #1A where the eerie, almost post-apocalyptic orange radiance of twilight caught and reflected on the glass towers

imparts a sense of a futuristic global megalopolis. But it also evokes the historically enduring and resonant conception of 'the city' as 'El-Dorado', a place of infinite possibility where dreams literally transform into gold. The generic figure of a traveller—a narrative cliché—is pictured following his path of dreams into the core of the image. His is no yellow-brick road however, but rather a grubby and stained concrete overpass. Thus he is twice a figure of alienation, drawn towards a conception of social space entirely fabricated in the relationship of image to cultural imaginings, only to encounter a network of social relations overdetermined by the dehumanising reality of urban environments.

Such over-determination is even more apparent in untitled #4 where the figure of a businesswoman is posed against a background of high-rise office buildings that signify the depersonalising power of corporate culture. The city appears as a set of interlocked pictorial signifiers that exclude reference to cultural place or social constitution. Unlike the previous image, there is little suggestion of the city as an entity borne of or lending itself to imaginative transformation. In both untitled #1A and untitled #4 the figures are fundamentally separated from a city depicted as a skyline and presented as a form of back screen or rear projection. In the case of the businesswoman, any small sense of belonging to place (to the city), is at the apparent expense of individual subjecthood. As an outsider, drawn towards its image, the generic, non-particularised figure of the wanderer pursues a dream founded on an absence of real consciousness or experience of that urban space.

Untitled #2 is slightly different in this regard as the woman and children are depicted moving through an urban space that has some resonance of social experience and history. Rather than a schematic rendering of the city as skyline, the structures of a destroyed factory and high-rise council flat convey a concentration of historical urban experience and social interaction across classes. Certainly these function symbolically to evoke experiences of urban degeneration and deprivation reaching far beyond any specific society or geographical setting. The figures of the woman and children similarly signify a universal familial bond pressured but persevering in the face of inner-city urban decay. Nevertheless, in its depiction of these figures within an urban setting bearing traces of social and historical forces, this of the three images discussed here most tends towards a picturing of real social experience, even if a significant element of this experience is in fact alienation from and within the urban environment. This more generative relation of figures to pictured
environment comes closest of Zahalka's *Fortresses and Frontiers* works to a synthesis of pictorial elements.⁴

Ultimately, however, even this third image still presents a fundamental disconnection between anonymous figures and settings. The mother and children pass through but also past this urban landscape, separated from it by a fence topped with barbed wire and not evidencing any particular form of relationship to it. Unlike the work of Wall, there is no moment of human drama intensified by the urban setting (and thus reflecting back upon it) played out here. Zahalka acknowledges the importance of Wall's work in general as a model to this series,⁵ yet whereas in Wall's *Diatribe* (1985) (Illus. 3.4), seemingly a likely model for Zahalka's image, a scruffy suburban setting concentrates the contrasting seriousness and fervour with which a young mother addresses the friend she is walking with, in Zahalka's image there is neither significant narrative or inter-subjective action, nor a fundamental pictorial link between complex subjects and place. Martyn Jolly rightly claims that Zahalka's work lacks the dramatic quality of Wall's "grand epics of the everyday".⁶ He goes on to state that, unlike Wall's work, "there is no psychological or phenomenological edge to her images – no sense of things being on the verge of exploding, or indeed imploding."⁷

This is borne out also in the cinematic dimension of Zahalka's works. It is concentrated in the use of actual settings as pictorial backdrops, rather than as settings that may envelop and intensify the actions and motivations of subjects. Zahalka's use of the city as a pictorial stage for action brings to mind the old painted scenes of pre-digital cinema that filled the areas of scenes masked as they were being shot – spaces that action was set against, never within, even if this latter quality were being striven for. As Jolly observes, Zahalka's images are static, not dynamic, her figures at best captured in motion, not in action.⁸

Zahalka herself acknowledges this sense of disconnection in her images between figures and the city as a pictorial trope. She has claimed that these images attempt to picture the condition of alienation between the city and its inhabitants. It may be inferred

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⁴ This is a key feature of the photographic *mise-en-scène* discussed in Chapter 7.
⁵ Author's notes, interview with Anne Zahalka, Sydney, 29 June 2001.
⁶ Martyn Jolly, 'Anne Zahalka: Spurs of the Moment', *Art & Text* 54 (1996) 64
⁷ ibid.
⁸ ibid.
therefore that the picturing of the general condition of alienation is considered by the artist to be more significant than any possible presence of the pictured figures as subjects. Indeed, Zahalka has claimed that these images of figures staged in real environments are actually akin to memory traces; they set out to depict memories of particular types of people passing through particular places.\(^9\) Furthermore, Zahalka has noted,\(^10\) as Jolly has also observed, that the city (not the figures) is itself the key subject of these works. Jolly astutely notes that:

Here the normal relationship between city and citizen is deceptively reversed. The citizen becomes a scenographic cutout personage, against which the city enacts itself: it is the city that glows and throbs, pulsates and beckons. Zahalka's characters do not even serve the emblematic roles of the figures conventionally found in the foreground of picturesque landscapes; they are not there to draw one into the scene, so as to reassure or placate, but to confirm the 'image gap' that exists between virtual urban space and the inner domain of its dwellers.\(^11\)

The language of Jolly's description brings to mind Jonathan Crary's recent reminder that the Debordian spectacle is itself fundamentally a "technology of separation" involving "multiple strategies of isolation."\(^12\) The spectacle, Crary writes, "is not primarily concerned with a looking at images but rather with the construction of conditions that individuate, immobilise, and separate subjects, even within a world in which mobility and circulation are ubiquitous."\(^13\) And further: "The logic of spectacle prescribes the production of separate, isolated, but not introspective individuals."\(^14\)

Is the concentration upon what Jolly refers to as the 'image gap' between social space and human experience in Zahalka's photographs a means of revealing the workings of the spectacle from within? Do Zahalka's images manifest exactly that new critical realism of a corporate age that John Roberts ascribes to the work of Wall? Jolly, for example,

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\(^9\) Author's notes, interview with Anne Zahalka

\(^10\) ibid.

\(^11\) Jolly, 'Anne Zahalka: Spurs of the Moment', 64-65


\(^13\) ibid.

\(^14\) ibid., 79
certainly equates the form and appearance of Zahalka's images with the display mechanisms of corporate advertising, in particular the "dazed ambience" of airport lightbox advertisements for mobile phones, digital watches "and other corporate bric-a-brac".\textsuperscript{15}

The answer may be located within the relation of Zahalka's work to that of Wall, its professed model. Zahalka's images are mannered by comparison. Urban space has been reduced to the status of pictorial setting or even backdrop. Figures are by and large located against these settings rather than within them, and the relationships between city and figures tend towards a state of pictorial semiosis rather than pictorial embodiments of urgent experience. A sense of subjecthood embodied in Wall's staged figures is absent from Zahalka's images. Nor are they recuperated by a strong sense of (lived) place seeking to engage critically with spectacle culture. Little in these three images marks a resistance to their own absorption within spectacle culture. They mimic the appearance of corporate advertising and cinematic culture without engaging critically with its tenets. They partake in, re-stage and re-iterate a dominant visual register in international art, neither extending it nor subjecting it to detailed critical analysis.

This discussion has treated these three images very much as singular works. This is appropriate, for while the title \textit{Fortresses and Frontiers} encompasses a number of works, each is quite hermetic in character and structure. There are neither interlocking narratives nor repeated subjects. \textit{Fortresses and Frontiers} is not sequential with narrative interleavings in the manner of Tracey Moffatt's \textit{Up In The Sky} (1997). Nor does it constitute a suite of repeated pictorial elements or narrative scenarios in the vein of Rosemary Laing's \textit{flight research} (1999/2000) and Moffat's \textit{Scarred for Life} (1995/1999). Nevertheless, other works in the \textit{Fortresses and Frontiers} series do begin to leaven the above criticisms regarding engagement with specific place and social experience, and thus mark some critical relation to homogenous spectacle culture. There is a classic Sydney 'vista' in the form of a view across the harbour from Taronga Zoo, with animals in the foreground. Quite the opposite image of the city is presented in the form of a (staged) homeless figure in a park at night, or in a work depicting a dank, seemingly toxic abandoned building site excavation in the middle of the city. These works anticipate Zahalka's later \textit{Leisureland} series in which existing relationships between urban space and human subjects are more astutely examined.

\textsuperscript{15} Jolly, 'Anne Zahalka: Spurs of the Moment', 64
although in Leisureland subjects are figured as members of a larger, even mass social body rather than as individuals.

Leisureland: Visual Consumption

Leisureland is the general title to an ongoing set of singular, large-scale, colour photographic images produced by Anne Zahalka since 1998. It is also the specific title of exhibitions of selections of these works held by Zahalka at Anna Schwartz Gallery in Melbourne (1999), Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery in Sydney (2000), as well as of a touring exhibition organised by Manly Art Gallery and Museum (2000-01). The overall body of work includes a range of images, but all, as the title suggests, picture leisure activities, primarily within the greater Sydney environment. Their form and pictorial structures, as well as content, tend to suggest fundamental connections between the organisation of public space, leisure activity and spectacle culture. As the titles suggest, whereas the urban environment in Fortresses and Frontiers is pictured as both a place of myth and a barrier to social interaction, present-day urban society is pictured in Leisureland as indissolubly wedded to an environment constructed to facilitate leisure. Whether this is handled so as to reveal and thus question a 'Brave-New-World'-like analgesic aspect to a spectacle culture promoting distraction and diversion, or whether these images simply celebrate and thus reiterate the passive conditions of subjecthood pictured within, is a key point of inquiry for this discussion.

Zahalka's Leisureland images also raise the issue of whether a form of photography binding documentary connotations of record with precision of colour and detail, depth of

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16 Most of these images are 115 x 145cm in dimension, with just a few—for example three out of sixteen in the first solo Sydney showing of the work in 2000—in panoramic formats of either 115 x 242cm or 115 x 280cm in dimension.

17 The first of these exhibitions was at Anna Schwartz Gallery in Melbourne in 1999 featuring sixteen images. The 2000 exhibition at Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery in Sydney featured eight images first exhibited in Melbourne, along with eight new ones. The Manly Art Gallery and Museum touring exhibition featured twenty-one works.

18 Zahalka has been developing a second body of work under the title of Leisureland Regional picturing spectacles of leisure across regional New South Wales, primarily in the form of local festivals. This will be first exhibited as a total body of work in 2003. This project obviously breaks with the emphasis upon urban structures of social organisation pictured in Leisureland. It also tends towards picturing of events organised from within (and thus as expressions of) specific, identifiable communities and their traditions. However once the series appears it will still be important to consider whether they take on a homogenous character in the specific form of the large-scale colour photograph so strongly linked to modes of spectacle culture, or whether the social specificity of pictured content dominates the works.
pictorial field and the scale of traditional history painting or advertising posters, and enabled by present-day imaging and production technologies, might allow photography to take on the function of historical record lost to painting during the age of mechanical reproduction. Like the work of overseas contemporaries such as Andreas Gursky, Mario Tessimo and Jeff Wall, Zahalka's images do function as a 'picturing of modern life', evidencing both fascination for and alienation from corporately determined public space. Furthermore, they picture the sorts of spaces characterised by Marc Augé as the "non-places of modernity": spaces created for the processing of information, goods and human bodies in which all subjects are cast as spectators, consumers, or indistinguishable data units. Augé's non-places are marked by an absence of identity, relations, history or organic society. However, Zahalka's overall project is not dogmatic in this regard. In fact, in many respects the diversity of both Zahalka's chosen subjects and her pictorial structures underlines the caveat in Augé's own argument that aspects of these non-places and of more conventional anthropological places characterised by social organisation always inhabit the other, each containing the kernel of the other.

**Derrida Lecture** (1999) (Illus. 3.5) and **Open Air Cinema** (1999) (Illus. 3.6) provide useful starting points for a consideration of these issues. Both are panoramic images picturing audiences from (or near) the back row of a 'theatre'. In each the audience faces a central screen. In the first the image is of philosopher Jacques Derrida in conversation on stage at the Sydney Town Hall. In the second the audience are at the open-air (outdoor) cinema at the Sydney Royal Botanic Gardens looking out at a blank projection screen protruding from the harbour waters. In **Derrida Lecture** Zahalka deploys a conventional formal arrangement. The flanking pillar forms of the Town Hall, in fact the whole architectural site, provide a rigid sense of perspectival recession and space, as does the focus of the pictured viewers upon a central viewpoint. The spatial organisation of the image draws upon both painterly and photographic conventions. Furthermore, the social organisation of leisure is pictured as a gathering of individuals concentrated upon visual consumption. This is repeated by spectators in front of the photograph. The relations between pictured individuals are unimportant, or in fact non-existent. Each spectator merely shares with the

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other the condition of spectator/consumer of the same scene, even spectacle. After all, the image of Derrida is the (slightly displaced) point of visual concentration, not his actual body on stage.

*Open Air Cinema* pictures a similar dilution of social interaction. But here the spatial organisation is different. The outdoor site is itself fundamentally pictorial, comprising a layering of backdrop planes—harbour surface, illuminated city skyline, opera house, harbour bridge—rather than a space of graduated recession. The focal point sits forward of the pictorial space, so operating in a classic Lacanian sense as a screen through which consciousness and world mediate each other. Whereas in *Derrida Lecture* the confined, enclosed space and event are pictured as conforming to the imperatives of spectacle culture, here it is the broader cultural site—Sydney as tourist brochure backdrop—that so conforms. Thus, in *Derrida Lecture* the spectators are incorporated within the spectacle, but in *Open Air Cinema* they sit separated from the photogenic scene thanks to the disruption of perspectival recession: they may consume it but are not so consumed within it. Indeed, viewers of the image experience the sense of inhabiting the audience's space (or vice versa). In contrast, the viewing position structured into *Derrida Lecture* is slightly beyond and above the seated audience. Zahalka's decision to picture the projection screen in *Open Air Cinema* as a blank or empty silver space means that it both acts as a structural marker and signifies a certain resistance to a form of mass consumerist immersion. (These figures are not, in fact, consuming anything other than what they choose to project upon or through the empty pictorial frame of the screen, other than the city skyline behind.)

Two images of gambling spaces, *Penrith Panthers* (1998) (Illus. 3.7) and *Star City Casino (after Breugal)* (1998) (Illus. 3.8) deploy less overtly controlled, less apparently rigid structures. The former makes use of a high viewpoint that appears to 'tip' the scene up parallel to (or as) the surface plane. Although the tilt is only partial, the resulting effect of depth giving way to surface organisation is intensified by the network of poker machine lights, carpet patterning, and illuminated signage all organised within interlocking grid arrangements mapping the coordinates of depth across the massive poker machine room, and of height up the wall to further mezzanine levels. The dominant position of the neon text 'interactive' across the picture surface appeals to both the rhetorical social documentary constructions of photographers such as Walker Evans who imaged a great deal of street
signage, and the overt textuality of 1980s appropriation art. But even more importantly, it further signifies a collapsing of distinction between architectural, pictorial and textual space in the image.

Star City Casino (after Breugel) also treats space as a notational field in which the illusion of depth gives way to the visual insistence of a surface field in which all elements are equally available and absolutely interconnected. Here the interior space of the casino plays a double game with the image. The room itself is an almost hallucinatory space that recedes pictorially within its own mirror-wall reflection.\(^20\) This is an architectural space designed to the imperatives of photogenia – as photographically pictorial prior to any individual occasion of its picturing. This is a pictorial composition of a space designed as a pictorial composition, and as with Penrith Panthers this sense is confirmed by Zahalka’s use of that omnipresent, all-seeing ‘eye-of-Hegel’ position described by Norman Bryson.\(^21\)

Another Leisureland image of gambling, Bingo Centre (1998) (Illus. 3.9) presents an acculturated space in which leisure is pictured as a relatively passive form of financial transaction. But this work images an altogether different set of social relations than those noted above. Like Derrida Lecture it features a rather classically constructed, enclosed (and enclosing), seamless pictorial space in the form of a large room or hall, in this case pictured from one end at floor level. Rows of elderly people are pictured side-on, facing each other across long tables. However they are not interacting with one another. Instead they are bent over, focussed on their bingo cards. The viewer effectively shares pictorial space with the subjects, but in this case does not share their spectorial activity. Whilst immersed in individualising concentration they are spatially organised so as to suggest community, social interaction and subjective interdependency. Unlike the barely visible gamblers in Penrith Panthers these subjects manifest individual characteristics. They are not consuming a visible spectacle as such, and so the inevitability of their eventual communicability is conveyed simply by their spatial organisation. This is, in fact, a very different social space—an anthropologically constituted place—than that pictured in Penrith Panthers or Star City

\(^{20}\) This lack of spatial definition is also pronounced in a related work, Star City Casino (Oasis) (1998) where another huge gambling room is topped by an elaborate night-sky ceiling.

Casino (after Breugel). Crucially, Zahalka pictorially stages it as such: the photogenia of the image is in its structural organisation rather than any pre-existing pictoriality of its subject. Indeed, it is a far more intimate photograph than many in the overall series.

The five works discussed thus far represent two key inter-related categories of images within Leisureland: those imaging leisure as itself a spectorial experience and those where leisure is pictured as a relatively passive process of consumption. There are other works which also fall within these frames: images of visitors to Oceanworld, of spectators at Royal Easter Show events and of an audience at an Imax cinema. But there are also other strands to the series, in particular images that depict leisure as activity: blurred figures driving golfballs out into a body of water at night, others negotiating an indoor climbing wall, more still at the gym and a swimming centre. This is not to suggest that the series is dichotomous, for it is not just their presentation in Zahalka’s photographic images that mark these scenes as integrated within spectacle culture. Rather, the activities and spaces are themselves constituted as photogenic, or as aspiring to the condition of image prior to their picturing in these works. In a number of these works Zahalka concentrates upon spaces that have been constructed to facilitate, even reconstitute certain modes of human activity within heightened or concentrated schema – schema which promote the virtues of the activity they enable, and so generally cohere to a photogenic conception of experience.

The mass of swimmers filling Bondi Beach in Cole Classic (1998) (Illus. 3.10) provide a good example. This is not just a ‘classic’ Australian scene, it is also the photogenic ideal of an Australian scene. Moreover, it is a photographic concentration of the sociality of communal activity played out as both event and image. Whilst it is by no means the only outdoor image, it stands out from others in Leisureland as it does not depict the outdoors as an enclosed stage setting (such as the ‘theatre-in-the-round’ structure of two images from the Sydney Royal Easter Show), or as an illuminated (even projected) backdrop (such as in Open Air Cinema). This is a ‘natural’ location, yet at the same time few sites in Australia are more subject to cultural formation and signification than Bondi Beach. And so, as with Open Air Cinema (or another image featuring climbers at the top of Sydney Harbour Bridge by day with the city in the background) this work presents Sydney as a photographically constituted entity. It is a complete submission to the imperatives, increasingly commercial, of a photogenic self-conception. Activity is rendered at a distance. This image features a horizon
line, and a sense of spatial recession marked by the faint form of a headland. Yet the scene is fundamentally flattened, reduced perhaps to two sections (foreground bodies and nature backdrop), or perhaps even more to one intermeshed photographic surface. The water is blue, the sky clear, the sand golden and the bodies if not photogenically perfect then certainly self-consciously bronzed and open to visual consumption. Most significantly, the various registers of matching bathing caps on the figures serve to cohere the whole into a visually pleasing whole.

Contemporary viewing subjects may recognise how images both conform to a certain contained, photographic scenography and picture conditions of their own social being in the world. Viewers would likely have been such subjects, or have been such spectators. In fact they remain such spectators before the images, thus the images in fact enact their own state of being in the world. And furthermore, as static or contained as many of them are (that is, as painting-like as they are) they not only reference the world, not only insert themselves as visual fields back into the world, but are formally inseparable from their referent. Their framing often appears almost arbitrary, not quite perfectly regular for example in relationship to the presentation of architectural space, or with the edges of images cutting through audiences or other pictured crowds so emphasising their status as photographic slices-of-life. They are slices of a scene played out before the camera but which continues beyond its framing edges. This sets up a range of productive tensions between the photographic and the painterly, the porous and the hermetic, the active and the passive, and between indexicality and iconicity. 22

As even the small number of images discussed here confirm, there are elements within Leisureland that do manifest some relation of critical distancing upon its pictured sites an manifestations of contemporary urban leisure culture organised in obedience to the imperatives of photogenia. Individual images straddle a fine and fluid line between a mode of critical realism employed in the picturing of the conditions and imperatives of social organisation, and a co-option to spectacle culture in which the image depicts the depthless experience of social inaction and so merely compounds a culture of spectatorial consumption. Nevertheless, as Norman Bryson almost reluctantly allows at the end of his recent essay on

22 Which is not to figure these as polar relations. The very potency of the iconography of such work depends, in fact, on its iconicity. It is also not to ascribe each of these characters or functions to either painting or photography. They are formed here, rather, in fluid exchange between the two.
the work of Andreas Gursky, any mapping of social experience itself may now by necessity have to resort to the form of the image or the picture – may have to conform to the imperatives of photogenia.23

Open House: Accumulated Signs of Life

...artists who have made it their project to challenge the originality and homogeneity of human subjectivity or the authority of mimetic representation, often choose the portrait as the genre to make their point. The portrait returns, but with a difference, now exemplifying a critique of the bourgeois self instead of its authority; showing a loss of self instead of its consolidation; shaping the subject as simulacrum instead of as origin. (Ernst Van Alphen)24

In the final section of this chapter I move from Anne Zahalka's picturing of figures in public spaces to her images of individuated subjects within carefully arranged domestic spaces. However, similar issues remain regarding the relationship of the images to spectacle culture and to other pre-existing representational models. In order to approach these issues I pay particular attention to how subject identity forms in these works via an accumulation, even over-abundance of significatory material.

Zahalka's Open House series consists of ten colour photographs, each printed on duration and mounted on lightboxes.25 This large-scale lightbox format imbues the works with a sense of dominant physical as well as visual presence.

Each of the Open House works presents a domestic tableau. Figures lounge about in static poses. There is no real interaction between figures.26 They are but one visual element amongst many accumulated within the frame of the image as ciphers of contemporary urban lifestyle. The images are in fact crammed with visual detail, all of it apparently meaningful, or at least with some role to play in the signification of social class and identity. Aside from the

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23 Bryson, 'The Family Firm', 81


25 Each image is approximately 125 x 173 x 25cm in dimension (or approximately 175 x 125 x 25cm as the series features a mix of both 'portrait' and 'landscape' formats).

26 Seven of the works depict a pair of figures. Two feature solitary individuals. One depicts three figures.
contemporary glass coffee table, hard-edged sofa and curvilinear bookshelf of *Sunday, 11.08am* (Illus. 3.11) much of the furniture and domestic-ware pictured throughout the images has a second-hand chic quality about it. The tubular metal and formica table with matching chairs of *Saturday, 2.48pm* (Illus. 3.12) is a case in point. The chairs are resplendent in 1950s Miroesque coverings counterpointed by similarly anthropomorphic patterns on the curtains behind. The jug on the table in *Saturday, 9.15pm* (Illus. 3.13) has a similarly retro post-war patterning. The spare functionality of wooden table, almost antiquated fridge and stove, old painted kitchen cupboards and visible arrangements of basic utensils, condiments and dated kitchenware (including metal teapot and clock) in *Thursday, 8.33pm* (Illus. 3.14) similarly signal the low-budget cultivated aesthetic of an urban, well-educated, artistic milieu. Photographs coat the door of another fridge. Prints, artworks, or in one case a piece of Pacific Tapa cloth hang on walls. Books pile up. Magazines lie around. Only in one image does the body of a television edge into the frame. This image excepted, Zahalka’s figures do not submit to the easy distractions of an electronic media age. Rather they sit reading, or drinking. Or they just occupy space, looking off into a half-distance in a stilted, wooden manner that suggests that they are consciously adopting an appearance of being lost in thought. Zahalka’s figures fake introspection. They are pictured as if they were models self-consciously posing within fabricated domestic environments.

Causal relationships between site and subjectivity are indistinct in these works. On one hand, there is a sense of domestic environments acting as determinants of their occupants' identities. But if place and subject are inextricably intertwined, neither obviously precedes nor produces the other. These images by no means assert a comprehension of real human presences within (and via) actual material spaces (although they are, in fact, photographs of just that). Rather, they assert a shared condition of image, of submission to the state of being pictured photographically. Character and environment are one as image. There are therefore two key frames of reference that need to be considered with regard to Zahalka’s *Open House* images. The first involves contemporary conditions of being subject to photographic visuality, or being visible to public scrutiny. The second involves representational conventions associated with pre-photographic portrait traditions.
Two key precursors to *Open House* amongst Zahalka's own practice warrant mention here. In 1990 Zahalka exhibited a set of seventeen colour portrait photographs of artists at City Gallery in Melbourne.\(^{27}\) Each was photographed in Zahalka's own studio but within constructed environments that exaggerated some particular quality associated with their practice. Thus, as catalogue essayist Michele Helmrich noted, the images both appealed to and undercut a modernist cliché of the heroic artist figure photographed in and signified by the site of their creative production. According to Helmrich these photographs presented "an interaction of imaginings."\(^{28}\) In this series of work, "the poetic as vehicle for observance corrupts the outworn notion of the photographic as 'honest' window of surveillance."\(^{29}\) A sense of collaboration between photographer and (identified) subjects is apparent here in a way that it is not in *Open House*. Traces of either the subjects' personalities, or their relationship to the photographer are far harder to ascertain in this latter work, despite the fact that it features personal domestic environments.

However, an earlier body of work is even more pertinent here, particularly in revealing the basis of Zahalka's own practice in modes of directorial or constructed tableau photography popular during the 1980s, and in illustrating the depth of her interest in the history of portraiture. The ten photographs collectively entitled *Resemblance* were produced by Zahalka during a residency at the Künstlerhaus Betheanien in Berlin in 1987. Each of these colour photographs depicted either a single figure or a group of figures within an appropriately furnished studio environment that served (along with clothing and pose) to signify their identity in terms of activity or profession.\(^{30}\) These identities were made absolutely clear by the subtitles given to individual works: 'The Cleaner', 'The Chess Players', 'The Composer', 'The Reader', 'The Vetinary', 'The Dutch Painter' and so on. *Resemblance* drew deeply upon the appearance of seventeenth-century Dutch painting. As Patricia Simon noted, the props deployed by Zahalka recalled those utilised in still-life, whilst the poses of

\(^{27}\) Each photograph was 85 x 87cm in dimension.


\(^{29}\) Ibid.

\(^{30}\) Each photograph was approximately 80 x 80cm in dimension.
figures frequently referenced those in genre studies of both bourgeois and peasant subjects. Simons continued:

Mutual scene-setting elements include curtains, lutes, heavy tapestries or vegetal matter languidly falling over a table's edge, books, scales, glasses, candles, a vase of flowers, curling fruit peel, black and white tiled floors and pictures on the background walls. Perspective relies on receding floor lines or space is compressed near the viewer and the overall impression is a super-realistic one.

The act of viewing these images was necessarily one of semiotic decoding, or as Simons put it, "spot the reference".

Zahalka played a complex game in Resemblance that is echoed in Open House. Her conjunction of photography and seventeenth-century Dutch genre painting within a conception of 'super-realism' served not to re-iterate a belief in the mimetic 'accuracy' of the latter tradition, but rather to emphasise the condition of each (photography and painting) as deeply coded modes of representation, utterly dependent upon the acceptance of symbolic structures for their possible picturing of real social conditions or individual experience. Some of these images pictured reproductions of the paintings they referenced in the background, compounding this relationship between photograph and source material. The Resemblance images also featured ciphers of modern life: contemporary clothing, watches, an electric sewing machine, a walkman and so on. The question is, to what effect? Did the images seek to construct complex conceptions of individual identity formed within a knowing interplay between contemporary life and historical convention? Or did they simply reduce all pictured elements (and conventions of picturing) to one de-historicised, amorphous mass of contemporary visual resource material? Is this the final, numbing effect of an unprecedented access to the visual form of the past offered via photographic and electronic imaging technologies? Simons would appear to think so, claiming that so far as the Resemblance work was concerned: "The past only exists in the present..." For Simons, Zahalka's

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32 ibid.

33 ibid., 83
photographs engaged in ongoing processes of displacement and distancing: distancing of actual conditions of past from those of present; distancing of subjects from the social conditions in which their identity may truly be formed; and distancing of subjects from viewers. Photography was a process of alienation, and Simons' following comments act as appropriate note of caution to any analysis of the later Open House photographs.

[Other] conventions are also displaced, especially by the confusion of genre with still-life with portraiture. The sitter and the objects have equal weight or weightlessness, their identities each reduced to detached objects for the camera. The initial sense of semblance and portraiture is instilled because we expect a consonance between persons, attributes and main titles. But these expectations are denied when some of the subtitles are read, and especially when the faces remain anonymous and remote. We are given no further access to any knowledge of personality...the photographs do no arouse a desire to know individual character.

The figures reveal no anxiety or spontaneity before our inspecting gaze. Their attributes and surrounds connotes no inner depths. Staged poses and sets are impassive, prepared performances, not open displays of self-good or personal environments. Identity, the supposed motive and function of portraiture, is here foregrounded as a construction but not fulfilled as an obligation. Identity is displaced, out of time and place. We see masks, not faces; models, not sitters; stages, not private spaces. The unnaturalness of portraiture and photography are stressed.\textsuperscript{34}

There are, of course, some key differences in the Open House series: the works are titled not with typological descriptions of their subjects but with a specific time; the images do depict the personal environments of the subjects; and they are not overtly modelled upon specific pre-existing images. However similar observations to those of Simons do hold. They offer no access to subject personality, no sense of a desire to know the subjects. Identity is again depicted only as the intermeshing of accumulated visual signifiers. The sitters have become masked, nameless models, and their private spaces photographic stages.

Furthermore the Open House photographs openly reference both Resemblance and the source conventions of that earlier series (seventeenth-century Dutch genre painting).\textsuperscript{35}

Bowls of fruit and other forms of domestic still-life feature in almost all the images. Red is a dominant colour in almost all the works, imbuing the images with a rich, fecund sensibility.

\textsuperscript{34} ibid., 86

\textsuperscript{35} Zahalka's own The Dutch Painter (1987) from the Resemblance series hangs on the wall of Wednesday, 8.40pm, ensuring that the new image is read as another of the artist's heavily coded tableau constructions (see Illus. 3.15). Although this is also the only clear sign throughout the whole series of a particular, long-standing relationship between subjects and photographer.
even when an apparently cool, minimal environment such as that in *Sunday, 11.08am* is depicted. Drapes and curtains are common. As with many of the *Resemblance* images the photographic space is generally shallow and compressed. In some instances two figures occupy the same small space, thus giving the impression of being crowded by the environment (see *Saturday, 2.48pm*, for example). The only glimpses of exterior space are through windows where the sky is generally depicted as a flat screen of colour little different from an interior surface. In *Saturday, 2.48pm* this collapse of exteriority into interiority is further emphasised by the geometric pattern of roofing tiles visible through the back window.

In this instance the material exterior form is again pictured in such a way as to visually correspond to patterned interior surfaces such as the woman’s shirt or even the modular forms of the kitchen cupboard doors. Right throughout this body of work patterned surfaces—gridded kitchen linoleum tiles, checked curtains and tablecloths, rugs, carpets, floorboards and even a wooden trellis—as well as groupings of objects depicted as arrangements of modular forms, serve to organise the pictorial surface of the images.

This surface emphasis is consolidated by the lack of perspectival recession. Walls and even windows that open only onto further screens of colour and pattern compress the visual spaces. Any sense of spatial complexity is rendered through an apparent layering of two or more spatial planes occupied by different figures. These tend to operate like the interchangeable screens of stage set design – they stack one behind another but will little architecture of transition between them and no sense of connection between figures occupying different areas.36 A male figure is illuminated sitting reading in the back of *Monday, 11.48pm* (Illus. 3.15) (this is echoed in one of two versions of *Wednesday, 8.40pm*).37 A linking carpet creates some transition between planes, but the reading figure is otherwise entirely disconnected from those in the foreground of the image. He is lit up almost as an independent picture in the background of the main image. Other elements stress this picture within a picture construction. Heavy drapes to either side along with some form of rolled-up curtaining along the top foreground of *Monday, 11.48pm* ensure the space

36 There is clearly some affinity here with the blending of bold, recognisable visual elements and motifs with forms of compositional layering found in early Pop art – in the early work of Richard Hamilton for example, or even that of Robert Rauschenberg.

37 In contrast to the work shown at Anna Schwartz Gallery in Melbourne in 1995, the room glimpsed to the left background of of the image takes up less of pictorial space in the version of *Wednesday, 8.40pm* shown at Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery in Sydney the same year and does not feature any figure.
of the photograph is read as a stage set – the space of a fiction. The mirror on the back of an open cupboard or wardrobe adds another layering of the self-reflexive fracturing of the one image into component images. Perhaps most striking in this regard, however, is a figure glimpsed in profile through an open hatchway into the kitchen behind the seated foreground figure in Saturday, 9.15pm. Framed by a white lintel, this takes on the optical appearance of a picture on the wall within the overall photograph, rather than as a point of view and recession through the pictured space. The background figure appears as a pictured presence within the experience of the foreground figure.36

To state that these images are resolutely visual may appear tautological. However the point here is that as images they do not simply provide visual manifestation of worlds experienced, perceived or imagined. Rather, they picture a world fundamentally conditioned and organised by the structures of visuality. They picture worlds of domestic intimacy as little other than worlds of public pictorial convention. One such convention can be found in the slightly saccharine pretended familiarity of the celebrity ‘open house’ magazine photospread where carefully art-directed interiors both over signify and reveal absolutely nothing of their owners’ actual characters. In Open House, conceptions of the world as visceral and the world as image or picture have fundamentally fused. These works picture a fundamental colonisation of individual subjectivity by the condition of spectacle. But do they merely partake in and reiterate the effects of that colonisation?

The “equal weightlessness” that Simons ascribes to all elements within the Resemblance images is even more apt with regard to Open House. The static, on occasion mannered appearance of the figures gives emphasis to their fundamentally pictorial quality. This lack of materiality is then compounded by the lightbox format of the actual works (as distinct from their reproduction in magazines, catalogues and as illustrations here). The incandescent fluorescent light serves to exaggerate the insubstantiality of the figures. The internal light source acts to visually fuse figures with environment. But whereas the following chapter claims that this functions to assert the presence of these figures within a public

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36 Such a device of a pictured presence within the field of the picture is familiar within the history of art, often utilised to ‘double’ the subject and thus create a sense of its formation within networks of looking, and/or to presence the embodied gaze of the artist (as surrogate viewer). Two particularly famous examples are Jan Van Eyck’s Arnolfini Wedding Portrait (1434) and Diego Velázquez’s Las Meninas (1656).
sphere in Brenda L. Croft's Conference Call images, in the case of Open House it suggests the indistinguishability of subjectivity from significatory visual clutter. As Martyn Jolly writes:

The lighting is arranged to evenly illuminate every surface, every nook and cranny of the rooms, so that the sitters almost become extensions of their furniture, physically coextensive with their possessions...But in contrast to classical paintings, these lightboxes proffer no sumptuous paint for the essence of things to take hold, no ineffable expressiveness to be caught in a few enigmatic brushstrokes and presented for our endless curiosity.\(^\text{39}\)

in short, they offer no presence.

However, before damning the work with such criticism some closer consideration should be given to the structures of visuality deployed here and their relation to other modes of apprehension in contemporary culture.

As I have already noted, the domestic environments of the Open House images function as stage sets. The viewer occupies a space beyond what is termed the invisible 'fourth wall' in traditional theatrical parlance. Bernice Murphy's structural definition of the 'tableau' photograph is clearly appropriate here. The tableau photograph, she claims, "delivers its contents from within a common space, oriented towards a frontal plane and the anticipated viewpoint of a stationary, en-face spectator."\(^\text{40}\) This is also, as Jolly notes, the structural form of the television sitcom, a genre Zahalka herself has mentioned with reference to her own work. Jolly suggests that Zahalka's images might in fact reflect a contemporary desire to be represented—to present a public presence—on the terms of these immensely popular modes of quasi-public discourse. He writes that,

such personality/character hybrids who live out their lives in three-walled rooms, repeating the same hyperdomestic patterns under the shadowless, public glare of TV lights, could be the result of today's dispersed, atomised populations demanding that they themselves be portrayed, just like the alienated masses of modernity, and the medieval patrons before them.\(^\text{41}\)

\(^\text{39}\) Jolly, 'Anne Zahalka: Spurs of the Moment', 65. "The lighting" here refers to lighting of the scene to be photographed, not the illuminated lightbox.

\(^\text{40}\) Bernice Murphy, 'Contemporary Photographic Art from Australia', in Zeitgenössische Fotokunst Aus Australien (exh. cat.) (Heidelberg: Edition Braus, 2000) 176

\(^\text{41}\) Jolly, 'Anne Zahalka: Spurs of the Moment', 65
However, as Jolly also notes, Zahalka's images do not concern themselves with the representation of "particular social habits" which remain at the core of the sitcom genre.\textsuperscript{42} They are not concerned with the observation of individual, familial and social alienation in action. Rather, they function to picture the foundational conditions of that alienation. Furthermore, they manifest and reproduce that condition in their very structure. As Jolly notes, there is no "psychological or phenomenological edge" to these images that may rupture this apparently self-perpetuating bind.\textsuperscript{43} Or as Simons noted with regard to Resemblance, "...she [Zahalka] is an arranger of furnishings not a spinner of tales."\textsuperscript{44} So far as Jolly is concerned, "Zahalka's images are assembled with the imperative to leave nothing to chance, to leave behind no potentially disruptive visual excess or residue. All her photographs are resolutely expository."\textsuperscript{45}

This final quality noted by Jolly may, however, also be thought of as a form of the insistent visuality discussed in both the Introduction and Chapter 2 of this study. This may in turn indicate a certain form of critical distancing structured into these images. For they are too meticulous in construction, too artificially stilted in terms of narrative scenario, too obviously lacking in humane subjectivity to operate as anything other than a parodic exaggeration of and thus subversive reflection back upon a complicit capitulation of individual self-consciousness to a culture ruled by appearance. This is apparent in the almost absurd degree to which the pictured figures refuse to acknowledge either each other within the frame of the image or the over-determining presence of the camera. The fundamental disconnection of subjects within their own domestic spaces produces a sense of unreality that sets the photographic form against the very assumptions of candid portrayal upon which its portrait traditions are based.\textsuperscript{46} The overt pretence of the images may lead, in fact, to some recognition of a cultural over-investment in visibility and appearance within the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{42} ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{43} ibid., 64
\item \textsuperscript{44} Simons, 'Anne Zahalka: Resemblance and Displacement', 86-87
\item \textsuperscript{45} Jolly, 'Anne Zahalka: Spurs of the Moment', 64
\item \textsuperscript{46} This denial of the photograph's supposed candid quality marks the overt public self-consciousness pictured here very different from that associated with the more recent vogue for 'reality' television. There it is the very association of candid portrayal that is heightened and manipulated in order to in fact entrench and celebrate the social objectification of the individual and relations between individuals that goes hand in hand with spectacle culture.
\end{itemize}
milieu that the images purport to represent. Jolly is right in suggesting that Zahalka's images picture the manner in which individuals may be determined by a heightened sense of their "public self-consciousness, even in private." That is, Zahalka pictures the manner in which individuals arrange themselves according to precepts of public visibility, but does so in exaggeration. These figures do not invite their own objectification by a public gaze, they are nothing more than the pictorial productions of that gaze. They are the empty vessels of sitcom or soap opera characters with the sound turned down. These are homes presented not for but as pages from a lifestyle magazine. Thus they are homes transformed by the pictorial precision of the camera. These are scenes that could not exist outside of the camera's purview. They are forms of pastiche upon the already contrived pictorial convention of the 'open house' image.

But exaggerated pretence alone may not be a sufficient basis upon which to claim a critical, or at least sceptical relation to spectacle culture. Two further elements are important here, both of which exist in an abrasive relation to the exaggerated pretence of the tableau structure. The first of these is the purported temporal specificity of the images. The obviously posed, almost frozen quality of the figures within each work creates an impression of pictured experience existing out of time. This again suggests a fundamental dislocation of (domestic) world as image from any actual experience of the domestic sphere. It is part of the basic artificiality of the images. And yet Zahalka offsets this reading with very specific temporal references. Clocks appear in a number of the images, along with magazines and newspapers. Although they are generally impossible to read for confirmation of the time of the image, their very presence signifies a specific temporal context. The actual titles of the images, however, most allude to this specificity. Yet rarely do these specific times (without dates) acting as titles add meaning or resonance to the pictured forms of the image. For the domestic spaces are pictured with no apparent relation to the business and schedules of the world at large. Figures simply occupy pictorial space as if displaced from time and society. They also appear quite deliberately posed in artificial contradistinction to the messy reality of their likely daily experience. Thus the temporal appellations are both precise and entirely arbitrary; these images actually pursue a disconnection from specific experiences of temporality, both individuated and communal.

47 Jolly, 'Anne Zahalka: Spurs of the Moment', 64
The second key point to be made here revolves around apparent signs of individual character and activity. My references thus far to the overt pretence of the works have been directed specifically at the staged artificiality of the figures and the manner in which they are pictorially fused with their environments. It is not, however, intended to deny the semiotic efficacy of that environment. The style of furnishings and clusters of objects as well as images within images do encourage some piecing together of subject identity within the images. Particular signs of individual taste and activity thicken this. It may be apparent in the choice of clothes in some instances, although there always remains some hint of these having been at least in part determined by the photographer. Photographs on mantelpieces, however, cannot be deciphered so readily by a viewer with no knowledge of the sitter. They cannot be accommodated within a generic schema. They assert individuality. Snapshots and postcards stuck all over a fridge can operate similarly, both conveying a general sense of social milieu and taste as well as visualising sets of personal relationships that necessarily remain beyond the comprehension of the viewer. Even the act of reading suggests something of this — not necessarily a cipher of social disconnection but an evocation of individual intelligence and imagination at work beyond the reach of the photographic. A similar sense is conveyed by the ream of paper hanging from the computer printer in Monday, 11.48pm. Some act of individual agency is signified here — a consciousness given expression. It can be gestured towards within the image, but not encompassed.

All these oblique references to the particularity of individual subjectivity serve to counterpoint the art-directed unreality of the images’ dominant forms. They cast the artificiality of these images into stark relief, thus simultaneously undercutting the hegemonic cultural status of the visual forms that they mimic. Individuals, couples and family groups may be subject to the dominating presence and conditions of spectacle culture in their everyday lives. They may even begin to structure their senses of selfhood (and lifestyle) to the precepts of perpetual public display — to a paradigm in which the self is fundamentally structured in terms of visual objectification. But Zahalka’s Open House images indicate just how artificial and dislocating a conception of domestic environment based absolutely on media images, for example, remains. For all their weightlessness, the figures pictured here in static, emotionally detached tableau arrangements are also implicit sites of substantive
experiences, subjectivities and relationships. It is just that, in contrast to the group portraits by Croft discussed in the following chapter, these qualities have been excluded from the images as determining presences.

**Conclusion**

I have examined the relationship of selected works by Anne Zahalka to spectacle culture, and to representational conventions within both the history and current trajectories of art internationally. The manner in which Zahalka pictures relationships between subjects and signifying, even determining environments has provided a key thread to this discussion, moving from the narrative staging of fictionalised relationships between figures and the urban environment in *Fortresses and Frontiers*, through the more forensic pictoriality of mass groupings of subjects at leisure in her most recent *Leisureland* series of work, to her concentration upon 'real' individuals within 'real' but photogenically organised private spaces in *Open House*.

Whereas each of the *Fortresses and Frontiers* works discussed is a stilted version of dominant international image conventions and a complete capitulation to the precepts of social alienation that it purports to engage critically with, these same relationships are more dynamic (and unstable) across *Leisureland*. The *Open House* works, however, are the most complex and engaging in these regards. The hyper-attenuated artificiality of these images stages some reflective distance upon the cultural conditions underlying the visual objectification that they enact. Yet, whilst an apprehension of social milieu and tangential signs of individual agency are pictured, there is little to suggest specificity of historical circumstance or place within the images. Thus it might be argued that their core relationship is not with conditions and experience of a particular culture or society, but with a conception of an 'international' condition of dominant spectacle culture, not least of all as it pervades and determines key modes of contemporary art practice. If the form of the works exemplify an implicitly conservative museum art of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, then the representational structures and lightbox forms of the works also act to ossify the figures and their environments as museum-like displays. The *Open House* lightboxes
become display cases for stilted, not quite life-like arrangements of specimens representing a social milieu.

The following chapter examines how the very different work of Brenda L. Croft seeks to subvert or refute this condition, again explicitly concentrating upon the relationship of images (and pictured subjects) to spectacle culture and representational history.
CHAPTER 4
Indigenous Self-Representation: Brenda L. Croft

The two bodies of work by Brenda L. Croft examined in this chapter provide important comparisons to the work of Anne Zahalka discussed in the previous chapter. Like Zahalka’s Fortresses and Frontiers (1993) works, Croft’s four Conference Call (1992) works are large colour lightbox photographs picturing figures staged within the urban Sydney environment, in one instance again with the city skyline acting as a backdrop. The apparently intimate and familiar sense of Croft’s The Big Deal is Black (1993) series of twenty-three colour portraits depicting Indigenous woman and children within their Sydney homes sits in contrast to the formality of Zahalka’s Open House (1995) works. In both instances the key point of comparison is that, unlike Zahalka’s work, Croft’s images identify and set out to give presence to the psychological substance and social experience of individuals. To a certain extent then, this impulse pitches the images against the cultural hegemony of spectacle culture. Nevertheless, in Conference Call in particular, the images exist within the cultural and representational framework of spectacle culture. Thus my task here is to ask whether and to trace how, and with what success Croft’s work creates a space in which to presence and convey something of the specific experiences and conditions of its subjects within a hegemonic and homogenising visual culture.

I give some emphasis to the apparent imperative within Croft’s work to presence a sense of embodied subjectivity resonating with Indigenous experience. However, I take care to avoid an inference of essentialism in either Croft’s treatment of her subjects or in this critique. I focus critical attention upon how this form of presencing draws on close relationships between the subjects and structures of Croft’s images and key representational histories. Croft’s images, for example, respond to colonial photographic representations of Aboriginal subjects. They also emerge from modes of politically engaged social documentary practices of the 1970s and 1980s that sought to reveal and analyse the social conditions and experiences of marginalised sectors of the community. Such practices were often characterised by close collaborative relationships between photographer and subjects, or involved forms of self-representation on the part of the subjects, whether informally or as part of some form of community arts undertaking. Croft’s work, in particular
The Big Deal is Black, also bears close working relation to 'insider' documentary practice that also developed internationally and in Australia through the 1970s within which the photographer sought to picture and presence their own community with a wider audience in mind.\footnote{This is at odds with the classic social documentary stereotype of the photographer looking in upon a cultural milieu or community, to which they do not belong, from outside.} Finally, the associations of Croft's The Big Deal is Black work with the intimate forms of family portraits and albums are important to its spectatorial encounter. I discuss this with extended reference to photography's relation to acts of personal record and its mnemonic functions.

Before embarking on a discussion of Croft's Conference Call images, some background material regarding the artist is pertinent.\footnote{Such biographical outlines are not provided in the other chapters as this form of material generally does not contribute significantly to an understanding of the respective works within the spectatorial encounter, nor of its wider-reaching relationships to and functions within contemporary culture. Croft is an exception in this regard. Both her personal history and the broader conditions surrounding her upbringing and her own working life as an Indigenous curator and writer visibly inform the structure and content of her artistic practice.}

Croft is a member of the Gurindji people of northern Australia. Her father was removed from his mother and community as a young boy and raised in an Aboriginal Boys Home outside Alice Springs before attending an Anglican boarding school in Queensland. Croft's mother is of European heritage. Croft herself grew up in Perth and Northern New South Wales before attending high school in Canberra where her father worked for the Department of Aboriginal Affairs. She moved to Sydney during the 1980s where she worked in Aboriginal media, studied photography and began to document urban Aboriginal communities and burgeoning Aboriginal rights activities. Croft is one of a number of urban Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists who rose to prominence during the late 1980s and early 1990s. She has also developed a career as a curator and writer. She was a founding member and General Manager (1990-96) of Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative in Sydney. She co-curated the exhibition Fluent, the Australian contribution to the 1997 Venice Biennale and curated Beyond the Pale, the 2000 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art at the Art Gallery of South Australia. Previously Curator of Indigenous Art at the Art Gallery of Western Australia she is presently Curator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art at the National Gallery of Australia.
These biographical details are not incidental to a developed understanding of Croft's photographic work. She has, for example, utilised old family photographs within digital image-text montages in much of her work from the mid 1990s through to the present day as a means to access and explore both her own historical experiences as well as those of her parents. The complex dynamics of encounter underpinning her photography of Aboriginal subjects in street settings and in particular during public gatherings and protests during the latter half of the 1980s informed her later more formal studio and portrait work. The media-based context of her early activity gave rise to an imperative towards narrative and language that also informed her later photographic practice. This might be characterised as a political imperative to access, record and give public presence to Indigenous people and their experiences. Details of Croft's other professional activity also suggest her substantial knowledge regarding both the history of representation of Indigenous peoples through the colonial period, as well as of their own cultural productions. These, along with a close engagement with issues regarding representation both by and of Indigenous peoples within contemporary cultural and specifically visual arts frameworks not only inform but in part drive her own artistic practice.

Conference Call: Real Subjects, Real Places

Each of Brenda L. Croft's four Conference Call photographs is dominated by one or two almost life-size Aboriginal figures standing within urban environments, looking directly at the

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3 This recent work is not under review here. See instead Lisa Bryne et al eds, Brenda L. Croft & Destiny Deacon: In My Father's House/Postcards from Mummy (exh. cat.) (Sydney: Australian Centre for Photography, 1999); Juliana Engberg, Signs of Life: Melbourne International Biennial 1999 (exh. cat.) (Melbourne: City of Melbourne, 1999); and Nicola Teffer and Wayne Tunnicliffe eds, Australian Perspecta '98: Living Here Now - Art and Politics (exh. cat.) (Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1999)

4 This holds true even in her masquerade studio body of work, Strange Fruit (1994). The guises and personas chosen by the Indigenous women posing here for Croft reveal much about their characters and desires. See Hetti Perkins, 'Strange Fruit: The Photographic Art of Brenda L. Croft', Art AsiaPacific 3/1 (1996) 90-93

5 Writing on nineteenth-century colonial photographs of Indigenous subjects, and responding in particular to the lack of even the most basic information regarding their identity, Croft has written: 'Images like these have haunted me since I was a small child and, along with a desire to remap my father's familial history (and my own), were instrumental in guiding me to utilise the tools of photography in my own work.' Brenda L. Croft, 'Laying Ghosts to Rest', in Judy Annear ed., Portraits of Oceania (exh. cat.) (Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1997) 9
camera. One depicts two greying, distinguished looking men in sports jackets standing in Prince Alfred Park near Central Station in inner-city Sydney (Illus. 4.1). They are classically framed by flanking trees with the city skyline in the distance. Another pictures a young woman in jeans and khaki jacket standing at the edge of a main road (Illus. 4.2). The road dips and then leads away uphill over the woman's left shoulder towards a pair of identical concrete-block office buildings, each bearing the same dominant orange lettering at the top: 'TNT'. Over the woman's right shoulder is a patch of wasteland, then an old brick factory and chimney. In the third, two young men dressed in casual sports gear stand at the top of a street of run-down looking terrace houses that drops away behind them (Illus. 4.3). In the fourth, a young man and woman stand in the entranceway of an old house, wearing leather and denim jackets respectively (Illus. 4.4). All four of these photographs were taken in Redfern, an inner-city suburb of Sydney that is site of one of Australia's oldest and largest urban Aboriginal communities. At the physical heart of this community lies 'the Block' — a residential area of Redfern developed in the early 1970s and managed as an Aboriginal Housing Co-operative project. 'The Block' has become synonymous in the popular press with issues of economic deprivation, alcohol and drug abuse, and crime.⁶

Two key concerns underpinning Croft's images are immediately clear. First, these works present images of real people in obvious relation to the real sites and environments in which they live, work, or have some community association. The images presence individuals who are part of inner city Sydney's Aboriginal community, and through their presence challenge generalised negative (media-driven) public stereotypes of that community. The two older men are the artist's own father (now deceased) and Mervyn Bishop, the latter generally considered to be the first professional Aboriginal photographer. The young woman standing alone is Aboriginal rights activist Sue Ingram. She wears a Provisional Aboriginal Government badge on her jacket. The young couple are Mathew Cook (now deceased) and Bonny Briggs. They stand in front of the Aboriginal Community Health Services office from which they operated as local AIDS workers. The two men standing at the top of Everleigh Street are locals Shane Phillips and Noel Collett. They wear the jerseys of the local Aboriginal rugby league team, the Redfern All Blacks.

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⁶ The two young men in the last of the noted images stand at the top of Everleigh St, the main street running through 'the Block'.
Second, the images act as record of the physical environment of Redfern. The large-scale colour lightbox presentation grants forceful visual presence to an environment that over the past decade in particular has been subject to substantial redevelopment both paralleling and compounding economic and social pressure on its traditional residential communities. For example, the skating rink in the far right background of the Prince Alfred Park image has since been demolished. The factory behind Sue Ingram has been replaced by apartment blocks, and the empty block of land in front of the 'TNT Towers—themselves major Redfern 'icons'—has also been occupied in recent years by two new apartment blocks, indicating the move of an urban professional class into Redfern.

These photographs were initially produced as part of a collaboration with African-American conceptual artist Adrian Piper facilitated by Anthony Bond, who as curator had already invited Piper to exhibit in The Boundary Rider, the 5th Biennale of Sydney. As Croft recalls, Piper was interested in exploring relationships of displacement between language and image at a nexus point between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Croft responded with a proposal to concentrate upon a Sydney setting and community in particular, rather than attempt to convey something of a generalised Australia-wide perspective. A fax dialogue developed between the two artists (who had not at this stage met). These faxes formed part of the final installation.

As the core author of the overall work, Piper largely determined this installation, including, crucially, the final lightbox form of the images that lined the four walls of the small gallery space. In the centre of the space were four leather office armchairs arranged back-to-back, each facing one image. Glass tables sat next to each chair, with a telephone, a desk lamp and a sign reading 'Please be seated and answer the telephone'. Viewers picking up the telephones could sit and listen to Pitjantjatjara language tapes sourced from the Institute for Aboriginal Development in Alice Springs. A very clear disjunction was created between the internationally legible register of the photograph and a traditional and quite specific language group indefatigably grounded within Australia (and yet absolutely 'foreign' to the vast majority of exhibition visitors, including Australians). It would be easy to

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7 Local 'legend' also has it that the 'TNT Towers' were used for surveillance of 'the Block' and nearby park. See Brenda L. Croft catalogue notes, www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/index, accessed 18 January 2002.

also claim a disjunction of sorts between urban and traditional modes of Aboriginal community suggested here, and between present and past. But an alternative and valid perspective could treat this relation as one of reciprocity and continuity between two equally significant forms of present-day Aboriginal community and presence within Australian society, and between two equally cogent modes of asserting that presence in communication forms.

Croft's four photographs were untitled within the context of the overall Conference Call installation. However, they have subsequently been exhibited as Croft's own independent work on a number of occasions, always with their subjects identified. It is therefore appropriate to consider the photographs independently. This study does so with reference to three discrete frameworks. First, nineteenth-century photographic representations of Aboriginal subjects, generally produced within the paradigms of ethnography, both professional and amateur social anthropology, and an industry that developed out of and fuelled European demand for images of 'native' or 'exotic' subjects. Second, the manner in which specific dynamics of relationship between an Indigenous photographer and Indigenous subjects may inform or be manifested within resulting images. And third, the deployment of photographic forms by corporate culture.

Colonial Photography

In 1997 the Art Gallery of New South Wales organised an exhibition entitled Portraits of Oceania that brought together and examined nineteenth-century representations of Indigenous peoples in Australia, Aotearoa/New Zealand, Fiji, Samoa and Tonga by European photographers. A substantial catalogue, including a guest essay by Brenda L. Croft ('Laying Ghosts to Rest') accompanied the exhibition. Three particular modes of photographic representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander subjects were apparent within both exhibition and catalogue.

The first is best described as an overtly ethnographic model, exemplified in the exhibition by the images made during the 1880s and 1890s by Paul Foelsche who was

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9 The full Conference Call collaboration was exhibited on one further occasion at Camerawork, London in 1994.
Inspector of Police in the Northern Territory for over thirty years. Subjects are depicted from the waist up, sitting or standing in front of neutral backdrops, generally facing and looking directly at the camera. (Some images depict subjects in profile.) A few of these have measuring rods at the side of the image revealing the quasi-scientific ethnographic impulse underpinning their production. Body markings and adornments are also visible, and the naked torsos of female subjects laid open to the viewer's gaze. Identification of the subjects is at best rudimentary.\(^\text{10}\) As Carol Cooper and Alana Harris suggest, this accumulative documentation of a supposedly doomed race has a dehumanising effect. "However", they continue, "without the measuring rod, and despite the incredible starkness of these portraits, the majority retain an inner strength and beauty that is quite profound."\(^\text{11}\) Whilst slightly romantic in sentiment, this comment is indicative of recent responses from within Indigenous communities to such images as links to ancestors or aids to historical memory and record. The material residue of a colonial process is thus reappropriated by the subjects of that process in order to resist its effects and assert continued cultural presence. Catherine De Lorenzo confirms this when she states that "ethnographic encodings of remnants of a dying race have been valued by some communities not, of course, for their anthropometric objectifications, but because they provide links in a saga of resistance and survival."\(^\text{12}\)

The second model is the studio tableau image, represented in *Portraits of Oceania* by the work of John William Lindt. Here generally unidentified Aboriginal subjects are posed

\(^{10}\) Another register of such apparently ethnographic images were those more obviously produced for commercial reproduction as postcards. This is evident in the work of Henry King and Charles Kerry included in the exhibition. Their subjects are generally head and chest views of strongly built men, sometimes supplemented by artefact props such as shields and weapons, or adorned with headaddresses in order to fulfill the criteria of the European stereotype of savage warrior. See Carol Cooper and Alana Harris, 'Dignity or Degradation: Aboriginal portraits from nineteenth century Australia', in Annear ed., *Portraits of Oceania*, 18.

\(^{11}\) ibid., 20. The essay ends with a brief account of Alana Harris' particular response to the general field of nineteenth-century photography of Indigenous peoples from her perspective as a Wiradjuri woman. "She [Alana] particularly empathises with the times which show Wiradjuri men as proud dignified warriors, not dressed in mission clothes or standing in subservient positions. Alana thinks that the direct eye contact with the photographer gives the portraits an identity as real people not just objects of anthropological interest. Despite the fact that there are some images which have negative aspects, for example the staged photographs showing aggression and fear, she believes that the nineteenth century images strongly support the notion of a proud people who have continued with dignity and a strong sense of identity and survival." 20.

\(^{12}\) Catherine De Lorenzo, 'Delayed Exposure: Contemporary Aboriginal Photography', *Art and Australia* 31/1 (1993) 58
amongst settings of native grasses, bushes and trees brought into the photographer's studio, often alongside bark shelter constructions and always in front of painted landscape backdrops. The images sometimes present single figures, on other occasions pairs or family groupings (including young children). They are clothed either in rudimentary European garb—rolled-up trousers or skirts—or simply with animal skins around or over their waists. They generally hold or are surrounded by props acting as colonial ciphers of 'native' identity: baskets, tools, animal skins, spears and boomerangs, and in one notable example a rifle held by the sole figure in the image. Cooper and Harris describe these images as attempts to recreate the sense of Aboriginal camps. They furthermore claim that during the 1870s, when the ten such photographs presented in Portraits of Oceania were made, they were treated by urban Europeans as realist in their depiction of the conditions and appearance of tribal Aborigines.\(^1\)

Finally, there are photographs such as those by Fred Kruger dating from between 1866 and 1887 that picture groups of Aboriginal subjects in the actual environments in which they lived and worked. Kruger's images document the changing circumstances of Aborigines' lives (in this case within Victoria), particularly their adaptation to European settlement. For example, one image depicts a group in front of a traditional mia-mia shelter, another a group in front of a more apparently European-influenced hut construction with fencing in the background. Other images depict groups of Aborigines playing cricket, fishing and resting on a riverbank running through a Mission Station, or working in a hops garden. These are generally large group scenes, again supplemented with very little, if any information regarding individual subjects, but as Croft herself comments, "one senses a true representation of community, of people determined, by their very numbers, irrespective of their colonial attire, or status as fieldworkers, to signal their intent to incorporate and withstand whatever changes the coming decades herald."\(^2\)

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\(^{1}\) See Cooper and Harris, 'Dignity or Degradation', 18. The structure and content of such images is repeated throughout the history of picturing Indigenous communities in Australia, as is evidenced in the exhibition and book After the Tent Embassy: Images of Aboriginal History in Black and White Photographs where the connections are made explicit through inclusion of nineteenth-century images, most particularly those by Charles Kerry of groups posed before their camp sites alongside similar mid to late twentieth-century images by a range of photographers. See Marcia Langton, Marcia, After the Tent Embassy: Images of Aboriginal History in Black and White Photographs (Sydney: Valadon, 1983)

\(^{2}\) Croft, 'Laying Ghosts to Rest', 13
Subject and Place

This "true representation of community" characterises an important imperative of Brenda L. Croft's own work during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Like Kruger, Croft locates her Conference Call subjects within real yet scenographic environments. These are semiotically laden visual environments that operate akin to Lindt's studio tableau settings in constructing and conveying subject identity via accumulations of references to lifestyle, character and experience. (In this sense they also function in a similar way to Anne Zahalka's Open House images.) Mountain vistas, rocky outcrops and views across lakes dominate in Lindt's works.

The city as it encloses the specific community of Redfern is the signifying environment of Croft's images. But its presence is figured differently in each photograph. In the image of Mervyn Bishop and Joseph Croft the downtown skyline is depicted as a hovering backdrop, physically distanced from the two subjects. Sue Ingram is depicted standing at the literal edge of an area of an area of once industrial land now scarred and awaiting 'renewal'. Shane Phillips and Noel Collett stand at the head of a run-down residential street, suggesting a more immediate sense of domesticity and community. Finally Mathew Cook and Bonny Briggs stand immediately outside an individual Redfern dwelling/office.

The four photographs are not intended for presentation in any particular sequence, however as these descriptions suggest a movement into a specific Redfern environment does take place across the images. Redfern itself is located in relation to the larger city environment, and then increasingly pictured in terms of community and human inter-relation rather than cartographical identification. As is the case in Lindt's photographs, the subjects of these images accrue signs of subjectivity and identity from these settings. But unlike Lindt's obviously constructed, artificial settings, Croft's environments are clearly the real environments in which her subjects live and/or work. The absolute centrality of land to Aboriginal identity is stripped away in most nineteenth-century photographic images of Indigenous peoples in Australia. A different form of this relationship, drawing upon traditional rights and bonds to country but adapted to and developed within an urban environment is reasserted by Croft's images. Place is crucial here. The images picture an enduring relationship of belonging between the subjects and their environment. Many of these Indigenous subjects or their ancestors may have moved from traditional tribal areas to
the city. They may be challenged by aspects of urban change, or be distanced from the
government and political decision-making processes 'downtown' that directly impact upon their
immediate environment. Nevertheless, the determined manner in which they stand their
footprint in the local parks, streets and before their homes leaves little doubt as to the
intensity and significance of the bond they claim to this location. These four photographs
are rejoinders of sorts to both those nineteenth-century images that attempt to dislocate
subject from place, and thus strip away a core element of Aboriginal experience and
identity, as well as to a Western misconception that such relationships to land or place no
longer apply within urban settings.

Croft is deeply concerned with just this issue of relation between subject and place. She opens her 'Laying Ghosts to Rest' essay as follows: "If context is all important, it is
usually out of reach. Place is an integral part of these images even when there is no
landscape evident, even when there is 'no there there', since many of the locations are
unrecorded, lost to us." Croft makes two further observations regarding the field of
nineteenth-century photography of Indigenous subjects in this essay that warrant mention
with regard to her own work. The first concerns the lack of identification of the people within
images. Without names little of their identity is maintained (within the photograph) and
conveyed. They become, in Croft's evocative phrase, "like ghosts deprived of rest." Then
there is her ascription of resistance to the colonial viewer on the part of one of three figures
in the earliest known photograph of Aborigines, a daguerreotype taken by Douglas T.
Kilburn in Victoria in 1847. She writes:

The younger man, with his equally direct gaze at the viewer and the photographer,
appears greatly amused by the whole scenario, exuding a confidence that belies the
impending fate of thousands of his compatriots. Their gaze subverts the officially
sanctioned opinion that these people were members of a race, of many nations, on
the verge of extinction. The joke is on whom? This same gaze, the same stance, the
same resistance is echoed in images of Indigenous people from every place and of
every time. The collective pain, anger, resignation, tired patience, sense of loss and
displacement is reflected in contemporary 'shots' of angry, urban Indigenous people
and people of colour in their determination to keep on resisting.

15 Croft, 'Laying Ghosts to Rest', 8
16 ibid., 9
17 ibid., 13-14
Croft makes an explicit connection across time in the response of Indigenous people to the photographic eye of the coloniser. Whilst the subjects in her own four Conference Call photographs adopt neutral, even inscrutable expressions these themselves can equally be interpreted as affirmations of both individual and collective identity, as well as undemonstrative modes of resistance to any sense of consumption by a colonising gaze. This sense of resistance is strongest in the image of Sue Ingram. Just like acts of naming, this picturing of real presence demands acknowledgment on the part of the viewer that these are real people not easily elided ciphers of an invisible culture. Croft's figures are resolutely more than spectral presences.16

But as suggested by De Lorenzo, this reading can be further extended. Croft's figures do not simply resist the gaze of the Western viewer; they appropriate and return it in their apparently neutral or 'objective' expressions. Indeed, De Lorenzo claimed that it was the majority white audience visiting the Conference Call installation who should have felt observed.19 Significantly, in Conference Call Croft's images were not illuminated or made visible by outside light sources, they themselves illuminated the room. In symbolic terms the gaze of the figures illuminated the audience. In material form, particularly within this specific installation (devised, it must be remembered, largely by Adrian Piper), Croft's images directly confronted the traditional relational terms of viewing subject and viewed object.

16 Interesting comparisons may be made here to the work of two other Indigenous Australian photo- artists: Leah King-Smith and Darren Swies. In her Patterns of Connection series of colour photographs (1990/1991) King-Smith superimposed unidentified nineteenth-century photographic portraits of Aboriginal subjects in Western dress (sourced from the La Trobe picture collection in the State Library of Victoria) as ghostly presences against or within strange dreamlike images of the Australian bush depicted in a fisheye-lens optical format. As Anne Marsh claims, these images "tap into a kind of cultural imaginary and use the mythology of photography's syntax... to conjure the ineffable." Marsh describes the figures as "ancestral ghosts", seeming to "drift through the landscape as a seamless version of nineteenth-century spirit photography." Anne Marsh, 'Leah King-Smith and the Nineteenth-century Archive', History of Photography 23/2 (1999), 117. See also Clare Williamson, 'Patterns of Connection: Leah King-Smith's Subject', in Blair French ed., Photo Files: An Australian Photography Reader (Sydney: Power Publications and Australian Centre for Photography, 1999) 219-24. (First published, Photofile 41, 1954.) In a number of large-scale colour photographs made in 1998 Swies superimposed ghostlike images of himself formally dressed and standing rigidly before or within otherwise abandoned public spaces in Adelaide photographed at night. See Teffer and Tunnicliffe eds, Australian Perspectives '99, and Brenda L. Croft ed., Beyond the Pale: Contemporary Indigenous Art (2000 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art) (exh. cat.) (Adelaide: Art Gallery of South Australia, 2000). These sets of work suggest a spectral presence of Indigenous subjects within both a colonial national consciousness and contemporary experience of the urban environment. Both artists resort to a far more metaphysical conception of Indigenous presence than apparent in Croft's work.

19 See De Lorenzo, 'Delayed Exposure', 61
This inverted relationship indicates a contemporary awareness on behalf of Indigenous peoples (and in Piper's case, peoples of colour) regarding the histories of their own representation by dominant colonial cultures. In particular it marks a consciousness of their apparent entrapment in stereotyped roles constructed within a condition of being simultaneously subject to and object of the European gaze. Such awareness informs the activity of both contemporary Indigenous photographers and Indigenous subjects within photography. Croft herself has made mention of the acute awareness within Aboriginal communities regarding issues of self-representation.\textsuperscript{20} According to Croft this became a particular issue of concern during the 1970s and 1980s as a number of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders began to make significant professional and public use of photography in the realms of media, art, political activism and community development. Debates took place around the key question of how Indigenous photographers should represent their own communities from within using a medium traditionally associated with the outside objectification of their cultural identity. The development of documentary practices by Indigenous photographers was an important step made in clear relation to the significant Indigenous Rights movement and activities of the 1970s and 1980s. As Croft has stated: "For many this was a necessary step in determining one's own place in society, of showing the relationship between the photographer and the subject, which was quite different from that between non-Aboriginal photographers and Aboriginal subjects."\textsuperscript{21} Again as Croft has noted, this did not always equate to picturing a open relationship between subject and photographer or camera: in addition to the returned gaze other forms of subject resistance to camera representation include covert disengagement and overt hostile confrontation, both of which are apparent in some of Croft's own black and white street photographs from the 1980s.\textsuperscript{22} Croft's Conference Call images not only result from but actually picture the conditions of an accord between subjects and photographer. Moreover, such an accord itself is enabled only by a historical process of photographers and communities grappling

\textsuperscript{20} Author's notes, interview with Brenda L. Croft.

\textsuperscript{21} Brenda L. Croft, 'Blak Lik Mi', \textit{Art and Australia} 31/1 (1993) 66

\textsuperscript{22} Author's notes, interview with Brenda L. Croft.
with those issues briefly noted here,\textsuperscript{23} as well as a shared understanding of how earlier ethnographic conventions operated to structure representation of Indigenous peoples.\textsuperscript{24}

Postcolonialism and Globalisation

It should be clear from the discussion to this point that Brenda L. Croft's general photographic project may be located within a postcolonial framework. This is most evident in the appropriation of or reference to aspects of colonial modes of representation within Croft's work for the clear purpose of challenging the cultural frameworks driving such conventions. In the images discussed here Croft works with Indigenous subjects in order to picture aspects of their experience. Photography is deployed in the service of presenting these people as real social subjects in a broader public arena, rather than treating them as objects within a classificatory institutional practice.

Postcolonialism may be thought of as a political and cultural framework formed by the reassertion of languages, cultural practices, laws, customs, belief systems and histories by colonised peoples both at 'home' and within their various diasporas. It is a framework emerging from, describing and further enabling their reclamation of agency over social organisation and structures; and within which larger encompassing social and political structures including that of the nation-state begin, in Tara Brabazon's words, to recognise and restore "the space and integrity of colonised people", as well as evidence "a desire to critically evaluate colonialism."\textsuperscript{25} Postcolonialism has been a core, if contested cultural framework for Australian art over the past three decades, paralleling broader social and

\textsuperscript{23} It is perhaps significant in this context that one of the images gives significant presence to the ground-breaking photographer Mervyn Bishop both within an institution such as the Art Gallery of New South Wales—his own 1991 retrospective had been facilitated by the Australian Centre for Photography in Sydney not the Art Gallery of New South Wales—and within the dynamic described here of the ostensibly subjects within the images being the ones, at least in symbolic terms, actively observing their audience. See Mervyn Bishop: Thirty Years of Photography, 1960-1990 (exh. cat.) (Sydney: Australian Centre for Photography, 1991).

\textsuperscript{24} Whilst, as De Lorenzo has claimed, "the limited visual range of the ethnographic tradition and the whiff of denigration that still lingers around it has forced most creative Koori-photographers to seek out alternative visual strategies", these works by Croft along with those by contemporaries such as Leah King-Smith certainly deploy aspects of these traditions in order to reveal and unravel the terms and effects of their constructions. De Lorenzo, 'Delayed Exposure', 59

\textsuperscript{25} Tara Brabazon, Tracking the Jack: A Retracing of the Antipodes (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2000) 47
political trajectories during this period. However, as Brabazon also warns, it can be both an inadequate and dangerous term, suggesting (wrongly) as it can "that colonial relationships and institutions have been replaced – that colonialism is over."\(^{26}\)

Postcolonialism is one recent paradigm within which political and social structures associated with Western modernity—in particular the nation-state—have been subject to significant revision. During the late 1990s 'globalisation' has also emerged as another dominant paradigm attempting to encapsulate and articulate the complex modes of interaction—financial, informational, political, cultural—between localities. According to Jill Bennett, this condition calls for new models of "globalisation theory" that pursue "analysis of multidirectional flows across national and cultural boundaries."\(^{27}\) As Bennett states, "to study cultural production in a given region no longer simply entails a focus on the local or on a single set of historical connections between places."\(^{28}\) It is debatable as to whether globalisation in part emerges out of postcolonial paradigms (as old colonial relations of political influence and trade give way to new polymorphous interconnections); simply appears subsequent to some of the key so-called postcolonial political movements; or is in fact a parallel paradigm. Such detailed chronology is not crucial to my overall study. However some brief observations regarding globalisation are pertinent to this consideration of Croft's photographs.

Globalization is both an all-encompassing paradigm, and one that may be taken to operate or impact in a variety of manners across different spheres of political, social and economic organisation and interaction, and perhaps contrarily, within different locations. No matter what the terms of reference or context, globalisation should not be treated as a simple description of intensified interaction between nation-states, or of the convergence of their political and economic interests. These may be signs of increased international interconnection, but globalisation is more usefully treated as a generative paradigm than as a descriptive identification. Furthermore, within this generative paradigm flows of information and capital tend to treat traditional political and economic boundaries as permeable at best.

\(^{26}\) ibid.

\(^{27}\) Jill Bennett, 'Editorial', Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art 3/2 (2002) 7. Later in her editorial Bennett does imply that globalization theory is emerging from advances in postcolonial theory.

\(^{28}\) ibid.
At the risk of oversimplification, two key models of such flows may be identified. The first comprises a relatively decentralised network of what cultural theorist McKenzie Wark refers to as "vectors" along which information, ideas and images flow.\(^2\) The second is based around dominant centres of both political and economic power. Similar such "vectors" here operate to trade the 'product' of a technological age in the form of both information and capital. Such 'product' not only attracts direct financial return but serves over time to reinforce the cultural and ideological as well as economic hegemony of the centres from which it is generated. Thus global "vectors" also serve to reflect the core values of the dominant centres back upon themselves, further concentrating their influence.\(^3\)

Within the first of these models, many Indigenous and minority migrant communities across the globe are able to partake in transnational forms of dialogue and to access cultural and intellectual resources in new ways that do not necessarily accord with the structures and imperatives of nation-states. Although the vast majority of the world's population do not have access to old information technologies such as the telephone, let alone new, it is inaccurate to solely figure members of such communities as powerless subjects within an all-pervasive corporate model of a global society. Clearly, the profit motive of the mode of globalisation that finds expression in the pursuit of economic and cultural power may be anathema to the cultural values of specific communities upon which it impacts. This commercial imperative is frequently allied with older expressions and conventions of political and social power, and thus from certain perspectives this form of globalisation appears to be little more than recostumed forms of imperial hegemony. Yet the structures formed within and as component elements of this globalisation may be

\(^2\) In his book *Virtual Geography: Living with Global Media Events* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994) Wark treats 'the vector' as the core structural component of a global media age. Thus it can also be used to describe the key delivery mechanisms and networks of dominant Western media outlets and major multi-national corporations. Wark also expands this model of 'the vector' or 'vectorisation' of the globe to networks of physical movement of products and bodies – actual trade routes that wrap the globe with cats-craddle complexity as well as the spread of imperial military presence. See McKenzie Wark, 'Globalization from Below: Migration, Sovereignty, Communication', www.fibreculture.lists.myspinach.org, accessed 17 January 2002

\(^3\) These centres themselves are actually harder to identify in terms of accurate definitions than perhaps generally thought. 'The USA' serves as an easy description of perhaps the most influential central nodal point within this model of globalization. But of course the concentration of power that 'the USA' here stands in for is actually a quite particular confluence of ideology, political influence and corporate wealth and ambition that excludes the vast majority of the citizens and residents of the USA, and either runs counter to or simply disregards most of their forms of social organisation and value structures.
appropriated and deployed in expressions of resistance. Indigenous communities, amongst others, may in fact utilise new global networks in order to challenge the second mode of globalisation (which itself effectively constitutes a new corporate imperialism).\(^{31}\)

This schematic discussion provides an important background to my discussion of the positions espoused by Fredric Jameson and Benjamin Buchloh in Chapter 2. For in the present age, a commodity culture of the spectacle is inseparable from the dynamics of globalisation. After all, spectacle culture involves, in part, the colonisation of vast sections of the globe by Western conceptions of the image. The transnational legibility of the photographic image as a dominant mode of representation, communication and commercial transaction is central to Guy Debord's conception of the "integrated spectacle."\(^{32}\) It is also crucial to a notion of globalisation as both an epistemological paradigm and a description of the everyday business of global activity (production, communication and movement). As I have already suggested, one possible form of resistance within the realm of artistic practice to the absolute domination of the spectacle that both Jameson and Buchloh allude to may be to insist upon the acknowledgment and manifestation of the particularity of cultural experience within clearly defined socio-historical contexts. Another may be to operate overtly from within both cognitive assumptions and mechanics of a spectacle culture. This may entail appropriation of the visual technologies, structures and representational conventions of commodity culture in order to avoid dismissal on the dominant terms of that culture in the first instance, and thus provide a foothold for alternative, questioning presences within that dominant cultural paradigm. Croft's Conference Call images evidence both strategies.

The collaboration between Croft and Adrian Piper manifested that first, generally lateral, network model of global interconnectivity outlined above.\(^{33}\) It deployed forms

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\(^{31}\) Witness the 'globally' networked phenomena of SO11, or the many localised campaigns across the globe against the hegemony of multi-nationals such as MacDonalds or Nike, or the internet activism associated with the Zapatista movement in Chiapas, Mexico. For a far more detailed analysis of the structures and operations of globalization, its accompanying theoretical models and impact on international art practice see David McNeill, 'Planet Ark: Resistance and Affirmation in the Wake of '91/11', Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art 5/2 (2002) 11-32

\(^{32}\) See Chapter 2, note 41

\(^{33}\) Some caveat may be required here regarding the generative 'authorship' of the overall work by Piper, an internationally celebrated artist working out of New York, the heart of the global contemporary art world. Certainly in terms of the initial conception of the work Croft was clearly the 'junior' or 'peripheral' partner and thus the Conference Call work may to a degree be viewed within a provincialist model of Australian art practice. However, the relationship here is not one of innovation (centre) and derivation/adaptation (periphery) at the traditional core of the 'provincialism problem'. See Terry Smith,
appropriated from and signifying international corporatism (the second register of
globalisation noted above), such as generic office furniture and the diverting structure of the
advertising lightbox, in order to invert the social relations (and assumed identities) figured
within this dominant structure. Croft's image of Sue Ingram standing before two high-rise
buildings emblazoned with the logo of a major global transport company—TNT—is
particularly resonant in terms of pictured 'content'. This symbol of global business
interconnectivity and communication hovers (both visually and physically) above the daily
activity of Redfern. It is a symbol of elsewhere (and as noted earlier, of control by dominant
Western culture) that compounds the particularity of experience in a specific place. But here
it is imaged in the background as simply a component element of Sue Ingram's everyday
reality, rather than dominant sign of her exclusion from or invisibility within a larger world.

In the original installation this inversion was even more pronounced. Visitors to
Conference Call seated in the office chairs were subject to destabilising linguistic and visual
experiences. Completely displaced by the former (the language of the neglected and
displaced), they were also made subject to the gaze of the marginalised within the latter.
The artists turned to a particular mode of material and visual presence—the cold glow of the
fluorescent lightbox—in order to assert the presence of actual people within the material
and visual cityscapes dominated or obscured by exactly those commercial structures and
forms. Moreover, these subjects were from marginalised communities with little or no
presence within the public register of commercial or media culture other than via negative
modes of stereotyping.

I am not claiming that these images aspire to locate Indigenous people within the
realm of advertising culture, but that they insist upon a visual reckoning with these
presences within a cultural space that simply cannot be ignored by dominant social
conventions. For just as the works picture subjects occupying actual locations, so too did
the works themselves (in the Conference Call installation context) occupy and specifically
reconfigure a site within the art institution. Thus they demanded a reckoning with

'The Provincialism Problem', in Transformations in Australian Art (Volume Two) The Twentieth Century
Modernity and Aboriginality (Sydney: Craftsman House, 2002) 113-21. (First published, Artforum XII/1
[1974].) It is rather one of open dialogue where the periphery does not simply answer back, but is
responded to: Croft's input assists in the development of the final work; the centre as represented
here by Piper learns from and adapts to the experiences and conditions of the periphery. Furthermore,
this dialogue itself is made transparent; it is manifested at and as the heart of the work. Lastly, Croft
maintains authorship and ownership of her particular component of the work.
Indigenous people within a location traditionally associated with processes of representation, acquisition and classification in European modernity, but a reckoning in which these figures resisted characterisation as subjects of modernity. The figures actually became both assertive individuals and symbols of presence as resistance as strong as any of those produced by photographers such as Paul Foelsche within colonial traditions.

Although developed in collaboration with an international artist, their primary dialogue as images is with representational traditions and developing postcolonial political and social situation within Australia. In no sense do these photographs capitulate to the forms and values of the dominant (Eurocentric and materialistic) culture. Their cultural specificity and evident historical consciousness suggest means by which both practice and criticism may evade the discursive paralysis that the positions of Jameson and to a lesser extent Buchloh infer is inevitable for contemporary practices of "lightbox photoconceptualism" in the midst of spectacle culture.

The second half of this chapter extends this line of argument through a consideration of Croft's more intimate The Big Deal is Black domestic group portraits. These are more deeply embedded within frameworks of narrative and personal history than the Conference Call photographs. (The four Conference Call photographs, particularly when considered in isolation from the overall installation, do in fact depend more fundamentally upon an insistent pictorial quality than any of Croft's other work.) However, before turning to this specific body of work, a background discussion regarding elements of photography's mnemonic character will assist in enriching the theoretical context.

Photography, Memory, Body

Not only is the Photograph never, in essence, a memory...but it actually blocks memory, quickly becomes a counter memory. (Roland Barthes)\textsuperscript{34}

In common parlance the photograph is treated as memory incarnate, or certainly as the prop on which memory depends for its authentication, its proof. On the other hand photography is acknowledged also as the usurper of memory. If photography is Siegfried Kracauer's "go-

for-broke game of history,” as that constant insistence upon the here and now, the ever renewing presence of images in and as the world, then what place remains for the narrative reconstitution of events and experiences through (and thus linking) time that we term memory? Must the image be supplemented by other narrative forms, as the installation form of Brenda L. Croft’s *The Big Deal is Black* work suggests (see below), in order to 'match' memory with any precision, or convey the substance of memory with any complexity? If the photograph must always act as a "counter memory", will it always undermine the acuity of narrative reconstruction?

Under Roland Barthes' phenomenological conception of photography, "the power of authentication exceeds the power of representation." This is to say, the photograph operates less as a representation—an image—that exists through time as aid to the recollection of a place or a person or an event in time, than as a simple proof of this something having once been. In this sense, photography is history's self-authentication. However, concurrent with this authentication is an elision of the historical. For if the photograph authenticates what has been, it only does so through insisting upon its presence as image in the ever-perpetuating present. Thus in Barthes' terms, that which authenticates history also signals its redundancy – all that matters is the image in the present. History and memory appear as poor, unreliable cousins of the photographic present. Memory, as Henri Bergson so eloquently argued in *Matter and Memory*, is virtual, without substance in its purest form (although impossible to experience without recourse to the substantive, even in the form of mental images). Memory's passage from past (recollection) into present as perception—that is, into image form—is a passage from pure sensibility towards representation and thus, itself, a passage away from itself. Bergson wrote, in a passage clearly inflected by the operation of photographic technology:

> To *picture* is not to *remember*. No doubt a recollection, as it becomes actual, tends to live in an image; however the converse is not true, and the image, pure and simple, will not be referred to the past unless, indeed, it was in the past that I sought it, thus following the continuous progress which brought it from darkness into light.

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36 ibid., 89

Eduardo Cadava writes of Bergson that he believed the photograph to condense and immobilise its subject and thus to represent only that which was absent: "If photography does not give us the past, it tells us that perception begins only at the moment when it begins to withdraw, when what is seen cannot be seen." \(^{38}\) In Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography Barthes attempted, in Bergson's terms, to seek or relocate the image of his mother (the 'Winter Garden' photograph), but insomuch as he pursued this passage through time his subject necessarily eluded him, for the photograph and his memory did not tally; they did not bear resemblance to one another. The subject of the photograph—its presence—was absent, withdrawn to (or never departed from) a past to which Barthes had no access. The photograph was not a means of temporal access, but on the contrary a barrier to memory, for it insisted on only the present instant of its presence, and the absence in this moment of its subject, not only displaced by the image but withdrawn from the field of perception. So for Barthes, photography denied the presentness of memory.

Barthes did not reproduce the 'Winter Garden' photograph in Camera Lucida because, he claimed, it would have no meaning to a broader audience (and thus its apparent lack of significance would undermine the urgency of his response to it). Nevertheless, it is possible to speculate another reason for its absence: its 'here- and now-ness' for an audience would have resulted in a plethora of alternative readings, not so much aimed at countering those of Barthes but simply indicating the rich discursivity of the image in the present as completely independent of memory. The image itself would then have been wrenched from its special place within imagination—the subjective envisionings of the individual—and located back within the general realm of photographic images that so dominate the world's countenance. It would have become just another photograph.

This wrenching is also the action of unintended passage from private to public realms. The works of Croft, discussed below, challenge Barthes' conception of the photograph as counter-memory because they are conceived of and produced neither as a sole record of historical presence (as an aide-memoire), nor as a contemporary effacement of memory (of the presentness of the past). Rather they are produced as acts of connection, of

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communication between past and present, absence and presence. Furthermore, the rhetorical effect of their presence is sourced in neither the private nor the public as hermetic realms, but in a flow between them. Unlike Barthes' 'Winter Garden' photograph, once released into the public sphere these photographs do not become yet more disconnected images drifting about from one transient association to another amongst the tidal wash of the photogenic age. Their transition from private to public is strategic: it is both the intended action of the photographs and the very paradigm through which they arise and that must be read back through the images. Barthes' universalist romanticising (not, it should be added, apparent throughout his other writings on photography) is confounded here by strategic modes of representation traversing private and public spheres as an implicit provocation to photography's lingering complicity with modes of thought, representation and action that maintain structures of social and specifically cross-cultural inequality.

Croft's work insists upon the re-historicising of photography. Again, this is clearly at odds with a conception of photography as a root condition of contemporary visual culture's inability to conceive of duration and thus history. Under such a conception the astonishment of encountering the presentness of an absent subject—the astonishment of the indexical 'this has been'—will, according to Barthes, disappear. But if this astonishment is being overtaken by an internalised scepticism regarding the temporal or historical viability of images, is this necessarily leading to the redundancy of the function of the mnemonic in photography? As Scott McQuire notes, the writing of both Jean Baudrillard and Fredric Jameson would appear to suggest that this is the case. Both claim a general de-historicising of perceptual experience at work in contemporary (Western) culture. McQuire identifies a general acceptance within cultural criticism of the idea that the photograph operates primarily to affirm that something is here and now as image – this place, person or event. Here the photograph is treated as neither manifestation of nor trigger to memory, but its metonymic replacement. It is taken to stand in for memory, insisting not upon narrative continuity but upon absolute discontinuity. Every single instant (as image) exists in its

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39 See Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 93. And in fact, thanks to new digital media imaging technologies, a loss of that particular astonishment is apparent when faced with much recent photography.

singular presence, separate from all others that do not so much precede and follow it but are simultaneously available in a never-ending claim to presence.41

Elsewhere McQuire writes: "The paradox confronting contemporary societies dominated by audio-visual media and the computerisation of traditional writing is the widely countenanced emergence of amnesic cultures: societies entranced by spectacle and immediacy but lacking any sense of history."42 History is lost in the displacement of experiences and conceptions of duration—of memory (personal and collective)—by the instantaneity of the image-realm. As experiences of the material and social world—of history—become increasingly image-based, memory becomes fundamentally redundant, or so the theory goes. Baudrillard, ever the ironic moralist, takes this to its furthermost degree in The Gulf War Did Not Take Place. He suggests not only the alienation of both individual and collective consciousness from the actions and consequences of history (via their aesthetically rhetorical screening and indeed displacement by media imagery), but their liberation from memory itself. Not only might an individual or society not remember, but they may also cease to acknowledge, even be placed in the position to acknowledge the occurrences and experiences which would otherwise pass into history. This is the absolute liberty of indifference, rendered by a world absorbed within absolute simultaneity, absolute presentness.43

Personal forms of photography act as antidotes to such nihilism. Personal photographs arranged in the form of the private family snapshot album for example still stand-in for memory. But rather than serving as amnesiac alienation/ liberation from history, they act as votive forms, as pleas towards the replacement of memory by something other than its absence, something other than forgetting. This is the crucial place accorded the

41 John Roberts claims that the development of sequential photographic narratives in the work of John Berger and Jean Mohr constitute a key "...use of photography as a challenge to the loss of historical memory... Narrative reconstruction of the photography actively breaks with the de-historical circulation of images under the effects of capitalist spectacle." John Roberts, The Art of Interruption: Realism, Photography and the Everyday (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1998) 132. This is discussed in Chapter 5 of this study in relation to the work of Tracey Moffatt.


personal photograph in aspects of contemporary criticism. It is treated as a circuit breaker to the extreme alienation from historical consciousness laid at the feet of the photographic.\footnote{44} Croft's *The Big Deal is Black* work is not private or personal photography in the strictest sense. But as an act of public exposure it draws upon the ethos and forms of photography founded in its personal and community development modes.

**The Portraiture Problem**

So here's the problem: if photographic portraits rarely, if ever, give us 'a subject', then what exactly are they providing 'a perfect likeness' of? The appearance of the sitter certainly, but which appearance (there are surely many available to each sitter) and to what end? Such questions point to the dilemma at the heart of all photographic portraiture, a tension between the easy mechanical resemblance that a photograph provides and the something-more-than resemblance that the word portrait seems to promise. (Geoffrey Batchen)\footnote{45}

As I have noted already, throughout its short history photography has been treated as a means of giving visible presence to pre-existing subjects. In the passage above Geoffrey Batchen touches on two core problems associated with this conception of photography as metonymic presencing of a given individual. First, photographic resemblance is incapable of conveying any sense of the complete and essential character of an individual. Appearance and resemblance may, in fact, serve to mask or divert attention from the psychological substance of the subject viewed. Second, no single photographic image can ever condense and encapsulate all the innumerable *visible* forms available to any individual. Every act of resemblance suggests a multitude of others formed in social convention. Thus the photographic portrait always leaves the viewer wanting, even in terms of a basic apprehension of its subject. As Joanna Woodall has noted, photography supposedly reduced the gap between portrait image and sitter – the space of 'likeness'. According to

\footnote{44} See, for example, as a rejoinder to the general pessimism regarding individual agency in the face of the general image field of culture at large that is apparent in Fredric Jameson's essay 'Transformations of the Image in Postmodernity' (discussed in Chapter 2), the productive relation identified between the individual and specific images in both Marianne Hirsh, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Post Memory* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), and also Linda Haverty Rugg, *Picturing Ourselves: Photography and Autobiography* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

Woodall, with the advent of photography, "the portrayed body no longer represented the sitter, it was the (trace of the) sitter". And yet this 'trace' appears to mark absence, emphasising another gap – that between viewer and represented subject.

A third problem exists also: there is no pre-existing consummation essence of the individual to be given photographic form in the first place. Early developments in psychoanalysis bequeathed Western society a general understanding of subjectivity as a complex and fluid rather than static and constant state of being, perception and imagination. In addition Marxism claimed that the individual subject was forged by the interplay of larger social and economic structures. Thus subjectivity is now broadly assumed to form via the intercourse of internal and external factors—a dynamic interplay of physiology, psychology, perception and social experience—rather than exist as a naturally formed and constant condition of cognisance. The deconstructive project associated with Jacques Derrida amongst others has consolidated this. The Derridean impact upon conceptions of portraiture has been to emphasise, according to Woodall, that "identity is defined not as a fixed identity but an ongoing process, enacted through language, between subjects." Photography therefore does far more than indexically mark the absent presence of identities beyond its frame in mimetic form; it plays an active role in the construction of subject identities.

Anne Zahalka’s Open House (1995) has already provided a pertinent example. The subjects of Zahalka’s photographs are fundamentally figures on and of display. They are not portraits in a traditional sense – they neither set out to identify nor present the psychological substance of individuals. Yet they operate in a manner similar to that identified by Ernst van Alphen within a recuperated mode of portraiture in contemporary art; one that does not depend upon the candid depiction of a pre-existing presence, but rather


47 Batchen elucidates this towards the end of his 'A Perfect Likeness' essay: "The resulting portraits are steeped in the theatrical artifice of performance, but then so are the lived personalities of each and every one of these subjects. It would be a mistake to search for a 'true' subject lying hidden somewhere beneath the surface of this cavalcade of staged images. A more interesting exercise is to think about the intention and effect of the persona assumed by each subject when confronted with the camera's inquisitive stare. Why this pose rather than that one? Why this treatment rather than one of the many others available?" Batchen, 'A Perfect Likeness', 35

48 Woodall, 'Introduction', 13
engages in a complex play of reference. As Van Alphen writes: "Portraits are caught up in the realm of representation. They refer to mass-media-produced stereotypes or simulacra which function as screens that block a transparent view of reality." 49

Photographic portraiture, therefore, is not the result of a disinterested mechanical process. It is both productive action and record of social formations. It is, in the words of Linda Nochlin (regarding portraiture in general), a place of "the meeting of two subjectivities" 50—that of the subject and the photographer—to which might be added a third, that of the viewer.

The Big Deal is Black

The Big Deal—is a card game, is the Mabo issue, is a land deal, is no big deal, but it all comes back to being BLACK and living in the city, and all the roads that lead you here. Don't intend to turn this into any opportunity for any convenient, misinformed labelling by any readers. All this BIG DEAL is about is letting you see something of us on our terms. This is about being a Black woman—you might be mother, sister, aunt, cousin, daughter, friend—no difference, the DEAL is the same. (Brenda L. Croft) 51

I wanted to give the impression of the people, not just images on walls... I wanted to focus on black women and friends and family and show through images the relationships that I've got with the people that I photographed. (Brenda L. Croft) 52

In the first half of this chapter I claimed some significance for the manner in which Brenda L. Croft's four Conference Call photographs give emphatic presence to particular subjects within particular settings. The images insist upon the real social, cultural and historical experience of their pictured subjects, including the experience of being subject to representation. At the crux of this argument, however, was an attempt to tease out the myriad manners in which the identities presenced in photographic form were formed within,


51 Brenda L. Croft, The Big Deal is Black (exh. cat.) (Sydney: Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative and Australian Centre for Photography, 1993) n.p. (Emphasis in original.)

continued to be subjects of, and developed in active response to social, political and economic formations, to changing representational conventions, and to contested interpretations of colonial history, in particular issues of race and representation.\textsuperscript{53}

The twenty-three colour photographs that constitute \textit{The Big Deal is Black} differ, however, from the earlier four photographs in two key manners. First, they are photographs of family groups and thus picture relationships between subjects within the images in a way not apparent even in the three paired figures within \textit{Conference Call}. Second, they are all taken within domestic spaces rather than public spaces (most are indoor spaces, but some images feature subjects on an outdoor terrace or in a back yard).

The public settings of the \textit{Conference Call} subjects imbued them with a partial sense of being totemic figures, abetting their transition from indexical to iconic forms. Their presence and visibility was of the public sphere. Croft's \textit{The Big Deal is Black} photographs are more resolutely of the private sphere, and thus appear more intimate and less formal. Nevertheless they evidence a similar desire to give public presence to the everyday characters and experiences of members of urban Sydney's Indigenous communities. As Croft herself has claimed (see above), the images also arose out of a desire to present a relationship of intimacy between photographer and subjects. As noted earlier in the chapter, this is a very different form of relationship than that through which photographic representations of Indigenous subjects were traditionally structured.

\textsuperscript{53} Even where photographic portraiture is utilised within contemporary art in such as way as to elide the social formation of subjects—when it takes on a metaphysical presence—it generally serves to activate a reflective encounter between image(s) and viewer within which the viewer must develop an individuated apprehension and experience of the presented subject. There has in fact been very little work of significance in this vein produced in Australia during the 1990s. International examples include Dutch photographer Rineke Dijkstra's full figure beach portraits of awkward adolescents made during 1992 and 1993 (of which Sydney photographer Peter Elliston's large format colour portraits of bathers at Wylie's Ocean Beach Pool in Sydney made in 1998 are reminiscent); German photographer Thomas Ruff's massive anonymous colour portraits (against white backgrounds) made during the late 1980s and early 1990s; and American artist Roni Horn's \textit{You Are The Weather} (1996) suite of thirty-six black and white and sixty-four colour portraits (head only) of the same young woman bathing at different pools and springs around Iceland, or Horn's more recent \textit{This is Me, This is You} (1999-2000) where forty-eight pairs of portraits of Horn's young niece (photographed between the ages of eight and ten) are installed facing each other across a gallery space in two grids, each pair consisting of slightly different images (generally two concurrent frames on a roll of film) so that the sense of subject accrues through a viewing process of looking back and forth across the room at images of the same face (rather than around the room as in \textit{You Are the Weather}), and so creating, as Nancy Princenthal describes, "a thoroughly warped mirror." Nancy Princenthal, 'Taking the Long View', \textit{Art in America} (October 2002), 137. See also Deborah Smith ed., \textit{Rineke Dijkstra: Location} (exh. cat.) (London: The Photographers' Gallery, 1997); Roni Horn, \textit{You Are The Weather} (Zurich, Berlin, New York: Scalo, 1997); Roni Horn, \textit{This is Me, This is You} (Paris: Edition 7L, 2002); and Régis Durand ed., \textit{Thomas Ruff} (exh. cat.) (Paris: Centre National de la Photographie, 1997)
In *The Big Deal is Black* women and children from five families are each represented by between three and five framed colour photographs.\(^{54}\) The individual photographs range from images of just a couple of people—a young woman and child, for example (see Illus. 4.5)—through to large family groups clustered together across a sofa (see Illus. 4.6). The majority of the subjects engage directly with the camera in a friendly, happy manner. They are open to personal interaction. This sense is enhanced by the intimacy apparent between subjects. In 'Hetti and Tyson' (Illus. 4.5), for example, the mother appears to gently rest her head against that of her small son. Her hands crossed over his waist and legs at the bottom centre of the image secure the boy against her, marking the binding of the two figures as one. 'Judy, Jody and Tjanara' (Illus. 4.7) depicts three generations of women from the same family seated on a sofa. The young woman and her child smile towards the camera, whilst the woman's mother alongside them looks fondly towards her granddaughter. The nine figures crowded together in 'The Ingrams: Millie, Norma, Sue, Leeanne, Sylvia, Jarin, Jemiah, Jaden and Shanae' (Illus. 4.6) all look towards the camera, some playing up to it and others feigning a child's disinterest. Relationships between the subjects are conveyed in physical terms: an easy relaxation in the manner in which the adults allow the boys to squeeze in amongst them, for example, or the way in which the family matriarch is appropriately pictured at the physical heart of the family group, right at the centre of the image.

The general informality of the works in terms of arrangement, pose and even clothing distances this and the other *The Big Deal is Black* images from the conventions of the formal studio portrait, and brings them closer in association to the family album (especially in their organisation within family groupings). Croft's images centre on an immediacy of individual relationships between subjects, as well as between subjects and photographer, commonly viewed within snapshot contexts where images are created as records of personal interactions and shown to others in similar moments of direct contact and communication. The informality of the works and their apparent intersubjective immediacy also suggests a diaristic mode of documentary photography developed during the 1970s and 1980s in particular, often within feminist-inflected practices such as those in Australia of

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\(^{54}\) The photographs are variable in dimension and can range from approximately 50 x 75cm through to 100 x 120cm in dimension.
Carol Jerrems, Sue Ford, Ruth Maddison and Micky Allan to name just a few. 56 Croft deploys conventions drawn from private modes of photography within the public setting of the gallery, and to emphasise the public aspiration of these images produces them at a scale more associated with 'art' than with the family photograph. Relationships of informality and immediacy both between subjects and between subjects and photographer are given authoritative scale within a public context. With its educative subtext, the overall series even takes on the character of a community album offered to a wider audience.

Like her Conference Call images, Croft's The Big Deal is Black photographs also directly challenge the colonial tradition of studio tableau photographs of indigenous subjects through their concentration upon the actual identities of their subjects formed within specific social, cultural and economic conditions. Both sets of photographs picture their subjects within the real environments in which they live and work, whether this be the specific urban environments of Conference Call or the domestic environments of The Big Deal is Black. But whilst subjects in the earlier set of photographs resist consumption as objects of a Western or colonial gaze via strong, even defiant stances, those in The Big Deal is Black defuse and repudiate the power of that paradigm via an intimacy that conveys their individuality as subjects.

The role of the subjects in actually determining their own representation is crucial to the final works. Individually, the settings for the images do not overly determine or signify the personality or subjectivity of the sitters. Most of the images are taken in domestic living rooms, but are dominated by the subjects rather than their environments (see Illus 4.8 and 4.9). 56 Like clothing, different forms of furnishing provide some hints at both personal taste and socio-economic background. Occasionally details of family photographs or works of art may be glimpsed in the background. In the case of 'Hetti and Tyson', a vacuum cleaner hose is visible alongside the figures further emphasising the everyday domestic nature of


56 One exception is 'Murri and Mary' (illus. 4.10) where the subjects are depicted outdoors in the backyard.
the setting. However, these details are really most significant in collectively stressing the
intimate, informal aspect of the works, and in suggesting that the choice of setting, pose
and clothing for the photographs was not entirely imposed by the photographer.\textsuperscript{57} Croft
discussed the images in advance with the subjects, allowing them to determine how they
would be photographed. So these formal elements are in fact determined by (and amplify
an apprehension of) the subjects' own self-conceptions, their desired representational
characters, and a sense of their physical repose within a familiar environment. Thus Lisa
Bellear describes these photographs as "interactive creations defined by real people."\textsuperscript{58} This
element of interaction between subjects and photographer resulting in forms of
photographic self-definition becomes even more crucial when considered in the light of
historical representations of Indigenous Australians discussed earlier in this chapter. As
Bellear asserts: "The Big Deal is Black is special in that it is not an ethnographic portrayal of
Aboriginal people; the subjects were in control of the images..."\textsuperscript{59}

The "interactivity" that Bellear notes was further emphasised by what she herself
described as the "multimedia" form of the complete \textit{The Big Deal is Black} exhibition held at
the Australian Centre for Photography in Sydney in 1993.\textsuperscript{60} Croft grouped the photographs
by families into discrete areas of the gallery. Each group of photographs was accompanied
by a soundtrack playing quite softly, so a viewer walking by the images experienced
something like a fleeting encounter with private conversations held in the front rooms of
homes. This further emphasised a sense of the photographs as windows into private
domestic spaces.\textsuperscript{61} The soundtracks were made up of tape recordings made by Croft in the
homes of the subjects depicted in the photographs. These recordings featured not only
conversations taking place around kitchen tables, or during a card game (hence the series' 
overall title, both literal and metaphoric in reference), but the attendant ambient sounds of

\textsuperscript{57} This informality is further emphasised by the apparently haphazard framing of the images, where a
glimpse of a staircase runs across the corner of an image or the frames cut paintings hanging
behind the subjects, as well as by the rudimentary lighting that casts shadows from the figures
across the walls.

\textsuperscript{58} Bellear, 'Brenda L. Croft', 21

\textsuperscript{59} ibid.

\textsuperscript{60} See ibid., 19

\textsuperscript{61} Author's notes, interview with Brenda L. Croft.
busy households—chairs moving, children passing through, utensils knocking on surfaces, cupboards opening and shutting—again stressing the intimate, everyday domesticity of the photographic context. The recordings conveyed a wealth of recollection, family history, and discussion regarding historical and contemporary conditions of Indigenous life in Australia, as well as major issues of the day such as the Mabo court case.\textsuperscript{62} Finally, the recordings also featured specific pieces of music chosen by the subjects in the photographs, ranging from country and western to soul to hip hop and contemporary activist songs.

The soundtracks—or soundtexts—therefore acted in two key ways. First and most obviously, they provided another contextual frame for the images. Not only did they further signify aspects of the photographic subjects’ experiences and personalities, they quite literally gave those subjects voice and placed them within specific historical moments as well as a ‘real time’ temporal flow. All this acted to alleviate photography’s tendency to wrench subjects out of historical context and indeed out of the flow of time. Second, these sound elements explicitly intermeshed personal experience and public socio-political context. Recounted narratives of tribal dispossession, mission stations and dealing with Aboriginal Affairs bureaucracies strongly emphasised the centrality of social structures to individual experience. The political dimension of the work is made clear by the title. Yet other aspects of family narratives, diverse individual opinions upon matters of both public and private interest, the sounds of everyday household activity and most of all the chosen pieces of music were all woven together in the soundtracks again heightening the specific humanity of the photographs.

Croft’s professed concern for the thorough contextualisation of her photographic subjects has already been noted. Her work evidences a strong desire to present the specific personalities of subjects as accurately as possible via reference to geographical location, family relationships, everyday activity, social conditions, cultural history and both conventions and technologies of representation. The textual/aural elements of The Big Deal

\textsuperscript{62} In June 1992 the High Court of Australia set out a decision to the Mabo case (so-named after claimant Eddie Mabo) stating for the first time that the common law of Australia recognised the prior land rights of Australian Aboriginal people. This provided the opportunity for Indigenous inhabitants of Australia to assert Common Law rights over land ownership and control, effectively denying the doctrine of Terra Nullius previously underpinning Australian law that held that land tenure did not exist in Australia prior to British arrival in the eighteenth century. The Mabo decision was and remains a milestone in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander struggle for land and sovereignty rights, although subsequent court decisions and legislation have reduced its practical influence as a legal precedent.
is Black reinforced this. On one hand, as Croft has indicated, these elements stemmed from her own experience of working in radio and her desire to accumulate as much information as possible regarding the lives and identities of her subjects, or more broadly of the circumstances and experiences of present-day urban Aboriginal women.63 Croft's role here is partially that of a social researcher working from within her own cultural group, equipped with the skills and understandings that enable her to convey the material she uncovers within the representational frameworks of Western society. Photography is one element (although the core element) in a complex cross-cultural negotiation undertaken by Croft in such a way as to ensure that the particular needs, desires and experiences of her subjects are never subsumed within a mechanics of cultural consumption. In this sense, Croft's project sits within a long tradition of social documentary photography as anthropological research, or perhaps more aptly as Catriona Moore suggests within a tradition most strongly developed during the 1970s of community arts projects that aim to give both voice and visibility to communities marginalised by dominant social and economic forces. "As a community photography project..." Moore writes, "...the series re-appropriates and adds to the archival image banks of Aboriginal people in museums and libraries around the country."64 The textual/aural elements of Croft's work can thus be treated as akin to the textual components associated with such research and community projects, including the textual elements of the traditional photo-essay. Again, the key point of distinction here is the subjects' role in the determination of this narrative aspect to the work.

However, might Croft's inclusion of explicit and complex narrative components in this overall work also be treated as a sign of her distrust of the visual as an autonomous means of presencing and conveying experience and subjectivity? If, as discussed earlier, historical colonial photographic images of Indigenous peoples tended to strip their subjects of experience and identity, then as a response Croft's project evidently aims to pack as many signifiers of experience and identity back into each aesthetic encounter. Her work is pitched against historical conventions of colonial photography, yet it would be inaccurate to equate this with an absolute refutation of the photographic image—of the visual—as a mode of representation irretrievably embedded within colonial, even racist paradigms, when involved

63 Author's notes, interview with Brenda L. Croft.
64 Moore, 'Photo-Documentary's Fluctuating Fortunes', 32
in the imaging of culturally specific communities. Croft’s work acts as a reinvestment of specific experience into the visual via its interaction with other media. Narrative elements and personal experience are implicit within the visual forms of the subjects (in particular within evident relationships between subjects), or even appear to linger as memory traces within the kind of phenomenological reading of the portrait epitomised by Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida*. Ultimately, the visual encounter with the photographs is primary within the work. Following their initial exhibition, the photographs within *The Big Deal is Black* have been exhibited, reproduced and accessioned into collections either individually or in small clusters without the textual/aural components. The photographs finally exist within and traffic through present-day society as material and visual presences only.\(^6\)

**Conclusion**

I have attempted to locate Brenda L. Croft’s images from *Conference Call* and *The Big Deal is Black* within a nexus of private and public reference points, as they draw on photographic conventions associated with each and are produced in a space of exchange between the two, deliberately sought and negotiated by the artist. *Conference Call* is an emphatically public work. But, their scale of production aside, *The Big Deal is Black* images initially appear akin to private photographs, made within a specific community for the purposes of both recording and celebrating its experiences, and to circulate as resolute signs of life both within and outside of the community.

Croft has utilised conventions associated with ethnographic, anthropological, documentary, personal and contemporary commercial photography across these two bodies of work in order to confront the models of social organisation upon which some of these

\(^6\) This is somewhat different from much of Croft’s later work that takes the form of digital montages of old family photographs, studio and landscape photographs taken by the artist and fragments of text. In these works text has a visual presence, fully integrated with and inseparable from the photographic images. Both of these models differ from the textual elements in Tracey Moffatt’s *Scarred for Life* (1994/99) discussed in the following chapter. In *Scarred for Life* the text is again presented in visual form, but as supplement to, not embedded within the image components. These bodies of work include *In My Father’s House* (1998), *In My Mother’s Garden* (1998), *She’ll be right mate: Strangers in a strange land* (1999) and *Westward Bound* (1999). See Bryne et al eds, *Brenda L. Croft & Destiny Deacon*, Teffer and Tunnicliffe eds, *Australian Perspectives ‘99*, and Engberg, *Signs of Life*. Music also continues to play an important role in Croft’s work. Her solo exhibition *Fever* (2000) at Stills Gallery, Sydney included a looped recording of the song of the same title.
modes of representation were built and in turn compounded. It is clear that the context of contemporary art here facilitates this self-reflexive deployment of photographic images, providing a literal and conceptual space in which opposition to historical and present-day dominant cultural paradigms is not only accommodated but also anticipated. Moreover, this context privileges the interplay of multiple and diverse subjectivities and enables the images to implicitly draw upon the aura of authority traditionally associated with genres of public portraiture.⁶⁶ Even if, as Henry Sayre has noted, there is always a posturing, a sense of staging and self-theatricalisation in photographic portraiture that rubs against its significance of 'naturalness',⁶⁷ Croft’s Conference Call and The Big Deal is Black photographs assert present cultural experience and conditions in the face of historical elision or misrepresentation, and furthermore imply a dialogue with future experiences, conditions and representations of Indigenous Australians. Her subjects standing resolutely in the streets of Redfern or interacting intimately with each other and the photographer within their own homes claim their place in the present moment as resonant historical figures.

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⁶⁶ As distinct from private portraiture, bureaucratic record and scientific classification amongst other contexts for photographic portraiture.

CHAPTER 5
Playing with the Photo-Essay: Tracey Moffatt

The representation of familial relationships and domestic environments is also central to Tracey Moffatt’s *Scarred for Life* series of 1994 and 1999. These two sets of work utilise the forms, conventions and rhetorical effects of the documentary photo-essay within constructed image/text vignettes. They evidence a number of subtle re-articulations and transformations of representational tropes that characterised quotational postmodernism and appropriation art. As constructed or staged photo-text series with a certain moral imperative at their core, *Scarred for Life* and *Scarred for Life II* may appear as culminations of those photographic practices so central to discourses of appropriation dominant within late 1980s and early 1990s Australian art. Alternatively, however, this work may also be treated as pivotal in an exchange between relative weightings of visual and textual representation, or as a marker to more recent insistently depictive rather than manifestly discursive photographic practices. In this regard these works are not fundamentally determined within an explicit relationship to spectacle culture. There are certain important continuities with aspects of the work of Anne Zahalka and Brenda L. Croft. Moffatt constructs tableau scenes – in this case, of human discord and dysfunction. Issues of cultural and racial identity appear, if somewhat obliquely, throughout the work. Memory is a crucial determining element. Most importantly, the work references and draws upon other pre-existing representational forms and contexts, in particular the historical form of the photo-essay mode in documentary photography. This acts as an appeal to a social consciousness of the 'real', so intensifying our relationship to the pictured recollections.

W.J.T. Mitchell’s model of the image/text as "neither a method nor a guarantee of historical discovery", but "more like an aperture or cleavage in representation, a place where history might slip through the cracks",¹ is relevant here. According to Mitchell, modes of comparative analysis are problematic. The important question is not what is the difference

(or similarity) between words and images in any specific instance, but rather what difference
do these differences or similarities make? In this chapter I look at both series in terms of a
rhetorical staging of this image/text relation and how it is used to appeal to the social
agency of the photo-essay convention.

Between Fact and Fiction

Reportage is interesting only when placed in a fictional context, but fiction is
interesting only if it is validated by a documentary context. (Jean Luc-Godard)²

Most of Tracey Moffatt's work epitomises the manner in which photo-based contemporary art
envelops both acts of record and fiction in their symbiotic dance, wrapping each in the not
quite expired guises of naturalism and positivism. Moffatt frequently cites her fascination with
the filmmakers of the 'New Wave', or indeed, "anything European-made before 1970 and
made in black and white like the dream films of Jean Cocteau."³ Working via a plethora of
visual sources, Cocteau's "dream",⁴ along with Godard's "fiction", "reportage", and
"documentary" provide the key tropes in Moffatt's imagery. Rarely are her images
documentary in intent. They are neither reportage, nor transcription of a pre-existing
occurrence within a material world of the everyday.⁵ Yet nor do her images convey an
entirely imaginary world of Moffatt's own conjuring. But nor, again, should they be read
solely through the proliferating yet flattening register of the simulacral, even when an
individual image may so clearly draw upon other representational forms such as cinema,
television, photography, painting and literature. None of the above serve as complete
explanatory models for any of Moffatt's work, yet aspects of each are brought into play in

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³ See Gerald Matt, 'An Interview with Tracey Moffatt', in Michael Snelling ed., Tracey Moffatt (exh.
cat.) (Brisbane and Melbourne: Institute of Modern Art and Asialink, 1999) 66 (First published in Martin

⁴ Here it is worth noting Moffatt's claim that "we can dream with our eyes open." ibid., 65

⁵ One key exception here is Moffatt's 2001 series Fourth – twenty-six colour photographic prints
on canvas based on video stills of competitors' expressions as they finish fourth in their events
at the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games.
any encounter with her images. Experiences of the real, the imaginary and of existing image realms are often indistinguishable.

*Scarred for Life*⁶ and *Up in The Sky* (1997) draw simultaneously upon codifications of fact and fiction, and upon the effect of the real as insisted via representational modes, rather than simply via reference to fixed formations of identity and biography. We should therefore interrogate its apparent look of the real, of the document or record always in relation to its forcefully rhetorical evocations of representational archetypes and conventions (manifest in material culture) that emerge from and tap back into collective desires, fears, memories and imaginings. John Tagg acknowledged this "real effect" of the photograph as constituting far more than mere reference "to a pre-photographic reality as to a truth."⁷ In this context then, a key task for criticism is to conceive of the realist effect not as an alchemic shadow-dancing with a pre-photographic realm, but as a conscious visual reproduction of the very social conditions and productions of that dance itself: not as a reproduction of a reproduction—a slide into the simulacrum—but as a deployment through reproduction, at times critical, of the social realities of the photograph.

These 'social realities' of the photograph may be arranged into two groups. The first is comprised of the material, social, psychological and imaginative experience pictured as well as perhaps presenced within the photographic image. The second group describes the presence of photographs as material forms within the social realm. Whilst these may be separated for purposes of elucidation, the forms of social realities encountered within these sets arise out of specific forms of engagement between the pictured content of the photographic image, the relation of that image to exterior referents, and both the material and the social fact of the photograph's presence in the world. These are indivisible as generative photographic forces.

In the case of Moffatt's *Scarred for Life* the phrase 'social realities of the photograph' therefore encompasses all of the following aspects. First, real experiences of familial friction,

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⁶ This title is used throughout this chapter to refer collectively to both series of images (1994 and 1999), unless otherwise noted. The key forms and concerns underpinning the works were established within the first series, with the second operating as a form of reprise with only minor variations upon an established template worth noting as analysis develops.

discord and dysfunction, as well as of adolescent abrasiveness pictured within the work. Second, real experiences of memory’s traumatic irruptions within the self, particularly with regard to moments of childhood or adolescent upset and confrontation, the simultaneous experience and reflection upon which marks the passage towards adult self-consciousness. Third, the context of a society in which issues of child sexuality, paedophilia and multifaceted gender constructions are debated within the public realm and subject to legal as well as social and cultural structure. Fourth, conceptions of racial stereotype within both private and public spheres. Fifth, the cultural ubiquity of the photograph, whether as a simultaneous marker of and block to memory as discussed in the previous chapter, or simply in terms of the material fact of photography’s pervasive presence across the social landscape and the everyday constancy of individual encounters with it. Sixth, the social profile and agency of post-World War Two photographic magazines evoked via formal and stylistic affinities within Moffatt’s works. And seventh, the critical, aesthetic and commercial circumstances that support or even privilege works of art that are produced as formal interactions between text and image, or work that engages with a multitude of issues regarding identity formation.

These are all actual contextual circumstances and aggregations of both public and private conditions of being that underpin Scarred for Life. Therefore, by making reference to the ‘fictional’ element of this work, I do not set out to implicitly question their basis in real experience, memory, or social situations. Whether these were actual events or are total fictions is of little consequence to the rhetorical potency of scenarios; it is of little consequence to the presence of the images as representations of actual forms and of processes of social interaction and individual identity formation. The notion of the ‘fictional’ acts as shorthand reference to the constructed or directed manner in which the scenarios are posed for the explicit purpose of photographic picturing. But furthermore, it suggests a strategy linked to the demands of individual memory and imagining.

Between Memory and Representation

Tracey Moffatt’s Scarred for Life is based within a different mode of remembering than that of Brenda L. Croft, which addresses blind spots in the Australian collective memory. Moffatt's
work engages with issues of memory as they determine (or hinder) individual identity formation. The relationship of representation to memory is crucial here, specifically the function of representation as the bedrock to memory. Jill Bennett discusses this relationship in an essay accompanying the 1998 exhibition *Telling Tales* that she co-curated with Jackie Dunn (and which examined the place of trauma and memory in contemporary Australian art). Bennett refers in particular to the work of French psychiatrist Pierre Janet and French writer and Holocaust survivor Charlotte Delbo in distinguishing common memory from deep memory.\textsuperscript{8} The former consists of

familiar or ordinary experiences [that] can easily be integrated into memory because they can be understood in relation to pre-existing cognitive structures. These structures provide a kind of narrative framework that enables us to interpret and therefore render intelligible each new experience. By contrast, frightening or traumatic experiences exceed our cognitive frame of reference and so remain unprocessed and fragmentary.\textsuperscript{9}

Thus, as Bennett continues, common memory consists of experiences that can mapped against shared frames of reference legible across a social strata. But deep memory encompasses unintelligible experiences that "cannot be interpreted against the backdrop of everyday experience or described in conventional language."\textsuperscript{10} They are felt as impressions. They are visceral. And they are frequently triggered by the faculty of sight.

Deep memory, however, also requires 'forms' through which it may be recalled or presented — literally given shape, form and presence. And this, clearly, is where representation remains crucial, even if it remains dislocated from narrative or discursive certitude. Bennett and Dunn's exhibition concentrated upon instances in which traumatic memories were given form within the fragmentary media paradigms of contemporary art. And as Bennett further claimed in her accompanying essay, such instances require an element of fictionalisation or psychological projection within representational structures. Memory of the most immediate, urgent form then—memory that touches closely upon the real—is, as

\textsuperscript{8} These specific terms are attributed to Delbo by Bennett.

\textsuperscript{9} Jill Bennett, 'Within Living Memory', in Jill Bennett and Jackie Dunn, *Telling Tales* (exh. cat.) (Sydney: College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales, 1998) 8

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid.
Bennett claims, "often essentially fabricated."11 "The 'truth' about memory..." Bennett writes, "...is often difficult to accommodate when it involves confronting issues of repression and recovery, the merging of truth and fiction and the ultimate reality that none of us can entirely trust our own memories."12 Divisions between memory and imagination are as blurred, even arbitrary as those between acts of factual record and fictional construction within cultural production. It is not that the two terms collapse into a meaningless indistinguishibility, but rather that meaning is to be found in their dynamic, ongoing negotiation.

Bennett infers that memory is inseparable from representation. Memory requires a representational structure that, when called upon to reference experience beyond the boundaries of openly shared knowledge, must fabricate means by which to straddle that schism between an unintelligible individual condition and a public realm of the symbolic. Representation, therefore, necessarily but paradoxically both follows and precedes memory. As Andreas Huyssen writes:

> Representation always comes after...But rather than leading us to some authentic origin or giving us verifiable access to the real, memory, even and especially in its belatedness, is itself based on representation. The past is not simply there in memory, but it must be articulated to become memory. The fissure that opens up between experiencing an event and remembering it in representation is unavoidable. Rather than lamenting or ignoring it, this split should be understood as a powerful stimulant for cultural and artistic creativity.13

Moffatt's Scarred for Life is generated by this relationship between memory and representation. In both narrative content and structure the individual works act as meditations upon the primacy of this general relationship within processes of individual identity formation. Therefore, in addition to considering Moffatt's two Scarred for Life series in light of the representational conventions of the photo-essay, this chapter also examines the relation of memory to representation in order to explicate the psychological efficacy of the work.

11 ibid., 7

12 ibid., 10

Scarred for Life

Scarred for Life comprises two sets of image/text works, that apparently quintessential postmodern form of "mutual corrosion [where] each medium throws the other into question and makes it problematic." As noted above, the alignment of such to the realms of print media and advertising suggest associations to earlier, if equally contingent traditions of social representation within modernity – the photo-essay and the picture magazine. My analysis teases out the manner in which the particular visual model of the photo-essay or captioned photographic layout associated with mid twentieth-century picture magazines such as Life acts as a very particular ground of reference; one which opens up an imaginary realm but only in so much as it codifies specific figurations of realism.

The nineteen individual works in two series comprise four elements: a photographic image of muted colour tones printed using a photolithographic process; a title, including date, in bold type; a caption text; and the artist's name. Each work is printed on a uniform sheet of paper with a generous amount of white space below the image, and sometimes also above. This highlights the potential display of the works in poster form – a format that serves to emphasise a particular polemical function in the movement of their subject matter from private to public contexts. Each work presents some domestic vignette. The first series includes a father berating his son for dressing in girl's clothes; a mother catching her son playing birthing games with another boy and a black doll; siblings taunting each other over their looks and personalities; teenagers being physically and verbally abused by their parents; and a young girl witnessing her naked father beating a girl from down the street. The second series includes boys being mocked for their size or their hand-knitted football jerseys; mothers condemning a grown single daughter for falling pregnant or a large

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14 There are nine works in the first series and ten in the second.


16 As outlined in Chapter 2, 'realism' is here taken to incorporate a set of representational conventions embedded in an active, mutually effective relation to material culture and social life.

17 The full paper size of each work is 80 x 60cm in dimension.

18 This reference nevertheless remains only supplementary to that linking the works to the picture-magazine photo-essay format.
adolescent daughter for being fat and unattractive; another mother being interviewed by police for tying up her small son with pantyhose for 'his own safety' whilst playing; an eldest daughter being to look after her young siblings; another group of children at dusk outside their dilapidated fibro house summoning the courage to dash inside past drunken father on steps; and two sisters pictured on their knees cutting the lawn with scissors as punishment.

However, not all of these actions are depicted within the images themselves. Subjects are often depicted in some form of distressed repose, even contemplation. Here we are witness to resonant (yet ultimately impenetrable) aftermaths of personal discord. From the first series, 'Birth Certificate, 1962' (Illus. 5.1) depicts an Aboriginal girl slumped crying over a hand-basin, the caption reading, 'During the fight, her mother threw her birth certificate at her. This is how she found out her real father's name.' 'Useless, 1974' (Illus. 5.2) and 'Job Hunt, 1976' (Illus. 5.3) are further examples of text providing narrative substance to otherwise indeterminate if resonant images. There are no single figure images in the second series, but similar depictions of a central subject caught in thoughtful repose still exist in 'Suicide Threat, 1982' ('She was forty-five, single and pregnant for the first time. When her mother found out, she said "If I wasn't Catholic I'd commit suicide."') (Illus. 5.4), 'Mother's Reply, 1976' (Illus. 5.5), and 'Responsible but Dreaming, 1984' (Illus. 5.6).

In other works, the underlying condition of the pictured relationships between subjects would remain a mystery but for the caption text. For example, it takes the caption in 'Charm Alone, 1965' (Illus. 5.7) from the first series to impart any real sense of the relation between two brothers looking into a mirror. The same is the case with 'Suicide Threat, 1982' and 'Mother's Reply, 1976' from the second series. By contrast, the exchange pictured taking place in 'Telecam Guys, 1977' (Illus. 5.8) from the first series depicting two teenage sisters, one of who is flirting with two workmen, significantly precedes the key exchange noted by the text. Even where some form of identifiable action takes place within the image, such as in the case of 'The Wizard of Oz, 1956' (Illus. 5.9), 'Heart Attack, 1970' (Illus. 5.10), 'Doll Birth, 1972' (Illus. 5.11) and 'Mother's Day, 1975' (Illus. 5.12) all from the first series, or 'Pantyhose Arrest, 1973' (Illus. 5.13), and 'Piss Bags, 1978' (Illus. 5.14) from the second series, the particular intentions and reactions of the subjects—the exact forms and meanings of their actions—remain entirely dependent upon their descriptive captions.
The caption texts provide narrative information and context, sometimes describing what is actually occurring in the image, so sharing in its temporality, and on other occasions describing an action that precedes the image. There is a space between two different temporal moments in these latter instances. This imbues the works with a depth and seriousness. Not only do they present actions, they also convey something of the relationships that gave rise to these actions and point to repercussions for the development of subject identity and conceptions of self worth. The works not only represent a present tense situation, they also reflect back upon the causal conditions of that situation. In some cases they also look back to the situation itself from a position of future self-consciousness. Furthermore, in a small handful of the images from the second series the actions or determining conditions are not limited to a single moment in the past but are ongoing across a longer period of time. The text infers that the two mothers’ affair in ‘Piss Bags, 1978’, for example, is ongoing, whilst the children in ‘Door Dash, 1979’ (Illus. 5.15) have to dash past their drunken father ‘every night’.16 Over the full series, the structural form of the works runs counter to the elusive frozen instantaneity of the single photographic image. The image/text form constructs self-reflective relations through both lived and imagined experiences of time. As Rex Butler and Morgan Thomas put it, "the presentness or 'thisness' of the photograph is crossed by a sense of its pastness." Memory is at work here, both triggered by and leading back to trauma. According to Butler and Thomas, the matter-of-fact past tense quality of the captions in Scarred for Life is crucial in this regard. The captions both respond to and precede the photographs. They may act to deflect the blow of the photographs. They are not the "'key' to [the] traumatic event but symptomatic of a withdrawal from it."21 Even more importantly, this relation locates the viewer in a space between the "specific injury" of the photograph and the "generalised discursive consequence" of its caption.22

16 Emphasis added. The only real sense of this ongoing condition through time in the first series is in 'Useless, 1974' where the father's nickname of 'useless' for his depicted daughter would clearly apply over a period of time.


21 ibid., 30

22 ibid., 31/note 20. Butler and Thomas are concerned here with a larger relation between aesthetics and ethics, figured by specificity (image) and universality (caption) respectively. The concern of this
This space, in turn, is replicated by the schism between the specific documentary element of each image and its formal stylisation at the hands of the artist leading to a universalisation of experience.\textsuperscript{23}

The temporal lag between image and text is key to traumatic recall. Such recall involves a simultaneous approach to the site of trauma and maintenance of some form of protective distance from it (so enabling recognition of the traumatic rather than simple exposure to its effects). Therefore, as Butler and Thomas claim, rather than "a mismatch between the image and the traumatic event recounted in the caption", each instead marks two different temporalities and thus acts "as a sort of delayed, traumatic reaction to the other."\textsuperscript{24}

The separation or temporal gap between image and text in \textit{Scarred for Life} also sets up contingent, even abrasive relations between possible multiple subject positions structured within the individual works. The caption texts take a detached (and all knowing) third person perspective, cloaking a rhetorical function in an authoritative posturing. They do not have the subjective signature of a classic photo-essay text (where the writer is as present as the photographer), nevertheless they do concentrate upon and empathise with the experience of the oppressed or violated subjects within the images. The core subjects of the work are the 'shes' and 'hes' identified by the texts. Moffatt has clearly chosen and structured these texts, whether they are sourced from her own memories, or those of others, or indeed are entirely fictional. Yet her name appears under the images specifically – it is fixed in its relation to the images but not so to the titles and caption. It is as if Moffatt were signalling this potential resistance and disruption between image and text, or signalling its performance: as if to say, 'only the pictures are mine.' In so doing Moffatt invokes the instrumentality of other voices.

\textsuperscript{23} ibid.

\textsuperscript{24} ibid., 30
I now turn to the structural means by which this play upon instrumentality is made possible, with reference to the work of image/text theorist W.J.T. Mitchell and that of Roland Barthes.

W.J.T. Mitchell and the Photo-Essay

In Chapter 2 I made reference to W.J.T. Mitchell's notion of the "pictorial turn" in contemporary culture. As noted there, when applied to the photographic, Mitchell's notion of a "postlinguistic, postsemiotic rediscovery of the picture as a complex interplay between visuality, apparatus, discourse, bodies, and figuration" infers a far more nuanced and dynamic model of explication for current photo-mimetic practices than the notion of a simple, para-linguistic, return to photographic document and 'truth'. In the early sections of Mitchell's chapter on the photo-essay within this book Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation, he addresses Victor Burgin's famous declaration of the photograph's total invasion by language. Mitchell does not openly oppose Burgin's position; for example he admits that visual and verbal registers interact at all levels of cognition, consciousness and communication. However, Burgin's dogmatic insistence that language invades (and thus pre-exists) the visual bothers Mitchell. He is concerned by this perceived passivity of the visual register. And so he considers what value there may be in seeking out forms of potential resistance to this invasion within the photograph, in trying to conceive of "some real motive for a defence of the nonlinguistic character of the photograph."

Mitchell's idea of resistance does not constitute a conservative separation of image from language (from modes of understanding), but is an attempt to conceive of a more dynamic model of the image/text than that offered by Burgin. Mitchell's relation of resistance

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27 Mitchell, 'The Photographic Essay', 282-83

28 ibid., 283
therefore evokes a paradox: the photographic as simultaneously linguistic, and not.\textsuperscript{29} And this, predictably, leads him to Barthes' photographic paradox – the co-existence of two registers of message in each and every photograph; one coded, one uncoded. Barthes claimed that "...the paradox is clearly not the collusion of a denoted and a connoted message...it is that the connoted (or coded) message develops on the basis of a message without a code."\textsuperscript{30} For Barthes this structural paradox coincided with an ethical paradox: the realisation that the act of copying reality meticulously is an ideological act – that the analogical is not, in fact, value-free, or resistant to pollution by value.\textsuperscript{31} Barthes viewed the co-existence of verbal and visual register not as a structural overlaying of levels of message, nor as a fluid, free-for-all exchange between the two, but as a relation of resistance. And so this is the value of Barthes to Mitchell, who writes:

This is not to suggest that resistance is always successful or that 'collusion' or 'exchange' between photography and language is impossible or automatically undesirable. It is to say that the exchanges which seem to make photography just another language, an adjunct or supplement to language, make no sense without an understanding of the resistance they overcome. What we need to explore now is the nature of this resistance and the values which have motivated it.\textsuperscript{32}

The photo-essay provides Mitchell with a formal model within which to seek this practice of resistance.\textsuperscript{33} Mitchell treats the photo-essay as a dialectical form based on the internal contradiction of concurrent collaboration and resistance between image and text. Thus Mitchell's interest is in photo-essays with strong, even invasive textual elements where the text is concerned not just with the common subject shared by visual and textual forms, but

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 284


\textsuperscript{31} See ibid., 20

\textsuperscript{32} Mitchell, 'The Photographic Essay', 285

\textsuperscript{33} It must, however, be noted that each of Mitchell's examples establish very different image/text relations, that is, four very different formal models of collaboration or resistance. Thus Mitchell is able to claim for the photo-essay a fluidity of form, or anti-formalism even, that sets to play always the question of unstable speaking positions, never their fixity. However, whilst this may complicate inherited notions of the authority of the photo-essay as narrative text, it does not deny connotation to social agency and intervention.
with the manner in which that subject matter is addressed. For Mitchell, the very best photo-essays are those which fundamentally avoid the use of either image or language as a transparent instrument for the propagation of a pre-existing social cause.\(^{34}\) "The problem is..." Mitchell writes, "...to mediate these disparate claims [to the ethical and political, the aesthetic and rhetorical], to make the instrumentality of both writing and photography and their interactions serve the highest interests of 'the cause' by subjecting it to criticism while advancing its banner."\(^{35}\) Mitchell treats the photo-essay as a more dynamic model of representational production than suggested by other more conventional models that figure it as embodiement of mutually affirmative collaboration.\(^{36}\)

The final element of Mitchell's text pertinent to this discussion deals with the conjunction and commonality of 'photo' and 'essay'. According to Mitchell, both photography and the essay typically reference reality or are associated with "non-fictional" modes of representation. The 'essay' connotes a relatively informal, personal form of narrative, representing a private point of view and individual memory. As such it has some affinity with "photography's mythic status as a kind of materialised memory trace embedded in the context of personal associations and private 'perspectives'".\(^{37}\) Furthermore, both image and text are partial or incomplete:

The text of the photographic essay typically discloses a certain reserve or modesty in its claims to 'speak for' or interpret the images; like the photograph, it admits its inability to appropriate everything that there was to be taken and tries to let the photographs speak for themselves or 'look back' at the viewer.\(^{38}\)

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\(^{34}\) This illuminates the manner in which Mitchell's dynamic, if elusive model of the photo-essay is deeply imbedded in an actively discursive notion of 'documentary' – not one restricted by containment within a relation of unmediated photographic transcription and transparency.

\(^{35}\) Mitchell, 'The Photographic Essay', 288

\(^{36}\) See, for example, John Roberts, 'John Berger and Jean Mohr: The Return to Communality', in The Art of Interruption: Realism, Photography and the Everyday (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1998) 128-43

\(^{37}\) Mitchell, 'The Photographic Essay', 289

\(^{38}\) Ibid.
Do Moffatt's images in *Scarred for Life* speak for themselves. Do they look back at the viewer? Does the work involve either a construction or a performance of this relation (both collaborative and resistant) of photographic image and text in order to call upon the social agency of the photo-essay convention? In teasing out this relation might it be possible to imagine other images to these texts? Or other texts to these images? Might it be possible to imagine other subjects formed in the spaces between text and image? Or other subjects returning in these spaces?

At a basic level these are simple questions to answer. It is of course quite easy to both imagine other texts to Moffatt's images and vice versa. It is also possible to imagine or project other subjects into the heart of the works given that only one of the nineteen works actually grants a name to its ostensible subject(s). The rest are peopled with nameless figures – ciphers of particular yet shared experiences. Furthermore, the specific generating situation of most of the images is ambiguous – given that they appear to be completed only by the captions, they could be completed or explained in other ways. The general narrative situations and explications offered by the captions could also be represented in different ways, either via concentrating upon a different moment in the scenario, upon another form of response to the scenario, or upon other subjects within the scenario. Adrian Martin perhaps describes this action of *Scarred for Life* best by asking the question: "Does the story belong to the person in the image, the artist, or somebody else entirely?"

Subject formation within the interplay of image and text is important to the appeal of Moffatt's scenarios to shared experience. And once more this hinges on a relation of the particular to the universal. As Martin again succinctly states it: "Moffatt conjures a kind of generalised melodramatic condition, the pathos and pain of which ensnares its viewers." Butler and Thomas similarly describe *Scarred for Life* as a set of episodes of humiliation.

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30 Experiences formed within the shared context of childhood, parenthood and the like which also fits hand in glove with the over-arching experience of always being defined within a subject relation to others – as someone's child for example.

40 Although this last would, of course, compromise the fundamental basis of the individual works within the recollection of the subjects of the specific traumatic scenarios that 'scar for life'.


42 Ibid.
where the effect of a word or gesture coming from a figure of authority marks a kind of passage from childhood to adulthood. These episodes are idiosyncratic, incongruous, odd, not at all what we tend to think of as 'normal' or as having occurred to us—and yet it is also true to say that they summon up something universal, something that seems particularly meant for us.43

If these scenarios are somehow "particularly meant" for each individual viewer, then any completion of the image by the text (and vice versa) can occur only within the structural register of the image/text relation prior to encounter with viewing subjects (which is, in fact, no completion at all). This is not a relation where image and text form a hermetic whole, or even partake in a set of logical mutually affirmative relations. On the contrary, the works simply proffer enough clues to a form of relationship between image, narrative and an exterior realm to invite a viewer's projection (sourced in memory, experience, desire, fear and imagination) into that space. As Martin Hentschel claims, the space of the image/text relation is the space of viewer projection, a space where it becomes clear that the informational element of neither image nor text alone is sufficient to fully reveal subject experience. And in this space, "a third interpretation develops which is neither contained in the text nor in the picture if either is looked at on its own."44 Moreover, the success of this invitation to the viewer is based in the opening up of a similar space between childhood and adult conceptions of selfhood. A whole range of possible and desired selves can be imagined.

Remembered Worlds

Two broad registers of memory are crucial to the structure of Scarred for Life: individual memory and shared (or cultural) memory. The latter can be discussed with particular reference to Tracey Moffatt's limited citations of period architectural and design styles within the images, her evocations of place, and her appeal to the historical cultural agency of picture magazines.

43 Butler and Thomas, 'Tracey Moffatt', 28

In terms of temporal reference, the individual images in the first series span a twenty-one year period, yet despite the waistcoat, mantelpiece clock and porcelain jugs of the image marked 1956 and the stubby shorts, loose blouse and beads of the image marked 1977 there is really very little sense of chronological development or stylistic distinction between the images themselves. The dating of each image within the very form of work separates it from all others. The second series is similar in this regard, with even less stylistic distinction based on historical moment, yet a greater range of temporal reference (from 1958 through to 1987). As discussed further in Chapter 6, much of Moffatt’s practice plays upon connections across images for its narrative import. In Scarred for Life, however, any play upon narrative and seriality takes place via reference to the form of the photo-essay with its implication that each singular work must be but an out-take from a more complete but absent narrative. Connectivity is otherwise inferred through a general similarity of content—all moments which ‘scar for life’—and through a stylistic and structural affinity between the works that creates a shared mode of looking. The images share in a generic look, a generalised appeal to a historical block of time that is both contained within, and is, the fading pages of the pre-digital age picture-magazine.

By Moffatt’s own description this work was “inspired by looking at 1960s American Life magazine layouts. A kind of snapshot photography – very everyday moments based on real life tragic funny childhood stories of my friends and myself.”⁴⁵ What assumptions are apparent here? To make ‘real’ pictures of ‘real’ life stories Moffatt turns to a particular representational form codified as ‘real’. Photography provides a line of contact to the acts and conditions of lived reality, but not, in this case, a transcriptive, denotive or uncoded line of contact. In fact, Moffatt’s texts do not so much describe pre-existing scenes as create the scenes for a viewer. As Roland Barthes famously wrote, on occasion the text acts to “produce (invent) an entirely new signified which is retroactively projected into the image, so much so as to appear denoted there.”⁴⁶ The text burdens the images with "a culture, a moral, an imagination."⁴⁷ Moffatt’s work invokes the effect of a particular relation to ‘real’

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⁴⁵ Cited in Matt, ‘An Interview with Tracey Moffatt’, 61

⁴⁶ Barthes, ‘The Photographic Message’, 27

⁴⁷ ibid., 26
experience created via clearly coded forms (or relations); the code of the photo-essay; the code of the picture magazine.

Critics frequently comment upon the attention to detail and stylistic fidelity of the Scarred for Life images. The lace curtains and brown drapes, the drawn venetian blinds, the chrome taps, the sun-bleached or false brick-clad walls, the velour-finished furniture, the unused fireplaces – in the words of Lynne Cooke all this apparently constitutes "vernacular detail from suburban sixties' Australia."Yet only two of the nine images in the first series are located within the 1960s, and none at all from the second series. Six of the images in the first series are located within the 1970s. Of the ten images from the second series four are located within the 1970s and five within the 1980s. So Cooke's above attribution is to a remembered (or imagined) location, coded (or conjured) by the image. It is also one sourced in awareness of Moffatt's own origins in 1960s' suburban Australia, and her own location of the work within a 1960s-form as mnemonic (or more acutely, a form which she encounters within and as the 1960s.) But might not these details also signify elsewhere? None of the works have the outdoors, outback Australianness of Moffatt's Up In The Sky for example. These Scarred for Life images could easily conjure suburban experiences in other Western societies impacted by post-war American representational culture – Canada and New Zealand to name just two. More to the point, they conjure a 1950s' and 1960s' suburban USA, or, more accurately, a suburban memory collectivised within the pages of the picture-magazine, transmitted and internalised. For one of the key features of all Moffatt's practice is this sense of both here and elsewhere inhabiting each other in material forms of cultural production as well as in individual experience and imagination (which is different from a process of extrapolating the universal from the particular). This folding of spatial or cultural reference occurs via the coded 'real' of historical experience. As Patricia Mellencamp has claimed with regard to Moffatt's film work: "We do not just witness history, we experience history as memory."^40 'We' look at these images and see suburban Australia of the not-so-

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distant past, or more precisely a reference to that suburban Australia via a representational structure or norm that 'we' associate with it. The picture magazine containing these images could be sitting atop the furniture within the images.

None of this is to infer that the photo-essay is a stable visual model with unmediated access to the material world, or that 'photo-essay' and 'picture magazine' signify interchangeable forms. Scarred for Life relates most specifically to a particular form of image/text relation sourced in picture magazines of the 1960s, and this relation itself is in part embedded within the development of the photo-essay through late modernity. It is not necessary to undertake a thorough historical analysis of both the photo-essay and the picture-magazine here, for the question of how closely Moffatt's works replicate or reference the representational structure, style and content of these sources is not so very crucial. The issue is more to do with the effective action of signification, than its basis within accurate resemblance. What is important here is not that Scarred for Life accurately replicates the picture-magazine photo-essay or captioned illustration form, but rather that it suggests such to a contemporary audience. Equally, the documentary veracity of this picture-magazine or photo-essay source is not as important as the strength of its association to an idea of a photography grounded in a particular relation to material culture and social relations. The historical place of the picture magazine photo-essay in both trading in and disrupting inter-racial stereotypes, or in replacing old stereotypes with new is also important here. For despite Moffatt's claims that her work "may feature brown faces but it could be anybody's story," the work resonates with reference to forms of inter-cultural representation. There is, as Mellencamp asserts, a prejudicial linkage between so-called documentary realism and the representation of Indigenous and black peoples.\footnote{Mellencamp, 'An Emperical Avant-Garde', 176-77}

Yet issues of Indigenous identity (whether collective or individual) do not appear important to these works. Moffatt's subjects are objectified from within their own cultural milieu (by peers and family) as much as from the outside. This being the case, does the photographic (and authorial) representation of this humiliation further perpetuate such objectification? Or does it, in fact, offer opportunity for the subjects to 'speak back'? Does

\footnote{Scott Murray, 'Tracey Moffatt', Cinema Papers, 79 (1990) 21}
the photo-essay structure imply a process of public judgement, in addition to that of public disclosure? Does the very form of the work insinuate a basis in objectifying revelation or personal catharsis? As is so often the case with Moffatt's work, there are no clear answers here – speculation provoked by both suggestibility and ambiguity is itself a pertinent outcome.

Three of the nine images from the first series clearly depict Aboriginal subjects; all teenagers suffering abuse from their mothers. The subjects of the other images are either clearly European in heritage or difficult to discern. The second series, however, contains a far wider cultural cross-section of subjects. One work depicts an inter-racial lesbian affair. Another has two Aboriginal and two Chinese children acting in a production of 'Waltzing Matilda'. One depicts a Tongan family. In another, two Chinese sisters are pictured cutting a lawn with scissors. A woman of apparently Middle Eastern or Mediterranean heritage ties her son up whilst he plays. The children summoning courage to dash past their drunken father may or may not be Aboriginal.

Two different readings suggest themselves. One is a rather simple ascription of social commentary to the work regarding, for example, alcohol problems and violence towards children in Indigenous families; or cultural misunderstanding between an immigrant mother and Anglo-Australian law enforcement officers; or lack of acceptance towards children's exploration of gender (within European families). In a broader sense such a form of reading may lead to an observation regarding the greater cultural diversity represented in the second series (especially the Asian and Pacific Island subjects depicted in images located within the 1980s) as indicative acknowledgment of the changing cultural make-up of Australian society during the 1970s and 1980s, or it may note the greater public (and representational) recognition given to this social make-up at the time of the work's production towards the end of the twentieth century. The converse reading involves treating these somewhat stereotypical representations as partial attempts to draw attention towards the dominance of such cultural stereotypes as determining tropes in social

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52 One is simply of a face recoiling from a blow from her mother on Mother's Day. Another tearfully clutches the birth certificate thrown at her during a fight with her mother. The third stands against an outside wall contemplating his mother's comment that 'maybe [he's] not good enough' to get a job.

53 Or it could, simply, just reflect the diversity of cultural backgrounds of the people Moffatt collected the anecdotes and stories that triggered the works from.
interaction. This second reading leads interpretation away from an over-restrictive basis in social commentary. If the work overtly highlights cultural stereotypes, then it also implicates the involvement of the photo-essay form in the construction and propagation of such stereotypes as the basis for rigid, unresponsive and fundamentally moralising cross-cultural relationships. This is Mellencamp's point.

This aspect of inter-racial or inter-cultural representation is absolutely crucial to the overall resonance of Scarred for Life. It would be misleading, however, to lock the work into a social commentary framework. Such allusions add to the richness of the work, and most significantly open up particular forms of relation between the work and its immediate social contexts. But the work is far more complex in its evocation of individual psychology and imagination, and finally too elusive in meaning to simply act as commentary. However we treat the photo-essay—whether like John Berger as a mutually affirmative, socially engaged practice,54 or like Allan Sekula as "a cliché-ridden form that is the non-commercial counterpoint to the photographic advertisement"55—it undoubtedly fulfilled certain affective social functions at particular historical junctures. For example, it gave weight to, even formulated certain societal understandings of 'other' cultural groups. In Scarred for Life, Moffatt activates collective memory as it is accessed via and embodied within the picture-magazine photo-essay. The 'real' appealed to here incorporates but does not necessarily privilege the significance of racial stereotyping.

The period that Moffatt herself alludes to as important in the genesis of the work—the 1960s—in fact marked the cultural and commercial decline of the picture magazine.56 During the later 1960s, magazines such as Life and Time tended towards shorter photo-essays, compressing visual content whilst looking to new subjects previously excluded by their relatively rigid and conservative moral codes: drug addiction, race-relations, civil rights, and social revolution.57 Scarred for Life bears a sense of the photo-essay's ultimate failure to

54 See Roberts, 'John Berger and Jean Mohr'


57 ibid.
reveal and persuade. A present day audience necessarily approaches this work conditioned to contemporary media fascination with issues of gender, sexual violence, race, and genealogy (both personal and cultural). These form essential aspects of a shared public consciousness. But only recently could such issues be imaged in this way. By routing them back via the otherwise exhausted codes of an earlier period Moffatt doubles the impact of the subject matter in a kind of 'as if...', or further, 'if only...-'—if only this format, even given its admittedly waning cultural hegemony, had been diverted to these subjects earlier.

**Childhood as Subject**

I have addressed the cultural and racial specificity of aspects of *Scarred for Life*, yet the ostensible subject of each of the works—their re-presented settings and their representational forms—also invite other familiarities. Like much of Moffatt's work, *Scarred for Life* straddles the blurred and absorbent edges of cultural specificity. All the *Scarred for Life* works open out to forms of familial relation: to familial dysfunction recalled; to familial conflict centred upon repressed issues. They open out to pressured, marked, displaced identity, and always upon childhood (including adolescence) as the source of traumatic eruption, a figure of Hal Foster's "return of the real". This is childhood as memory evoked, memory given form, memory made real. But there is no pretended transcriptive photographic imaging of that occasion or state as if this was once so witnessed, as if the camera were there. Rather, through invoking the strength of reference and understanding associated with the representational form of the photo-essay in its picture-magazine manifestation these works assert the cultural authority of the real.

Memory or the acts of recollection underpinning these works stem from adult forms of self-consciousness. *Scarred for Life* represents moments or situations in which childhood subjectivity is marked (or scarred) by coming into abrasive relationship with the social. Upon reflection, these moments become pivotal to a developing sense of self-consciousness or identity. They mark points in transition between childhood naivety and more mature states of

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self-awareness.\(^{59}\) As Adrian Martin states, Moffatt’s subjects are marked by their entry into the symbolic, into “the whole social fabric of preordained and sanctified positions, identities, stereotypes, ways of behaving and appearing.”\(^{60}\) Her work “dramatises, in many different ways, the primal violence of socialisation – the invariably traumatic way in which each individual must be ‘inserted’ into an ever-widening set of social, institutional frames: family, school, community, nation.”\(^{61}\)

Children are the core subjects of all the works, even when presented as adults. They are all subject to the judgement, and occasionally physical violence of others: generally their parents;\(^{62}\) occasionally their peers or siblings; and sometimes, quite overtly, the viewer. If other subjects or experiences were to be imagined into these works, an inversion of active and passive subject positions across the image/text relation would take place. The projection of such imaginings would be most possible within works in which teenage subjects are figured in passive, yet reflective repose. Staring into space they embody a potential autonomy that may be responsive to and altered positively by other narrative scenarios.

The condition of being subject to the actions, prejudices and judgements of others, however, is not solely constructed within the image/text relation. Affective subject relations conveyed via visual structure alone do exist, particularly when the scene is presented from the viewpoint of the ’scarred’ subject.\(^{63}\)

Even though parents are the core agents of the ’scarings’ represented within the two series, they are rarely pictured with any clarity, as if even in recollection they are being kept at a safe distance, displaced any denied any sympathetic identity. Fathers appear twice in

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\(^{59}\) Each series, for example, includes an image of a teenage subject confronting themselves in the mirror in the light of taunts regarding their appearance.

\(^{60}\) Adrian Martin, ‘Moffatt’s Australia (A Reconnaissance)’, Parkett 53 (1998) 26

\(^{61}\) ibid.

\(^{62}\) This is the case in seven of the nine images in the first series and and seven of the ten images in the second.

\(^{63}\) This occurs once in each series. In ’Heart Attack, 1970’ from the first series the image is exactly that ’glimpse’ of her naked father belting a little girl that the ’she’ of the text sees, standing in the doorway. The core subject of the work is thus not pictured within the image. ’Door Dash, 1979’ from the second is different in that the image presents a view from over the shoulder of the children looking at their drunken father, with the suggest that the viewer is not only sharing their perspective (although from a slightly higher viewpoint) but may in fact be occupying the position of a fifth sibling. Here, however, the viewer still looks upon the apparent subjects of the work, thus the affinity between subject and viewer is less marked.
the first series as dominating figures hectoring their children, or physically abusing a child. In each instance they are pictured as a faceless, physically domineering mass. By contrast, parents are pictured more frequently in the second series, but never as central presences. In two instances where they verbally abuse their daughters, mothers are depicted as partially obscured or out of focus figures ("Mother's Reply, 1976' and 'Suicide Threat, 1982"). The drunken father in 'Door Dash, 1979' is more threatening for being a small, indistinct figure in the half-light of evening. The two mothers in 'Piss Bags, 1978' embrace in the background to the side of the image thus offering little sense of either appearance or identity. The Tongan mother in 'Responsible but Dreaming, 1984' is also pictured (sleeping) to the side of and behind the central figure. Only the mother arguing with a police officer in 'Pantyhose Arrest, 1973' is depicted both in some detail and as an active subject.

On two occasions in the first series the viewer is forced to take up the parent's viewpoint; on one occasion staring down at a son and his friend caught playing a birthing game, and on the other looking straight at the blurred side of a daughter's head recoiling from a blow. Only in 'Scissor Cut, 1980', looking down upon the two kneeling girls, is this equation of parental and audience viewpoint made in the second series. Nevertheless, these few occasions infer a correspondence between the represented acts or consequences of scarring and the controlling gaze accorded the viewer (and by further implication central to the camera's structural and social operation). Elsewhere in the first series in particular, the viewing position remains one of self-implication, as if squeezed into the compressed, claustrophobic domestic spaces of the images. The images depict subjects up close, so that even when apparently outside ('Job Hunt, 1976' and 'Useless, 1974') or in a public location of some sort ('Telecam Guys, 1977) we have the sense of intrusion into private spaces. This is clearly in keeping with the works' basis in acts of private revelation. But it also evokes a particular notion of social documentary photography as a revelatory mode of representation, constantly straddling some fine line between the so-called demands of knowing (resulting in a requirement for the photographer to get close to her subjects) and an inappropriate intrusion upon the private realms of photographic subjects. Similar forms of photographic relation are evoked in the second series, but there are more works depicting groups of figures. These images depict fuller environments, and thus the sense of psychological claustrophobia diminishes. In pictorial terms, therefore, the second
series is more scenographic and less psychologically intense than the first — there is a far greater sense of distance between viewer and represented experience.

The above descriptions confirm Martin Hentschel’s point that the viewer is constantly shifted about throughout the two series, moving from the perspective of the observer to that of the observed, from that of the perpetrator to that of the victim and then back out to a more detached, ‘public’ audience relation. This is crucial: in its activation of audience/subject relationships the pictorial structure is central to the intersubjective imagining of the overall work. And this activation requires that the scenarios be encountered on far more than a basic biographical level — they are far more than just someone else’s experiences. Explaining the individual works’ genesis in fundamentally biographical terms would absolve the viewer from an active relationship to both content and form of the recalled trauma. Conversely, the more apparently detached images depicting a wider range of interrelationships serve a similar end via insisting upon the social and intercultural complexity of identity formation, upon a network of relationships open to constant intervention and re-invention.

In Scarred for Life allusion to biography — to the status of the subjects and scenarios as actual people and events recreated by the artist — is just that, no more than an allusion. Unlike the work of Brenda L. Croft where this factual biographical element offers a key to the broader cultural operation and significance of the work, in Moffatt’s work the suggestion of a basis in biographical actuality serves merely to heighten the affect of the work as psychodrama. Whether these works have been sourced in actual biographical detail, or whether they present purely imagined subjects and scenarios is of little importance. The apparent coexistence of both sources results in works that both resonate with experiences of the real, and are seductively open to viewer projection. Fact and fiction cohabit in every element of the work. As Martin claims: "It is not the forensic accuracy of quotation that her [Moffatt’s] art

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64 See Hentschel, ‘Emblems of Exposure’, 28

65 ‘Pantyhose Arrest, 1973’ is perhaps the richest work in this regard as it not only pictures relationships between mother, child and police but via the text identifies a third-party — a next-door neighbour — as the locus for the scenario of clashing beliefs taking place in the image. Furthermore, the slightest possibility exists in their simple naming that the ‘next-door neighbour’ is actually occupying the same viewing position as a viewer of the work, or at least looking over the fence at the same scene, thus casting the viewer into the scenario as the most active figure of misunderstanding and lack of willingness to engage directly with the ‘other’ in the form of the woman of Middle-Eastern or Mediterranean appearance, preferring instead to phone the police.)
dwell on. Rather, particular cultural 'auras'—thick with mood, memory, atmosphere, association—become a steely conduit for the channelling of intense emotions of anger and desire."  

The 'Return of the Real'

In his highly influential *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*, Hal Foster claims that contemporary practice is marked by a return of the real, of subjectivity once cancelled in trauma. This is both subject and structural dynamic of Tracey Moffatt's *Scarred for Life*. Foster, however, concentrates upon the body as a key site of trauma. The body is the dismembered ground of lived experience as or within a dislocation of memory. And so Foster is most interested in art practices that re-figure (or literally re-member) the body. I have made little reference to 'the body' in *Scarred for Life*, for any such 'return to the real' in this work is enacted via a particular form of image/text relationship evoking a range of potent associations to belief structures in and accessed through representation. A notion of recourse to the symbolic in the very experience of the real is crucial to this work; such is the centrality of the photo-essay form. This marks it apart from the work Foster is interested in (and apart from the idea that an experience of the real requires some momentary disengagement of symbolic). Clearly, this identification of a representational history at the core of *Scarred for Life* displaces any notion of the return of authentic experience or selfhood. The scenarios constructed within *Scarred for Life* are deeply affective. But their staging within the dynamics of a particular representational structure that itself has a rich cultural history ensures that the viewer is denied the (fallacious) sense of direct, unmediated relationship to the subjects' experiences. The photo-essay form plays a double role here. It both evokes a certain resonance of real experience, and makes opaque the dependence of that resonance (of real experience) upon representational convention. As with much appropriationist image/text work from the 1980s in particular, *Scarred for Life* foregrounds the role of representational forms in the development of both individual and communal experience and identity. Unlike such work, however, *Scarred for Life* evidences an

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65 Martin, 'Moffatt's Australia', 26
acknowledgment of the cogency of real—in this case direct, traumatic experience—in identity formation. Furthermore, its cogency and affectivity as a body of work depends fundamentally upon an appeal to that very same sense of real experience in each and every viewer. The photo-essay provides a model in which image and text compliment and augment each other in deceptively complex manners, but do not serve to fragment and undercut the veracity of each other to the degree of much appropriationist and postmodern image/text work.

Conclusion

Scarred for Life is the only body of work discussed in this study where textual elements are absolutely fundamental to both the work's structure and discursive operation. In this regard, the work does not risk capitulating to the hegemonic condition of spectacle culture discussed to date. Rather, in its unique deployment of particular ciphers of the real in photographic style (and history), and its subtle merging of tableau construction, performability and documentary veracity with textual components, it provides a counter-model to dominant photo-based art practices of the past decade.

The form of Moffatt's works occupy a space between the very images they contain and the material world imaged. This space—representational, cultural, and indeed political—might itself be thought of here itself of the real; as a set of conventions and relations in which both the world and the image share. In these terms Moffatt makes of memory an effect of the real through the form—the fiction—of the picture-magazine photo-essay. In the following chapter I discuss how Moffatt does something similar via recourse to the forms, conventions and cultural potency of the cinema.

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67 As I note in Chapters 4 and 6, text plays important roles in the work of both Brenda L. Croft and Jon Rhodes. It remains, however, supplementary to rather than embedded within the material form of the image.
CHAPTER 6
Film and Performance: Tracey Moffatt and Jon Rhodes

We no longer know what is imaginary or real, physical or mental, in the situation, not because they are confused, but because we do not have to know and there is no longer a place from which to ask. It is as if the real and the imaginary were running after each other, as if each was being reflected in the other, around a point of indiscernability. (Gilles Deleuze)\(^1\)

Far from shoring up the real, cinema accentuates its ambiguity, opting for neither one nor the other, cinema finally cannot choose between faking reality and the reality of its own fakes. (Scott McQuire)\(^2\)

Just as with the preceding analysis of Tracey Moffatt's *Scarred for Life* (1994/1999), in this chapter I argue that a formal evocation of image models sourced in other modes of representation may, in turn, closely touch conceptions of 'real' experience within viewing subjects. I pursue a comparison of two sets of work by Moffatt and Jon Rhodes in order to highlight the manner in which hybrid clusters of representational conventions drawn from documentary photography as well as from film serve to forge strong relationships between viewing and pictured subjects (relationships of recognition if not always identification) and so compound the rhetorical force of the photographic image released into a contemporary art context. Indeed, both sets of work discussed here appeal to a notion of social realism, so concentrating the apparent experience of their subjects at both personal and social levels.

This is particularly so with the work of Rhodes. Of all the artists discussed in this study Rhodes is the least associated with contemporary art. He is most readily described as a documentary photographer. The discussion of Rhodes' work in this context is nevertheless appropriate, for his is a general form of practice that the other artists discussed in this study explicitly or otherwise reference in their own work. Moreover, it successfully develops a critical friction between individual subjects, viewers, and the often conflicting social and material experiences of each pursued in so much of the other work under review.

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I concentrate upon a selection of Rhodes' works presented in the exhibition, *Whichaway? Photographs from Kiwirrkura 1974-1996* that toured Australia during the late 1990s, and upon Moffatt's *Up In The Sky* (1997). I also make brief references to other bodies of photographic work produced by Moffatt during the 1990s in order to indicate how her use of cinematic conventions and allusions changes over this short period of time. For example, cinematic stereotypes are evoked in *Something More* as a means to partial but overt revelation regarding their role within identity construction. By *Up In The Sky*, however, such conventions provide Moffatt's work with formal models for the harnessing of the constructive, imaginative forces associated with cinema within the still image as a space in which real experience may be presented. This is emblematic of a general shift in photo-based contemporary art practice from what Adrian Martin describes as an "agitational–deconstructive" approach to cinematic tropes within postmodernist or appropriation art of the 1980s, towards a generative appeal to the rhetorical force of those tropes through their adaptation and deployment within art of the later 1990s.

Distinctions between the general practices of Moffatt and Rhodes are easy to make. Moffatt is the most internationally celebrated Australian artist of the 1990s. Her work could easily be located in a lineage of figures running through the history of Western art who have successfully deployed the envisioning, transformative powers of images apparently deriving from, inhabiting and intermingling both imaginative and factual worlds. Rhodes is more evidently concerned with the faithful visual communication of his subjects' social experience. Moffatt constructs and images fictions. Rhodes photographs people in their actual cultural settings. Moffatt works across and draws upon a diversity of representational forms and

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4 *Scarred for Life* notwithstanding, the two sets of photographic work produced by Moffatt during the 1990s not mentioned in this chapter, or in this study as a whole, are *Pet Thang* (1991) and *Beauties* (1994).

conventions. Rhodes primarily presents black and white photographs in narrative sets or sequences.

Yet my examination of how the work of each draws together the photographic image in persuasively documentary guises with representational conventions drawn from film reveals evocations of remarkably similar cultural landscapes and experiences. The work of both visualises connections between viewer, social subjects and both visual and acculturated locations. My analysis focuses upon the performative or interventionist gestures of each photographer’s subjects. The picturing of active bodies in ‘real’ space is crucial to the manner in which each set of work shifts back and forth between what Joanna Lowry describes as iconic and indexical signification.⁶ The work thus simultaneously stands in for, displaces and is marked by real scenarios, subjectivities and experiences. The resulting play backwards and forwards between signifiers of fact and fiction, between social experience and imagination, or between lived space pictured within the image and the image as itself a form of lived space is central to the conception of social realism generated by both sets of work. Indeed, the work of both Moffatt and Rhodes depends upon this conception for any meaningful relationship that it may have to specific material and social formations.

There are three specific, interrelated conceptions encapsulated by ‘realism’ worth noting here. The first is the manner in which it encapsulates a dynamic relation of social and material worlds to their representational forms. Such a notion bears close relation to the dialectical realism of method advocated by John Roberts (see Chapter 2), in which representational “understanding and recovery of the world is based upon the socially produced and self-qualifying nature of signification, in which things and their relations and representations are in dynamic movement and tension.”⁷ In this formation a relation of acquaintance between world and image flows cogently in both directions.⁸ Resemblance and signification are held in a tensile relation, a somewhat precarious yet productive

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balance in which pictorial realism is revealed as rhetorical—as "representation plus a belief system"—without capitulation to the furthermost relativity of appropriationist logic of the simulacrum.\(^9\)

The second is the manner in which realism does not simply denote mere representation of conditions of the material world and social experience, but reproduces such conditions in the process of the artwork's production. The artwork, here the photograph, is activated in its relation to both subjects and viewers as an embodiment of such conditions or experiences (which are of course at least in part subjective and imaginative). And third; realism depends upon the energy of imaginative transformation for the force of its effect.\(^11\) All three conceptions lead to what Lynne Cooke calls, in specific reference to \textit{Up In The Sky}, "a form of realism that refutes naturalism."\(^{12}\)

The work of both Moffatt and Rhodes partakes in a game of association with social documentary photography in particular. Here 'realism' describes the means by which such works seek to visualise the specific social conditions and experience of their subjects in a dynamic, rhetorical and imaginatively evocative manner. It allows that such works function as social documentary photography always has, but also exaggerates the manner in which the very experience visualised in both the production of images and in their relation to viewers is that of subjects themselves formed in the experience of being subject to, of viewing, and of making photographic images. This does not constitute a circular relation of experience and representation, but rather the fundamental cohabitation of each in the formation of both individual and collective subjectivity. This is neither new nor confined to the areas of 1990s 'post'-documentary photography. Social documentary practice of the 1960s and particularly


\(^10\)Resemblance theory is discussed at greater length in Chapter 8.

\(^11\)Although not referring to photography, Terry Smith perhaps best characterises this: "The shadow of the magical," he writes, "...haunts Western seeing, just at the point when it seems most objective, pragmatic, self-evidently realistic. It is this which is released when the visual language of realism reaches its limits; it is this release which realism needs to secure its effects, chief among which is the effect of effectlessness, of direct encounter with the real." Terry Smith, 'Modes of Production', in Robert S. Nelson and Richard Schiff eds, \textit{Critical Terms for Art History} (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996) 242-43

\(^12\)Lynne Cooke, 'A Photo-Filmic Odyssey', in \textit{Tracey Moffatt, Free-Falling} (exh. cat.) (New York: Dia Center for the Arts, 1998) 34
the 1970s not only evidenced but also developed this performative awareness and self-reflexivity into representational styles and conventions. As I noted in Chapter 4, this is especially apparent in forms of 'insider' documentary where an already existing relationship of intimacy or affinity between the photographer and subjects both formally generates and is the core subject of many images. And so the subject of social documentary becomes 'our' rather than 'their' lives. Casting even further back, lessons drawn from anthropological practice have long assisted critical recognition of photography's implication in the formation of the social experience it may purport to depict. By extension then, a contemporary social documentary photography must surely be predicated upon the production of social experience itself formed in dynamic interplay with representational convention. A 'social realist' photography may need to be particularly attentive to and further incorporate the ubiquity and social agency of other representational modes such as cinema and television.

With this in mind I wish now to turn more directly to the work of Moffatt and Rhodes, focussing upon the manners in which they infuse the photographic image with visual structures and performative gestures associated with cinema and moving image representation in general. This is a potent partnership effecting particular coalescences of faith and fascination as well as enacting an ongoing, circular negotiation between representational veracity and visual exhortation that taps right into the core cognitive actions of our age.

Moffatt, Rhodes and Cinema as 'Intertext'

We have never been in a better position to approach a given visual medium by imagining it in light of another, through another, in another, by another, or like another. (Philippe Dubois)

Tracey Moffatt's *Up In The Sky* is a series of twenty-five photographs produced as monochromatic offset prints. The series involves an ambiguous interweaving of characters and narrative typical of Moffatt's work. The setting is a universal fictional cliché (most often

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14 Each image is 61 x 76cm in dimension, and either steel blue or burnt rust brown in colour.
repeated within cinema) yet resonant of a particular conception of Australian identity formed in the relationship of settler communities to a harsh, unforgiving rural environment. Action takes place in and around a small town perched precariously on the edge of the outback. This is a community neglected by the imperatives of market economics yet romanticised by mainstream urban culture as the haunt of fringe-dwelling, non-conformist, outsider figures. It is treated as a place of edgy, volatile human relations; a place where the persistent presence of the landscape's overwhelming otherness presses in upon the psyche threatening to fracture community, or to expose the discord and abrasion between peoples. That this setting purports to be both imaginary and real (allowing, qua Deleuze, that the distinction nears redundancy) only serves to emphasise the social import of the work. As Helen Grace has written, "Moffatt's work oscillates between social realist documentary photography and the aesthetic of a Benetton ad, between the languor of a segregationist pre-civil rights deep South and the menace of a western New South Wales town—in the fifties or the nineties—where the colour bar still operates."^15

The settings for Jon Rhodes' work are similar. He is most recognised for his work imaging the life of Western Desert and Far Northern Australia Aboriginal communities whom he has visited and lived amongst for substantial blocks of time since the 1970s. Rhodes' black and white photo sequences are closely aligned to documentary practices within both photography and film. They refute the orthodoxy of the decisive moment as cipher of the photographer's unique visionary skills both through their concentration upon unfolding narrative and through the foregrounding of their subjects' active participation in the processes of image making. On one hand, this quite simply involves the apparently unsolicited desire of Rhodes' subjects to 'act' for his camera (even if at times as a means of masking themselves from its intrusions). But this relationship extends also to the manner in which they partake in the development of his work through negotiating his presence and


activity within their communities, on occasion suggesting or directing the general scope of possible subject matter and even working with Rhodes on the selection of images for particular usages.\(^7\)

Moffatt enacts a dialogue between photographic and filmic forms in both her still and moving image work.\(^8\) Most important to this study is the manner in which her various photographic series openly draw upon both stylistic and formal conventions of quite specific cinematic genres and even individual films. This is evident in Moffatt's first major photographic series. The nine image series *Something More* (1989) consists of a set of static story-board-like scenes depicting a glamorous young woman (Moffatt herself) in red and black cheong san apparently trapped within an oppressive outback environment.\(^9\) Other than the one full tableau image depicting Moffatt's character standing before an old shack (clearly a temporary stage set), a grizzled man drinking inside and a 'baby-doll' figure leaning in the doorway with three boys off to the side before a painted wheat field, all the other images are akin to cinematic close-ups (of motor-cycle boots and a whip, or a knife stuck in a table-top, of Moffatt's character thrusting a dress into a bag or her lying splayed on a road near a sign indicating 'Brisbane 300 miles'). These serve to either intensify an impressionistic sense of character and action, or fetishise objects and their significatory function with regard to subjects (see Illus 6.1 and 6.2). Each image serves to concentrate psychological intensities. The six colour images in particular have a film noir feel, with their flat, artificial sense of high-key environment, garish colouration and undertone of sexual violence. Film critic Adrian Martin locates *Something More* within the genre tradition of melodrama, mentioning "disreputable" movies such as *Mandingo* (1975) or *Butterfly*.

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\(^7\) Rhodes writes in the *Whichaway?* catalogue, for example, of the processes through which he gained permission on various occasions to live amongst desert communities, his attendant responsibilities within such communities, the manner in which images were supplied to the communities and even selection of images for public presentation subject to communal discussion, and furthermore about incidences and consequences of the misuse of such images. But this process of negotiation is perhaps most graphically evidenced in theblackening out of the figures of deceased persons throughout the publication. This is the result of a decision made in consultation with the Kiwirrkura council—the community in and of which the photographs were made—to adhere to customary Aboriginal restrictions over the use of the name and image of deceased people. See Rhodes, *Whichaway?*.

\(^8\) In addition to her photographic practice Moffatt has worked extensively as an artist/director with film and video. Her work includes the feature film *beDevil* (1993), short films *Nice Coloured Girls* (1987) and *Night Cries – A Rural Tragedy* (1989), and video works *Heaven* (1997), *Lip* (1999) and *Artist* (2000).

\(^9\) There are six colour images and three black and white in *Something More*. Each is 100 x 130cm in dimension.
As Martin evocatively writes of both *Something More* and the short film *Night Cries — A Rural Tragedy* made in the same year, "Moffatt approaches the passions of melodrama coolly...we get not stories but pieces of stories—painfully broken pieces, testifying to manifold kinds of lacerations upon personal, sexual, racial, and national identity." Martin also points out affinities between the figure portrayed by Moffatt herself in the images and "the mixed-blood heroines of old Hollywood race-conscious weepies like Douglas Sirk's *Imitation of Life* (1959), or even the confused Irish-American who longs to be a Sioux warrior in Sam Fuller's *Run of the Arrow* (1957) — characters who ricochet wildly between two worlds, accepted by neither, scarred by both." In addition to this set of Western references, Moffatt has noted the influence on her visual imagination of the formal, artificial quality of 1960s' Japanese cinema.

*Something More* is built entirely upon a play with stereotype (with regard to character, scenario and style) formed in representational convention. Thus it demands audience collusion in recognition and consumption of such stereotypes. There are few if any stylistic or narrative allusions to real individuals and their actual lived experiences. Moffatt presents a world entirely formed within representation — a world constituted by images in image form. The work is therefore thoroughly locked into an appropriationist logic. But Moffatt's work neither seeks to play up the artifice of this conception experience for critical purposes, nor celebrate a notion of the simulacrum as emancipatory — a realm in which subjects are free of the determining conditions and constraints of both biology and social convention. Whilst absolutely located within representational stereotype, the central figure within *Something More*... 

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21 Adrian Martin, 'Tracey Moffatt's Australia (A Reconnaissance)', *Parkett* 53 (1998) 26

22 Martin, 'Tracey Moffatt: The Go-Between', 27. Of all the many critics who have written on Moffatt's work Martin, with his specific background in film, is most engaging with regard to the relation of Moffatt's photographic work to the rhetorical force of film, particularly within the two essays cited here. Most significantly, he attempts to understand the manner in which Moffatt's powerful evocations of 'Australian' character and experience are constructed through appeal to cinematic conventions and stereotypes constructed elsewhere, especially in Hollywood but also in European new-wave and neorealist filmmaking. This consistently leads him back to considerations of how compelling conceptions of national consciousness may in fact be most profoundly sourced in the (internationalist) collective unconscious of mass media and entertainment industries. See both Martin, 'Tracey Moffatt: The Go-Between', and most importantly Martin, 'Tracey Moffatt's Australia (A Reconnaissance).

More remains locked within real world dilemmas of rural entrapment, predatory sexuality and her own apparently impossible desires. Moffatt deploys artifice, in part, to concentrate the discursive cogency of her presencing of universalist operations of desire and imagining within restrictive social settings. This appeal to the real—enhanced by the biographical connotation of Moffatt's 'casting' of herself as the central figure—sets the work slightly apart from much appropriationist work of the 1980s, but is less overt than in subsequent bodies of work (such as the two Scarred for Life series and Up in The Sky) where stronger stylistic evocations of the image as a space of real experience are apparent.

Returning to Moffatt's use of cinematic models, GUAPA (Goodlooking) (1995)—ten blurred, impressionistic, sepia-toned monochromatic images, each depicting female figures in dressed in padded skating gear in violent interaction—draws on a 1970s' 'roller-derby' television series and films, as well as specifically, as Martin points out, to "the lurid seventies B-movie starring Raquel Welch, Kansas City Bomber." (See Illus. 6.3). Although also drawing upon George Miller's trilogy of Mad Max films (1979, 1981 and 1985) in both desolate outback settings and the images of muscular figures hammering at a vehicle wreckage, as well as aspects of Hollywood 'Western' imagery, the core "intertexts" of Up in The Sky are Pier Paolo Passolini's 1961 film Accatone—generally considered as both the highpoint and the summation of Italian neo-realism—and the 1955 feature film Jedda by Charles Chauvel—an early Australian cinematic exploration of relationships between Indigenous and non-indigenous Australians. Moffatt's images of figures wrestling in the dirt closely resemble scenes in both films, right down to the elevated point of view. Finally, in this regard, the nineteen photogravure prints of Laudanum (1998) in their various shapes

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24 Each image is 76 x 100 cm in dimension.

25 Lynne Cooke ascribes a biographical element here with regard to Moffatt's claimed fascination with such television programs during her youth. See Cooke, 'A Photo-Films Odyssey', 31. This is similar to Moffatt's own professed youthful interest in picture magazines from the 1960s and its significance to the Scarred for Life work discussed in the previous chapter.

26 Martin, 'Tracey Moffatt's Australia (A Reconnaissance)', 22

27 The description "intertext" is used by Laileen Jayamanne in her discussion of the relationship between Jedda (1955) and Moffatt's Night Cries – A Rural Tragedy (1989). Jayamanne, "Love me tender, love me true, never let me go...", 82/note 4

28 See Cooke, 'A Photo-Films Odyssey', 34, and Martin, 'Tracey Moffatt's Australia (A Reconnaissance)', 27
contain obvious affinities (of character, narrative and visual style) with German expressionist film (see Illus 6.4 and 6.5).29

Film and television by no means provide the only representational "intertexts" to these works. *Up In The Sky* evokes modes of documentary photography, whilst *Laudanum* is steeped in the stylistic influences of both pictorialist and 'spirit' photography. Erotic and racial stereotypes found in various forms of popular fiction and drama—particularly that associated with the American Deep South—also resonate across both these series. Lynne Cooke cites Tennessee Williams' *Baby Doll* (1956) and Erskine Caldwell's *Tobacco Road* (1948) in reference to *Something More*, as well as the fiction of Sam Shepard with regard to *Up In The Sky*.30 Moffatt herself mentions her fascination with writers of the American South such as Williams, Truman Capote and Carson McCuller, if "only because the type of stories they wrote reminds me of the 'redneck' aspects of my own environment in the state of Queensland, Australia, where I grew up."31 Moffatt also cites the writing of Federico Garcia Lorca as a key influence, and acknowledges Paula Reage’s erotic novel *The Story of O* (1954) as a clear source for *Laudanum*.32 Painting, finally, provides another key stylistic underpinning to Moffatt’s practice, apparent in the compressed screen-like arrangement of space in *Something More* for example, or the tactility of *Laudanum’s* hand-worked negatives, or most pertinent in the overwrought mannerist tableau dramatics of some of the *Up In The Sky* images. Régis Durand makes an important point here. According to Durand, Moffatt’s particular imaginary is

our memory of other images that have reached us from cinema, television, photography albums, or—not the least important source—from dreams and their hybrid productions. Thus it is never a matter of mediatised 'reality', deformed and

29 The *Laudanum* images are presented as rondel, curved window, even keyhole forms but all on sheets of paper 56 x 76cm in dimension.

30 See Cooke, 'A Photo-Filmic Odyssey', 23, 34. A Shepard story was printed in the Dia Center for the Arts catalogue within which this essay appears.


'fictionalised'—a reality thoroughly worked over by narrative and iconographic styles... In fact, the referent and the style(s) are one in the work of Tracey Moffatt.33

It is, however, the relation of Moffatt's work to cinematic image models that most concerns me within this chapter.

In utilising, even mimicking stylistic genre conventions drawn from the cinema, Moffatt's photographic images appeal to the imaginative conventions of character, subjectivity and social milieu formed and evoked within this form. This is particularly the case with the representation of female sexuality and of inter-racial tension. One of the most impressive aspects of Moffatt's work is her deployment of such tropes, even clichés, in a manner that serves neither to simply dismiss them as such, nor conversely to celebrate the theatrical unreality of stereotype, nor even to compound their power in the name of photographic confirmation. Rather, in their stilling and thus visual concentration of cinematic genre tropes, Moffatt's images suggest an ongoing oscillation, even negotiation between all these impulses within a field of ultimate indeterminability. What does remain constant is a tangible sense of the force of fictional narrative cinema to seed and develop these conventional forms of individual and communal subjectivity as verifiable social codes.

Not only does Moffatt introduce tropes from fictional narrative cinema into photographic image forms (which themselves draw upon traditions of social documentary—upon traditions of attempting to picture and convey the social experience of subjects in their real world settings), she melds connotations of action and performance to the still image. Thus the temporal associations of the images are both complex and ambivalent. Are these decisive moments distilling narrative complexity and encapsulating social and imaginative experience? Or are they out-takes from ongoing narrative action through time dependent upon preceding and succeeding images for their meaning?

Durand writes of the manner in which Moffatt's work modulates the photographic and cinematic through each pressuring the other: ‘Cinema upsetting photography's character as image closed in on itself: photography cutting against the grain of cinema's 'natural' temporality and production of narrative.’34 This "back-and-forth movement" for Durand is a

33 Régis Durand, 'Specific Climates', in Snelling ed., Tracey Moffatt, 11. (First published in Durand and Gili eds, Tracey Moffatt.)

34 Durand, 'Specific Climates', 10
"dual way of approaching a heterogeneous and unstable contemporary reality, a reality that feeds on the inexhaustible flux of images conveyed and recycled by the world's televisions, and also on individual memories and fantasies." As Durand infers, Moffatt's work constantly calls forth the rhetorical, associative power of a world of images. But something similar also takes place in Rhodes' images in terms of relationships between imaginative experience and social reality enacted by his subjects.

Like Moffatt, Rhodes has a working experience of film – he was a cinematographer for Film Australia during the 1970s, specialising, as he has related it, in "hand-held documentary films" which honed his compositional skills. This experience, along with his interest in the sequential photographic works of Duane Michals, has clearly underpinned his ongoing interest in photographic series. Michals' work was important to Rhodes in two fundamental ways. First, the multiple image sequence provided a way "of telling a story – a unique method of recording movement and revealing the passage of time." Second, Michals' retention of the black border around his images (adopted by Rhodes) signalled the manner in which the particular image presented was wholly composed within the camera lens. This, for Rhodes, "brings the act of picture-making very much 'into the moment'. It was the only way I wanted to use a camera." However, unlike Michals, whose content he found "too staged," Rhodes has, from the early 1970s onwards employed this sequential approach to image-making within a fundamentally documentary practice. Rhodes' photo-sequences are means by which to represent something of the dynamic temporality of his subjects' lived and imaginative experience.

35 ibid.
36 Jon Rhodes, 'Origins', in Whichaway?, 41
37 ibid.
38 ibid.
39 ibid.
Film Stills, Sequences and Subjects

With the decline in volumes and in the expanse of landscapes, reality becomes sequential and cinematic unfolding finally gets the jump on whatever is static and on the strength of materials. (Paul Virilio)\(^2\)

Tracey Moffatt's *Up In The Sky* features a number of suggested yet incomplete narrative scenarios. An apparently crazed man crawls back and forth across the open highway (Illus. 6.6). In another image he presses a chicken to his chest as if in supplication before a young pregnant white woman and her dilapidated dwelling (Illus. 6.7). The same woman is depicted lost in thought amongst a country fair crowd, as well as sitting forlornly in a child's paddling pool amongst dusty backyard debris as a tattooed man strides away (Illus. 6.8). Elsewhere she runs cradling her Aboriginal baby chased from a small stone chapel, or sits on a bed in a graffiti-covered shack still holding the child whilst nuns gather outside (Illus. 6.9). The nuns raise the child skywards. A steer hangs silhouetted from a tree. Three powerfully built woman pound at a wrecked car chassis abandoned in the outback (Illus. 6.10). Two youths, Aboriginal and European, wrestle in the dirt (Illus. 6.11). Townspeople gather in a back lane, dressed in nightclothes, as if acolytes or witnesses to some extraordinary event (Illus. 6.12). A young Aboriginal man lies face-up outside, lifeless, as darkness encroaches.

Clearly, there are narrative groupings of sorts hinted at by repeated settings, actions and characters, and of course by the division of the work into blue and brown tone images. However, the images do not constitute a singular, rigid sequence.\(^4\) Impressions of place, subjectivity and community are formed both within singular images and in ever-changeable interplay. *Up In The Sky*, as with a number of Moffatt's works, operates as Clive Scott advocates, against the consequential reading of the photographic sequence, operating instead as a "series of independent perceptions and verbal realisations, which do not

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\(^4\) This is further borne out by the manner in which the series has been installed in different locations in vastly contrasting manners, from the isolation of single images alone on a gallery wall to their 'stacking' two, even three deep in a visually engulfing arrangement.
supersede each other, but which persist, resist and complicate each other as the eye passes over them.\textsuperscript{42} Within this model: "Photo sequences...make possible a documentary mode whereby juxtaposed photographs can be used to interrogate each other, to penetrate, as it were, each other's surfaces."\textsuperscript{43} The most compelling narratives both drawing upon and referring to real social and imaginative experience are formed within the dynamic of this interpenetration – in the movement between and intersections of individual images. A key example of this is the clear reference in one set of images to the historical role in Australia played by the church in raising and educating Indigenous children removed from their families, often without consent, by government agencies.\textsuperscript{44} Moffatt's narratives are strangely more affective for their fragmentary nature – for their need for completion. As Adrian Martin has written of Up In The Sky: "Taken as a whole, these superbly composed and treated photographs aim to evoke an entire microcosmic world of moods, characters, sites, fragmentary incidents and apparitions. It is a little like an elaborate film set or location, with everyone costumed and in place before the screenplay has been fully devised."\textsuperscript{45}

This stated, Moffatt's Up In The Sky images also resonate meaning singularly. Attention is formally focussed upon specific arenas of action or subjects via the use of receding roads and tracks to create (as well as dramatise) perspectival space. Telephone poles and brick walls cut across and divide picture planes. The camera as viewing prosthesis allows the viewer to approach and gaze down upon the sleeping baby, or to then follow its look out a window upon the approaching nuns. In both their formal self-containment and the

\textsuperscript{42} Clive Scott, The Spoken Image: Photography and Language (London: Reaktion, 1999) 312

\textsuperscript{43} ibid., 250

\textsuperscript{44} This issue of the 'stolen generations' is a key point of public debate in Australia over recent years. See Justice Ronald Wilson's 'Report of the National Inquiry into the Separating of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families'. See also Bringing Them Home: A Guide to the Findings and Recommendations of the National Inquiry into the Separating of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families (Sydney: Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997); Carmel Bird ed., The Stolen Children: Their Stories—Including Extracts from the Report of the National Inquiry into the Separating of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families (Sydney: Random House Australia, 1998); and Robert Manne, In Denial: The Stolen Generations and the Right (The Australian Quarterly Essay 1) (Melbourne: Schwartz, 2001)

\textsuperscript{45} Martin, 'Moffatt's Australia (A Reconnaissance)', 27
conferral of intimacy between subject and viewer the images draw directly upon and mix conventional expectations of the documentary photograph and the film still.

Max Kozloff has written on the creeping influence of the film still upon contemporary photography in his short essay 'The Dream Mill in the History of Photography'. Film stills, he claims, are fundamentally iconic rather than narrative based. They "whisper" of events "outside the frame" of not only the image but also the whole film - that is, they are fundamentally evocative rather than explanatory. According to Kozloff, the still "derives unclearly from a larger artifact. Nominally, what we see in a still depicts a reality, but is in fact some kind of gloss on a separate and completed representation - the movie itself." The film still, therefore, is a consummate vehicle for that entanglement of social experience and representational imaginary that drives all of Moffatt's practice. Moreover, stills in Kozloff's phrase "belong to that large set of images whose contents had no function or even existence except to be photographed." Film stills, therefore, "had a tremendous impact in depicting the whole world as a stage." This is, of course, one of the core conditions of contemporary photo-art that Martin notes above and which my study is responding to. In Up in The Sky, however, the film still model is spliced with ongoing allusions to a documentary-like proximity to the conditions of lived experience and real subjects. Thus the works encapsulate social experience and distil meaning in single image forms, without constricting the imaginative potential of their release into a series. On the contrary, this condensation of affectivity within single images serves to heighten the potential of their interrelations.

In contrast to this quite simple but fluid cognitive relation of the singular image to the series in Moffatt's work, Jon Rhodes' works encompass a startling array of carefully constructed formal compositions involving multiple images. Rhodes particularly favours intersecting strips of horizontal and vertical sequences, resulting in a number of variations

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47 ibid., 286

48 ibid.

49 ibid., 292

50 Rhodes does also produce single image works.
on 'L', 'T' and '+' shape forms. Different narratives intersect or run through each other. This concentrates attention upon disjunctions in cultural experience, often between traditional and contemporary influences. However obvious certain of these disjunctions may appear at first glance, they are in fact rarely presented as bluntly contradictory. Rhodes' images are both participatory elements within and testament outcomes of an ongoing cross-cultural negotiation. Whilst they may appear abrasive and so signify apparently conflictual factors underpinning social organisation and cultural identity, his images appropriately figure these intersections of influence in more subtle terms, recognising the shifting currents and networks of communication and social interaction always at work within living cultures.

The formal intersections of photographic sequences act as points at which the subject of each mediates and informs the other. Spears to spanners (1990/1990-92) (Illus. 6.13) is a good example. The two horizontal images depict spears being hand-fashioned in close-up detail. They sit to the left of the middle of five vertical images that from top to bottom depict a car, painted in tiger stripes, in progressive states of decay. By the bottom image it is nothing but a dilapidated shell. The middle of these five images, and so also effectively the third of the horizontal series, depicts an Aboriginal hand and three spanners. It is also a colour image (rare for Rhodes) so further emphasising its visual and semantic centrality. The contrast between traditional and contemporary technologies appears simple enough. However, the hands making traditional spears and those working with spanners both belong to present day subjects – they are both contemporary, utilitarian modes of working and thus by inference equally vital to the maintenance of community life. Furthermore, whilst the decaying car might be read as indicative of a sort of separation of technology from community—a sense that the technology is perhaps not valued or utilised in the manner that it might be—the image of hand and spanners disrupts this potentially judgmental interpretation with its allusions to labour, skill and care. It suggests the possibility that the car's abandonment (and productive stripping for parts) might, in fact, be an intelligently considered and adaptive utilisation of an imported resource appropriate to and within the limits of its social and environmental context.

A different form of intersection occurs in We seen it on the television (1990) (Illus. 6.14). The horizontal series depicts a man standing in the desert pointing in various directions. The final image depicts only his shadow angling across the dirt. The fourth of the
six images is, however, a full frame image of a Western desert painting depicting the very story of the Tjakamarra snake that the figure—Timmy Tjapangati—is pictured relating in the other images. Text is crucial to many of Rhodes' works. It takes the form of extended captions identifying and locating subjects, and relating the stories that background his images and/or are re-enacted for the camera. In this instance the body of the storyteller pictured standing in his country gesturing and relating this story is one register. The supplementary text supplied by Rhodes is another. And as if to emphasise how complex these networks of narrative are the fourth image in the sequence is the subject's own painting of that story (within a mode of painting itself formed at an intersection of Aboriginal and European representational systems). A complex construction of representational self-reflexivity takes place in these apparently quite straightforwad images. The works foreground the manner in which codes of communication and knowledge mesh and weave through one another to evoke conventions within which belief forms. All this is dramatically heightened by the vertical sequence of this work, depicting in turn four different Aboriginal children playing with a discarded television casing, physically framing themselves within the set for Rhodes' camera against a flat, dusty expanse of land and receding road. However, they also literally peer back at the viewer with remarkable prescience or self-awareness of their representational status (or so perhaps, a Western viewer would wish to believe).

Both this sense of his subjects' representational self-awareness and Rhodes' complex formal interleaving of codified experience is further apparent in works in which he incorporates images of subjects holding photographs of themselves that he took many years earlier.51 These are visual performances of witness and verification, but also of passage back and forth between points in time. There is, however, little appeal here to photography's conferring of the certitude of historical presence, nor to its stilling of temporality or its wrenching of the past into the present. Here the photograph does not select stilled cross-sections of temporal presence, but rather acts as space of temporal and thus inter-subjective accumulation. This synthesis of disjunctive conceptions of temporality within the photographic act evidences a sensitive cross-cultural negotiation.

The complex intertextuality of Rhodes' works enables some apprehension of the nuances of social organisation and activity in present-day Aboriginal communities, often via

51 See, for example, Wati mulvati (1974/1990).
concentrating core themes such as technology, communication, education or food. Which tucker? (1990) (Illus. 6.15) and Bush tucker machine (1989/1990) (Illus. 6.16), for example, each dramatise a relationship between traditional and manufactured western foods and the means by which they are sought. In the former a vertical row of six images features young Aboriginal men standing in front of the same stone wall with a wire meshing window cover (possibly a store front) holding up their purchases (packaged food and soft drink) for the camera. The second from bottom of these images just pictures the blank wall and is flanked on either side by two images of more traditional foods such as goanna and kangaroo lying on the ground. The vertical row suggests the instant gratification of manufactured consumables. The horizontal row represents moments in the process of food preparation (between hunting and cooking). And the empty point of intersection between them indicates a choice of sorts (as implied by the questioning title). What appears to be the same stone wall features also as backdrop for the horizontal sequence in Bush tucker machine in which younger Aboriginal children pose before a Coca Cola vending machine. The right hand image of the sequence is of the machine alone, and it forms also the fourth of five vertical images (reading top to bottom) which otherwise depict the hazardous process of gathering pura or bush tomato from prickly bushes. The contrasts are similar to the first work, but here the two intersecting sequences are joined by two further images stacked at the right hand side of the overall panel each depicting a fridge in a concrete block interior. In the lower image the fridge door is wide open, displaying its empty interior.

This kind of arrangement, utilising singular or paired images as supplements or anchors to sequences, reoccurs throughout Rhodes’ work. These images are often slightly larger than those comprising the sequences are. They sit out to the sides as questioning supplements that twist or block the temptation to easy narrative readings as in Bush tucker machine. They can also reinforce or anchor narrative elements by operating to still narrative flow, to flense all extraneous details of a performative activity in order to direct our attention to a hitherto invisible but significant element. Rhodes also frequently incorporates single portrait images that forge a psychological bond between subject and viewer, as well as acting to locate character within fluid narrative forms and particularly within physical settings. Analogies are often suggested here between the mapping of the face and of the land in its various linings and forms and plays of light and shadow.
Whilst specific subjects such as technology, hunting, sustenance, Dreamings, communal activities, education and play all feature in Rhodes' works, these are generally enveloped by the larger themes of personal and cultural identity as they form and grow in ongoing interaction with cultural tradition, with location, with contemporary social formations, with immediate community and with individual imaginings. Rhodes' works are both multidimensional narrative performances of these relations, and a mapping out or storyboarding of their determining coordinates. In addition to linear sequences, intersections, pairs and individual images Rhodes makes rich use of multiple sequence and grid forms that operate as networks of relations flowing in various directions. Mapping is clearly crucial in its relation to narrative, to knowing and occupying land and to Dreaming; that is, to the very means by which many of Rhodes' subjects locate and identify themselves in material, imaginative, spiritual and historical senses. A number of Rhodes' works both depict and recreate the telling of stories and the mapping of relations to land. The Maps of Marruwa (1990) (Illus. 6.17) is a key example. A single image at the top of the map showing a pair of Aboriginal hands drawing a map in the dirt is counterpointed by a similar image at the bottom, except that here the hands are drawing upon a printed European-style map. In between these images lie two sequences of track markings and stone arrangements in the desert, indicating the living, active means by which the land is mapped in human presence and passage.

Affectivity

The weak intentionality of the photograph, its inbuilt unreliability, its polarisation of the authentic and the inauthentic, make it a narrative vehicle for prevarication and infinite reconstructability. We might indeed argue that recent photographic narrative has attempted to combine the extremes of the indexical and the symbolic, the contingent and the fantastic, the referential and the fictional, against the steadily coded, iconic, middle path of realism. (Clive Scott)\textsuperscript{52}

\textsuperscript{52}Scott, The Spoken Image, 316-17

Jon Rhodes' treatment of the relation of subjects to land—that is his imagining of their absolute interdependency—is clearly different from Tracey Moffatt's deployment of the landscape as a form of stage set. Yet the land is figured as an acculturated space in each
of these formations. Land and its inhabitants are bound together in a mutual ongoing development of the identity of each. But although this bind appears more seamless, less semantically strategic in Rhodes' work, this is not evidence for a claim to Rhodes' imaging of 'real' relationships against Moffatt's fictions. For on one hand, the work of Moffatt draws rhetorical authority from the very real experience of such a relation to place and location, even if concentrated via representational tropes. On the other hand, an overt or self-aware picturing of willful, self-determining attitudes of relation between self and land is apparent in Rhodes' work. His subjects are not caught unawares by the camera as they go about their daily lives in 'natural', unreflective relation to their environments. On the contrary, they are self-conscious photographic subjects presenting an imaginative, performative relation to the world about them as a means of self-expression and construction.

Lynne Cooke argues that Moffatt's decision stage her Up in The Sky scenes in 'real' landscape environments (rather than against scenographic backdrops as in Something More or within an empty, apparently depthless neutral space as in GUAPA (Good Looking)) results in images of less overt artifice. In addition Moffatt's use of pre-flash techniques in the printing of these outdoor daylight shoots produces, according to Cooke, "a flattening effect that not only tends to fuse her subjects into an ensemble aligned on a single plane, but welds them indissolubly to their milieu."\textsuperscript{53} Cooke's reading here brings to mind Gilles Deleuze's model of the action-image at the heart of what he termed an old model of cinematic realism. Deleuze allowed that realism might include "the fantastic, the extraordinary, the heroic and above all melodrama. It [realism] can include exaggeration and lack of moderation, as long as these are of its own type."\textsuperscript{54} According to Deleuze, realism was to be identified in the modes of behaviour embodied via characters within these milieus, and in what he called the action-image, a form of relation between character and milieu:

The milieu and its forces incurve on themselves, they act on the character, throw him a challenge, and constitute a situation in which he is caught. The character reacts in his turn (action properly speaking) so as to respond to the milieu, or his relation to the milieu, with the situation with other characters. He must acquire a new mode of being

\textsuperscript{53} Cooke, 'A Photo-Filmic Odyssey', 34

\textsuperscript{54} Deleuze, Gilles, Cinéma 1: The Movement Image, transl. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London: Athlone, 1986) 141
or raise his mode of being to the demands of the milieu and of the situation. Out of this emerges a restored or modified situation, a new situation.\textsuperscript{55}

Cooke uses the term 'milieu' in a more limited fashion than Deleuze. Within Cooke's text it refers to the setting of and in Moffatt's images. In Deleuze's work it is both the setting for and the style in which action is rendered; it is the energy that drives and determines action. This is different from Cooke's interest in the release of energy through character or subject as image. Nevertheless, the close affinity between Deleuze's model of realism as it pertains solely to the moving image—to movement within the image and the image as movement—and Cooke's analysis of the rhetorical affect of Moffatt's still images reinforces something of the debt of Moffatt's work to cinematic models.

Cooke makes an important qualification, however, regarding this notion of welding together subjects and milieu. For according to Cooke, this milieu constitutes a space of alienation. She claims that this relation of subject to space is in fact one of accident rather than desire, suggested by "the discontinuity of the pictorial space [that] precludes the positing of a unitary, coherent identity to this terrain..."\textsuperscript{56} According to Cooke, this is a fundamentally dysfunctional social space in which any linkages (between subjects and in turn between subjects and environment) "depend on movements of affectivity, on attempts to group and unite—to act collectively—irrespective of how limited, tentative, contingent, and temporary such attempts must inevitably prove."\textsuperscript{57}

Under Cooke's critical model, key differences between the 'creative' work of Moffatt and the 'documentary' practice of Rhodes may be sought not in their respective basis in fiction and fact, but in terms of a different manifestation of that "movement of affectivity"—that collective action of pictured subjects in relation to their environment and to viewing subjects. In Moffatt's images the core relations between subjects and environment, and between overall image and viewer are conveyed largely through formal allusion to the dramatic agency of fictional narrative cinema; through, for example, theatrically tilted horizons, or the manner in which a technologically manoeuvred camera appears to circle

\textsuperscript{55}ibid., 141-42

\textsuperscript{56}Cooke, 'A Photo-Filmic Odyssey', 36

\textsuperscript{57}ibid.
and swoop about its subjects, at one moment right up in the faces of a crowd or at the legs of the car wreckers, at another peering down over bodies writhing and struggling in the dirt. Rhodes' images, however, act as the visual release of just that very affectivity (in the most affirmative sense) into the world of social experience. The mediation of relation between subject and viewer is apparently less coded; is structured to appear more transparent, more immediate. There is also a greater concentration upon individual subjects – they appear to determine the presentation of their immediate social environment and experience rather than be determined by it (as is clearly the case in Moffatt's work).

This is particularly pertinent with regard to Rhodes' images of children. Many are delightfully performative as children play up for the camera wearing over-sized sunglasses, or through a television, or from underneath spinifex grass wigs. In these performances the realities of both social experience and imaginative projection are bound as one within single subjects. Rhodes' multiple image structures draw out this constant performance of the self in space, time and culture as a dynamic of self-identity and inter-cultural negotiation in mimicry. The children crucially maintain evident control and determination of their self-image. This holds even in their more formal posing for 'school photographs' in The Other Side of the Wall (1990) (Illus. 6.18). There are two vertical series of young children (almost all girls) posing in uniform one by one before the teacher's desk and a blackboard covered in neat English script. A third series depicts young boys against what looks like the outside wall of the school building dressed for traditional performance. It would be all too limiting to point to the self-consciousness of the children in the classroom as indication of the ill fit of a colonising system of knowledge and social organisation. But similarly, it would be overly simplistic to claim that because in each setting or situation the children are masked (or mask themselves, block the camera's gaze) they are resisting that conception of themselves as camera-subjects. For this performability involves a negotiation with the camera; a negotiation with the image form of the photograph and the multi-dimensional passage of image and narrative through collective subjectivity associated with moving image media. This performability is not simply an acting up to block the representation of actual experience and/or of pre-formed subjectivity, nor confirmation of performance as the only remaining

condition of the real in the wake of a fracturing of foundational belief systems. It is a performative embodiment of real experience and subjectivity produced, accessed and evoked at this nexus of photographic and filmic forms and conventions.

This very sense of performability as 'real' is something that Moffatt taps into with great acuity throughout all her work. Her subjects have always been performative in some way. This does not so much fictionalise them as give import and weight to their emotional or subjective presence. After all, as I have noted, performability is central to much social documentary photography.\(^5\) However, as Cooke warns, Moffatt has worked in a manner akin to a film director in the production of these images, scouting locations, seeking 'actors' (although here these are non-professional models, drawn from the surrounding community) and employing a substantial support crew.\(^6\) Moffatt overtly constructs and directs the performances that she presents for visual consumption or the studied detachment of a de-personalised audience gaze. Rhodes' work, on the other hand, appeals to a more confidential, if abrasive intimacy, with the camera deployed as conduit for the most immediate of relationships between subjects, photographer-artist and viewer. Rhodes' images the drama of these actual relations. And without promoting his presence as the central motive force of the work, he is clearly aware of the manner in which both the narrativity and the imaginative force conveyed within his images is occasioned by his own very presence. (In this regard he works directly out of 1970s social documentary conventions with their heightened sensitivity to the dynamics of pictorial acts as instances of social intervention.) In the extended captions that frequently accompany the work, Rhodes takes great care to ascribe his own position as protagonist, spectator or subject to whom knowledge and information is revealed or conveyed.

As noted in the previous chapter, I wish to avoid claiming Moffatt's work as being entirely dependent upon pre-existing conceptions of reality formed solely in representational conventions, and rather suggest that the image realm of her work connects to and partakes in the 'real' world of the image-laden consciousness of each individual (and necessarily

\(^5\) The 1970s work of Carol Jerrems provides another example of such practice within Australia. Youthful subjects pose self-consciously in her images, often partially naked and somehow directly engaged with the camera or at least visibly aware of its presence.

\(^6\) Cooke, 'A Photo-Filmic Odyssey', 28-29
social) being. Moffatt's images tap into a psychological or even hallucinatory reality that constitutes both a generalised experience of, and means by which contemporary subjects may transact the world. Moffatt's 'social realism' is of both individual and collective imaginary. This is, as Cooke writes, an imaginary or memory "of other images that have reached us from cinema, television, photography albums, or—not the least important source—from dreams and their hybrid productions,"\(^{61}\) but one also grounded in contemporary subjects' and viewers' experiences of place and social relations.

This conception of realism clearly places a significant emphasis upon viewer experience and imagination. It demands forms of projective envisioning on behalf of a viewer, rather than dependence upon linking representational elements and pre-existing referents. The image is treated as a productive space that extends rather than confirms all realms of experience. All of which is to suggest a close affinity with the model of neo-realism proposed by Deleuze in the second of his Cinema books. Whilst the model of realism detailed in Cinema 1 and noted above has certain resonances for Moffatt's Up In The Sky work, it is very much bound to the capacity for movement and action within the cinematic form. Deleuze's conception of neo-realism is perhaps more suited to translation into a still image context given its diminished dependence upon such movement. "What defines neo-realism..." according to Deleuze "...is this build up of purely optical situations...which are fundamentally distinct from the sensory-motor situations of the action-image in the old realism."\(^{62}\) This does not imply the absence of movement—or of the images of performability within Moffatt's Up In The Sky—but it does concentrate attention upon the optical situation or register in which movement is pictured. In one sense it could be claimed that Moffatt's work consists in part of optical concentrations of instances within the neo-realist Accatone, itself a film overtly structured as a sequence of intensely visualised set pieces or scenes.\(^{63}\)

By reaching beyond this structural analogy, the resonance of Deleuze's conception for the forms of experience that Moffatt's work both pictures and triggers becomes clear. For according to Deleuze, rather than describing a pre-existing object, neo-realism replaces that

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\(^{61}\) Ibid., 11


\(^{63}\) And likewise with regard to other sources such as *Jedda* and the *Mad Max* trilogy.
object, erasing its reality (by passing it into the imaginary), but simultaneously setting into play "all the reality which the imaginary or the mental create through speech and vision. The imaginary and the real become indistinguishable."

"Yet, it might be added, they never become entirely the same – they never become a unified, singular state of experience. The rhetorical force of each operating through the other remains 'real'. "The imaginary gaze makes the real something imaginary, at the same time as it in turn becomes real and gives us back some reality. It is like a circuit which exchanges, corrects, selects and sends us off again." And further on: "The two modes of existence [the real and the dream] are now combined in a circuit where the real and the imaginary, the actual and the virtual, chase after each other, exchange their roles and become indiscernible." This is simultaneously the condition of a world pictured by Moffatt, the structure of that picturing, and an evocative description of the means by which that world (both within and as image) is encountered.

Deleuze's evocations of neo-realism are not, however, so applicable to Rhodes' work. And this perhaps is where the fundamental point of difference between the two bodies of work becomes clearest. For Rhodes' images insist always upon the prior existence and experience of subjects beyond the frame. Put simply, their realism is ultimately built upon photographic indexicality, however complex the sets of social and performative relations informing the images become. This stated, Rhodes' work does share with Moffatt's an insistence upon this potential for imaginative transformation within that set of relations constituting social and material experience brought about by plays of visuality, narrative and performance both for and with the camera. Rhodes' subjects open their world to viewers through their imaginative communication with the camera and figure of the photographer. The drama of this association is formed through formal and subjective allusions to cinematic registers evoked by both Rhodes and his subjects. But this is a drama stamped with the mark of the indexical, and with the verification of location and naming.

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64 ibid., 7
65 ibid., 9
66 ibid., 127
67 All of Rhodes' works feature scrupulous naming of subjects and locations in extended captions as if reassuring both the indexicality of the image and its true identity as dependent upon the presence real and imaginative of its subjects, not in its abstraction from them.
Conclusion

To a certain degree in this chapter I have utilised the work of Jon Rhodes as a means to unraveling certain complexities in the operations of affect and persuasion in Tracey Moffatt's *Up in The Sky* work. Whilst suggesting hitherto unacknowledged affinities between the two bodies of work in terms of both subject experience and the structural operation of images I have sought also to avoid eliding the very real differences between the work of each.

In the work of both Moffatt and Rhodes a realism of photographic transparency is, if in often divergent manners, discarded in favour of interpretative, projective, performative images operating as productive forces at the nexus of both social and imaginative experience. These form polyvalent social realisms within which factual and fictive relations to social conditions are consistently intermingled and their distinctions pressured. These are, ultimately, social realisms of a fundamentally rhetorical jurisdiction. Adrian Martin describes "Moffatt's Australia" as "a nation that improvises its nature and negotiates it survival, constantly, from every available fragment of individual experience, collective fantasy and communal friction." As different in apparent character as Rhodes' work is, this might serve also as an apt description of his images, full as they are with subjects experiencing and creating this Australia over and over again, negotiating their place via "every available fragment of individual experience, collective fantasy and communal friction." The Australias of Moffatt and Rhodes, at least as evoked, cajoled and rhetorically set into persuasive play within these bodies of work, are perhaps not so very different at all.

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68 Martin, 'Moffatt's Australia (A Reconnaissance)', 22
CHAPTER 7
Staging Alienation: Bill Henson

In the preceding chapter I concentrated upon the importance of film and moving image structures to the development of photographic sequences and explorations of narrativity and performability in the work of Tracey Moffatt and Jon Rhodes. Much photo-based contemporary art features staged or directed action within constructed studio 'sites', including existing 'real world' material environments utilised as if photographic or filmic sets. In such work, individual photographs (even when presented within overall series) constructed in forms akin to filmic scenes appeal to contemporary audiences' comprehensive cinematic visual experience of the world. On occasion they also highlight the potentially alienating effect of that mediation (often through evocations of cinematic fantasy).

I therefore begin this chapter by reconsidering Moffatt's Up In The Sky (1997) work in light of models of cinematic staging within singular photographic images. This discussion introduces the model of the mise-en-scène and presents some introductory remarks regarding how representational structures drawn from the cinema are used to stage scenes redolent of individual alienation from social and urban environments. I draw a comparison here to the work of North American artist Gregory Crewdson. Moreover, I implicitly invoke the contrast between Brenda L. Croft's staged photographs of Indigenous subjects within the inner-Sydney suburb of Redfern discussed in Chapter 4 and Anne Zahalka's Fortresses and Frontiers (1993) work discussed in Chapter 3. Croft's Conference Call (1992) photographs depict real subjects within their actual urban environment. Zahalka's images depict largely desocialised human figures as models and actors within fictive scenes. Whilst some degree of subjective presence or embodied experience is present in Moffatt's Up In The Sky, as well as in the images by Bill Henson discussed at the heart of this chapter, the figures in Zahalka's Fortresses and Frontiers works are mere ciphers of human presence within carefully choreographed but ultimately disengaged pictorial scenarios.

The bulk of this chapter is then given over to discussion of an ongoing body of untitled work produced by Henson since 1997, also involving the performative staging of apparently alienated figures in real environments. Cinema has some importance as a structural model for Henson's images; however my discussion of Henson's work also considers how fashion and
documentary photography, along with issues in aesthetics appear to provide both models for these photographic scenes and stagings, as well as contextual entry points for analysis.

Film, Photography and the Mise-en-scène

Cinema has always been for me, in a very palpable and almost hallucinatory way, a drama of space...Cinema is the art of surfaces and appearances; it is a proudly exhibitionist thing. (Adrian Martin)\(^1\)

In the previous chapter I traced various ways in which Tracey Moffatt's *Up In The Sky* images draw upon cinematic models, from the obvious sourcing of some of the images in films ranging from *Jedda* to *Accatone* to the *Mad Max* trilogy, through to their use of striking cinematic viewpoints, their evocation of photographic film stills and most particularly their allusions to narrativity created through performative subjects and the interrelationships between individual images. As noted in that discussion, in *Up In The Sky* Moffatt deploys an existing physical environment as a form of stage set. This provides my key point of introduction into the key areas for discussion in this chapter.

A number of Moffatt's images present narrative action within physical environments that evoke the particular socio-economic situation of their fictionalised subjects – so much so that they resonate with all the toil, torpor and depression of real experience. (See for example Illus 6.7 and 6.8 with their dilapidated iron and fibro dwellings and their sun-baked dirt and scrub surrounds strewn with rocks, sticks and bottles.) Yet they abound also with desire and fantasy, generally associated with ideas of escape and flight (as is the case also in Moffatt's earlier *Something More* series of 1989). Nowhere is this more evident than in the image of townspeople gathered in a back lane, dressed in night-clothes, eyes all focussed on some evidently fantastical occurrence out of frame that is drawing one young girl out of their midst (Illus. 6.12).

This one image of Moffatt's brings to mind the work of North American photographic artist Gregory Crewdson, in particular his *Hover* series of black and white photographs of 1996 and his colour *Twilight* photographs of 1998/1999.\(^2\) Crewdson's images abound with signs of other

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\(^1\) Adrian Martin, 'Second that Emotion', in Stuart Koop ed. *A Small History of Photography* (Melbourne: Centre for Contemporary Photography, 1997) 76

worlds invading and marking plain American suburban settings: earth circles inexplicably appear in a backyard (see Illus. 7.1); a woman sits blankly staring amongst her living room come flower garden whilst sun streams in as if some form of visitation (see Illus. 7.2); whilst another figure is bathed in light flooding down from the night sky (see Illus. 7.3). Like Moffatt, Crewdson's work evokes cinema's hold over the cultural imagination, particularly with regard to the fantasy of flight and escape to other existences, real and imagined. Crewdson's Twilight, for example, draws significantly upon Steven Spielberg's 1977 film Close Encounters of the Third Kind in both structure and ambience of its individual images (whilst also seemingly evoking more recent television series such as The X-Files). Crewdson's Twilight differs from Moffatt's Up In The Sky; however, in the resolute unreality of its fantastical scenarios despite their setting in real suburban locations. Crewdson's images are more overtly dramatic, whether through deployment of high, sweeping vantage-points, or dramatic contrasts in lighting, or close-ups upon figures who are clearly posing as models within carefully constructed fictional settings (such as the living room as flower garden in Illus. 7.2). Moffatt's work, by contrast conveys a far stronger sense of relation between its subjects (as social beings) and settings that are less constructed or apparently tampered for and by the camera. As noted with reference to the commentary of Lynne Cooke in the previous chapter, Moffatt's characters appear unequivocally welded to their environment as well as to a particular form of community. There is almost no sense of community or social subjects in Crewdson's work. There, North American suburbia is pictured as having been overtaken completely by its own slide into a clichéd self-image formed within film and television. Crewdson's subjects appear irreversibly alienated from their suburban settings, concerned only with their individual relationships to the inexplicable (a potent trope of contemporary popular culture upon which Crewdson's images depend). Unlike Moffatt's subjects, those of Crewdson are rarely, if ever pictured in any form of social interaction. Community has been erased from Crewdson's world, supplanted by intensely private but forlorn relationships of desire to the fictions of the world of mass entertainment.

The formal contrast between these two photographic artists' work can be highlighted in part via reference to the structural model of the mise-en-scène. In an essay on recent Australian photography, Rhys Graham describes the mise-en-scène as, at the most basic level, a means of
referencing the "assemblage of staged elements within the [photographic] frame." As Graham goes onto discuss, however, the term is traditionally far more important within film theory where it is used to address the manner in which the staging of objects, actors and movement reveals forms of visual authorial virtuosity. This is to say, reference to mise-en-scène draws attention to the manner in which the pictorial content of an image is arranged in order to heighten a particular sense of pictorality or quality of appearance. (This, in turn, may connote the presence of an authorial consciousness.) It is thus an apt point of reference within forms of contemporary photo-art so rhetorically dependent upon structures of appearance (as discussed in Chapter 2), and especially given that many of those forms of appearance reference, or are drawn from the cinema. For example, Alexandre Astruc's now forty-year old characterisation of the cinematic mise-en-scène cited by Graham anticipates a core tenant of photo-based contemporary art: according to Astruc, the mise-en-scène describes a "means of transforming the world into a spectacle given primarily to oneself" where "what is seen is less important than the way of seeing, or a certain way of needing to see or be seen." In short then, the mise-en-scène may be treated as a means of highlighting the photographic image's fundamental aspiration to the 'ideal' state of image within a fundamentally photogenic culture.

But Graham extends his discussion beyond this apparent collusion of mise-en-scène and spectacle culture. He refers to the mise-en-scène as a "moment of synthesis" in the image, a means to comprehend the point at which all its pictorial elements combine to "create an energy that seduces us into engaging with the visual and narrative elements of the scene." So although the movement and action of a cinematic scene is obviously absent from the photograph, photographic artists are nevertheless able to "manifest the representational stagings and the intangible alchemy of cinema fictions." Motion and narrative scenario, Graham implies, are evoked through the pictorial synthesis of images drawing upon cinematic, and thus self-consciously pictorial (rather than transcriptive or indexical) structures. Graham writes of a

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5 Graham, 'A Breath Held', 19

6 ibid.
release within the image akin to my discussion of presence outlined in the Introduction and the performative element of the work of both Moffatt and Jon Rhodes (see Chapter 6): "The image appears, not as a single discrete element, but as a conduit for what we imagine has preceded it and what we expect (hope, dream) will follow. When this occurs the photographic frame becomes vibrant with an intensity of potential energy." 7 (The subtle evocation here of performability within the image is also in keeping with the quality of much work under review in this study.)

This energy is apparent in a number of Moffatt's *Up In The Sky* images, but absent from Crewdson's *Twilight* works. The synthesis uncovered by consideration of the images through the framework of the *mise-en-scène* in Crewdson's images is entirely directed towards ensuring the clarity of the cinematic and televisual reference points. That is, the arrangement of pictorial elements within Crewdson's images function primarily to reveal the scene to itself as a photographic image, or the pictured world to both subject and viewer as a fundamentally photographic space. For all Moffatt's reference to, even direct citation of cinematic sources in her *Up In The Sky* work, the synthesis of elements within the works—in particular the meshing of subjects with their immediate environments—draws from and directs attention back to real social situations. Moffatt's images are therefore "exhibitionist" (to use Adrian Martin's term) in a far more emotionally efficacious manner than Crewdson's coolly contrived stagings of scenes that lead back only to a Hollywood backlot conception of suburbia (even if this is one that North American suburbia may have adopted and absorbed as a 'real' self-reflection).

This contrast between Moffatt's handling of the relationship between her (fictional) subjects and their immediate environment (an actual real world environment deployed as a photographic set) and that of Crewdson, ascertained through the trope of the *mise-en-scène*, provides a useful point of entry to a consideration of Bill Henson's recent photographs set in gloomy nocturnal light on Melbourne's urban fringes.

7 ibid.
Bill Henson’s "Baroque Carnality"\(^8\)

At the forefront of photographic practice in Australia for over two decades, and celebrated internationally, the work of Bill Henson has frequently been characterised as baroque, romantic or sublime in sensibility. That is to say, it has been aligned with other spheres of artistic activity (such as painting, literature and opera) as well as traced back to the generating consciousness of the ‘author’ or ‘artist’ as an experiential being. But cinematic sources and forms, along with photographic traditions (social documentary and more recently fashion photography) also have an important presence in Henson’s work. It is perhaps no surprise that one of the more astute, if highly critical commentators on Henson’s early work in particular is the film critic Adrian Martin who identified and wrote about the relationship between Henson’s large untitled 1983/1984 colour diptychs and triptychs juxtaposing images of young adolescent junkies with grand Baroque architectural settings and Robert Bresson’s film, *The Devil, Probably* (1976) in which “a group of utterly beautiful and entirely alienated youths wander through the monuments and stations of an Old World which no longer means anything to them.”\(^9\) This apparent alienation of expressionless, anonymous, naked and semi-naked youths from their immediate environment remains a core trope in Henson’s most recent work, and one that I wish to approach via consideration of different representational models in order to analyse the relationships Henson constructs between forms of desiring spectatorial gaze and the construction (and consumption) of the sexualised body within pictorial space.

Since 1997 Henson has produced over three hundred of the singular, almost hermetic images noted above, depicting the neglected, semi-industrial, semi-rural fringe of a metropolis at night, or in the half light between night and day.\(^10\) Images of this form of setting dominated

\(^8\) The phrase “baroque carnality” is applied to Henson’s work by Helen McDonald on page 220 of her book *Erotic Ambiguities: The Female Nude in Art* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001).


\(^10\) These are all colour photographs approximately 120 x 180cm in dimension. In each of three exhibitions at Henson’s commercial gallery in Sydney—Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery—in 1998, 2000 and 2001 selections of the works have been presented unframed and attached loosely to backing boards closely abutted and gridded up to three deep on the gallery walls. As has been the case with much of Henson’s work throughout the 1990s in particular the overall installations have been carefully spot-lit so as to replicate a dramatic chiaroscuro effect, utilising areas of darkness and shadow to intensify the impact of light and to heighten the theatrical experience or aesthetic of the viewing encounter. By contrast, when exhibited at Henson’s Melbourne and Los Angeles commercial galleries—Tolarno Gallery (in 2000) and Karyn
Henson’s 1998 Sydney exhibition. There were only a handful of images featuring prepossessed partially clad adolescents languidly reclining within an apparently abandoned car chassis, or self-consciously arching their bodies as they drink or gaze past one another. The car and a bicycle act as key ‘props’ for these ‘portraits’ or figure studies (featuring three models – two girls and a boy) that are otherwise merely situated in fields of black illuminated by flashes of artificial light (see Illus. 7.4). The positioning of these images within an overall suite suggests the urban fringe—with its attendant connotations of a form of borderland or interzone, a space of neglect and decay that is barely a place at all—as a ‘home’ of sorts to these figures. The iconography of the non-peopled images is highly evocative, drawing not only upon cinematic traditions such as film noir and its contemporary manifestations,\textsuperscript{11} but also upon traditions of documentary photography ranging from classic images of small town America in the work of Walker Evans (and that of so many subsequent American photographers) through to Atget’s compelling ‘crime-scene’ visions of Paris after dark. This ongoing body of work by Henson is replete with images of power-lines against half light of cloudy skies (see Illus. 7.5); dark highways receding into darkness (sometimes framed by reflective road-markers or trees or fence-lines, see Illus. 7.6),\textsuperscript{12} railway lines, paths and road bridges that appear to lead no-where (see Illus 7.7 and 7.8); empty factory sites or shadowed buildings illuminated only by the insidious light of the distant city skyline (see Illus. 7.9); old tumbledown farm houses (see Illus. 7.10); and in the more recent work, bursts of light illuminating scatterings of bush (see Illus. 7.11), as well as simply extraordinary renditions of colour in the form of golden twilight and cloudy pre-dawn skies or iridescent blues against pure blacks (see Illus. 7.12).

Rather than pursue a closed analytical description of these ‘landscape’ images however, I wish to concentrate on their importance to Henson’s partner images of adolescent figures, which

\textsuperscript{11} For example, the location of Curtis Hanson’s \textit{LA Confidential’s} (1997) climatic scene in an abandoned motel surrounded by scrub and oil gantrys at the edge of the city, or the opening scene of David Lynch’s \textit{Mulholland Drive} (2001) taking place in the equally banal yet forboding scrubland of the Hollywood Hills.

\textsuperscript{12} For example, the sweeping bend in the road seemingly illuminated only by car headlights in one work (Illus. 7.6) is echoed, whether consciously or otherwise, by a momentary scene in Ray Lawrence’s feature film \textit{Lantana} (2001).
are of greater importance to this study's general examination of the staging of photographic scenes.

**Points of Reference**

Bill Henson's portrayals of self-contained, highly sexualised adolescents evoke a variety of reference points. I have already mentioned cinema and documentary photography, albeit briefly. Henson's use of chiaroscuro lighting with static, almost marble-like white torsos gleaming against the dark also brings to mind figure studies from the history of 'high' art ranging from classical forms through to the work of Caravaggio. Helen McDonald claims that this appeal to the "authority of the history of art" not only lends "grandeur" to the images, but also serves to demonstrate "that the eroticism of children in art is not necessarily lascivious, undignified or new."\(^{13}\) This claim is partially echoed by Charles Green in an *Artforum* review of Henson's work.\(^{14}\) Both McDonald and Green imply that Henson's images of naked or partially clothed adolescents lasciviously reclining, moodyly turning towards but looking out past the camera, or acting out sexual encounters in an almost disinterested manner, may somehow be differentiated from so much fashion photography of the 1990s dominated by similar representations of a troubled, withdrawn, introspective sexuality signifying an assumed state of post-postmodern adolescence in a Western world stripped of security and stability.

I return to representational conventions associated with fashion photography and with cinema in greater detail below in order to consider both the relationship of Henson's figures to their pictorial milieu—that is the *mise-en-scène* of the work—and the forms of subject presented in his images. But another strand of reference needs to be briefly traced here, that of Henson's own earlier work. This is because Henson's evocation, utilisation, perhaps even exploitation of adolescent sexuality for expressionistic purposes stretches back a number of years.

As noted above, Henson's untitled work of 1983/1984 consisted of large colour diptychs and triptychs juxtaposing young adolescents with ornate architectural forms. This work was heavily criticised by both Adrian Martin and Memory Holloway for being constructed around a

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\(^{13}\) McDonald, *Erotic Ambiguities*, 220

\(^{14}\) See Charles Green, 'Bill Henson', *Artforum* (December 1998), 141
fundamentally masculinist visual exploitation of adolescent sexuality. According to Holloway, in a critique apparently indebted to Laura Mulvey's analysis of the controlling masculine character of the gaze, particularly with regard to feminine 'subjects', "the spectator is positioned, like the photographer, within a phallocentric discourse of power and dominance." Holloway continued:

The eyes [of the girls] are averted, downcast or effaced in darkness. Males and females act out predetermined roles as gendered subjects through a series of culturally given symbols of aggression and passivity: the males sweat and shoot up; and females stand naked for the observation of the camera's eye.

For Holloway, this work duplicated and reinforced a conservative order of gender relations in which feminine subjects lack agency and are offered up as visual fodder to the desiring male gaze. Furthermore, this was an order itself formed in representational convention.

Martin similarly attacked Henson’s work for reinforcing a conservative worldview and ignoring the (potential or latent) agency of its own subjects. Martin, however, was not so concerned with gender stereotypes and relations as he was with what he perceived as the universalist, primary death drive underpinning the work. Henson's work, according to Martin, amounted to a "simplistic [world-view] in its brutal thematic contrasts of ugliness and beauty, present and past, monumental stone and withering flesh." Martin continued:

The problem here is that if you, as a spectator do not feel or believe that such a death-drive is universal, but quite specific to certain socially circumscribed sensibilities (like Henson’s and the caste he stands for and speaks for), then there is not really much you can do with these images, other than reject them out of hand, despite all their technical and aesthetic qualities, and their momentary ambiguities."

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16 Memory Holloway, 'Ventures into the Opulent interior. The Work of Bill Henson', Studio International 199 (December 1986-February 1987) 27

17 ibid.

18 Martin, 'Bill Henson and the Devil, Probably', 260

19 ibid.
The stark contrasts favoured by Henson but criticised by Martin continued in Henson's untitled work 1985/1986. In over one hundred and fifty photographs Henson intercut images of contemporary suburbia—houses, street scenes, petrol stations and the like—with images of ancient forms of architecture. Here again it appears that Henson's work emphasised a universalist worldview—a human impulse spanning millennia to determine and construct the physical and thus social environment. Yet this was also Henson's first significant body of work in which specific elements from the contemporary urban environment featured as key photographic subjects.

From 1987 onwards Henson began to put aside the multiple image form prevalent in much of his work to that point, and turned to working with large single structure compositions. These were produced by cutting up and then reconstituting images—generally again of adolescent subjects—in collage type structures. Via this technique Henson drew attention to the materiality of the work at the expense of any photographic illusion of unified or 'real' pictorial space, whilst also physically manifesting a form of violence upon the pictured subjects that had been latent in their previous subjection to a controlling gaze. Henson's use of this structure culminated in his large untitled works of 1994/1995 exhibited in the Australian Pavilion at the 1995 Venice Biennale. Torn and cut sections of photographic paper—including blank white sections of the back of the paper—were stuck together with visible pieces of black tape to create monumental scenes of what McDonald describes as "baroque carnality."

In these works, groups of naked and often dirty adolescents are strewn about what Isobel Crombie, curator of Henson's Venice exhibition, characterised as "an unknown natural landscape littered with the detritus of urban life." These settings bring to mind operatic stagings

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20 This is best evidenced within his untitled series of 1980/1982 comprising over one-hundred small black and white photographs of individuals unwittingly photographed amongst crowds on the street, then brought together in installation form as a visual 'crowd' of anonymous subjects—a apparently generic, universalist 'family of man'.

21 That is, unable to be exactly reproduced over and over again in the Benjaminian sense.

22 The works for the Venice Biennale exhibition ranged from approximately 180 x 250cm through to approximately 250 x 300cm in dimension.

with their towering mountains and distant storm clouds. They are fabricated, multi-faceted (or fragmentary), twilight spaces that do not signify as real in an illusionary or depictive manner. They present a vision of a corrupted Eden. As symbolic spaces they concentrate and intensify the dramas of sexual desire and adolescent abandon, addiction and bewilderment that take place within. This is further heightened by the use of intense chiaroscuro lighting both within the works themselves and cast upon them in gallery installation. As Crombie noted, Henson's 'Venice work' issues from and calls forth a world of the imagination, of instinct and sensual encounter,24 but most significantly (and not stressed by Crombie), a world in which the core determining and indeed overbearingly dominant presence is that of the artist's—the authoring—imagination.

Certain key elements therefore run right through Henson's work into the present: the depiction of naked and semi-naked, highly sexualised adolescent subjects; his use of urban fringe settings that often merge into a degraded wilderness; and his predilection for a moody, nocturnal ambience within his photographs. But the full-blown romanticism of the Venice Biennale and earlier work, in which there is almost no sense of social context or of his models being in any way social subjects, is somewhat tempered in his most recent work under discussion here. The integrity of photographic spatial illusionism is retained in these individual, single frame images. That is, a more apparently direct relation of image to world before the camera is evoked (and thus the image presents a world not necessarily entirely generated by the artist's own internal 'vision'). These images picture and evoke experiences of real places through which real subjects move, even if they are here deployed as pictorial rather than social environments. Furthermore, where models feature they now dominate the frame (as was the case in Henson's Paris Opera Project images of 1990/1991. They have the presence of real subjects, even when anonymous and posed in self-conscious mimicry of both high art and advertising attitudes. They are not merely bodies in erotic interaction overwhelmed by either their baroque stage settings or the overt manipulation of the works' material form. In addition, these single image works more clearly evoke social codifications of meaning formed and located within popular visual culture than Henson's preceding monumental cut-screen work.

These points of departure raise some important questions. To what extent are real subjects presenced within these images? And how important are these evocations of existing

24 ibid.
representational codes and contexts to such a process of subject construction? Or, conversely, do the models of 'photographic' imagery apparent in Henson's images (documentary, fashion, cinema) actually point to a replication of adolescent stereotypes propagated within commercially orientated sites of visual culture? To what extent is authorial subjectivity still a dominant visual presence in the work? Brief reference to two recent commentaries upon this work published in *Artforum* provides an entry point to these considerations.

In a feature article written in response to Henson's 1999 exhibition at Karyn Lovegrove Gallery in Los Angeles, Dennis Cooper claims that the single image format of Henson's new work enables a more intimate form of encounter with its adolescent subjects than was evident in earlier work. Cooper's critique depends upon certain assumptions regarding 'straight' or documentary photography, primarily that it depicts pre-existing subjects unaffected by or within the photographic encounter. According to Cooper, Henson's earlier formal experimentations have "given way" in this work to pictures that engage "unobtrusively with the psyches of his young subjects."25 Cooper, in fact, holds fast to an ideal of Henson the romantic artist, but here one in which the artist's achievement is in utilising an indiscernible (rather than overtly apparent) "aesthetic system" that allows the emotive presence of the subjects—rather than that of the artist—to dominate the work.26 This subjective presence may, however, be alternatively ascribed to an aesthetic system that validates a stereotypical conception of troubled adolescence appealing to forms of both expectation and desire propagated within other representational arenas.

Whilst Cooper treats photography as a medium in which the internal condition of the human subject may be visualised, Charles Green, by contrast, concentrates upon the forms of masquerade played out by these models, thus implying that their internal conditions as subjects outside of the photographic act are effectively irrelevant within the surface drama of the image. These models take part in scenes "acted out with varying degrees of inattentiveness, inconclusiveness, and self-forgetfulness."27 Green goes on to claim that "the kids are idealised

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25 Dennis Cooper, 'Naked Youth: The Photography of Bill Henson', *Artforum* (February 2002) 97

26 ibid.

27 Green, 'Bill Henson', 141
and theatrical, but detached and oblivious to our gaze.\textsuperscript{28} Whilst this may appear to be the case, it should be noted that any detachment of the models is a studied one, deliberately played out for the purpose of the photograph. The question then becomes one of whether this studied disinterestedness in the gaze merely confirms these adolescent subjects as passive objects of the gaze—in many cases their bodies remain open to visual consumption—or whether it amounts to a deliberate if oblique and rarely confrontational rejoinder to the visual authority of the viewer.

Cooper and Green therefore have quite different readings of Henson's images of adolescent subjects: Cooper claims a degree of intimacy and immediacy between subjects and viewers, and Green the opposite. Green is more interested in the degree of socialisation presented in the images, but he appears to make some distinction between the images of human subjects and those of night-time environments. The latter, he claims, present "landscapes of urban and suburban peripheries under the stress of overwhelming social and cultural forces."\textsuperscript{29} And yet in the overall exhibition "Henson smothers political difference."

Ultimately, however, for Green, just like Cooper, this new evolving body of work is redeemed through a formal beauty (or in Cooper's phrase "aesthetic system"), an "extreme self-absorption and tonal precision" that makes the work "believable rather than merely grotesque and sexually gratuitous."\textsuperscript{30} Both readings are incomplete. The 'believability' that Green refers to, or Cooper's 'engagement', derive also, in part, from the appeal of these images to forms of social codifications within visual culture through which both social and personal experience are presented.

\textbf{Fashion and Self-Absorption}

It is unclear whether Charles Green's description of Bill Henson's work as extremely self-absorbed is meant primarily as a reference to an authorial attitude, an attitude ascribed to the models pictured, the formal self-containment of the images, or their overall character as

\textsuperscript{28} ibid.

\textsuperscript{29} ibid. (Emphasis added.)

\textsuperscript{30} ibid.
fundamentally hermetic and lacking in social context. A case may be made for each of these characterisations. However, a brief discussion of the self-absorption of Henson's models in particular serves to resist claims to the images' absolute separation from social and representational context, for it necessarily points to conventions located in recent fashion photography.

This form of fashion photography presents a kind of unkempt, unhealthy, emaciated barely post-adolescent sexuality and is perpetuated in lifestyle publications such as The Face, Dazed and Confused, and Purple amongst many others. It has an enormous reach across popular culture, in part propagated and paralleled also within films such as Danny Boyle's Trainspotting (1996), as well as a complex relationship with the worlds of both documentary photography and contemporary art. It draws, for example, upon the gritty subcultural realism of the work of Larry Clark from the late 1960s and early 1970s, as well as the confessional, diaristic mode of 'documentary-as-art' pioneered by Nan Goldin and Jack Pierson amongst others during the 1980s. Furthermore, it feeds back across into the present-day practices of figures such as Paul Graham, Wolfgang Tillmans and a host of other photographer-artists who straddle the worlds of art, fashion and advertising.

Henson's models are generally depicted within one of three attitudes or types of pose. The first, involving pairs of figures, has them languidly acting out sexually suggestive poses, apparently oblivious to the camera's presence (see Illus 7.14 and 7.15). In the second loose group of images, single figures are depicted in utter self-absorption, turned away from or again exhibiting no awareness of the camera or viewer's presence (see Illus 7.16 and 7.17). In the final set of images, models look slightly towards, but often beyond the camera or across its line of sight so clearly adopting an attitude of awareness yet pretended disinterestedness in their condition as objects of the viewer's gaze (see Illus. 7.18). In all cases, whether head and shoulders portraits or full body images the figures dominate the images. (Three forms of relationship to the pictorial settings can also be discerned, cutting across the categories of pose noted here. These are described below with reference to the mise-en-scène.) And in all cases this staging of figures is reminiscent of a dominant strain in recent fashion photography,\(^ {31}\) if also sourced in the long history of Henson's own photographic practice.

\(^ {31}\) Despite having undertaken a commission for the Melbourne fashion label Scanlan and Theodore in 1997 that consisted of dark, moody portrait images of apparently adolescent girls or young women dressed in the label's clothing which are closely echoed in some of his recent art practice work (see Illus. 7.13),
In a recent essay on 'Heroin Chic' fashion photography, Katharine Wallerstein traces the current vogue for the use of extremely young, apparently disaffected and dishevelled models back to early 1990s campaigns for major labels such as Calvin Klein. In images by photographers such as Corrine Day "young models [were] posed as alienated and disengaged, with numbed or depressed facial expressions and postures, often ultra-thin bodies, and at times distinctly unhealthy demeanours," rapidly creating a dominant 'look' of a sort of anti-glamour with close ties to the worlds of youth and street culture rather than traditional high fashion. Wallerstein’s description of the importance of model Kate Moss to the development of this 'look' has particular resonance with regard to Henson’s images. Moss, she claimed, attracted attention in the early 1990s for her sullen, withdrawn demeanour and her streetwise, jaded airs. Her moody manner and rough-but-gentle appearance, combined with her skinny, tomboyish figure (in the earliest images she was barely fifteen) have lent the various pictures in which she appeared a tone of ambiguity and androgyny, a sexual vagueness that seems intricately connected to her melancholic and detached affectations.33

Wallerstein’s essay accurately characterises the style and impact of this 'look' within the world of fashion. More significant, however, is Wallerstein’s refusal to either simply celebrate the potency of this strand of visual signification within the Western imagination over the past decade, or to attack this form of photography as yet another sphere in which the female body is subject to visual exploitation by the masculine gaze. For Wallerstein, this emaciated 'heroin chic' look signifies not emptiness and powerlessness on the part of the young women depicted in such

Henson’s individual images are not so particularly mobile across cultural spheres, being rather quite deliberately structured as ‘high’ art. Moreover, the fact that Henson’s work draws on a particular mode of fashion or commercial photography should not be seen to necessarily undermine its status as photo-based contemporary art (or even ‘art photography’). Given their ubiquity and cultural influence Henson’s apparent referencing of the forms of adolescent sexuality presented in fashion and advertising imagery may be argued as evidence of the cultural currency, even criticality of his images. Indeed, the forms of adolescent sexuality presented here may in fact be more resistant and complex than a simple dismissal of the images as fodder for the consuming male gaze, or insubstantial signifiers of vapid lifestyle would allow.


33 ibid. It may usefully be asked whether Moss’ ‘melancholic and detached affectations’ should be treated as subjective conditions of the model herself or as a carefully modulated visual evocation on the part of photographer here working as part of an advertising campaign team.
images,\textsuperscript{34} but rather a "deliberate refusal to be filled, fulfilled, satisfied."\textsuperscript{35} That is to say, the culture that constructs such images and within which they circulate does not meet the needs of these subjects and thus their apparent participation within it is at best partial and conducted on their own terms. These subjects, according to Wallerstein, withhold themselves, and this in turn only makes the images all the more evocative in their suggestion of experiences unable to be adequately conveyed in visual form. The models' "dark emotions, erotic undertones, and intensities of expressions (even in their refusal of affect) suggest romantic notions of tragic beauty and ecstatic experiences achieved through physically destructive expenditures – such as drug-induced highs, sleep-deprived euphoria, famishment, or extreme emotional or physical experience."\textsuperscript{36} Such images, according to Wallerstein, suggest degrees of experience far beyond those available to a reading of stereotypical phallocentric desire. The nakedness or supposed sexual provocation of Moss within certain images, for example, offers an image of masculine impotency rather than confirmation of the domination of masculine heterosexual desire over the visual domain. According to Wallerstein, writing on a 1994 Calvin Klein 'Obsession' advertisement depicting Moss naked with her hand over her mouth: "Moss is alone, beyond reach, yet at the same time extraordinarily present. She asserts her presence through her unavailability. She confronts through her withdrawal."\textsuperscript{37}

Wallerstein's critique clearly depends upon an ascription of subjectivity to Moss the individual as pictured within advertising images. Yet this is not necessarily to confuse Moss the individual subject and Moss the model in photographic form, for Wallerstein's argument, only roughly paraphrased here, does treat the photographic image as a dynamic space in which multiple subjectivities intermingle and generate meaning. In this case fashion photography is partly dependent upon the public persona of Moss the model to generate the aura described by Wallerstein, yet that aura surrounding the persona of Moss is to a large degree generated within the visual realm of the photograph. The photographic realm feeds and drives the realm of public persona and dominant cultural 'fashions', and vice versa. All of which indicates the potency of

\textsuperscript{34} And by implication with regard to young women collectively in the face of certain phallocentric or outright misogynous drives within western media and entertainment culture.

\textsuperscript{35} Wallerstein, 'Thinness and Other Refusals', 131

\textsuperscript{36} ibid., 135

\textsuperscript{37} ibid., 141
the visual models that Henson's images evoke. This is so even given the propensity of those representational conventions to give rise to a formulaic repetition of stereotype aimed at maximising economic potential of certain shared cultural imaginings – a point omitted from Wallerstein's discussion. Whilst such instances of commercial practice may cease to operate as a visual space of complex social and subjective or imaginative evocation, they remain a ubiquitous presence within contemporary society.

Wallerstein's reading infers a relation of resistance on the part of the (fashion) model to the function of the camera, yet of course this relation is actually only given social form via an accord of sorts between camera (and by implication photographer) and model. Through this accord a relation of resistance is performed for and within the space of the public photograph. This complicates, although certainly does not necessarily entirely discredit readings of such sexually implicatory images that equate the figure of the 'masculine' photographer/viewer with a position of exploitative power with regard to the objects of his gaze. There is little doubt that Henson overtly evokes senses of 'outsider' experience and social taboo through sexualised images of adolescent models. Both his individual subjects and the precedents they conjure up from the realms of photography, cinema, painting and literature are put to the service of giving visual form to a projected authorial imagination. It is therefore quite appropriate to focus critical attention to some degree upon the apparent visual and representational relationship of the authoring consciousness of Henson and that of his models – to question whether his images are products of a visual exploitation of the physical and symbolic presence of youth on the part of rather conventional modes of masculine desire (that hold even when the pictured subject is a young male, as in the case of many of Henson's images). But this is not a key point of consideration within my study. More important here is an analysis of the representational forms, conventions and models that shape the visual presence of Henson's figures and in turn find some purchase upon viewers' social and imaginative experience.

However 'real' the settings and subjects, the forms of experience pictured in Henson's images are fundamentally of the imagination. Unlike Moffatt's Up In The Sky images for example, Henson's photographs, at least those featuring human figures, fundamentally appeal not to actual social conditions mediated via representational precedents but to a photogenic

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36 Masculine in sense of gendered relation of the gaze as detailed in the work of both Laura Mulvey and Abigail Solomon-Godeau amongst others, not in a biologically-determinant sense. See note 15 above.
anti-ideal of brooding, vaguely dangerous and certainly sexual glamour. However collectively recognised this anti-ideal may be, it remains essentially a projective imaginative experience of the individual.

Both Wallerstein’s analysis of the photographic figure of Kate Moss and Cooper’s discussion of Henson’s images point to forms of experience beyond those available to visual form. The photograph is treated as a space of innuendo, or a launching pad for projective imagination. Either emphasis leads back to the notion of a ‘visionary’ artist evoking hitherto unimaginable forms of experience. If this is the case, then for all their forms of visual reference and aesthetic beauty, Henson’s images must necessarily operate somewhat beyond what I described in Chapter 2 as the ‘primacy of appearance’ of much photo-based contemporary art. And there is little doubt that this is a large part of the attraction of Henson’s work: it sits comfortably within an understanding of creative production that posits an artist figure of some remarkably creative, visionary capacity at the core of the work. Crucially, however, this cannot be taken as the locus of all meaning within the work. Henson’s work hints at states of being beyond the visual, whilst working with a synthesis of representational models developed within a primarily visual epoch.

There is, therefore, a core tension in Henson’s work therefore between the ineffable and the visible, and this in turn echoes a relation between the sublime and the beautiful, both of which are characterisations that have appeared in discussions of Henson’s work throughout his career. For the purposes of this brief analysis I wish to characterise the sublime as an internalised condition founded in the relation of the individual subject to the external world. The sublime, including most recent formations of the postmodern and the technological sublime, is experienced internally by the individual subject in confrontation with the conditions of exterior worlds, including the ‘mysterious’ world of technology. I wish to characterise beauty as being located entirely within the appearance of the external world as it presents to the human subject. So, to contradict Cooper, I suggest that beauty may prove to be the more appropriate framework through which to consider Henson’s work, although as I detail below, what Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe terms a "differential" (rather than oppositional) relationship between beauty and the contemporary technological sublime may be ascertained in current photography’s relationship to glamour.
The Purest Form of Photography

Beauty has 'returned' as a key issue of discussion in contemporary art criticism of the past decade, paralleling similar developments in philosophy, aesthetics and literary criticism. Major international critics such as Arthur C. Danto, Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe and Dave Hickey have all published significant texts considering beauty as an alternative aesthetic model to the postmodern sublime within recent art, whilst Regarding Beauty was the title of one of the largest millennial survey exhibitions of late twentieth-century art in Europe and North America. In the following section I simply point out a few core ideas developed within this discourse in order to suggest certain possible approaches to thinking about Bill Henson's recent photographs.

In elements of this recent thinking, beauty is described as a state beyond discourse – a condition of the visual that escapes language, reason and thus forms of social cognition. It is, simply, a means of labelling the ineffable. Thus, as Gilbert-Rolfe describes it, beauty sits in opposition to the sublime or to the critical function of art; it is frivolous, "typically located within fragility and the delicate. The beautiful exceeds what frames it, and what frames it is discourse, whose currency is meaning, and whose terms are always those of strength and the rigorous." To a certain degree then, under this reading beauty mirrors the anti-theory, 'naïve-reflectionist' critical response to aspects of recent photography (discussed in Chapter 2) that seeks to elide the critically generative or discursive conditions of photography. Danto best identifies the key questions raised by this characterisation: "Is a return to beauty, then, an acknowledgement of

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42 Gilbert-Rolfe, 'Beauty and the Contemporary Sublime', 161
art's limitations when it comes to effecting social change?" To put it another way, has recent art recognised its failure to occupy a critical position within spectacle culture, and turned instead to a frivolous pursuit of pleasure and desire? Or, as Danto posits in a more positive vein: "Is the return a concession that in a futile effort to modify social awareness, art has sacrificed precisely that which gives it its deepest meaning?" Is art disentangling itself from the corrupted, superficial realms of commercialised visual culture and seeking instead to retrace and recover its ontological foundations? This latter question of course suggests that a 'return' to beauty may also constitute a return to rarefied conceptions of 'high' art. Yet beauty is also treated in much contemporary criticism as a means of freeing both art practice and, most significantly, the viewing encounter with art from the 'elitist' requirements of intellectual discourse. So may beauty simultaneously signify the elite strata of high art and the professed accessibility of mass visual culture? Danto's key concern with rhetorics of beauty, however, as he states in another text, is its potential use to mitigate the difficult aspects of art's relationship to social experience. He is concerned with art being treated as a diversion or means to console, rather than an invitation to engagement. "It is not art's business to console," he writes. "If beauty is perceived as consolatory, then it is morally inconsistent with the indignation appropriate to an accusatory art." 

Gilbert-Rolfe takes a different position, identifying a continued resistance on the part of the world of contemporary art to conceptions of beauty formed primarily within broader spheres of visual culture. He claims that "the current administration of contemporary art" (writers, publishing outlets, academia, bureaucracies, galleries and museums) holds onto a "faith in discourse" matched by a "fear of beauty". According to Gilbert-Rolfe, beauty remains outside the pale of art in its strictest sense, yet all pervasive in the general field of visual culture. Thus the world of art, concerned with "redemption", perhaps ironically "miss[es] the point of everything around it". Spectacle culture seeks to arouse and evoke both desire and pleasure. This,

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43 Danto 'Beauty to Ashes', 184
44 ibid.
45 Danto, 'Beauty and Morality', 34
46 Gilbert-Rolfe, 'Beauty and the Contemporary Sublime', 180
47 ibid.
according to Gilbert-Rolfe, is what the art world seeks to ignore, and in so doing risks disconnection from the social.\textsuperscript{46} The issue of morality (or here an ethical notion of 'meaning') is irrelevant to Gilbert-Rolfe, yet so clearly at the heart of Danto's interest in contemporary art's relationship to conceptions of beauty. And so the question must be, in the broadest sense: what social function or identity might be demanded of art? Or, more specifically: what may be desired from Henson's images? Or, what is it appropriate to require from them? Is it not enough that they conjure projective states of romantic self-conception? That they play to particular codes of desire? That they confirm the potency of the visual imagination? If it is enough, however, do they not also then confirm the most pessimistic ruminations of Fredric Jameson and Benjamin Buchloh regarding the image's absolute absorption within the dictates of corporatised spectacle culture? If they do attempt differentiation from the vast mass of photographic images in the commercial and social realm they would appear to do so via a\textit{concentration} and\textit{intensification} rather than repudiation of the strategies of seduction and visual suggestion played out in those spheres.

Gilbert-Rolfe's analysis supports such a reading. Photography (not art as such), he claims, is synonymous with beauty in the present day. Both are about "always being all there at once."\textsuperscript{49} Like beauty "the condition of the photograph is one of simultaneity, flawlessness, intensification."\textsuperscript{50} Beauty, claims Gilbert-Rolfe, is now equated with glamour – a form of attractive unproductivity that "appropriates photography's surface."\textsuperscript{51} And so beauty does not sit in opposition to the technological sublime, rather the two have a "differential" relationship, each manifested in forms of electronic instantaneity, each flawless and blank.\textsuperscript{52} Thus, finally, beauty is surrounded by what it is not (a notion of the sublime) and so in art achieves a sort of critical status by default.\textsuperscript{53}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[46] It is important that Gilbert-Rolfe specifically identifies the social, intellectual and economic matrices of the art world here rather than an isolated notion of creative practice per se.
\item[49] ibid., 169
\item[50] ibid.
\item[51] ibid., 170
\item[52] ibid.
\item[53] ibid.
\end{footnotes}
Most crucially, according to Gilbert-Rolfe, the fashion model of all human subjects most aspires to the condition of photography (is in fact only granted identity within the sphere of photography). Fashion photography is the purest form of photography. Fashion images are pure presence (of the photographic surface, not presence within the photograph) and therefore generate no independent meaning. They are "the realisation of the visible post-human in the human at, in a sense, its most and least human. The terms of the post-human, techno-sublime, are the surface without depth and continuity as flawlessness: blank and static activity, intelligence without expression, encoding without inflection, measurement and pure power." Under Gilbert-Rolfe's reading, therefore, it may be possible to argue that Henson's images aspire in fact to the purest form of contemporary photography – a photography beyond discourse. However, whilst a useful structure through which to consider how Henson's images apparently seek to evade and indeed challenge the terms of certain modes of criticism, Gilbert-Rolfe's metonymic relation of fashion, photography and beauty in the end offers only a partial and perhaps misleading entry to Henson's images. For in Henson's images all is not absolutely present. Many of his images are not so much blank as empty. They entice other presences—those of the viewer's imagination, for example—into their spaces, rather than instantly fulfil spectorial desire. Whilst reason or discursivity may not be core organising principles of the work, Henson's images offer spaces of experience beyond the visual appearance of their proffered surfaces. They depict social spaces and have a knowing, if contingent cultural presence. Beauty has a limited use here as a framework through which to highlight the means by which Henson appears to privilege a mix of intensified aesthetic, and romantic rather than rational sensibility, over social commentary. It simply serves, in the end, to highlight how the question of morality is left deliberately unanswered by his images.

54 ibid., 175
55 ibid.
56 ibid., 179
57 A criticism that would challenge Henson's visual rendering of gender relations, for example, or the basis of his mimicking of advertising's 'sex-sells' visual strategies
Darkness on the Edge of Town

In concluding this discussion of Bill Henson’s recent work I wish to turn from questions of aesthetics and photographic source models to a brief consideration of the occasional cinematic structure of the work, cinema being both one space of the technological sublime and a key arena of romantic envisioning. This returns my discussion to issues of cinematic staging and the *mise-en-scène* addressed in the early sections of this chapter.

In his *Artforum* essay on Henson’s work Dennis Cooper describes the black tones that dominate the photographs as being "as solid as lead", both blanketing the pictured adolescents and appearing to exude from them.⁵⁸ Such a reading corresponds in part to the notion of synthesis between pictorial elements that Rhys Graham posits at the heart of the photographic *mise-en-scène* (see above). It also, however, infers a relation between Henson’s images and the literal merging of figures and black as a material substance possible in painting and drawing. Indeed, the images where black or darkness provides the sole spatial and pictorial setting for Henson’s figures (see Illus. 7.19)—where bodies appear to both emerge from and be enveloped by black as suggested by Cooper—are those corresponding least to cinematic forms.

Reference was made in the section above on fashion photography to three loose clusterings of relationship between figures and pictorial settings that are apparent in Henson’s recent work. These are figures solely contained within fields of black as already noted; figures physically located via relation to props and spaces such as car interiors; and figures pictured against a distant pictorial screen or backdrop of city lights. Images falling into the third of these clusterings are most significant here. Of all Henson’s work over the past five years these images most evoke cinematic forms and scenarios. Furthermore, they are most prominent in Henson’s latest sets of work.

In a number of these images a single model is pictured at night either reclining or standing turned towards the camera. The sky is an empty black space. But far in the distance a set of city lights cut across the image in either a line or a field of small bursts of orange. These almost abstract arrangements of colour generally occupy at most the lower third or half of the image.

⁵⁸ Cooper, ‘Naked Youth’, 97
but on rare occasions (generally where two figures are depicted) they cut across the upper section of the image. There is less of a sense of fusion between figures and blackness as the actual defining space than in earlier instances, and more of a sense of pictorial layering of image planes or screens (or 'flats' in theatrical terms).

In juxtaposing these moody provocative figures of youth with schematic references to the nocturnal metropolis, Henson evokes a sense of dangerous glamour most associated with film noir traditions (as noted earlier) but also constructed within the mythologies of popular music.\(^{59}\) (Such conventions are also exploited to create a similarly seductive and edgy fringe-dwelling mystique within advertising photography.) Significantly, Henson does not locate his figures within the metropolis but rather simply pictures them against or in front of it. The city exists solely as overtly significatory backdrop, like a stage flat or a digitally generated cinematic setting. His figures are both infused with romantic notions of the nocturnal netherworld, yet also exist outside or beyond the parameters of this convention. They are as outsiders in all senses.

Indeed, a graduation in relationship between staged figures and real world settings can be identified therefore across the work of Tracey Moffatt, Anne Zahalka and Henson. Moffatt's *Up In The Sky* figures act out scenarios entirely embedded within their material and social environment. These scenarios therefore, no matter how staged and based in earlier fictional representations, convey a sense of being generated by and appealing to real social experience. Zahalka's *Fortresses and Frontiers* figures are depicted moving against (even through), yet alienated from the space of the city. The figures are ciphers of human experience, acting out generic rather than particularly personalised scenarios of alienation. Their function is to signify an emotional and experiential gulf between the self and the urban environment. Henson's figures are further removed from the urban setting – they occupy separate pictorial realms. Yet like Moffatt's subjects (and unlike Zahalka's more detached, less personalised figures) the concentration upon individual subjects does indeed evoke senses of real social and imaginative experience, even when this is carried out through an appeal to the social agency and potency of other representational conventions.

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\(^{59}\) The very content and mood of Henson's images immediately bring to mind emblematic rock songs dealing with desire and disillusionment expressed through the figure of the fringe dweller such as Bruce Springsteen's 'Meeting Across the River' as well as the title track from his *Born to Run* album of 1975. Numerous further examples from the history of Australian as well as North American and British rock music could easily be listed.
But if figures and backdrop function as two separate pictorial and signifying elements juxtaposed within the two-dimensional space of the image for projective, evocatory purposes, is the energy potential of the mise-en-scène resulting from pictorial synthesis as described by Graham therefore lost? Certainly, unlike Moffatt's Up in the Sky work, there is little suggestion of imagined narrative action at the temporal edges of the images forged in a dynamic synthesis of subject and setting. Yet a different form of synthesis is taking place here, and one that does also have a basis in contemporary cinema driven far less by analogical manifestations of illusionary space than digital generation of overtly synthetic space. This is a synthesis of layered screens or planes of pictorial content rather than an apparent resolution of elements within a singular and complete space. And it indicates, in turn, an important set of relationships between cinematic image forms, the recent history of performative gesture within photography as driven by aspects of conceptual art, and the signifying structures of advertising images.

All this is best illustrated by the particular image (Illus. 7.20) depicting the greatest sense of motion amongst Henson's recent work – an image that evidently stills a kinetic body. A barely clad young woman is depicted floating or suspended against the black night sky and both in front of and above a swathe of city lights that cover the bottom third of the image. She is ungrounded – completely detached from any clear spatial relationship to place. In fact, she floats like an apparition or pictorial projection rather than a visceral body. But this very notion of 'floating' is itself primarily metaphorical – it alludes to the movement of a body in relation to the material substance of the earth. Henson's figure, however, is simply a stilled image of a woman, pictured as if suspended above a shorthand visual evocation of a nocturnal urban metropolis. These two signifiers are meshed within the frame of the image by the right arm of the woman hanging down into the pictorial space of the city lights.

Here Henson utilises the body of his subject in a form of pictorial gesture that is both evocatory and yet elusive in meaning. Of all Henson's recent images discussed here, this most moves into the territory of a gestural body posed in striking yet enigmatic visual relationship to a schematic rendering of a real material environment. This is a common structural strategy of much large (billboard) advertising imagery. Whilst remaining redolent of the sheer scope and ambition of cinematic image forms in its staging (and subsequent stilling) of an act of grand visual motion, this particular image links more closely to the rapid semiosis of the advertising

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60 Itself little more here than an evocative signifier of a certain psychological state of being.
image than to the pictorial (and spatial) synthesis of the *mise-en-scène* that concentrates the cogent presence of its pictorial *subjects*, or indeed to the rich social history of documentary image making that permeates much of the rest of Henson's recent work. Even the sociological grounding of fashion photography that aspects of Henson's work parallels is set aside here. This is a visually arresting image encapsulating a double-relation of estrangement and cathartic release of the subject from the mundane despoilment of the everyday. In this regard it is very different from Zahalka's *Fortresses and Frontiers* works, in which stilted figures remained trapped within all-encompassing urban environments. Zahalka's figures are evidently unable to even imaginatively project themselves. If, as Zahalka has claimed, her images seek in part to visualise memory traces, Henson's clearly on occasion seek to traverse the boundaries of memory or lived experience in acts of imaginative projectioning that eschew narrative forms.

**Conclusion**

Beginning and ending with the cinema, in this chapter I have discussed the manner in which a range of visual and conceptual models may be brought to the analysis of photographic images featuring figures staged in various relationships to urban and social environments. As has been the case right throughout this study, my intention has not been to claim relationships of rigid derivation or equivalence between the work of Bill Henson and these models sourced in broader visual culture. Rather, in advancing this discussion I have highlighted the complexities of relation between these images as contemporary art and the far wider purview of contemporary image culture within which they also circulate. Moreover, I have displayed how such a mode of investigation provides us with a range of tools (modes of analysis associated with the deconstruction of fashion imagery for example) that may be taken to the viewing encounter with appropriate images within a contemporary art realm in order to better understand their structures and cognitive actions as well as their character as forms of public communication or visual presence.
CHAPTER 8
Picturing the Gesture: Rosemary Laing

Bill Henson's image of a young woman apparently suspended in the night sky (Illus. 7.20) discussed at the end of the previous chapter is similar in structure to Rosemary Laing's flight research (1999/2000) images, a series of nine colour photographs all featuring the airborne figure of a red-headed woman in a white wedding dress, diving forwards, falling backwards, tumbling about or, in the most celebrated of all Laing's images, seemingly suspended before a deep blue sky, arms outstretched looking out at the viewer.¹ In some of these images, flight research #4 (1999) (Illus. 8.1) for example, the figure dominates the frame of the image with nothing other than the transparent blue of an empty sky around her, or the tinge of twilight suggested in yellow and orange banding across the image (see flight research #3 [1999], Illus. 8.2). But in the two key images in the series, flight research #5 (1999) (Illus. 8.3), and flight research #6 (1999/2000) (Illus. 8.4), both panoramic in format, the figure is smaller and pictured against a deep blue colourfield sky, either pictorially suspended centrally above a eucalypt blue horizon line formed by the ridge line of distant hills paralleled by thin traces of cloud (flight research #5), or located to one side poised diving forward back towards the centre of the image, and down to earth (flight research #6). Despite the affinity between these works and that of Henson at the level of pictorial structure, they are in fact significantly different in terms of photographic encounter and their genealogical tracings through photographic history. The different forms of physical activity or performance pictured in these works, for example, suggest different photographic models through which the works may be interrogated.

In addition to flight research, in this chapter I consider selections of images from Laing's brownwork (1996/1997), airport (1997) and bulletproofglass (2002) bodies of work.² I again look at photographic models drawn from both visual culture in its widest purview as well as avant-garde practice in order to arrive at appropriate analytical tools through which to identify and assess the presence and operation of Laing's images at a nexus of contemporary art (or avant-garde aesthetics) and spectacle culture. The legacy of conceptual art as discussed in Chapter 1,

¹ The images in the series range in size from 60 x 60cm to 118 x 262cm in dimension.
² There are five brownwork and three airport images, all approximately 120 x 250-280cm in dimension; and six bulletproofglass images ranging in dimension from 70 x 110cm to 120 x 253cm.
for example, is important to Laing’s practice as a basis for models of performative subjects within photography that Laing’s work draws upon.

Laing’s imagery differs from that discussed in the previous two chapters in that whereas image forms redolent of the cinema frequently evoke the collective consciousness of film as an efficacious space of the real within modernity, Laing’s imagery also draws strongly upon the performative legacies of conceptual art to concretise (in pictorial form) the disruptive gestures of performance and to utilise performance to pictorially stage other apparently external phenomena. The pictured action becomes a symbolically coded gesture, born within and dependent upon an understanding of the image as a semiotic nexus. Its immediate appeal is not to narrativity and subjectivity, but to code and message. Of course, clear distinctions between cinematic legacies and those of conceptual art are extremely difficult to make given their co-existence in the work of so many individual image-makers. Thus in my view the task of critical analysis is in part to ascertain the relative significance of each model of representation to the visual structure and cognitive action of each image.

A brief consideration of resemblance theory and signification in light of digital imaging technologies follows my discussion of images from brownwork and airport. During the first half of the 1990s Laing utilised digital technologies in the production of her work as well as treating them as a central subject of her practice. However, whilst Laing continues to utilise digital technologies in the final production of her images, her work from brownwork onwards has become resolutely analogue in genesis – it is not only generated from individual analogue photographic negatives, but insists upon the associated connotations of authenticity in its production of meaning within a digital culture. The work draws on iconicity dependent upon the appearance of the camera’s accord with acts of record and authentication—not as ‘this has been’ but ‘this seen (here, and like this)’—as it applies to the picturing of performative gestures or actions. This ‘appearance’ of the analogue resonates with Paul Virilio’s characterisation of a digital age realism in The Vision Machine as, “the relative fusion/confusion of the factual (or operational, if you prefer) and the virtual; the ascendancy of the ‘reality effect’ over a reality

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3 The ariel wall component of Laing’s greenwork (1995) (illus. 8.5) series attempted a visual phenomenology of velocity—a visualisation of the conditions of speed—via digital ‘stretching’ of verdant colourfield swathes of forest-tops. This and other work led ot Laing’s frequent identification as a ‘digital’ photographic artist. This was exemplified by her inclusion in the major 1996 Digital Gardens exhibition at The Power Plant in Toronto and the use of one of her time lapse’ photographs from greenwork on the cover of the accompanying book. See Louise Dompiere ed., Digital Gardens: A World in Mutation (exh. cat.) (Toronto: The Power Plant, 1996).
principle already largely contested elsewhere, particularly in physics. Virilio's terms 'effect' and 'principle' do not, however, necessarily sit in clear distinction to one another. In Laing's work, for example, they are hinged by the conception of the 'analogical' in photography. In an age of digital media the 'look' of the analogue photograph—the image that straightforwardly depicts materially possible or probable scenes—connotes a tradition that irrevocably links photography and realism. This is photography's reality 'effect', even when this 'look' is (avowedly or otherwise) digital in generation. (Jeff Wall's The Flooded Grave work discussed in Chapter 2 is exemplary in this respect.) But this traditional link of photography and realism is itself developed through the indexical sign structure of the analogue photograph. This provides the reality 'principle' of photography. Both 'effect' and 'principle' are crucial to Laing's images — both the appearance of the analogue image and the verifying principle of the analogue which confirms that the acts appearing in and as the photographs did in fact materially take place. As I outline below, this is a crucial aspect of Laing's work.

I conclude this chapter with a lengthy discussion of Laing's flight research and bulletproofglass. While my final comments are directed to these sets of work, my conclusions have varying degrees of application across Laing's practice. The whole chapter is concerned with the manner in which Laing draws upon photo-mimetic codes and conventions as symbolic forms in all these bodies of work in order to attempt to visualise a phenomenological conception of time and space in constant flux, stretched, compressed and accelerated in and via technology in an effective, insistent or convincing manner. The body as a pictorial coding of motion is crucial throughout the various images discussed here. It is utilised in a performative play of expectation and deferral with regard to its physical reckoning with technology and its marking by, even disintegration within that meeting. Thus the body is stripped of interiority, or perhaps viscerality in this picturing. Laing stages acts of motion in order to picture speed—to picture the conditions of material and informational flow—not to presence or convey subjective experience. The key issue that the chapter builds towards, however, is that of the degree to which this form of pictorial coding of figures in action has also come to underpin contemporary media and advertising culture. To what does this effacement of subjective experience reduce the flight

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research and bulletproof glass images to? Does their insistent pictorial presentness risk appealing only to the semiotic instaneity of mass entertainment and advertising culture?

Picturing Motion

In Rosemary Laing's brownwork and airport photographs, Sydney airport acts as both a key subject and stage set for a number of performative actions undertaken solely for the purpose of 'record' by the camera. The airport doubles as a highly resonant cultural signifier and as the reinvented photographic studio described by Jeff Wall in his 1995 essay "Marks of Indifference": Aspects of Photography in, or as, Conceptual Art' (see Chapter 1). Pictorial and structural affinities to Wall's own work do exist here, but not so clearly as in Anne Zahalka's Fortresses and Frontiers (1993) (see Chapter 3). The key relation here is with Wall's model of the picture in post-conceptual contemporary art.

Collectively the two bodies of work constitute an attempt to picture the forces of gravity and velocity as they are determined by the mechanics of a high-tech age. The airport is thus an apt location and subject. As airports process ever-increasing volumes of goods—ever-more information in ever-more complex flows—they become less ciphers of place than mere transportation hubs: points of convergence and dispersal for a multitude of travel vectors, as well as functional spaces for the massive orchestration of continuous material and informational flow and transaction. As Laing's images made on the airport tarmac attest, airports are reconfigured landscapes, exemplary "non-places of supermodernity" as described by Marc Augé (see Chapter 3).

Utilising heightened pictorial conventions an image such as Laing's brownwork #8 (1997) (Illus. 8.6) reveals operational structures that function beneath the airport's seamless technological façade. The massive architectural and mechanical structure of the freight warehouse is depicted as a data management system where even figures operating machinery appear as functionary units operating to pre-determined schedules and trajectories. The data

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reference carries through a number of the images: the digital '01' on the back of an abseiler in brownwork #9 (1997) (Illus. 8.7) and the tarmac target of the helicopter landing site behind the woman in airport #2 (Illus. 8.8) both focus attention upon the discrepancies between such technological determinations of transport and trajectory, and singular individual action.

Laing’s use of traditional linear perspective, resulting in the deeply recessed spatial illusionism of the warehouse corridor in brownwork #8 and the stripped aircraft interior in brownwork #9, draws attention to the conventionalisation of pictorial space via the monocular structure of the camera. In comparison to her earlier greenwork, these images act to still and fix the viewing body in place before the scene, not to mobilise an embodied vision and so impart something of the destabilising sensation of velocity.

Laing also utilises pictorial conventions associated with landscape painting and photography. This draws attention to the condition of the airport as a rearticulated form of landscape. The division of pictorial space by a dominant horizon line is clear in the tarmac images airport #1 (Illus. 8.9) and airport #2. However a horizon line of sorts is also apparent in brownwork #8 in the form of a horizontal slice across the picture-place made by the receding orange line running through the levels of storage cages. A similar effect is achieved in the aircraft interior of brownwork #9 through the tonal contrast between the floor and sides of the hull. By so adapting landscape conventions into these interior images and imbuing them with a shared sense of the panoramic Laing’s images work to convey the immense scale of these architecturally encased spaces. Built environments—technologically determined environments—are pictured here as all-encompassing; they are the new ‘natural’ habitat of late twentieth-century society. But furthermore, as the new landscapes of both present and future they are also spaces for individual contemplation, occasions for longing, and touchstones for both personal and collective identity. All this is suggested by the formal grandeur of Laing’s images.

However, most important here is the manner in which the acculturated space of the airport has come to stand in for the representational location of the artist’s studio. Laing has staged actions for the camera that are deliberately enigmatic, even obtuse if (inappropriately) considered within narrative terms. In most, future action is unclear and possibly irrelevant to the choreography of activity. In brownwork #9, a figure hangs suspended in the cavernous interior of a freight 747. In brownwork #1, (1996) (Illus. 8.10), a female athlete stands poised, ready to
pierce the anthropomorphic form of another flip-top 747 with a javelin. In airport #2 a woman in trousers and bright blue shirt stands on an airport tarmac about to catch a bright red ball suspended in flight before her, whilst behind her, also static against a clear blue sky hangs a Qantas 747. In airport #1, a third woman runs out into the heavily foreshortened space of the tarmac and sky towards a distant approaching jet.

These are apparently absurd actions, strange enough to demand decoding as meaningful performances, or points of references within a narrative flow. But to do so would be to take the narrative implication of the works too far. It would be to treat them in fundamentally cinematic terms. These images might conjure narrative connotations, act as allegorical or even iconographic scenes, but only by dint of gestural and visual association. It is a fundamentally symbolic, associative narrativity that flows from the indexicality of these images, from their literal elements. Whereas in fact the actions depicted only exist, in the first instance, as tableau poses for the camera – as clear, even slightly stilled simulations of action in photographic forms. They are gestures constructed for and by the camera, inextricably intertwined with the idea of the photograph as gesture itself situated obliquely back within the realm of the social. And so here Laing clearly stages that parodic relation of art-concept and photo-journalism that re-instates, for Wall, the priority of the 'Western picture' within contemporary art (see Chapter 1).

In these images Laing appears to have made an attempt to convey processes and mechanics of motion by stripping them back, in pictorial form, to first principles – to a simplicity of action and response and a immediacy of relation between the technological and the corporeal. These photographs do not suspend or capture motion; they deploy the mimetic associations of the camera to picture structures of motion in an almost notational sense – as kinds of visual equation. The javelin indicates a basic means of dexterous ariel propulsion and trajectory. The ball stilled mid-lob between figure and shadow on the tarmac visualises basic gravitational process and its obvious determination of the actions of take-off and landing simultaneously enacted by the image of the aircraft suspended at the left of the photograph. The woman running across the tarmac conveys the relationship of human acceleration and

7 Or having just thrown the ball – the distinction is not crucial.
movement to the traversing of distances, a necessity that so clearly underpins the human drive to further technological enhancement of that process.\(^6\)

These images could only ever be photographic. They depend on their own foregrounding as photogenic. Their relational structures of figure to technology—the pictured divides between physical capabilities of the human body and its technological prostheses—would be barely visible within the temporal fluidity of a moving image form. Moreover, they would have little cognitive impact if they were not somehow manner based in photography’s claims to transcriptive veracity. These visualisations of propulsion, acceleration, trajectory and gravity would remain abstract without some hint of indexicality. They would have no purchase upon the realms of social and material experience.

The brief descriptions given above of the actions within a selection of photographs point to the basis of the overall work in a form of iconicity displaced within the structures of postmodernism and appropriation art rather than in narrative constitution. Certain image forms (aircraft for example) and actions stand-in for and condense shared meanings. These images appeal to pictorial forms running through the history of the ‘Western picture’ in art, within which iconicity is fundamentally embedded. They draw upon the iconographical loading of Western art history, upon assumed or conventionalised relations of image to associative meaning and to allegory rather than the narrative structures of the moving image. Some of the iconographical reference points are obvious. There is the ubiquitous Qantas symbol in \textit{airport \#2}, for example, that is not only a brand marker but also an evocation of cultural place and collective identity. (It also serves, of course, to collapse the distance between any avant-gardist intent underpinning Laing’s image and the strategies of visual recognition employed within advertising photography.) But there are also forms of iconicity brought into play by the hermetic structures of the images (their containment of staged action within representational forms that connote ‘art’). There is an implied directive here that meaning must reside in visual content as a pictorial sign system capable of connecting with the conditions of material and social experience. Thus iconicity and allegory depend upon that certain inference of indexicality noted previously— that sense of world

\(^6\)This form of pictorial coding or symbolism is quite different from a futurist project of visualising the condition of technologically generated velocity through searching out pictorial equivalents of heightened phenomenological experience. In this regard the digital ‘stretch’ of Laing’s \textit{ Ariel wall} (1995), the pictured ‘blurs’ of moving aircraft in the 1995 ‘time lapse’ photographs (also as part of her \textit{ greenwork} body of work, and the stunt-plane mounted point-of-view of her \textit{spin} (1997/99) video are all far closer to futurist concerns and working practices than this later work.
and image somehow touching, even sharing a realm of experience whilst always remaining distinct, never collapsing into each other. In short, the work depends upon exactly that "reality effect" described by Paul Virilio, an iconographical mapping rather than phenomenological replication of real experience. Any sense of an entirely fabricated airport space (an actual studio set), for example, or of digitally facilitated actions would strip the work of its cogent purchase upon the real and shift its register from an iconicity embedded in material and representational experience, to that of simulacra fundamentally separated from the physical conditions of velocity and gravity that it sets out to explore.

This appeal to pre-appropriationist iconicity constitutes, in part, an exploration of a form of photographic 'realism' within a digital culture where modes of resemblance and signification take precedence over and yet remain strangely dependent upon assumed conditions of indexicality. In the following section I provide a brief introduction to aspects of resemblance theory which assists in questioning the basis for the apparent visual appeal of Laing's more recent flight research and bulletproofglass work.

Photographic Realism in a Digital Age

As I discussed at some length in Chapter 2, a dynamic conception of critical realism lies at the heart of this study. But of course, any critique of realism with regard to photo-based contemporary art must clearly be inflected by digital imaging technologies. As many critics have noted, manipulation of the photograph's so-called indexical veracity has as long and rich a history as photography itself. Photography has always been characterised by a certain (changing) opacity as a significatory system. Its images have always existed in constructed, manipulated relations to similarly fabricated external worlds. This, in fact, is what leads Geoffrey Batchen to claim—contra William J. Mitchell—that photography has always been, in the most exact sense, a digital rather than analogue practice. Claims to the effect that only with the

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9 Which may, in some small manner, point to one reason as to why a depictive post-conceptual photographic practice has taken hold during the period this study is concerned with as a space of exchange or even hinge between the realms of representation and social experience in a manner that depictive, post-conceptual painting has not. My thanks to Dr Charles Green for raising this point in discussion in response to a public presentation of some of the above material in a lecture given at the College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales, September 2000.

advent of digital imaging technologies has an imperative to understanding meaning as generated within the context and modes of image construction crystallised betray a pronounced historical amnesia, wilful or otherwise. At most, the proliferation of digital imaging technologies and their multifarious outputs has intensified this imperative. However, in an age when an image may be mathematically fabricated to mimic or model reality to such an extraordinary degree, issues of verisimilitude hold changed meanings. It is no longer a question of to what degree the image bespeaks either a faithful or a manipulated relation to the external world (no longer a question of balance between Roland Barthes’ denotative and connotative message, or between the analogue and the digital), but rather a question of assessing the purpose and effect of the image’s mimicry, staging, or distortion of resemblance. How has Paul Virilio’s “reality effect” been promoted, if at all, over his “reality principle”? Put simply, when it is technologically possible to faithfully replicate the look of the external world in any ‘photographic’ image—to mimic indexicality—yet equally possible to banish all participation of or reference to the external world, then any visual appeal to indexicality must be treated as fundamentally rhetorical. They must be treated as intentionally seeking as well as deriving from specific relations between the image as sign and the conditions and experiences of social and material reality. And so it must be asked: what is the purpose of making an apparently transcriptive, indexical or realist image within such a scenario? What is the effect?

There is, then, a new aptness to Scott McQuire’s claim that: “Contemporary responses to the reality of an image tend to be determined not so much by the image itself, but by assumptions concerning the origin of the image. These assumptions often seem to derive from the image itself, but are usually determined more by the context of viewing.”

11 As Darren Tofts writes: “The idea that digital technology introduces, or initiates a problematics of the photographic image is, of course, nonsense. Ever since Walter Benjamin’s critique of the auratic glow of the artwork in the age of mechanical reproduction, the status of the photographic image as an objective, truthful depiction of a glimpse of reality has withered. So, too, has the notion of an original image that can claim authenticity over reproductions or fraudulent copies. In the age of mechanical and post-mechanical reproduction, the image is always already reproduced. This critique of photography as a metaphysics of presence can be traced back to the very origins of photography in the nineteenth century.” Darren Tofts, ‘Unseizable Enigma: Notes Towards a New Morphology of the Image’, in Parallax: Essays on Art, Culture and Technology (Sydney: Interface, 1999) 85-99.


much as different modes draw upon the strategies and techniques of others for rhetorical effect, the question of whether an image is produced and presented within frameworks of advertising, journalism or art is crucial to its codification within (or against) structures of realism. Many critics would (rightly) claim that this was always the case, and this is certainly a critical orthodoxy of sorts within poststructuralism. However, the general level of public exposure to photographic images in all these realms has increased exponentially throughout the twentieth century, and thus so has the general sophistication of responses.

Visual resemblance within the contemporary context cannot reinforce an empirically sourced positivist belief in the infallibility of vision as arbiter of truth. Furthermore, as both resemblance and indexicality are figured as fundamentally discursive systems of signification, the ideologically constructed (and persuasive) character of positivism itself throughout the history of representation is presently undergoing critical revision. Of course, such a questioning also took place under earlier poststructural modes of critique, as is well detailed in Don Slater’s recent introduction to his 1983 essay, ‘The Object of Photography’. In this introduction Slater positions his own earlier poststructural critique of positivism in the context of a Hegelian-Marxist critique of reification; that is, within a tradition concerned with “demonstrating that modern modes of appearance and representation made the social processes which are enacted by human subjects appear to be natural objects or things.”

Slater continues:

The critique of reification gives a compelling account both of how the world is so reduced, and of why it produces wrong (undialectical) knowledge and oppressive social power: representations simply and slavishly mirror the appearance of the world created by capitalism, depict that world as a natural object rather than social product to which there are alternatives and internal contradictions...

At the same time, this tradition also explored the ways in which this ‘objective’ and objectifying vision has come to permeate everyday life, producing not only power but also alienation, boredom, passivity, nihilism, rebellion.

Slater sought to shift from this nineteenth-century conception of positivism to the conception and mobilisation of free-floating visual signification by consumerist twentieth-century capitalism. According to Slater, each construct a very different relation between the image and any notion of

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15 ibid.
the real: the first is one of so-called objective determination and reinforcement; the second is one in which "the signifier without referent allows the diminution and substitution of reality itself", or in which "in place of reference we have the construction of a manufacturable real, a real which can be perpetually renewed, re-constructed, re-possessed." And yet, according to one of Slater's key points, both derive from a prioritising of vision within modernity:

What is at stake in all this work are notions of the spectacle and the spectacular: once modern vision reduces the world to things and their appearances and has produced technologies for depicting those appearances realistically, it is capable of producing not only 'knowledge' (however mystified) but also astonishing and engaging spectacles—modernity as a kind of magic show of scientific and technical wonders, consumer culture as a spectacular of desire and fetishism. Representation is transformed from a channel of knowledge to an engine of desire. 

Accept neither the alienation of a reified, objectifying vision, Slater seems to state, nor the consumerist wonder of the spectacle in which images as free-floating chains of signification are no longer expected to have purchase on any exterior reality.

But what should we look to instead?

Slater's questions, echoed by John Roberts in The Art of Interruption: Realism, Photography and the Everyday, still hold true: "Is there anything that the photograph no longer refers us to? Is there a field outside the image with which we have lost touch? If there is no reference, can there be any engagement? If the photograph no longer points to a reality can it be effective?" In this study I have suggested that the terms might be altered to ask not whether the image points to a reality, but how it interrelates with and assists in the changing constitution of an external world. Further, we could ask, not 'can it', but 'how can it' be discursively and cognitively effective? To echo Norman Bryson, writing almost twenty years ago, the manner in which "signs interact with the world outside their internal system" remains a crucial issue.

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16 Don Slater, 'The Object of Photography', in Evans ed., The Camerawork Essays, 106. (First published, Camerawork 26 (1983).)
17 Slater, 'Introduction', 90
19 Slater, 'The Object of Photography', 115
As discussed in Chapter 2, the work of Roberts, Slater and John Tagg is linked by a sceptical attitude to a realism figured within a positivist framework (where the visible is treated as factual, the factual as truthful, and thus the visible as truthful). This framework disguises photography's determining relation to, its deployment by, and its acts of reinforcement of social and epistemological power and convention. Roberts, and to a degree also Slater, might criticise Tagg for not seeking to break this framework by seeking an analysis of the constitution of power relations by and within photographic production itself. Along with Allan Sekula they more openly convey a belief in the possibility of a more critically productive realist mode, whilst refuting a theory of pure resemblance. Yet they are also careful not to advocate an absolute relativity of signification. I concur with Roberts' claim that a certain element of visual acquaintance—of resemblance—must exist within any concept of a dialectical realism, along with W.J.T. Mitchell's claim that realism is not to be "located in degrees of resemblance produced by representation", that it is "not just a formal matter of elaborating further discriminations of resemblance." As Mitchell states, there are no such things as degrees of realism (partially, substantially or fully realist). Rather, realism itself is figured (and dynamically mutates constantly) within what has been described here as a symbiotic relation of resemblance (or acquaintance) and signification — a relation of image and world each holding the other in relief but each also, simultaneously, inhabiting the form and process of the other (signification dwells within and activates resemblance and vice versa). As becomes apparent when considering Rosemary Laing's images, this relation is a dynamic model of constant flux, traversal and exchange.

Resemblance and Signification

...if vision itself is a product of experience and acculturation—including the experience of making pictures—then what we are matching against pictorial representations is not any sort of naked reality but a world already clothed in our systems of representation. It is important to guard against misunderstanding here. I am not arguing for some facile relativism that abandons 'standards of truth' or the possibility of valid knowledge. I am arguing for a hard, rigorous, relativism that regards knowledge as a social product, a matter of dialogue between different versions of the world, including different languages, ideologies, and modes of representations. (W.J.T. Mitchell)\[22\]


What I have outlined above as a relation of resemblance and signification sits within a long tradition of debate regarding the relation of the photographic image to the external world as one forged on plays between the denotive and connotative, between the natural and the conventional, and as Ernst Gombrich claimed, between expectation and observation (or experience). As W.J.T. Mitchell notes, in *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* Gombrich argued for what might be thought of as a linguistic view of images. He argued that images both assist in forming significatory systems and become constituent elements within them. According to Gombrich, perception becomes knowledge (which is to say, that recognition, identification and meaning are formed) through measurement against schema formed in habit and experience. Thus Gombrich wrote: "It matters little what filing systems we adopt. But without some standards of comparison..." [that is, without the referent] "...we cannot grasp reality." He re-emphasised this further on: "All thinking is sorting, classifying. All perceiving relates to expectations and therefore to comparisons." Or, as Gilles Deleuze would have it, comparison leads to a process of selection: "We perceive the thing, minus that which does not interest us as a function of our needs.

The early sections of Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* provide important background to this discussion. Foucault outlines the manner in which resemblance functioned as a primary arbitrator of knowledge in Western culture up until the end of the sixteenth century:

It was resemblance that largely guided exegesis and the interpretation of texts; it was resemblance that organised the play of symbols, made possible knowledge of things visible and invisible, and controlled the art of representing them...representation —whether in the service of pleasure or of knowledge—was posited as a form of repetition:

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24 See Mitchell, *Iconology*, 81

25 Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, 178

26 ibid., 301

the theatre of life or the mirror of nature, that was the claim made by all language, its manner of declaring its existence and of formulating its rights of speech.\(^{28}\)

Foucault goes on to note the richness of the multitude of pre seventeenth-century concepts associated with resemblance, detailing four as of particular importance: *convenientia*, *aemulatio*, *analogy*, and *sympathy*.\(^{29}\) Yet most significantly, he claims that even within the operation of these forms of resemblance a further system is necessary, which he terms a "system of signatures", but which we might also treat as a system formed in convention – the structure of language. For Foucault, there can be "no resemblances without signatures. The world of similarity can only be a world of signs."\(^{30}\) He continues:

The system of signatures reverses the relation of the visible to the invisible. Resemblance was the invisible form of that which, from the depths of the world, made things visible; but in order that this form may be brought out into the light in its turn there must be a visible figure that will draw it out from its profound invisibility.\(^{31}\)

The result is not only language in the forms we are familiar with, but hieroglyphics, characters and signs, and to which might also be added, modes of the photographic image.

This has some bearing on the semiotic system of the photographic image, and to the question of expectation and knowledge (formed in experience) of and via the visual that I first raised in Chapter 2. In the otherwise very different work of Deleuze and Gombrich, this idea of expectation is treated as a standard of measure or a framing for acts of signification, thus suggesting that resemblance might be most usefully treated as not only a relation of images to things but of images to images; or of the individual image to the standard of image; or even further, of the individual image to the culturally assumed (and so ever-changeable) expectation of image. This constitutes a slide from a resemblance theory of the image to a theory of conventionalism (of semiotic and symbolic operations); indeed, it risks embracing an absolute conventionalism of the image. Mitchell, however, warns of such a slippage to a "facile


\(^{29}\) See ibid., 17-25

\(^{30}\) ibid., 26

\(^{31}\) ibid.
relativism." He suggests that this slippage later becomes a source of concern for Gombrich himself:

When Gombrich argues this question nowadays...he feels no need to argue for the conventionality of imagery but sees his task as one of arguing against the conventionalist consensus he helped to form. His argument is no longer with the naive 'copy theory' of representation but with what he tends to regard as the over sophisticated relativism and conventionalism of semioticians and symbol theorists.  

The operation of resemblance as figured by Gombrich, Mitchell and others takes place in tandem with and on occasions absorbs operations of convention, and vice versa. To think of resemblance in the manner outlined above (as a figure of relation also between images, and between image and expectation) is to indicate not a binary relation—two opposed conceptions of the photographic image as passive copy and active sign—but rather to indicate the inhabitation of each by the other, a fluid 'both-and-neither-at-once' relation. Indeed, one may act to render the other relatively opaque, or may serve to intensify the other's actions. In the work of Rosemary Laing, resemblance (here our recognition of actually performed physical acts) does indeed serve to concentrate the significatory function of the photographs, producing, in terms outlined by André Bazin, images that are realities of nature, yet are hallucinations as well as facts (or acts of expressive signification appealing to expectation as well as products of resemblance).  

This double evocation of hallucination and factuality in the work of photo-based contemporary art has been threaded right throughout this study, and it remains germane to my following discussion of two final bodies of work: Laing's flight research and bulletproofglass.

**flight research: The Pictorial Body**

As I noted above, Michel Foucault's "system of signatures" claims visibility (or specifically the already visible or the expectation of a dominant visuality) as the key determining condition of resemblance. For Foucault, resemblance is a mode of signification generated by visible "figures", rather than a Platonic model of pre- or extra-linguistic affinities. Foucault's  

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32 Mitchell, *Iconology*, 81


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resemblance model anticipates the insistent visibility of the 'figure' (generally, but not exclusively in the form of the human figure) within and as the photographic image in much contemporary art and visual culture. Rosemary Laing's flight research is exemplary in this regard. This can be highlighted by a brief comparison to Bill Henson's.

The formal contrasts between Laing's work and Henson's most recent sets of images point to conceptual and structural contrasts in the significatory actions of the respective works. Dramatic chiaroscuro lighting is a feature of many of Henson's images. Figures or objects are often illuminated by intense bursts of light within otherwise gloomy and shadowy images, or are partially immersed in darkness. The full setting and visual space of the images is thus often difficult to decipher. This results in a moody evocation of subject, rather than a visual transcription in the strictest sense. Even when intensely active, bodies appear languid, both richly suggestive of subjective states yet also somehow withholding and in part secretive. Crucially then, it takes relatively long periods of time to 'recognise' all the elements within Henson's images, let alone to decipher the visual connections between them and to sift the developing set of formal and conceptual allusions. Like all photographic images they do generate immediate forms of viewing response (generally at the significatory register of formal style), yet they also accrue significant further meaning over time as processes of visual recognition take place, and connections are made. Many of these connections, as I argued in the previous chapter, are to pre-existing visual models and conventions which filter into the viewing consciousness and thus assist the image content's emergence from darkness, to borrow Foucault's metaphor. So a system of visual signatures is at play, but primarily at the level of style (rather than via instantly recognisable visual 'figures').

Such a system operates very differently in Laing's work. All elements are equally and instantly visible. The very quality of photographic visuality is signalled here; its purported capacity to objectively and completely reveal the visible world before the lens. Laing's images are visual figures that resemble a conventional standard of 'image' in contemporary media culture. They confirm an expectation of 'image', fulfilling certain notions of how a photograph operates in the present day as both focus of visual distraction and source of instantaneous information.

Laing's flight research images are bright and evenly lit, with little shadow. All elements are immediately visible and decipherable: we see an airborne woman in a white wedding dress.
Unlike the brownwork and airport images, we make few visual connections between pictorial elements within the images, or to external image models in order to 'recognise' content. Three images feature a landscape horizon line. Some feature cloud. The barely discernible forms of flora in all three images with landscape elements—the cliff forms of one horizon line (Iillus. 8.11) and specifically eucalypt blue colour of the two others—provide some hints of place, but in a loose, evocative sense. As is the case with some of Henson's images, it may be possible to recognise the location of each of these three images, but that would not add to their meaning in any significant manner. These are not photographs specifically of place, or landscape, although they toy with signs and structures of each for rhetorical purposes.

An instantaneous cognitive encounter between viewer and work is suggested by both the form and the content of the image. The works are not dependent on a viewing relation existing through lived time. Indeed, the images themselves appear to exist out of time rather than as stilled moments in time. Other than the three images featuring a twilight tinge of colour in the clouds, Laing's figures are pictured in a daylight that is transparent in its evenness and thus has little significatory function. Indeed, even the banding of twilight colour and liquid luminosity of the faint blue sky above it in flight research #3 serves to evoke the wash of a colourfield painting—of 'pure' colour and surface—rather more than it signifies natural phenomena or place. By comparison, Henson's contrasting of 'natural' darkness with flashes or areas of illumination often serves to signal means by which specific time (night) is inhabited. Furthermore, his half-light images suggest moments of transition between night and day as experienced by actual human subjects (even when absent from the images), because unlike Laing's coloured cloud images this sign of temporal transition is cast upon, and so revealed by, the material and social world of human inhabitation.

Laing's photographs, despite being images of a body in mid-flight, convey little sense of temporal continuum—of 'before' and 'after'. They are far more removed from image sources in performance documentation or the cinema than her earlier performative brownwork and airport photographs. This is largely due to the lack of other pictorial elements in relation to which the body may appear in motion and thus convey some sense of materiality or viscerality. Even in the three instances where there is a relationship between body and a landscape horizon line, it

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34 Light often signifies presence within the night and thus attempts to negotiate and pass through it temporally as well as directionally.
appears purely pictorial (the body is pictured above, before and/or diving 'into' the landscape). The landscape is so distant that no sense of material relationship of body to land is generated (a relation that would evoke gravity as either a concept or an experience). Thus the landscape horizon line and the figure of the airborne body simply become two key composition elements within the images (the third being the screen-like blue sky that also appears as a pictorial field rather than spatial arena). Resemblance operates here via Foucault's "system of signatures" as an equation of absolute visibility simultaneously aspiring to and generating a condition of absolute visibility.

The figure of the woman's body is purely pictorial; this is a body entirely stripped of viscerality. The dynamism of the actual body in motion is hidden (or veiled) by the flowing formlessness of the white dress. (By contrast the athletic body of the javelin thrower in brownwork #1 is accentuated by her sporting attire that in turn also serves to further signify the physical nature of the pictured activity.) This dress in turn serves a primarily symbolic rather than material function. When meshed with the figure of the airborne woman its symbolic character is both readily legible and yet extremely open-ended: purity, innocence and freedom (perhaps from the contract of marriage). Despite the social reference of marriage there is really no firm grounding here in the conditions of social reality or of lived experience. And this is central to the immense popularity of flight research; the images are easily legible without being closed in meaning. (Just as three of them hint at place without fixing either geographical or cultural location). Their simplified set of codifications—flight, freedom, and the defiance of

35 This contrast has a certain irony given that the 'physicality' of the act of javelin throwing in brownwork #1 is conveyed via a figure posed in a static position for the taking of the photograph, whilst the apparently suspended or levitating figure of Laing's signature flight research #5 has actually been photographed whilst actively leaping in the air (aided by a trampoline). This serves as a reminder of a crucial point of distinction: analysis, comparative or otherwise of the works must concentrate on the pictured figures as they appear within the photographic image. The means of staging the images provides supplementary material for consideration. It does not determine or entirely account for the spectatorial encounter or 'meaning' of the works.

36 flight research #5 has proved to be particularly popular, featuring for example on posters for the 2000 Das Lied von der Erde / The Song of the Earth exhibition in Kassel, Germany and in large, colour reproduction on the front page of the Weekend Edition of the Sydney Morning Herald (July 13-14, 2002) without being attached to any front page story (it referenced a new item on page 6 regarding an exhibition of contemporary Australian art at the National Gallery of Australia within which the work was being exhibited).

37 In this sense the three flight research works featuring landscape elements operate a little like Tracey Moffatt's Up In The Sky (1997) photographs discussed in Chapter 6. They both contain subtle signs of specific geographical and cultural place and yet also evoke other places—real and formed in art, film, literature etc—so providing multiple points of encounter for diverse audiences.
gravity—is readily transferable across a range of viewing contexts, situations and subjectivities. Thus the images appear constructed so as to remain open to the projective imaginings of as wide a range of viewers as possible. (This is what John O'Brian refers to as the "soft and ingratiating" quality of the work.)

They are enigmatic without being mysterious or puzzling in the vein of Henson's work. They are, perhaps, the very antithesis of contemporary practices entrenched in social context (and commentary) and/or preoccupied with theoretical speculation, commentary, and even self-justification. They are easy images, open to all manners of encounter and readily comprehensible to all.

In addition to this, the pictorial figure of the body apparently in flight—the body defying gravity—is a particularly attention-grabbing one when presented in photographic form with all its connotations of indexicality and factuality. It evokes Walter Benjamin's notion of the optical unconsciousness in which the photograph serves to visualise conditions of the material world otherwise beyond the register of the human eye. Here photographic record or 'proof' of actions considered improbable within material reality does not so much serve to suggest new states of experience as manifest forms of belief or imagination latent within the human unconscious.

The photograph acts as a form of examination into the visual modes of the unconscious. As static forms, Laing's photographs present images of a body stilled in space not available to the 'naked' eye viewing the ongoing continuum of action through time. This is where the images resonate with André Bazin’s conception of the photograph's double condition of hallucination and factuality: they present both an 'impossible' image of the body suspended in space, and an authentication of the action that has taken place before (and for) the camera. But in comparison even to Laing's own performative brownwork and airport photographs, this action of bodily abandon is in fact lacking in material resonance: the "denotative actuality" of the body in space

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38 John O'Brian, 'The Unusual Truncatory of Words', in Trevor Smith, Robert MacPherson (exh. cat.) (Perth: Art Gallery of Western Australia, 2001) 138

39 But not previously beyond the capability of human imagination.

40 Benjamin writes: "For it is another nature that speaks to the camera than to the eye: other in the sense that a space informed by human consciousness gives way to a space informed by the unconscious. Whereas it is a commonplace that, for example, we have some idea what is involved in the act of walking, if only in general terms, we have no idea at all what happens during the fraction of a second when a person steps out. Photography, with its devices of slow motion and enlargement, reveals the secret. It is through photography that we first discover the existence of this optical unconscious, just as we discover the instinctual unconscious through psychoanalysis." Walter Benjamin, 'A Small History of Photography', in One Way Street and Other Writings, transl. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter (London and New York: Verso, 1979) 243. (First published, 1931.)
has little "connotative" substance beyond the open-ended symbolism noted above.\textsuperscript{41} The gesture of the body in flight is devoid of any substantive relation to technology and culturally inflected space; that is, to a form of material reality. As noted above, there is no play here between the body and other forms of object, other manifestations of velocity, or other forms of spatial containment. On one hand this is a body apparently set free within the frame of the image; on the other it is groundless, lacking a meaningful referent. A brief comparison with Yves Klein's famous \textit{Leap into the Void} (1960) serves to concentrate this point.

Klein's black and white photographic 'documentation' of his own leap out into space from a roof ledge above a footpath and road is, despite the apparent veracity of the photograph, well-known as belonging to the long history of manipulated photomontage 'fakes'. (Klein's assistants, fellow Judo exponents, who were holding a tarpaulin to assist in breaking his fall have been removed from the image.) However, according to Sidra Stich, despite this manipulation the photograph was intended by Klein to act as evidence both of the potential for human levitation and of a similar leap he had made earlier in the year unaided (but also unrecorded), something Stich notes was entirely possible for Klein given his Judo training.\textsuperscript{42} Such contextualisation creates some sense of possibility, and thus suspension of disbelief within a viewing encounter. However, for a viewer unaware of this background and suspicious of the photograph's likely manipulated quality a certain tension remains in the relation of pictorial body and material setting. The suggestion of the body's impending collision with the pavement and its subjection to pain give this performance 'documentation' some sense of tension sourced firmly in the experience of material reality no matter how overtly constructed it may be. (Such tension is lacking from Laing's \textit{flight research} images.) Thus the actual \textit{and} photographic setting for such documentation of performance actions—or photographic performances—is crucial. Furthermore, Klein's image preceded the digital transformation of the stunt body into a purely pictorial netherworld – a realm of special effects rather than special actions. There is little general expectation now that an image of grand performative gesture should be assessed in terms of its


\textsuperscript{42} Sidra Stich, \textit{Yves Klein} (Ostfildern: Cantz Verlag, 1994) 217-21. A contrast may be made here to Bruce Nauman's double exposure photographic proof of his own inability to levitate in \textit{Failure to Levitate in the Studio} (1966).
verifiably indexical relationship to the conditions and capabilities of visceral bodies in the material world. To reiterate Paul Virilio, (reality) effect has superseded (reality) principle.

In all this the respective relationships of Klein’s image and Laing’s flight research to analogue modes of representation is crucial. Both require the signification of indexicality that analogue representation provides for the works to resonate. The denotative element of the indexical is inverted by Klein’s image; yet the material, everyday setting of the photograph provides the image with its hard edge. Laing’s images are directly indexical. Laing is careful to point out that they picture action occurring before the camera in single frame form. Thus the principle of indexical veracity is evoked. But to what end? Ultimately these images tend towards a positivist rather than critically reflective mode of resemblance. Yet despite the artist’s claim that this maintains a "suspension of disbelief" about the image, it actually does little to intensify the symbolic resonance of the works, nor does it provide them with any purchase upon social and material experience. On this reading Laing’s flight research images are, in fact, a contradictory mix of a closed, positivist sign structure and an entirely relative and unbounded relation of signifier to referent at a connotative register.

There is one final point to add to this particular reading. Just as the body of the woman in the flight research photographs is stripped of viscerality, so it is stripped of interiority or subjectivity. There is no narrative element within the photographs to begin to piece together a sense of character from (in contrast to both the work of Henson and that of Tracey Moffatt for example). The face of the figure is rarely visible (only in flight research #5 does she look out towards the viewer, but without meaningful expression). And unlike the models in Laing’s brownwork and airport photographs the woman has no other objects or spaces to focus attention upon. There is no sense of her as a subject formed in interaction with an environment. She simply ‘is’ in flight. Moreover, each photograph is an entirely discrete work; there is no sense of narrative connections between or formal system running across the multiple images. The repetition of the same figure across all the photographs is significant, for when exhibited in groups of two or more (which is frequently the case), any sense of distinction or discrimination

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43 See Michael Fitzgerald, 'Suspension of Disbelief', Time (June 12, 2000) 74

44 See ibid.

45 Although this is primarily the result of Laing's pragmatic need for a trained stuntwoman.
between the works at the level of the model as a subject is absent. This repetition of a single model in the same attire across each image further reduces the figure to the status of a standardised pictorial component. She becomes, in effect, a pictorial unit within a repeated image structure, entirely devoid of subjecthood or assertive visual presence (in the sense of presence laid out in my Introduction as a means by which specific modes of experience are manifested in compelling photographic forms). On the contrary, she functions primarily as a diverting optical gesture and a fundamentally isolated but freely associative signifier.

The Enigma of the Advertising Image

The qualities I have ascribed above to Rosemary Laing’s flight research images—instant visual legibility, enigmatic yet lacking mystery, semiotically free-ranging yet lacking meaningful connection to a range of experiences of the real—also characterise much present-day advertising imagery. The pictorial enigma of the woman suspended in flight serves to instantly appeal to the visual imagination (or the optical unconscious), capturing a viewer’s attention and so, for a moment, ensuring that the image stands out from the plethora of other images surrounding it whether in the worlds of corporate visual culture or contemporary art.

Some notes regarding the structural relation of Laing’s images to the conditions of photographic images within advertising are therefore pertinent. But my emphasis here is upon the structural. For whilst Laing’s images deploy certain (already discussed) pictorial strategies found also in advertising imagery, they neither set out to draw upon the same subject matter nor establish themselves in modes of critical relation to the social function of advertising imagery. In this regard they have a very different relation to advertising photography than, for example, the work of Bill Henson discussed in the previous chapter. Whilst Henson’s images by no means enact a critical commentary upon form, content or social function of closely related fashion

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46 By contrast, it is apparent across the brownwork and airport images due to the use of different models for each photograph.

47 But, if Paul Virilio is to be believed, this moment of attention is both increasingly brief and ultimately impotent. The advertising image, he claims in The Vision Machine, is a space of absolute suggestiveness. But, in an age in which other modes of sophisticated media delivery mechanisms appear daily, the advertising image “that grabs our attention and forces us to look is no longer a powerful image; it is a cliché…” (62) The advertising image, according to Virilio, is rapidly becoming an empty aesthetic shell. See Virilio, The Vision Machine, 62-64.
photography, they do at least invoke some consideration of the current cultural potency of such images through shared signifiers of apparent sexual and representational transgression. There is no such potency of visual allusion at work in Laing’s flight research, certainly at the level of content grounded in socio-historical conditions of the real. Indeed, even the enigmatic quality of Laing’s images is really a signification rather than evocation of enigma.  

The enigmatic relation of figure to land or urban space that exists in the three flight research works with landscape elements is in fact a reasonably familiar strategy within such commercial practices. For example, a recent magazine back-cover advertisement for an Internet and telecommunications company bears particular resemblance to Laing’s flight research images (see Illus. 8.12). A woman dressed in red flowing robes strikes an energetic martial arts pose suspended against a cloudy sky with Sydney Harbour below. The recognisable forms of the Sydney Harbour Bridge and Sydney Opera House are directly below her feet. There is an even greater sense of separation between figure and background here. The woman has quite clearly been photographed in the studio and superimposed digitally against the setting (the hard edges of the ‘cut-out’ figure particularly betray this). Nevertheless, in making the distant city features slightly out of focus there is an attempt here to create some sense of singularity as an image, and so to at least suggest a meaningful or real connection between figure and setting.

This strange, fundamentally pictorial juxtaposition of the body against a ‘real’ world backdrop

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48 A similar emphasis upon the structural (rather than discursive) may be claimed of the relation of the flight research photographs to structural models in both conceptual art and in particular cinema. For example, Laing’s works draw upon a photographic tradition of performance documentation. But the discursive distance between performance and picture has been collapsed; the performative action only exists within and as the photograph, it has no further meaning within a wider world. Indeed, the photograph inaugurates the performative action rather than vice versa. The issue, as Jeff Wall puts it in his ‘“Masks of Indifference” essay is the condition of the picture or an idea of self-reflexive photographic visuality. It is not that of the performance, nor its relation to social or material experience. Likewise, the critical genealogy of this relation between performative action and the photographic image is not a central subject of or issue for the flight research works. The structure of the works also invokes a cinematic consciousness: The panoramic format of the largest works references the wide-screen format of the cinema as much as it does a particular format within the tradition of landscape photography. This is further emphasised both by the performative aspect of the images (even if, in contrast to Tracey Moffatt’s Up in The Sky work discussed in Chapter 6, they are devoid of even faint allusions to narrative or temporal continuity); the implicit scale of endeavour behind their production (identification of locations, employment of a stunt woman etc) which is particularly evoked when the analogue character of the images is asserted (see above), so ensuring that the works are not (mis)understood as having been fundamentally generated within a computer, and in the case of the three works featuring landscape components, by the pictorial treatment of the material environment as a form of stage set (as discussed in more detail in Chapter 3 with reference to the work of Anne Zahalka and in Chapter 7 with reference to the work of Bill Henson).

49 She is identified below the image in fine print as “Lauren Burns, Taekwondo Olympic Gold Medalist. Ozefemale.”
acts as a diverting, relatively free-floating visual signifier of some potency (freedom, power, vitality, energy, progress, future possibility, fearlessness etc), heightened by the manner in which the gravity-defying martial arts pose of the young woman directly alludes to Ang Lee's immensely popular 2000 film, Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon. But its success as an advertisement requires that it impart a particular message. It requires a caption or slogan to direct the image and to ensure that the visual seduction of its pictorial open-endedness is matched also by a particular and assertive expression of meaning, or at least a textual mnemonetic device (a brand). In this case two pieces of text are used: the assertive, loosely interpretative caption "Go Anywhere Faster" that in the Barthesian sense acts to 'quicken' or intensify the meaning of the image, and the corporate branding "Ozemail Broadband" below to ensure association of such meaning to a particular entity.

A similar form of semiotic structure can be created when an image (as a work of contemporary art) is shifted into a promotional realm, such as with its use on a poster. This was certainly the case with the use of Laing's flight research #5 as the poster image for the 2000 exhibition Das Lied von der Erde / The Song of the Earth at the Museum Fridericianum in Kassel, Germany. Laing's image was cropped from a 'landscape' into a 'portrait' format so concentrating attention further on the figure of the woman looking back at the spectator. The image was bled to the edges of the poster, with the title of the exhibition featuring in a band along the bottom. Given the content and structure of the image in the first place (in particular its affinities with forms of advertising images) a sense of the poster image being a detail of a extant work of art dissipated before the seductive visuality of the image itself. A relation of image and text similar to that outlined above in the 'Ozemail Broadband' advertisement was established, only with the exhibition title serving a double function as intensification of the image's range of allusion and as brand identification. The title 'Song of the Earth' may in fact be as enigmatic as the image itself, but equally prolific in signification, so it set up a rich associate play of words and image hinting at states of lightness and freedom, of nature and of song, all of which was further

50 According to Barthes "the text constitutes a parasitic message designed to connote the image, to 'quicken' it with one or more second-order signifieds... the image no longer illustrates the words; it is now the words which, structurally, are parasitic on the image." Later in the same paragraph he notes: "Formerly, there was reduction from text to image; today, there is amplification from one to the other." Barthes, 'The Photographic Message', 25-26. Barthes' analysis is specifically focused upon the news or media image rather than advertising imagery, nevertheless it appears in fact even more apt when applied to that relation between freely associative yet readily identifiable juxtaposition of visual elements and textual corporate branding.
'amplified' (to use Barthes' phrase) by recognition of the source of the exhibition title (and image caption) in Gustav Mahler's 'song-symphony' *Das Lied von der Erde*. All of this made for a highly effective poster, and crucially, despite the above comment, one in which the character of Laing's image as work of contemporary art was not subsumed, for as a work of art it is structured on the precepts of a culture in which images serve promotional purposes. In this sense Laing's images appear carefully crafted and quite astute in their marking out of a territory for a photographic art practice within contemporary visual culture in its widest purview. However, as is concluded below, this does not mean that they exist in cogent critical relationships to that culture. Rather, they partake in and are absorbed by the tenants of contemporary spectacle culture.52

A comparison with Maria Kozic's photographic billboard work *Bitch* (1990) is salient in these regards. In this work, produced for the public art billboard project *Add Manic* organised by the Australian Centre for Photography, Kozic appropriated both a structural form (the billboard) and image content (scantily clad woman) associated with advertising, in order to both mock and critique this mode of image production along with its exploitation (indeed, perpetuation) of social stereotypes and basic masculine voyeurism for commercial benefit. The work featured Kozic herself lying on her front in a bikini (or underwear), wearing a tool belt on which were strapped small toy models of men, and aggressively wielding an overtly phallic power drill. The image was emblazoned with the words 'Maria Kozic is Bitch', the final word 'Bitch' being rendered large and bold.53 The figure in this work was both an inverted manifestation of a common representational stereotype, and a particular subject. In fact, in the insistent identification of the figure as the artist, both subject and producer of the image were publicly merged, asserting both a sense of true ownership of the image as well as an independence of identity. As well as confronting the consuming masculine gaze, the assertive, almost hyperbolic caption also resonated with

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51*Das Lied von der Erde* was composed in 1908 and 1909 but only first performed in 1911 after Mahler's death.

52 This is not to claim that Laing's images somehow 'copy' the strategies of advertising images, nor indeed that they provide new models for advertising imagery. There is no direct relation of causality here but rather a shared structure of the photographic image deployed across both commercial and artistic realms as a means of attracting spectators and imparting if not meaning then certainly memorable messages or associative imaginings.

53 This billboard work was one of a number of works sharing the title "Bitch" undertaken by Kozic. An earlier work (1989) consisted of two life-sized, plywood cutouts of similarly dressed and 'armed' women. A 1981 video of the same title featured Kozic in the same guise as her billboard persona.
associations to the monstrous or horrifying in popular culture, in particular cinema advertising.

The artist engaged in taking control of her own representational form, was the 'bitch', the manifestation of the deepest fears (political, representational, and sexual) of a collective masculine unconscious. The work therefore acted to invert and challenge the very foundations of those equally fabricated and manipulative images of masculine desire made manifest in so much billboard advertising.

Over a decade later, Laing's work, by contrast, deploys the image production strategies of corporate visual culture, with little apparent interest in setting up discursive relations to that cultural condition. The work does little to engage with the real social, material and psychological experiences generated within the culture from which it emerges. In fact, the comparison between Kozic's *Bitch* work and Laing's *flight research* may be treated as emblematic of general changes through the 1990s in the relation between artistic practice and visual culture as figured in the shared structure of the photographic image. Kozic's work typifies the most overtly political strand of appropriation practice, reworking image conventions in order to directly challenge the structures of social, representational and political power underpinning them. Laing's typifies a later disengagement with political and social dimensions, turning instead to the potency of the large scale, post-industrial, transnational era photographic image as a means of visual diversion and seduction.

**Reprise: bulletproofglass — The Visceral Body?**

In 2002 Rosemary Laing produced a sequel of sorts to *flight research*. The six bulletproofglass images all feature the same airborne stuntwoman in the same white wedding dress, but with some crucial pictorial differences from the earlier set of work. There is a large red bloodstain on the bodice of the woman's dress, and blood splatters along her neck. In four of the six images (including bulletproofglass #3 [Illus. 8.13], one of the three main works in the set), the airborne

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54 Given the immense popularity of the work, however, it may be claimed that it does somehow engage with aspects of the real imaginative experience of contemporary culture – desire for flight from physical encasement perhaps, or desire for spectacular experiences of unbounded space.

55 The three main images are bulletproofglass #1, bulletproofglass #2 and bulletproofglass #3. These are the three largest works in the set and the three reproduced in the exhibition brochure accompanying the first exhibition of the work at Gitte Weise Gallery, Sydney, 2002 as well as featured on postcards produced by the artist and her agents.
woman is surrounded by the smudgy dark forms of pigeons scattering as if startled by a loud noise. In all except one of the images the woman's body is in a far more contorted and expressive position than in the flight research images. The images of greatest motion in that earlier work depicted the woman tipping or tumbling forward in apparent control of her movement (facing the direction of her movement) and in accord with gravity. In the bulletproofglass images she is pictured diagonally splayed across the image, arms thrust out to signify shock or lack of control or as in the case of two of the three main works (bulletproofglass #2 [Illus. 8.14] and bulletproofglass #3) arched over backwards in a form of reverse swallow dive.

The key exception to this dynamism is the strangely stilted bulletproofglass #1 (Illus. 8.15) where the figure appears upright and rigid. The image is made peculiar by its vertical inversion: the stratification of the clouds forming an arch behind and above the woman indicate that this is actually a photograph of the woman falling head-first that has been inverted, so making it initially appear that she is suspended in a 'standing' position. This inversion serves to jolt the viewer's optical expectation, and to give the overall image a distinctly unnatural and static sense, even in comparison to its close partner image from the earlier series, flight research #5.

The final key pictorial difference in the later set of work is a stronger presence of light and shadow playing across denser sections of cloud. This imparts a greater sense of the sky as a three-dimensional space within and through which the woman moves than in the more one-dimensional screen- or colourfield-like skies of flight research. All of these elements serve to make the bulletproofglass images generally richer in registers of association and links to other representational structures, but without necessarily indicating any greater degree of critical engagement with the conditions of spectacle culture from within which the work emerges.

Indeed, the key development here is really a shift towards a greater suggestion of narrativity in the work, and a stronger cinematic reference. The blood and scattering of pigeons signal some prior causal event such as a gunshot resulting in this woman being airborne, or falling from the sky. This connotes a linear sequence of events within which the still images are located, thus giving them a particularly cinematic sensibility (as if these were multiple stills taken from slightly different angles, at minutely differentiated moments, from some blockbuster action film). The blood, visually effective if obviously fake, evokes the visceral quality of the body—its substance and mass—missing from the flight research images. And this in turn, along with the
inference of narrativity (particularly the implied interaction between the woman and out of frame participants) suggests a shift in the condition of the woman from a purely pictorial figure in flight research to a character of sorts in bulletproofglass.

But these are all mere allusions suggested by the images – what Barthes refers to as second-order signifieds.\(^5^6\) Whilst pictorially more complex and expressive than flight research, the bulletproofglass images do not construct more elaborate relationships to the cultural conditions within which they are generated, nor indeed to the experiences (beyond the imaginative experience) of viewers standing before them. Narrative and characterisation are implied but entirely intangible; no detail is offered and no sense of a subject undergoing an actual experience is conveyed. The images are spaces of fantastical projection, but the unlike the work of either Tracey Moffatt or Bill Henson discussed earlier in this study, it is not in the figure as a subject that the viewer is encouraged to channel their imagination. These are imaginative acts played out pictorially before but always at some distance from the viewer. Despite their fundamental indexicality as images they have little purchase on the real, even in the sense of a discursive relation to the cinematic as a register of visual narrative, intersubjectivity and cultural imaginary.

This is strongly conveyed even in bulletproofglass #2 which has the most pictorially coherent sense of a real world setting in its melodramatic theatre of glowing twilight, clouded, foreboding sky and vast landscape laid out below and behind the highly wrought, tensile figure of the arched woman in flight. This is a spectacular image in all senses of the word (the largest and most panoramic or window-boxed in format, and thus the most cinematic in formal reference) and can certainly be situated within a lengthy pictorial tradition of the solitary, romantic figure in a psychologically symbiotic relationship with the overwhelming magnificence of the natural world. Yet there is no sense here of a visceral presence evoked in the encounter between viewer and image and within which shared forms of experience, imagining and knowledge might be recognised. Thus, despite its apparent striving in this direction, there is little sense of sublimity in the image – no romantic, cinematic, or technological sublime is to be found here. As with all the bulletproofglass works, the key point of reference for this image—the touchstone upon which its generation of affinities depends—is Laing’s own earlier flight research work, in particular flight research #5. The sense of a more complex pictorial space, or signs of

\(^{56}\) See Barthes, 'The Photographic Message', 25
narrative structure, each contributing to a greater impression of viscerality within the images, are all generated within a comparison to the earlier work. This is not simply some convenient construct of subsequent analysis: it is a core element of the work carefully built into the later series through repetition of all the key elements of the earlier (performative action, setting, model, costume, pictorial structure, material form of the photograph). Thus the key connotative 'message' of bulletproofglass is dystopic - a rejoinder to the utopic connotations of flight research. Open-ended associations of flight, freedom, innocence and the defiance of gravity are countered with signs of violence, despoilment and the final triumph of materiality over imagination (the clear inference being that this figure—this wounded body—is earth-bound). Yet for all these apparent signs of a reasserted hegemony of the (necessarily corrupted) social realm over the pictorial imagination, there remains, as outlined above, very little sense of these images being in any way grounded in or engaging in a specific manner with any of the multiple registers of real experience (beyond the imaginative) in contemporary life. Laing's bulletproofglass images remain firmly entrenched as products of a spectacle culture.

Conclusion

Along with Anne Zahalka's Fortresses and Frontiers (1993) stagings of figures against the city skyline discussed in Chapter 3, of all the work examined in this study Rosemary Laing's flight research and bulletproofglass images most uncritically replicate and are absorbed within the diverting visual escapism and commodity promotion of present day entertainment and corporate culture. Even John Roberts' proposed critical realism for a cinematic age (see Chapter 2) only serves to provide a supportive platform from which to treat the material form of these sets of these works (as forms that readily share in and transact across the core conditions of contemporary visual culture). It cannot serve to gloss over the works' reliance on the easy and entirely open-ended semiotics of a competitive visual culture of distraction and promotion. Conceptual art's staging of culturally and conceptually disruptive gestural acts in pictorial forms has been entirely smoothed out in large photographic images. Each is open to a multiplicity of readings, but most are immediately accessible and lacking in purchase upon the real as a set of complex forms, expressions and experiences.
CONCLUSION

In this study I have treated photography as both a dominant mode of contemporary art practice in Australia between 1992 and 2002, and as a key representational means of forging connections between the aesthetic forms and conceptual concerns of art and the wider realm of popular visual culture. I have been especially concerned with photographic engagement of social and material experience through particular forms of appeal to the real during this period.

In this study I have identified a number of key tendencies within photo-based contemporary art. First, the predominantly transcriptional character of the photographic image as utilised by contemporary artists. Second, the tendency towards concentration upon the singular photographic image as the complete form of the work of art itself. Third, the apparently ever-more seamless, hermetic compositional forms of photographic images within contemporary art, enabled by increasingly sophisticated imaging technologies. Fourth, the appearance of the photographic image as a space in which the world is organised and thus produced in infinite variations. Fifth, the utilisation of the photographic image in contemporary art as a means of direct access to material, social, imaginative and psychological experience. Sixth, the deployment of the photographic image as an arena for the pictorial staging of contemporary social relations and discursive conditions of art. And seventh, the strong relationship between photographic images within and as contemporary art to other image forms and contexts (including documentary photography, the photo-essay, historical 'ethnographic' photography, conceptual art, advertising and fashion photography, the cinema, film, and television).

As noted in the Introduction, my study has addressed a wide range of practices that share in these tendencies, without being totally exhaustive in its treatment of Australian photo-based contemporary art. The hegemony of the modes of practices that I have identified and discussed at length is most noticeably complicated by rapidly developing digital imaging technologies. I have not incorporated a specific analysis of recent 'digital photography' in Australian art within this study, yet as I outlined in Chapter 8 in particular, much of the work discussed utilises or manifests some form of relationship to digital imaging technologies. I would, however, hesitate to describe it as 'digital photography'. My primary interest within this study has been the manner in which photographic images in contemporary art forms and contexts picture, intervene within and impact upon the broader realms of social, material, psychological and imaginative
experience through appeals to our conceptions of 'the real'. A technologically deterministic characterisation of photography's forms and functions is therefore inappropriate to my work. Furthermore, images whose core visible conditions and subjects are their own digital construction rarely evoke these key relations in any potent manner. Of course, as all these general fields of experience themselves become increasingly conditioned by digital technologies, so then will this relation of image to 'the real' alter. It may not be so very far into the future before a study underpinned by exactly the principles underpinning this one concerns itself exclusively with 'digital' photography. Certainly, in the Australian context, Patricia Piccinini's meshing of artificial and natural life-forms within one realm of social experience in recent photographic, video and sculptural work is a key step towards such a socially engaged 'realist' art of the future.¹

I have also avoided proposing a model a technological progression within photo-based contemporary art practices (which would necessarily run from analogue to digital). In fact, throughout this study I have attempted to complicate this linear model of historical development through my analysis of relationships between current image forms and their diverse range of precedents. Certainly, it is easy to imagine future histories of photographic practice and criticism characterising the 1990s (to greater or lesser degrees) as a period of transition in definitional conditions from the indexical to the digital. Yet how much of the complexity of actual relation between these representational registers is likely to be suppressed in such characterisation? Would it not be more useful to speculate that the determining drive of the photographic as figured within contemporary art and culture over the past decade has been provided by an ongoing negotiation between the indexical and the digital, a sort of mediation of each by the other at the point of their public manifestation—at the moment of each and every image's public appearance—rather than attempt an exclusive narrative of passage?

The preceding chapters have discussed work predicated upon an almost forensic depiction of scenes of anterior social life, through to other images of scenes staged entirely for the camera. My analysis has ranged from work concerned with the photographic presencing of particular named subjects and all their complexities of real experience, through to images of

¹ See, for example: Juliana Engberg, Retrospectology: The World According to Patricia Piccinini (exh. cat.) (Melbourne: Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, 2002); Julian Engberg, Hiroo Yamagata and Edward Colless, Atmosphere / Autosphere / Biosphere: Works by Patricia Piccinini (Melbourne: Drome, 2000); and Rachel Kent, Call of the Wild: Patricia Piccinini (exh. cat.) (Sydney: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2002).
anonymous figures who signify modes of experience through representational notation and convention. But all this work partakes in some way with the transcriptive, depictive conditions of photography, and so depends upon its relationship to conceptions of the real for its pictorial affectivity. This study has therefore grappled with issues of realism and the real as they are formed within and apply to photographic convention. I have argued that a positivist or even fundamentally empiricist model of realism is inadequate for the task of explicating the relationships of photographic images to different realms of experience, both personal and shared, and to the social and material structures of the world about us. The photographic image is far more implicated in the conditions of the world from which it emerges and seeks to represent than the functions of witness and commentary offered by what I have referred to as a 'naïve reflectionist' mode of criticism. Even the most apparently 'documentary' of the practices discussed in this study—those of Brenda L. Croft and especially Jon Rhodes—feature subjects themselves at least partially formed in the act of representation.

My analyses have forged and highlighted strong relationships between the works under review and pre-existing representational models. As I have argued throughout, these relationships do not point to some form of profligate representational profusion, but indicate how potent various forms of public representation have become in shaping cultural convention and experience, and in the mediation of our experience. (This, of course, is a key definition of spectacle culture.)

These analyses have therefore leant towards a notion of critical realism that describes a dynamic relationship between image and world where each impact openly upon the forms and conventions of the other; are recognisably subject to the other; and within which specific conditions of time, place and culture are always treated as influential factors. Resemblance and recognition remain important however; critical realism is by no means a code for open-ended relativity, but it does offer a means of treating photographic images as cogent cultural forces. And, as suggested in my Introduction and demonstrated throughout this study, it also enables us to move beyond dogmatic critical positions of blithe celebration or trenchant despair at the potency and pervasiveness of spectacle culture. This is crucial, for this relationship of photo-based contemporary art to spectacle culture is the core issue for this study.²

² In addition to 'spectacle culture' I have also used the phrases 'the broader realm of commercial and popular visual culture', or 'a fundamentally photogenic culture'. Each has specific inflections of meaning, but they all describe a common general condition of contemporary culture.
Of the three rigid critical frameworks questioned in this work—a naturalist version of photographic realism; a negation of photographic criticality within a 'culture industry' critique; and an unbridled relativism associated with the world of the simulacrum—most attention has been granted to the 'culture industry' critique of spectacle culture. This has provided the most valuable departure point for a consideration of photography's potential discursive spacing from, rather than total absorption within spectacle culture, for it at least accurately identifies core conditions of the image in present day society and the potency of its impact upon our various registers of experience. I do not, however, accept the universalist character of this critical position, nor its contradictory pessimism regarding the efficacy of the image. (The image is treated as both potent functionary of commercial culture and yet absolutely powerless as a potential means of critical intervention within that culture.)

So in this study I have been examining the specific forms of relationship between individual images (or sets of images) and that cultural condition in order to displace the deadening effects of critical generalisation. Many of these relationships have been created or mediated through existing representational models. In some instances I have identified how these models have enabled their own intimate and cogent relationships to the real to be formed. In other instances (a significant minority of cases), I have suggested where existing representational conventions or styles have merely been restaged and reiterated in order to appeal to dominant conventions of the image within spectacle culture. Here I have conferred with a culture industry mode of critique and claimed that the specific photographic image as contemporary art has been absorbed within the dominant strictures of spectacle culture. But I have not held that this should therefore be extrapolated to hold as a general condition.

The issues raised and addressed by this study are urgent. Over the period in question, increasingly spectacular photographic images have become a dominant mode of contemporary art practice within what is fundamentally a spectacle culture. It is therefore vital that we understand both the workings of this culture in general, and the changing positioning of contemporary art within it. My study has sought ways of determining the potential double relation of photo-based contemporary art to spectacle culture as both an active component of that culture and a mode of discursive reflection upon it. I have not adopted an old trenchant leftist position of opposition to commodity culture, but nor have a sought to celebrate art's awakening to and embracing of the hegemonic status of spectacle. My desire has been to
identify and value the particular and often quite subtle modes of participatory resistance to
dominant formations of spectacle culture from within the realm of photo-based contemporary
art, and equally to identify and criticise work founded in passive conventionalism or absorption
into spectacle-culture.

These are difficult undertakings. As Meaghan Morris has written, in a media-saturated
world, such as "practice of discrimination" has become harder, but let us add also, increasingly
important.\textsuperscript{3} This "practice of discrimination" is crucial to a nuanced understanding of artistic
practices apparently so aligned with dominant models of visual culture. If we cannot find ways of
understanding the relationships between progressive artistic practices and the broader sphere
of recent spectacle culture in all their complexities; our task in unravelling similar forms of
relationships between 'digital art' and the likely even more pervasive social and epistemological
presence of 'digital culture' will become all the more difficult in the future. In this regard, my
study offers one small step forward.

\textsuperscript{3} Meaghan Morris, "Panorama: The Live, The Dead and The Living", in Paul Foss ed., Island in the
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Appendix
ILLUSTRATIONS

CHAPTER 2

Illustration 2.1
Andreas Gursky
Chicago Board of Trade II, 1999
chromogenic print
167 x 297cm

Illustration 2.2
Jeff Wall
The Flooded Grave, 1998-2000
colour transparency in lightbox
244 x 305cm
CHAPTER 3

Illustration 3.1
Anne Zahalka
untitled #1A, 1993
from Fortresses and Frontiers
colour transparency in lightbox
125 x 177 x 25cm
edition of 3

Illustration 3.2
Anne Zahalka
untitled #4, 1993
from Fortresses and Frontiers
colour transparency in lightbox
125 x 177 x 25cm
edition of 3

Illustration 3.3
Anne Zahalka
untitled #2, 1993
from Fortresses and Frontiers
colour transparency in lightbox
105 x 143 x 13cm
edition of 3

Illustration 3.4
Jeff Wall
Diatribes, 1985
colour transparency in lightbox
203 x 229cm

Illustration 3.5
Anne Zahalka
Derrida Lecture, 1999
type C print
115 x 280cm
edition of 12

Illustration 3.6
Anne Zahalka
Open Air Cinema, 1999
type C print
115 x 242cm
edition of 12

Illustration 3.7
Anne Zahalka
Penrith Panthers, 1999
type C print
115 x 145cm
edition of 12

Illustration 3.8
Anne Zahalka
Star City Casino (after Bruegel), 1998
type C print
115 x 145cm
edition of 12

Illustration 3.9
Anne Zahalka
Bingo Centre, 1998
type C print
115 x 145cm
edition of 12

Illustration 3.10
Anne Zahalka
Cole Classic, 1998
type C print
115 x 145cm
edition of 12

Illustration 3.11
Anne Zahalka
Sunday, 11.08am, 1995
from Open House
colour transparency in lightbox
173 x 125 x 25cm
edition of 3

Illustration 3.12
Anne Zahalka
Saturday 2.48pm, 1995
from Open House
colour transparency in lightbox
125 x 173 x 25cm
edition of 3

Illustration 3.13
Anne Zahalka
Saturday 8.15pm, 1995
from Open House
colour transparency in lightbox
165 x 125 x 25cm
edition of 3

Illustration 3.14
Anne Zahalka
Thursday, 8.33pm, 1995
from Open House
colour transparency in lightbox
125 x 190 x 25cm
edition of 3

Illustration 3.15
Anne Zahalka
Wednesday, 8.40pm, 1995
from Open House
duratran, lightbox
125 x 176 x 25cm
edition of 3

Illustration 3.16
Anne Zahalka
Monday, 11.48pm, 1995
from Open House
colour transparency in lightbox
190 x 125 x 25cm
edition of 3
Illustration 3.13

Illustration 3.14
CHAPTER 4

Illustration 4.1  
Brenda L. Croft  
'Mervyn Bishop and Joseph Croft, Prince Alfred Park, Redfern', 1992  
from Conference Call (with Adrian Piper)  
colour transparency in lightbox  
270 x 180 x 20cm  
Collection, Art Gallery of New South Wales

Illustration 4.2  
Brenda L. Croft  
'Sue Ingram, Botany Road/Regent St, Redfern', 1992  
from Conference Call (with Adrian Piper)  
colour transparency in lightbox  
270 x 180 x 20cm  
Collection, Art Gallery of New South Wales

Illustration 4.3  
Brenda L. Croft  
'Shane Phillips and Noel Collett, Everleigh Street, Redfern', 1992  
from Conference Call (with Adrian Piper)  
colour transparency in lightbox  
270 x 180 x 20cm  
Collection, Art Gallery of New South Wales

Illustration 4.4  
Brenda L. Croft  
'Mathew Cook and Bonny Briggs, Aboriginal Community Health Services, Pitt Street, Redfern', 1992  
from Conference Call (with Adrian Piper)  
colour transparency in lightbox  
270 x 180 x 20cm  
Collection, Art Gallery of New South Wales

Illustration 4.5  
Brenda L. Croft  
'Tyson and Hetti', 1993  
from The Big Deal is Black  
R3 colour print  
Dimensions variable

Illustration 4.6  
Brenda L. Croft  
'The Ingrams', 1993  
from The Big Deal is Black  
R3 colour print  
Dimensions variable

Illustration 4.7  
Brenda L. Croft  
'Judy, Jody, Tjanara', 1993  
from The Big Deal is Black  
R3 colour print  
Dimensions variable
CHAPTER 5

Illustration 5.1
Tracey Moffatt
from Scarred for Life
offset print
80 x 60cm (paper size)
edition of 50
Caption text: During the fight, her mother threw her birth certificate at her. This is how she found out her real father's name.

Illustration 5.2
Tracey Moffatt
'Useless, 1974', 1994
from Scarred for Life
offset print
80 x 60cm (paper size)
edition of 50
Caption text: Her father's nickname for her was 'useless'.

Illustration 5.3
Tracey Moffatt
'Job Hunt, 1976', 1994
from Scarred for Life
offset print
80 x 60cm (paper size)
edition of 50
Caption text: After three weeks he still couldn't find a job. His mother said to him, 'maybe you're [sic] not good enough'.

Illustration 5.4
Tracey Moffatt
'Suicide Threat, 1982', 1999
from Scarred for Life II
offset print
80 x 60cm (paper size)
edition of 60
Caption text: She was forty-five, single and pregnant for the first time. When her mother found out, she said "If I wasn't Catholic I'd commit suicide."

Illustration 5.5
Tracey Moffatt
'Mother's Reply, 1976', 1999
from Scarred for Life II
offset print
80 x 60cm (paper size)
edition of 60
Caption text: On the night of her first school dance, she asked her mother what she thought. She replied "you don't dress a pig up unless ya gonna eat it."

Illustration 5.6
Tracey Moffatt
'Responsible but Dreaming, 1984', 1999
from Scarred for Life II
offset print
80 x 60cm (paper size)
edition of 60
Caption text: The eldest girl, though always responsible, would escape in her dreams.

Illustration 5.7
Tracey Moffatt
'Charm Alone, 1965', 1994
from Scarred for Life
offset print
80 x 60cm (paper size)
edition of 50
Caption text: His brother said, 'crooked nose and no chin - you'll have to survive on charm alone'.

Illustration 5.8
Tracey Moffatt
'Telecam Guys, 1977', 1994
from Scarred for Life
offset print
80 x 60cm (paper size)
edition of 50
Caption text: Later, her sister said, 'the Telecam guys told me I was far more attractive and vivacious'.

Illustration 5.9
Tracey Moffatt
'The Wizard of Oz, 1956', 1994
from Scarred for Life
offset print
80 x 60cm (paper size)
edition of 50
Caption text: He was playing Dorothy in the school's production of the Wizard of Oz. His father got angry at him for getting dressed too early.

Illustration 5.10
Tracey Moffatt
'Heart Attack, 1970', 1994
from Scarred for Life
offset print
80 x 60cm (paper size)
edition of 50
Caption text: She glimpsed her father beating the girl from down the street. That day he died of a heart attack.

Illustration 5.11
Tracey Moffatt
'Doll Birth, 1972', 1994
from Scarred for Life
offset print
80 x 60cm (paper size)
edition of 50
Caption text: Her mother caught him giving birth to a doll. He was banned from playing with the boy from next door again.
Illustration 5.12
Tracey Moffatt
'Mother's Day, 1975', 1994
from Scarred for Life
offset print
80 x 50cm (paper size)
edition of 50
Caption text: On Mother's Day, as the family watched, she copped a backhander from her mother.

Illustration 5.13
Tracey Moffatt
'Pantyhose Arrest, 1973', 1999
from Scarred for Life II
offset print
80 x 60cm (paper size)
edition of 60
Caption text: For his own safety while he played, his mother tied him up with pantyhose. The next-door neighbour called the police.

Illustration 5.14
Tracey Moffatt
'Piss Bags, 1976', 1999
from Scarred for Life II
offset print
80 x 60cm (paper size)
edition of 60
Caption text: Locked in the van while their mothers continued their affair, the boys were forced to piss into their chip bags.

Illustration 5.15
Tracey Moffatt
'Door Dash, 1979', 1999
from Scarred for Life II
offset print
80 x 60cm (paper size)
edition of 60
Caption text: To get into their house every night the children had to dash past their drunken father at the door.
The Wizard of Oz, 1986

Illustration 5.9

Heart Attack, 1976

Illustration 5.10

Mother's Day, 1975

Illustration 5.11

Doll Birth, 1972

Illustration 5.12
Pompeii Arrival, 1970

For two days safely, while his friends, his truck had left up with pompeii.
The next door neighbor called the police.

Illustration 5.13

Pompeii, 1970

Lured in the car while their symptoms continued their whine.
The boys were forced to pile into their van bags.

Illustration 5.14

Granbrook, 1979

To pull into these house where my mother screamed two as
smell used that basket lumber at the time.

Illustration 5.15
CHAPTER 6

Illustration 6.1
Tracey Moffatt
from Something More, 1989
cibachrome
100 x 130cm
edition of 30

Illustration 6.2
Tracey Moffatt
from Something More, 1989
cibachrome
100 x 130cm
edition of 30

Illustration 6.3
Tracey Moffatt
from GUAPA (Good Looking), 1995
black and white photograph on chromogenic paper
76 x 100cm
edition of 20

Illustration 6.4
Tracey Moffatt
from Laudanum, 1998
photogravure print on rag paper
76 x 56cm (paper size)
edition of 60

Illustration 6.5
Tracey Moffatt
from Laudanum, 1998
photogravure print on rag paper
76 x 56cm (paper size)
edition of 60

Illustration 6.6
Tracey Moffatt
from Up In The Sky, 1997
offset print
61 x 76cm (image size)
edition of 60

Illustration 6.7
Tracey Moffatt
from Up In The Sky, 1997
offset print
61 x 76cm (image size)
edition of 60

Illustration 6.8
Tracey Moffatt
from Up In The Sky, 1997
offset print
61 x 76cm (image size)
edition of 60

Illustration 6.9
Tracey Moffatt
from Up In The Sky, 1997
offset print
61 x 76cm (image size)
edition of 60

Illustration 6.10
Tracey Moffatt
from Up In The Sky, 1997
offset print
61 x 76cm (image size)
edition of 60

Illustration 6.11
Tracey Moffatt
from Up In The Sky, 1997
offset print
61 x 76cm (image size)
edition of 60

Illustration 6.12
Tracey Moffatt
from Up In The Sky, 1997
offset print
61 x 76cm (image size)
edition of 60

Illustration 6.13
Jon Rhodes
Spears to spanners, 1990/1990-92
5 black and white photographs, 1 colour photograph
99 x 86cm

Illustration 6.14
Jon Rhodes
We seen it on the television, 1990
11 black and white photographs
90 x 119cm

Illustration 6.15
Jon Rhodes
Which tucker?, 1990
10 black and white photographs
89 x 102cm

Illustration 6.16
Jon Rhodes
11 black and white photographs
82 x 141cm

Illustration 6.17
Jon Rhodes
The maps to Marruwa, 1990
10 black and white photographs
110 x 94cm
10. Spears to spanners

99 x 86

(3rd frame in colour)

Illustration 6.13
12. We seen it on the television

90 x 119

Along the southern edge of Wilkinkarra (Lake Mackay), Tjapangati pointed out the place where that Tjakamarra snake come up from long way - Karrruyarra. He stop right here now at this place - Wilkinkarra. From here Tjakamarra head west underground and shed his skin and then he come up to Nyimmu - long way. Tjakamarra finish up there at Nyimmu.

(Karrruyarra, Mt Wedge, is 200 miles east of Lake Mackay in Wirrpinya country. Nyimmu, Jupiter Well, is 100 miles west of Lake Mackay.)

Horizontal series: Timmy Tjapangati, Wilkinkarra, 1990 (6th frame: the Tjakamarra snake at Wilkinkarra painted by Timmy Tjapangati)

Vertical sequence:
1. passed away
2. Kumanangyi Tjungurrayi
3. Elwyn Tjuntjintja Yapa
4. Selina Napamangka

Illustration 6.14
6. Which tucker?

89 x 102

Vertical sequence, top:
1. Walala Tjapaltjarri
2. Ray Tjapaltjarri Gibson
3. Jon Jon Tjapurrula West
   Danny Tjapaltjarri Gibson
   David Tjapurrula West
   Ray Tjapaltjarri Gibson
4. David Tjapurrula West
   Joseph Tjapurrula West
6. Joseph Tjapurrula West
   Kiriwirrura, 1990.

Horizontal series:
Gibson Desert, 1990.
CHAPTER 7

Illustration 7.1
Gregory Crewdson
untitled ('concentric circles'), 1997
from Hover
gelatin silver print
51 x 61cm
edition of 6

Illustration 7.2
Gregory Crewdson
untitled ('woman in flowers'), 1998
from Twilight
type C print
122 x 152cm
edition of 10

Illustration 7.3
Gregory Crewdson
untitled ('bear dream'), 1998
from Twilight
type C print
122 x 152cm
edition of 10

Illustration 7.4
Bill Henson
type C print
127 x 180cm
edition of 5

Illustration 7.5
Bill Henson
untitled, 2000/2001
type C print
127 x 180cm
edition of 5

Illustration 7.6
Bill Henson
type C print
127 x 180cm
edition of 5

Illustration 7.7
Bill Henson
type C print
127 x 180cm
edition of 5

Illustration 7.8
Bill Henson
untitled, 1997/1998
type C print
127 x 180cm
edition of 5

Illustration 7.9
Bill Henson
untitled, 2000/2001
type C print
127 x 180cm
edition of 5

Illustration 7.10
Bill Henson
type C print
127 x 180cm
edition of 5

Illustration 7.11
Bill Henson
untitled, 2000/2001
type C print
127 x 180cm
edition of 5

Illustration 7.12
Bill Henson
untitled, 2000/2001
type C print
127 x 180cm
edition of 5

Illustration 7.13
Bill Henson
type C print
127 x 180cm
edition of 5

Illustration 7.14
Bill Henson
untitled, 2000/2001
type C print
127 x 180cm
edition of 5

Illustration 7.15
Bill Henson
untitled, 2000/2001
type C print
127 x 180cm
edition of 5

Illustration 7.16
Bill Henson
type C print
127 x 180cm
edition of 5

Illustration 7.17
Bill Henson
untitled, 2000/2001
type C print
127 x 180cm
edition of 5
Illustration 7.18
Bill Henson
untitled, 2000/2001
type C print
127 x 180cm
edition of 5

Illustration 7.19
Bill Henson
untitled, 1997/1998
type C print
127 x 180cm
edition of 5

Illustration 7.20
Bill Henson
untitled, 2000/2001
type C print
127 x 180cm
edition of 5
CHAPTER 8

Illustration 8.1
Rosemary Laing
flight research #4, 1999
Type C print
80 x 123cm
edition of 6

Illustration 8.2
Rosemary Laing
flight research #3, 1999
Type C print
90 x 90cm
edition of 6

Illustration 8.3
Rosemary Laing
flight research #5, 1999
Type C print
122 x 266cm
edition of 6

Illustration 8.4
Rosemary Laing
flight research #6, 1999/2000
Type C print
70 x 141cm
edition of 6

Illustration 8.5
Rosemary Laing
ariel wall, 1995
from greenwork
Computer painted vinyl
197 x 298cm

Illustration 8.6
Rosemary Laing
brownwork #8, 1997
Type C print
122 x 283cm
edition of 6

Illustration 8.7
Rosemary Laing
brownwork #9, 1997
Type C print
122 x 258cm
edition of 6

Illustration 8.8
Rosemary Laing
airport #2, 1997
Type C print
122 x 263cm
edition of 6

Illustration 8.9
Rosemary Laing
airport #1, 1997
type C print
122 x 279cm
edition of 6

Illustration 8.10
Rosemary Laing
brownwork #1, 1996
duraflex photograph
120 x 245cm
edition of 6

Illustration 8.11
Rosemary Laing
flight research #9, 1999/2000
type C print
60 x 60
edition of 6

Illustration 8.12
Ozemail Broadband advertisement, The
Sunday Telegraph Magazine, 14 July 2002

Illustration 8.13
Rosemary Laing
bulletproofglass #3, 1999
type C print
120 x 193cm
edition of 10

Illustration 8.14
Rosemary Laing
bulletproofglass #2, 1999
type C print
120 x 253cm
edition of 10

Illustration 8.15
Rosemary Laing
bulletproofglass #1, 1999
type C print
120 x 209cm
edition of 10
Illustration 8.6.

Illustration 8.7
Illustration 8.10