

SCOPE

Contemporary Research Topics

art & design 8:
Visual Archaeologies of Photography
November 2013

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The series *Scope (Art & Design)* aims to engage discussion on contemporary research in the visual arts and design. It is concerned with views and critical debates surrounding issues of practice, theory, history and their relationships as manifested through the visual and related arts and activities, such as sound, performance, curation, tactile and immersive environments, digital scapes and methodological considerations. With New Zealand and its Pacific neighbours as a backdrop, but not its only stage, *Scope (Art & Design)* seeks to address the matters which concern contemporary artists and arts enquirers in their environments of practice.

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Submissions should engage with contemporary arts practices in ways which may contribute to critical debate and new understandings. High standards of writing, proofreading and adherence to consistency through the Chicago referencing style are expected. For more information, please refer to the *Chicago Manual of Style*; and consult prior issues for examples. A short biography of no more than 50 words; as well as title; details concerning institutional position and affiliation (where relevant); and contact information (postal, email and telephone number) should be provided on a cover sheet, with all such information withheld from the body of the

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Statement

A NEW MATERIALISM

Mark Bolland

Photography is always changing and has always been understood through, or in dialogue with other media. Its histories are of succession by, and connections with, other media and forms. Its identity has always been plural and malleable. With this in mind we might try to summarise some of the key developments in photography of the past thirty years or so in order to provide some context for the apparently anachronistic photographic practices featured in this issue of *Scope: Visual Archaeologies of Photography*.

If we were to try to describe the current situation across the many and various fields of photographic practices we would certainly give prominence to three recent occurrences that have shaped the photographic landscape of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries: Firstly, the advent of technologies for the digital production and dissemination of images; secondly photography's rise to prominence in contemporary art; and thirdly, a new materialism that prioritizes objects, chemical processes and a tendency towards the singular that may seem positively perverse in the era of the digital.

This 'new materialism' is the focus of this issue of *Scope*, and the new materialist practices featured here can be understood as a corollary to digital images and the digital dissemination of images. The materialist meme seems precisely and deliberately antithetical to the digital with its characteristic ease, its immateriality and its ubiquitousness. It is also part of a wider cultural trend that has seen a revaluing of the handmade and the artisanal in parallel with the rise of the digital. These ideas are not archaic or a neo-ludditism, nor are they necessarily a nostalgic return to a lost photography, but rather, they represent a deliberate move away from the hermetically sealed world of high-tech and the intangibility of the digital to something visible, touchable and makeable. They are not necessarily a return to the past but an embracing of different possibilities for the present. In photography these ideas also represent a recognition that the many possibilities of photography are still interesting and relevant despite the current domination of the digital, and that apparently old ideas can be combined with the new in interesting ways.

Digitisation, accelerating the process started by photography in the nineteenth century, has helped create a world dominated by image and by images, where images produced for consumption have largely replaced pictures made for contemplation. It has also highlighted and heightened the fluidity and malleability of photography that defies some of the previous assumptions about the medium, casting doubts upon its veracity, as well as changing its modes of dissemination and reception. During this time, contemporary art and its accompanying critiques have provided a context in which these changes can be considered, while recent art photography has provided the contemplative pictures absent from consumer culture. These pictures often reflect upon society and the continually shifting identity of photography in a way that the majority of the photographs we encounter cannot. In keeping with this, we might understand the 'new materialism' as an extension of the idea of the contemplative picture into territory where it can position itself not just in dialogue with, but as an opposite of, the culture from which it emerged, or as a reclaiming of some of the possibilities that digital culture excludes or reduces to simulations.

If the arrival of digital imaging technologies, precipitated a 'crisis' in photography, then this crisis, which led to the premature announcement of photography's death in some quarters, was generated by the anxiety that such a change would leave the photographic field with no essence or identity. This anxiety has at least two main symptoms: Firstly, digitisation erodes the truth-effect of the 'indexical' character of the photographic image and undermines photography's power to carry with it our belief - although not to the extent that was feared some years ago.

Digital images and their many uses and manifestations have highlighted that rather than simply recording the visible, photographs or 'photo-capitalisms' actually construct new realities. The second consequence of the arrival of digitised photographic images was that it marked the end of photography, in the traditional – optical, chemical-sense, as the dominant form of technically produced images.¹ This obsolescence has freed chemical photography from its utilitarian functions (which had been gradually taken over first by moving image technologies and then by digital modes) and opened it up, once again, to the artistic and the utopian.²

One trend that resulted from the 'crisis' of digitisation was a concerted attempt to gather up the various strands of the newly expanded medium and pull them together – to re-form photography and to re-establish it as a discrete medium. But its subsequently continuing dispersal and dissemination only serves to highlight its now undeniably hybrid qualities. Photography, then, has been replaced by *photographies*.

If we were to use this idea of an 'expanded field' of photography to map the various forms of photographic practices in contemporary art since the late 1970s,³ we might find that modernism and its critiques are no longer the only starting point for a thoughtful artistic photographic practice. The same period has seen both a renewed interest in nineteenth and early twentieth century photographic practices and processes, and also a reappraising of the turn-of-the-century pictorialism that seemed so un-photographic to the modernists in the 1920s: After the 'de-skilled' aesthetics of the 1970s and the tentative return to 'pictures' (modernism deconstructed, but retaining its distaste for pictorialism) in the 1980s, the pictorial has subsequently re-emerged as a significant part of photography in contemporary art.

The new materialism is not a return to pictorialism, however, as it incorporates various aspects of photography from the nineteenth century into a contemporary practice that embraces its connections to, or defines itself in opposition to, the prevailing culture, whilst maintaining a dialogue with any number of historical manifestations of the photographic. In other words, such a practice necessarily conceives of the photographic as being plural and being part of an ecosystem of cultural production, rather than a silo.

Recent new materialist photographic practices are expanding the possibilities of art photography by reconsidering 'old' modes of production and dissemination, and these practices choose to emphasise properties of photography that are currently neglected in the prevailing popular culture. At the beginning of photography the multiple and reproductive possibilities of WHF Talbot's positive/negative process triumphed over Daguerre's direct positive process because it was more suited to the commercial demands of the burgeoning consumer culture based on mechanisation and mass production. Now that those responsibilities have been taken over by digital processes, photographic practitioners can luxuriate in the qualities that were exemplified by Daguerre's process: uniqueness, objecthood and beauty. In doing so, they might cause us to consider the ways in which we use, and what we value about, photography in the digital era. If the billions of photographs on social networking sites have now inverted the original photographic project of making the world visible, because they largely only serve to point back to the photographer as their reference point, then the 'new materialist' photographers remind us that there are other photographs and that they can still show us the world in interesting, beautiful and surprising ways.

1 See: Peter Osborne, *Photography in a Expanding Field: Distributive Unity and Dominant form*, 'Where is the Photograph?' David Green, Ed., Photoforum & Photoworks, Brighton, UK, 2003.

2 As Rosalind Krauss has pointed out: "[Walter] Benjamin believed that a the birth of a given social form or technological process the utopian dimension was present and, furthermore, that it is precisely at the moment of the obsolescence of that technology that it once more releases this dimension, like the last gleam of a dying star. For obsolescence, the very law of commodity production, both frees the outmoded object from the grip of utility and reveals the hollow promise of that law." Rosalind Krauss *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition*, Thames & Hudson, New York, 1999, p.41.

3 George Baker did this in: *Photography's Expanded Field*, October 114, Fall 2005, pp.120-40.

NO NEED TO REMEMBER WHEN 'CAUSE EVERYTHING OLD IS NEW AGAIN!': VISUAL ARCHAEOLOGIES OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Hamish Tocher

What might it mean, in a time when you make phone calls with your camera, to deliberately take up a photographic practice whose basis is in silver, in collodion, in glass? Has digitization, by changing the material base of photography, changed its meaning? How can we compare works created with the technology of the 19th century with works and technologies of the 21st century? What new possibilities may be emerging? *Scope 8, Visual Archaeologies of Photography*, presents some responses to these questions.

1. *The light of those joyful mornings*

The fact that two enunciations are exactly identical, that they are made up of the same words used with the same meaning, does not, as we know, mean that they are absolutely identical.

Michel Foucault, "The Original and the Regular"²

In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, from which we take the title of this issue, Foucault pours scorn on models of history that concern themselves with chronologies of invention. Archaeology, says Foucault "remains unmoved at the moment when for the first time someone was sure of some truth: it does not try to restore the light of those joyful mornings."³ As an alternative, Foucault suggests that history should concern itself with "discursive regularities" and "enunciative regularities". For Foucault, it is naïve and unimportant to enquire (for example) whether Archer or Cutting made the first ambrotype, with the intention of seeing one as "original" and the other as "banal". Instead, all ambrotypes can be seen as part of an enunciative regularity, in which they are all statements made using the same language. The regularity contains "creative" and "imitative" statements, and statements made in different times and places. It might seem unusual that photographers working in the 21st century would choose to use techniques and technologies from the 19th century; but under this construction, these photographers can be seen to be participating in an ongoing enunciative regularity—*enunciative*, as they are using the same language, the same means. The work they make belongs to the same formation, whether or not it seems to restate something that has already been said. This does not mean that a 19th century tintype and a 21st century one are identical, as Foucault notes above, but it does mean that the order in which they were made is less important than what they might have to say to each other. And it means that, as well as strictly chronological relationships between those images, there can be readings in which the newer image can inform the older one.

Foucault uses both the term "enunciative regulaties" and the term "discursive regularities" in his text.⁴ Perhaps we could use "enunciative" to describe technologies, means of operation, and "discursive" to describe ideas? Then, having agreed that there are enunciative similarities between, for example, Dan Estabrook and W H Fox Talbot, or between Ben Cauchi, Keliy Anderson-Staley, and Frederick Scott Archer, the question yet remains as to whether they can be housed within the same "discursive regularity". Works and texts by Geoffrey Batchen (on Keliy Anderson-Staley), Kevin Fisher (on Ben Cauchi), Joyce Cambell, Dan Estabrook and Jai Hall, take up this question in various ways in the essays and statements here collected.

2. *The green ray*

Jeffrey Eugenides: Does everybody see the green ray when they see the film, or does it happen too fast?

Tacita Dean: No. That's what's nice about it, because otherwise the film would just be about a phenomenon. But in the end it's more about perception and faith, I think.

JE: Did you always see it?

TD: This is really interesting, because I filmed it on this beach in Madagascar, and there was this couple who were hanging around. They didn't see the green ray, and they'd videotaped the sunset to document it. Then they replayed their video to me for proof that it wasn't there. But I was absolutely convinced that I had seen it, so it had to be on my film, which was optical and analog. When I got the film back, it was very, very faint, and I had to really push it to get more color in the film, to bring out the green ray. But it's definitely there. It's not a fiction. Some people think the green ray is an illusion, but it's not.⁵

Tacita Dean, interview with Jeffrey Eugenides, *BOMB* magazine, 2006

As several of the texts in this issue of *Scope* point out, some recent digital technologies have attempted to adopt the aesthetic of the analogue, ranging from digital "tintypes" to Instagram filters designed to emulate a notional film stock and its notional degradations in colour and tone. Essays by Courtney Johnston, Rachel Allan and Ted Whitaker all discuss these digital simulacra. Once again, Foucault's argument that "the originality/banality opposition is not relevant"⁶ might be applied in coming to an accommodation with images made with these technologies. Rather than arguing, then, that digital simulations of, say, tintypes, are validating a "new" form of photography with reference to an "older" type, the question instead is whether or not digital tintypes and analogue ones share a common discursive regularity, even if they do not share an enunciative regularity.

The photographic materials and systems I've used throughout my career are disappearing at an alarming rate. Over the last five years, companies such as Kodak, Agfa, and Polaroid have been pushed into an economic free-fall as the demand for their long-established products has evaporated. The end of the analogue era is evident in the recent closings and demolition of large-scale manufacturing facilities dedicated to the production of conventional photographic products.

Robert Burley, *The Disappearance of Darkness*⁷

It is a commonplace of photographic discourse that just now, or just recently, the digital image has replaced the chemical image. This has often been presented in terms of "the end of an era". Though the notion of "discursive regularities" tends to suggest a continuity in discourse, rather than a decisive rupture, it must nevertheless be acknowledged that among many parts of the community of photographers, particularly those who use analogue technologies as their primary creative means, there is a sense of loss at this perceived end of days. This loss has been caused in part by the destruction of infrastructure that supported these technologies (a destruction which has been recorded, for example, in Robert Burley's portfolio *The Disappearance of Darkness*). Throughout the modern era, photography has been the recording angel of the power that technology possesses, power to create and power to destroy. Gary Blackman's contribution to this issue, of Polaroid SX-70s and a brief statement, reminds us that these processes of destruction and reinvention have always churned away at the material base of photography as it has existed at any given moment in time. At the same time, he makes it clear that there is something essential to the Polaroid that should be missed and perhaps mourned, something that a digital simulation of a Polaroid does not contain. Like Gary Blackman, Brian Scadden and Alan Bekhuis have also made comment on how analogue photographers can operate at or after the perceived end of an era. As the section of Tacita Dean's interview in the epigraph points out, some photographers fear that what may be lost when film is lost is a way of seeing.

This is not to say that photographic work which examines the history of photography must necessarily be attempting to preserve something that is lost. Perhaps photographers who examine the history of photography are doing so out of a sense that the medium has enough history now for this to be possible: in short, that it has the mature self-confidence to be reflective, rather than constantly and neurotically re-inventing itself. Vikky Alexander's work, here paired with an image by Eugène Atget, might be considered in this vein.

3. *The last gleam of a dying star*

[Walter] Benjamin believed that at the birth of a given social form or technological process the utopian dimension was present, and, furthermore, that it is precisely at the moment of the obsolescence of that technology that it once more releases this dimension, like the last gleam of a dying star.⁸

...it is the onset of higher orders of technology... which allows us, by rendering older techniques outmoded, to grasp the inner complexity of the mediums those techniques support.⁹

Rosalind Krauss, "A Voyage on the North Sea": *Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition*

In *A Voyage on the North Sea*, Rosalind Krauss describes Marcel Broodthaers, making films in the late 1960s and early 1970s, imagining himself to be an "artisanal" filmmaker of a type extinguished 50 years earlier. Broodthaers, says Krauss, was

...understanding the medium in the light of the openness promised by early film, an openness woven into the very mesh of the image, as the flickering irresolution of the illusion of movement produced the experience of sight itself as dilated: a phenomenological mixture of presence and absence, immediacy and distance.¹⁰

Under this reading of his work, Broodthaers has performed an extraordinary feat: imagining himself back in time, forgetting what he "knew" about how to construct a film, in order to learn something new about it. What possibilities for image-making, for understanding the world, were laid open by the early experimenters in cinema? Krauss, moving from the specific to the general, offers an intriguing thought:

As Benjamin had promised, nothing brings the promise encoded at the birth of a technological form to light as effectively as the fall into obsolescence of its final stages of development.¹¹

If chemical photography is "falling into obsolescence", what promises might be brought to light? How can we read back into photography's history, looking for clues for what to do now?

One model of this kind of historical reading is visual archaeology as supermarket: take any form, any technology, any aesthetic that can be derived from such a combination, and mix-n-match, making the tacit assumption that everything has a cultural equivalence and, at the same time, has no specific meaning. *No need to remember* the specific histories of a material or a way of working: just grab onto it and blaze away 'cause everything old is new again. But another, more reflective model of archaeology looks back on that which was offered on one or other "joyful morning", not to establish an order of precedence but to consider what facets of the "promise encoded at the birth of a technological form" may not yet have been explored. In this issue of *Scope*, we reproduce some work of Andrew Beck's, which, returning to the simplest mechanisms of photosensitivity, suggests new sculptural possibilities for the photographic image, connected certainly, if anachronistically, to Minimalist sculpture among other things. Caroline McQuarrie's images, also contained here, might be seen as exploring the heliographic reproductions of the 1820s as much as the operations and possibilities of the scanner.

Earlier this year, the British band London Grammar released a video for their song *I'm Wasting My Young Years*. The major sequences of the clip are composed of hundreds of simultaneous exposures from pinhole cameras, which

were stuffed with rollfilm and arranged in a ring or a strip around models' acrobatic jumps and dives. Set in motion, the pinhole frames depict the subjects caught in a static position, while the camera's point-of-view whirls around the moment. There's a heritage here, of course, not Muybridge and Marey but Tim Macmillan's *Time-Slice* and the "bullet time" of *The Matrix*, both from the 1990s. But the softness of these images (wide apertures to get fast exposures, imperfect pinholes) and the judderiness of the frames takes you back to the first films, (products themselves of early photographs) and makes you wonder, was the monocular logic of cinema as we understand it inevitable? Or were there, on that particular joyful morning, other choices for how the moving image might have worked? *Visual Archaeologies* suggests that those possibilities for the camera's images were not lost when photography and cinema took on the forms that they now appear to possess: rather, all the other possibilities were left latent, and they might yet, if approached with a sensibility that is forgetful of how things are supposed to be done, still be capable of being developed.

- 1 Lyrics from Peter Allen's 1974 song "Everything Old is New Again", from the album *Continental American*, A&M Records/UMG. The song continues: Don't throw the past away/ You might need it some other rainy day/ Dreams can come true again/ When everything old is new again.
- 2 Foucault, Michel, "The Original and the Regular" in his *The Order of Things*. (Translated from the French by A M Sheridan Smith. First published (in French) 1969; this edition New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), p. 143
- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 144
- 4 In many places, but also in *ibid.*, p. 144-5
- 5 Eugenides, Jeffrey, "Tacita Dean" [interview] *BOMB* 95/Spring 2006. Accessed May 2013 at <http://bombsite.com/issues/95/articles/2801>
- 6 Foucault, *op. cit.*, p. 144
- 7 Burley, Robert, *The Disappearance of Darkness: photography at the end of the analog era*. (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2013), p. 13
- 8 Krauss, Rosalind, "A Voyage on the North Sea": *Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1999) p. 41
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 53
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 44
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 45



Ben Cauchi, *The Start of It All*, 2008, Ambrotype, 430 x 360 mm. Art Gallery of New South Wales



Keliy Anderson-Staley, *Sabrina*, 2012, Tintype



Gary Blackman, *Sky reflection Dunedin 26 February 2004*, 2004, Polaroid SX-70



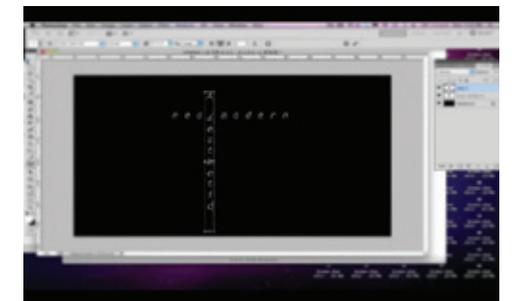
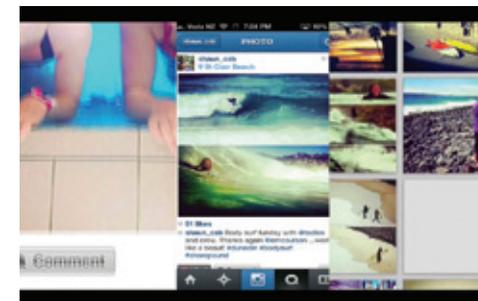
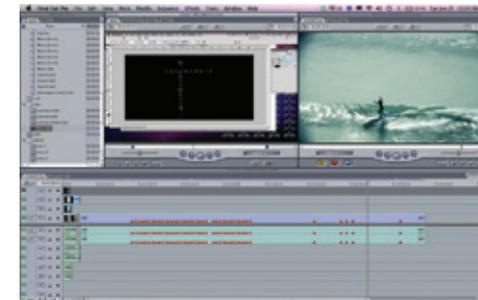
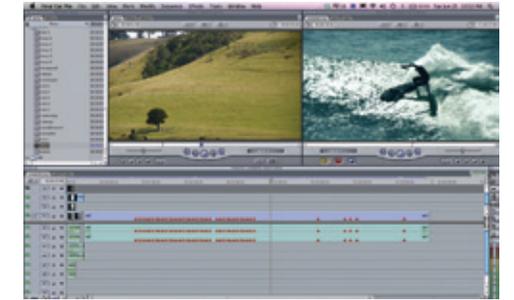
Joyce Campbell, *Who lives at Te Reinga and is an ancestor of everyone in the village*, 2010, Daguerreotype, 127 x 178 mm



Vikky Alexander, *Overpass*, 2011. Black and white photograph on Epson Ultrasmooth Fine Art Paper; 1016 x 1524 mm. Courtesy Vikky Alexander and TrépanierBaer Gallery



Brian Scadden, *Pennyfarthing riders, Oamaru*, c. 2001. Ambrotype



Ted Whitaker, *A Neo-Modern Aesthetic* [stills and production screenshots], 2013

Ted Whitaker, *A Neo-Modern Aesthetic* [stills and production screenshots], 2013



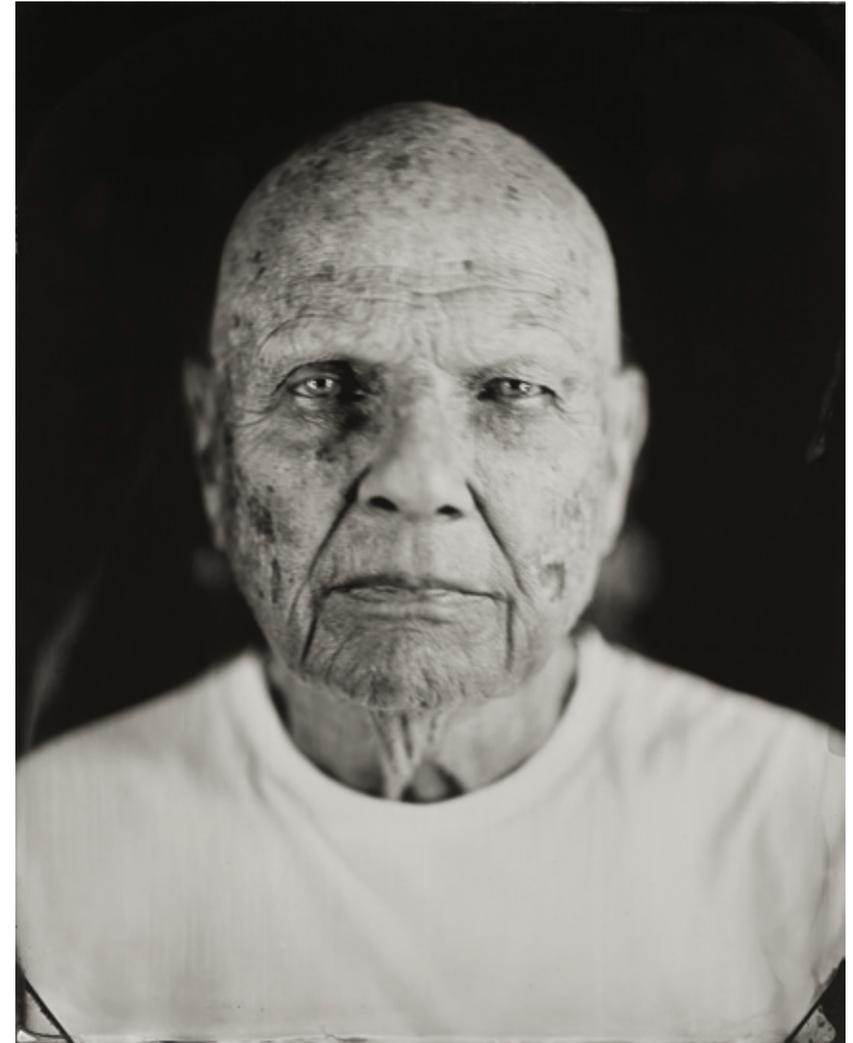
Gary Blackman, *Diamond — floor and deck Dunedin*, c. 1978-9. Polaroid SX-70



Andrew Beck, *Photogram Black Out*, 2013. Oil on silver gelatin print



Ben Cauchi, *Dead Air*, 2003. Ambrotype, 240 x 200 mm. Private collection



Kelij Anderson-Staley, *Hackman*, 2010. Tintype



Caroline McQuarrie, *Happy anniversary*, 2011. Inkjet print, 860 x 600 mm



Brian Scadden, *Re-enactors, Howick Village, Auckland*, 1996. Ambrotype



Eugène Atget, *Avenue des Gobelins, Paris*, c. 1925. Albumen silver print from glass negative. 219 x 173 mm



Vikky Alexander, *Paris Showrooms: Gold Torso*, 2009. Digital print on metallic paper; 762 x 1016mm.
Courtesy Vikky Alexander and TrépanierBaer Gallery

Arte Povera (Zine)

A style of minimal
art originating
in the late sixties
making use of
commonly available
materials
deliberately
chosen for their
worthlessness.

Jai Hall, Arte Povera (Zine), 2013

06 June 2013

Dear Hamish,

I had to look up anachronistic: something out of it's proper time. and I had to think about eulogised? to write in praise of... So here is a new zine made without much technology.' I have experienced nostalgia, explored personal history and this is probably the closest I will get to archiving something that was once precious. ~~xxxxxxx~~ ~~xxxxxxx~~ For a seminar ~~xxxxxxx~~ ~~xxxxxxx~~ on cyanotypes I wrote: I want to be able to simplify my photography, to be able to set up and make images wherever I may be. Ultimately outdoors with the sun shining. This is one reason why Cyanotype is suited to me. Working with an old process to recover the handmade quality of images.

I made photograms of found objects in their immediate environment, a female goldminer's hut... I made a makeshift darkroom in the old washhouse to prep my materials (using an old doll's cot for my drying rack.) My table was the ladder from an old dredge, the sun was intense february high country uv and the river was the Nevis, cold and clean.

My aim then was to make a photogram showing handmade quality hoping for the opportunity to add something of my soul and somehow honour "Gavine" the lady goldminer's relics.

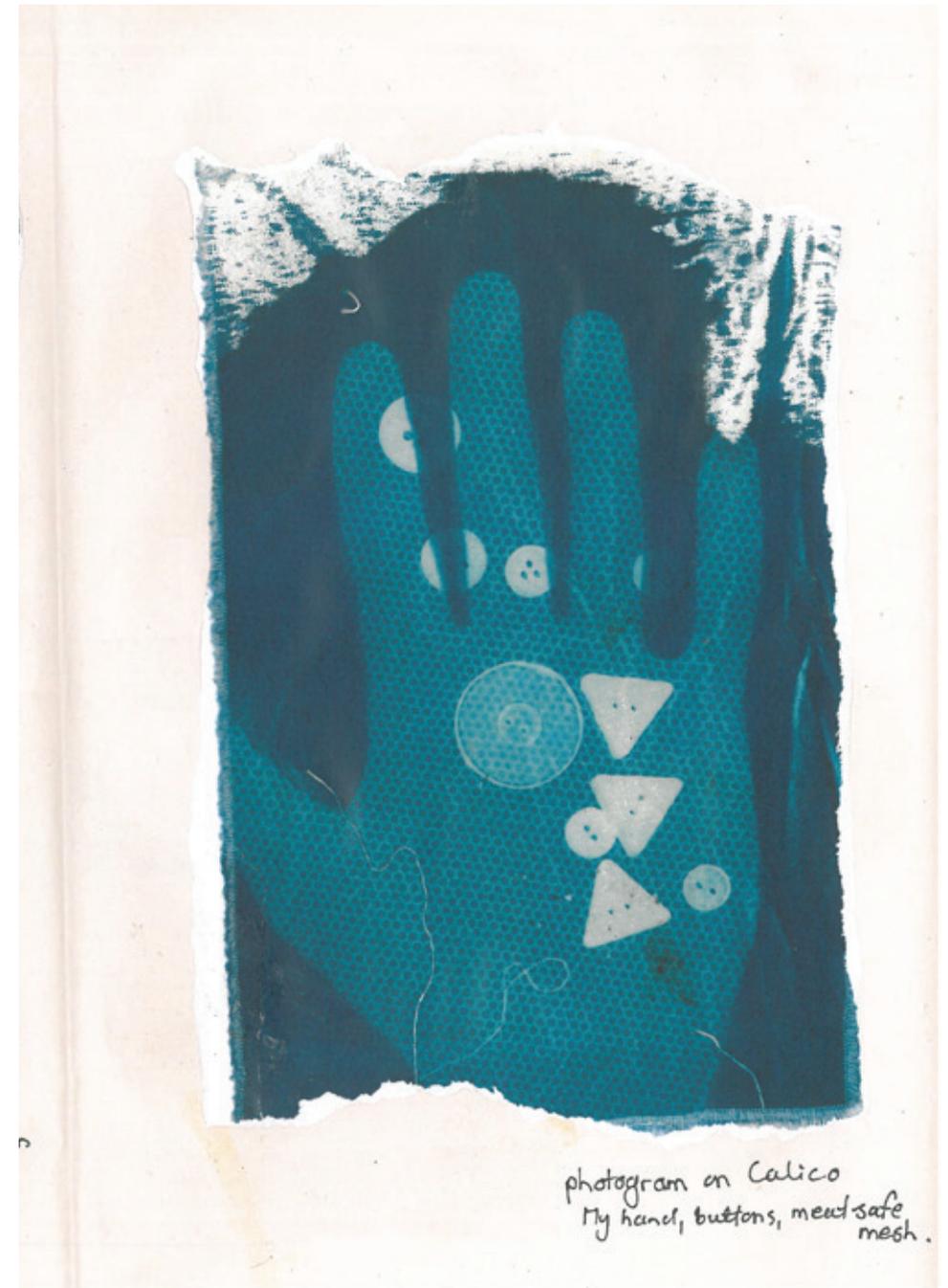
Catchup soon
MA



Dressmaking Scissors on Calico



Washer & button on Calico



photogram on Calico
My hand, buttons, metal safe mesh.

A reaction against

the

give me the sun
give me a river
and I will take
my camel hair brush
my piece of glass
paper, silk, canvas
tin~~ex~~ chemicals
and I will give
you a glimpse
of the past ...

commercialization

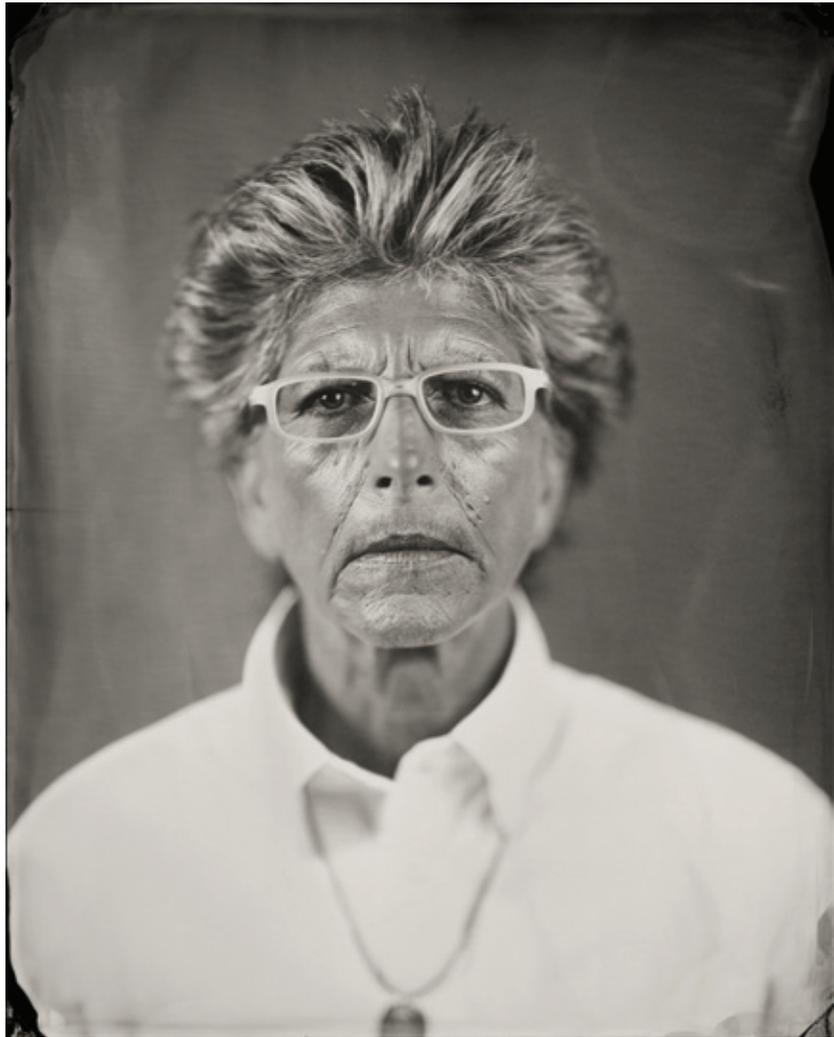
Alain Bois (p52)

Model gives
Artist takes
Artist gives
Audience takes...



of the art world.

My answer to : "Is photography,
the recording angel of modernity's
creative and destructive impluses...?
maybe .



Kelily Anderson-Staley, *Elizabeth*, 2012. Tintype



Alan Bekhuis, *Robert*, 2011. Daguerreotype in case. Private collection



Alan Bekhuis, *Rangianewa*, 2011. Daguerreotype in case. Private collection

Following page: Rachel H. Allan, *Ladydrive* [installation shot], 2012. Digital C-type prints





Dan Estabrook, *Dirty Feet*, 1999. Albumen print, mounted, 102 x 152 mm



Gary Blackman, *Macmillan Avenue Christchurch 3 January 2004, 2004*. Polaroid SX-70



Andrew Beck, *Steel Photogram*, 2012. Steel and silver gelatin print



Alan Bekhuis, *Waharoa II*, 2009. Daguerreotype in case. Archive of Modern Conflict collection



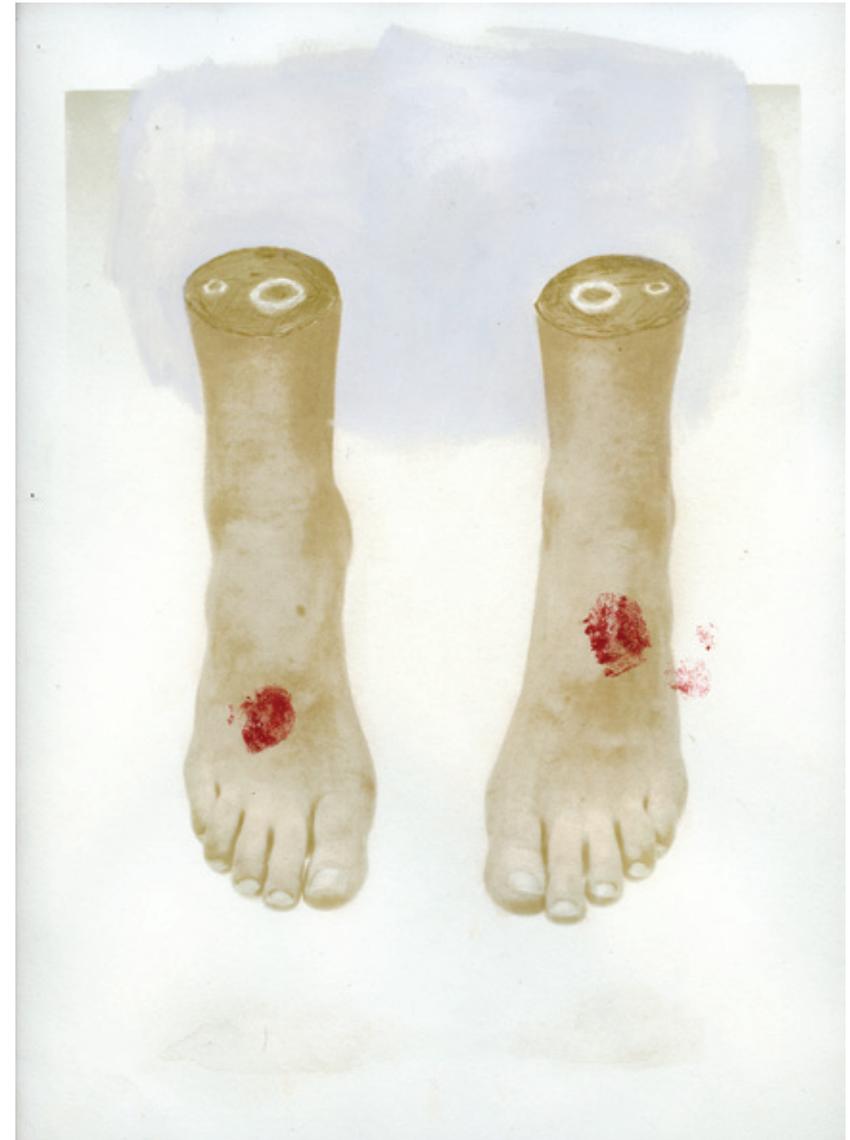
Dan Estabrook, *The Boy*, 2012. Gum bichromate with watercolour and gouache, 457 x 381 mm



Alan Bekhuis, *Horse's Head*, 2009. Daguerreotype in case. Musée Adrien Mentienne collection



Keliy Anderson-Staley, *Clifton*, 2012. Tintype



Dan Estabrook, *Stigmata*, 2013. Gum bichromate with watercolour and gouache, 356 x 279 mm



Joyce Campbell, *Hyoscamine* from *LA Botanical*, 2006-7. Ambrotype, 343 x 343 mm



Gary Blackman, *Steps Wellington 26 January 1979*, 1979. Polaroid SX-70



Joyce Campbell, *Untitled*, 2010. Ambrotype, 114 x 152 mm



Vikky Alexander, *Bow*, 2011. Black and white photograph on Epson Ultrasmooth Fine Art Paper, 1016 x 1524 mm. Courtesy Vikky Alexander and TrépanierBaer Gallery



Andrew Beck, *Rectangle Solid*, 2012. Oil on silver gelatin print



Rachel H. Allan, *Act II No. 1*, 2012. Polaroid, 254 x 203 mm



Dan Estabrook, *Chemical Still Life*, 2000. Calotype negative with mixed media, 127 x 102 mm



Caroline McQuarrie, *Friends are the best things in life*, 2012. Inkjet print, 860 x 600 mm



Keliy Anderson-Staley, *Erica*, 2010. Tintype



Keliy Anderson-Staley, *Jair*, 2012. Tintype



Dan Estabrook, *Competing Conditions*, 1999. Salt print with watercolour, 102 x 89 mm



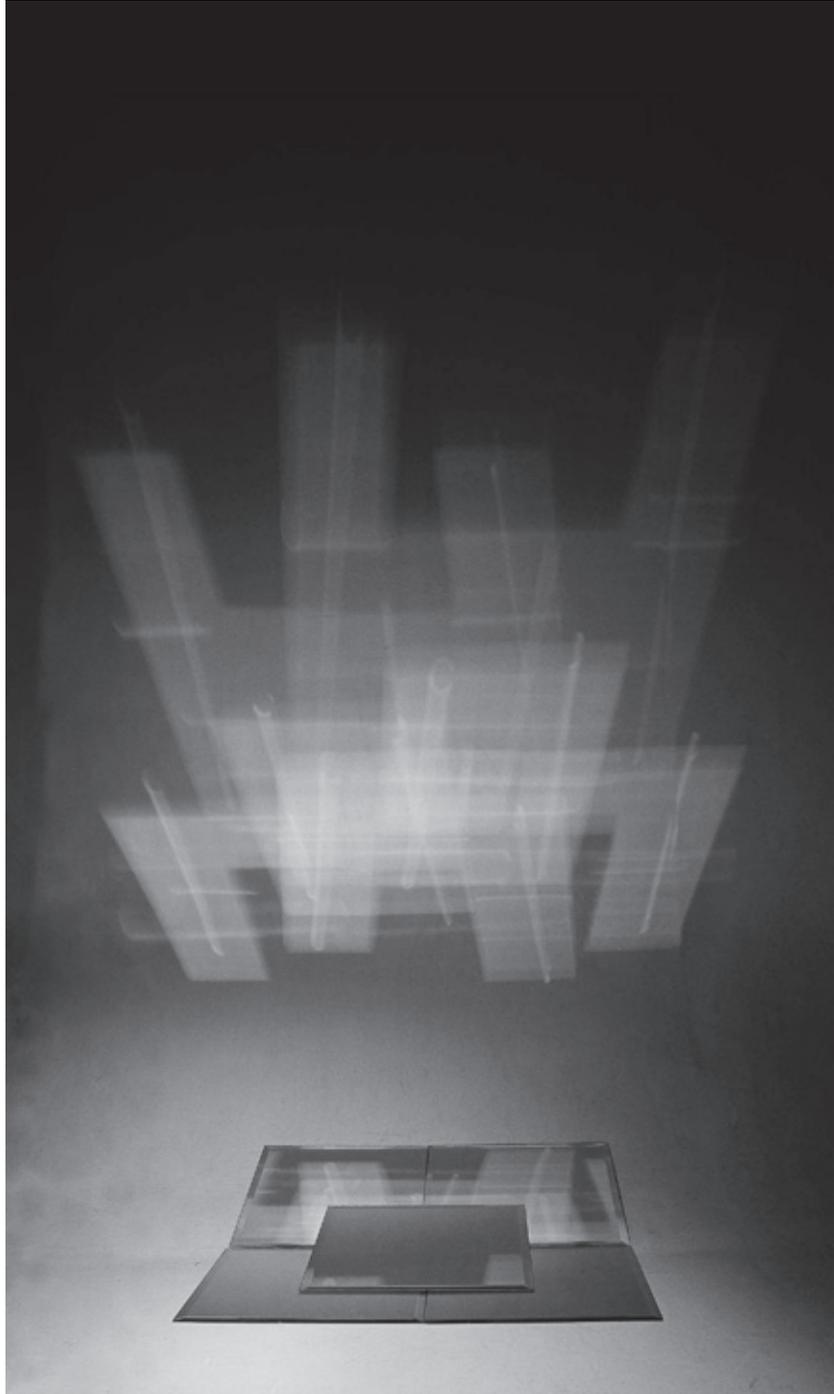
Rachel H. Allan, *Act I No. 9*, 2012. Polaroid, 254 x 203 mm



Joyce Campbell, *Mallow* from *Crown Coach Botanical*, 2008. Silver gelatin print (dimensions variable) from 114 x 152 ambrotype



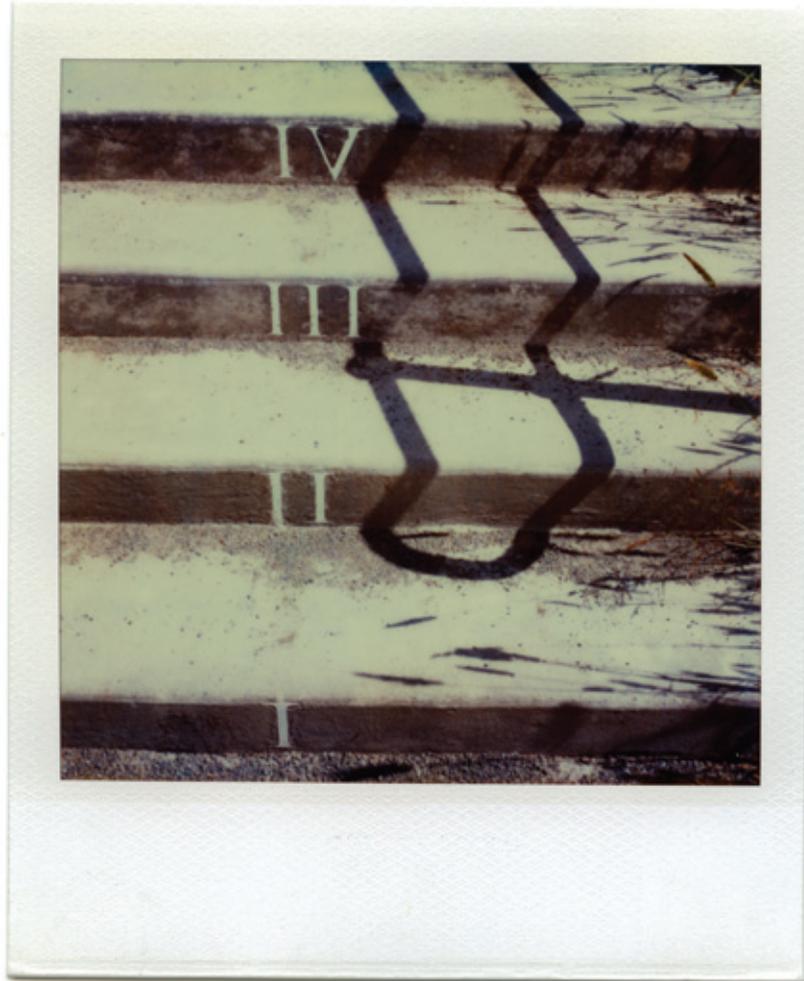
Gary Blackman, *Park Christchurch manipulated 2 January 2004*, 2004. Polaroid SX-70



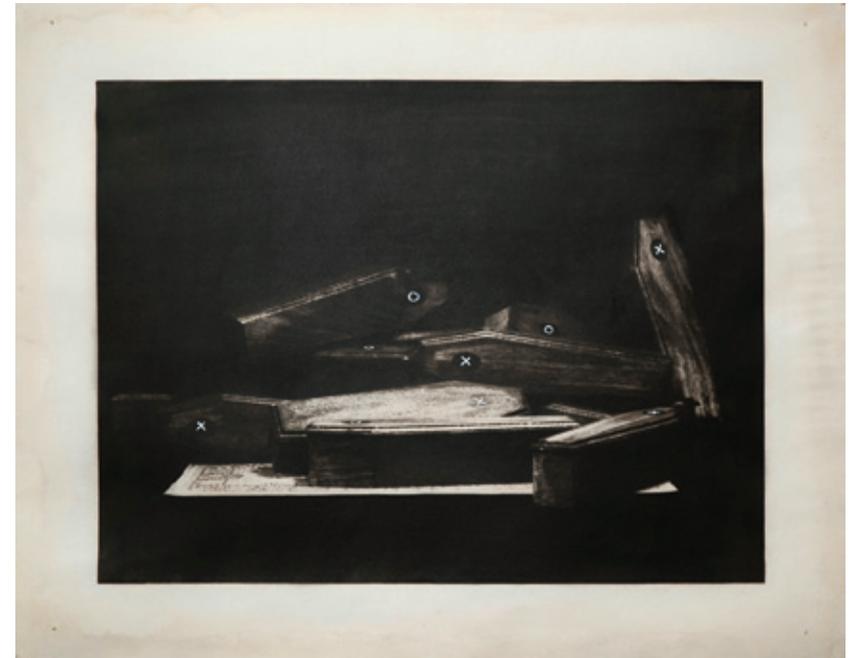
Andrew Beck, *Transfer*, 2010



Alan Bekhuis, *Larnach Tomb Interior*, 2007. Daguerreotype in case. Musée Adrien Mentienne collection



Gary Blackman, *Steps Christchurch 1 January 2002, 2002*. Polaroid SX-70



Dan Estabrook, *Alphabet*, 2013. Gum bichromate with watercolour and gouache 406 x 508 mm

MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

Geoffrey Batchen

They loom out of the darkness, as if hovering uncertainly between past and present, offering themselves for our scrutiny with an intensity that borders on the confrontational. Part of it is the look these people give us, staring at the camera for as long as 60 seconds or more, resulting in a kind of clenching of the eyes (as a sitter, you become aware of the sheer physicality of looking under these conditions, of the need to fight your eyes' desire to wander). Part of it is the texture of their skin, turned into rugged planetary surfaces by the tintype's peculiar response to colour and its high resolution of detail. And part of it is the differential focus with which these people are depicted – sharp in some places and strangely liquid in others – as if their bodies are floating in a primordial wet world with just the faces breaking the surface. For all these reasons, Keliy Anderson-Staley's tintype portraits are best described as otherworldly, rather than antiquarian.

The tintype, an American invention, was introduced in 1855 and continued to be widely used until the 1930s, making it one of the most enduring of photographic processes. The selection reproduced here is part of a collection of hundreds of contemporary examples taken by Anderson-Staley. Among their other attributes, these portraits – each designated only by a first name and the year of exposure – offer us a survey of race, gender, and age that considerably expands the primarily Caucasian version of American society recorded in nineteenth century tintypes.

As a collodion negative developed on a small sheet of lacquered metal, a tintype has the appearance of a positive print but no possibility of being reproduced in multiple manifestations. Each tintype is, in other words, a unique object. As a mirror image, tintypes also show an inverted version of their subject (what appears to be a right hand is in fact the left, and so on). To make her tintypes Anderson-Staley used hand-poured chemistry that she mixed herself according to nineteenth century recipes, period lenses, and wooden view cameras to expose positive images directly onto blackened metal (usually aluminum) plates. Exposure times are long by today's standards, and many of her sitters have made use of a hidden metal posing stand, its cold extensions holding the head steady as the seconds tick interminably by, counted off by the photographer.

These technical details matter. They help explain how these photographs come to look the way they do (why, for example, nobody smiles). Walter Benjamin evokes this look rather well in his 1931 essay "Little History of Photography", when he writes,

The first reproduced human beings entered the viewing space of photography with integrity – or rather, without inscription... The human countenance had a silence about it in which the gaze rested... The procedure itself caused the subjects to live their way into, rather than out of, the moment; during the long duration of the exposure, they grew into the picture.¹

Perhaps that is what is most striking about these pictures: the people portrayed still appear to be growing into them, still seem to be in the process of becoming themselves. In this sense, Anderson-Staley's work transcends the undoubted curiosity value of her chosen medium. For, before they are tintypes, these pictures are portraits, portraits of contemporary Americans (perhaps, even, when seen collectively, a portrait of contemporary America). As such, they raise the whole question of photographic portraiture, of what exactly can be deduced about an otherwise unknown person from a mere picture of their face. These particular faces stare back unblinkingly, eyes unnaturally bright and piercing, as if intent on hypnotizing us, here on the other side of the page. It is unclear who is looking at whom, who is the subject of this act of looking. Is it them, or is it us?

The pictorial qualities of the tintype, its obvious artifices and self-conscious accentuation of surface appearance, make these questions unavoidable. They remind us of what we already know (but usually choose to suppress): that a photograph represents a truth-to-presence (it certifies that a person was once there before the camera, in some past moment in time and space), but not a truth-to-appearance. These tintypes don't look much like the people they represent; the process itself results in visible deformations of form and feature. And yet these same people seem so much more present than the subjects of other kinds of photograph, in part because the passing of time between then and now – a feature of all photographs – seems here to be flowing before our very eyes. In simultaneously drawing attention to both the medium's pictorial deceptions and its temporal peculiarities, these pictures insist that our relationship to photography hinges, not on truth, but on desire (on our own desire to transcend time and space by means of the magic of the photograph: to, as it were, cheat death). In short, the work of Keliy Anderson-Staley is an open invitation to see much more than meets the eye.

This essay was originally published in *Contact Sheet 163: Keliy Anderson-Staley*, by Light Work, in 2011.

1. Walter Benjamin, 'Little History of Photography' (1931), in Michael W Jennings, Brigid Doherty and Thomas Y Levin eds., *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press), 2008, 279-80.

Perspective

WHY LOOK BACK?

Joyce Campbell

The following text is the transcript of a talk given at the Monash University Museum of Art (Melbourne) symposium Archive States, Contemporary Art and the Document, in July 2012.

I'm going to talk about three projects that I've worked on over the last six years that can be seen as functioning as archives: "LA Botanical," "Crown Coach Botanical," and "Te Taniwha."

"LA Botanical" is most obviously, among these three series, an archive. It was my very personal response to the collapse of New Orleans in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and the absolute abdication of responsibility by the US Federal government – which left their people to drown and starve and descend into chaos en masse during the week or so after the initial disaster: I was living with my husband and two-year-old son in Los Angeles at that time, and my very bodily response was to start scanning the landscape for food, medicine, weapons, fuel and the like. Walking in the hillsides around my home I saw real barley we could eat, walnuts, acorns, and then sacred datura and the castor plant – a source of lubricants, industrial and personal, as well as the deadly toxin ricin. Obviously, 14 million other Angelenos would soon have stripped the hills bare, but I was engaging in the kind of survivalist magical thinking that will be familiar to many parents here when I imagined I could save my son by harvesting this somewhat desiccated cornucopia.

"LA Botanical" refers to botanical knowledge that was either held by indigenous communities or which was brought to the city, with the plants, by immigrants steeped in subsistence knowledge. It was a concerted effort to archive wild plants with uses ranging from weaponry to pharmacology to entheogenic plants used for spiritual initiation and insight. I documented 45 functional plants as 14-inch-square glass plate ambrotypes – around life-size – and

exhibited them as glass sheets – ghosts casting shadows against the walls of the gallery. I made a small, cheap book that included all the plants and text that encapsulated my research into their uses. It was a kind of guidebook to the region, although a hazardous and erratic one, and is my most widely disseminated publication to date.

“Crown Coach Botanical” is a survey of the Crown Coach site, a poisoned, petrochemical-saturated industrial brownfield, the former home to the Los Angeles school bus provider the Crown Coach Company, in downtown Los Angeles. I set up an on-site darkroom in an old Chevy truck and made ambrotype images of every species I could find living on that site.

The plants depicted in “LA Botanical” and “Crown Coach Botanical” are not all native. Most are introduced and this is in part their interest for me. They have been brought to Los Angeles – mostly with good cause – by immigrants who needed them, and then forgot why they needed them, so they have become wildings, weeds. People need plants. There is no other way for our bodies to channel the energy of the sun. This is our only connection to life, but we have forgotten it, en masse, in a city like Los Angeles. This is a case of real alienation – from life in its most primary form. These archives are a very limited attempt to undo that alienation.

I used ambrotype – a photographic technique invented in the mid-nineteenth century – to produce the “LA Botanical” images because the invention of the ambrotype process was simultaneous with the ‘invention’ of the city of Los Angeles in the early 1850s. I wanted a technique that would instantly draw my audience into the realisation of the time that has passed since the city’s beginnings. It’s a small envelope of time, but immense change has occurred within that period. The landscape and the ecology of Los Angeles have been utterly transformed, and yet a life force persists on the edges of our control that is really spectacular in its regenerative power.

My use of anachronistic photographic techniques could be interpreted as an attempt, perhaps nostalgic, to transport my audience into the past with a view to critiquing the present. One thing I’d like to make clear is that I don’t regard the primordial as having gone away, or as being truly in the past. Rather, modernity lies on top of it, smothering it, although it occasionally breaks through. As a photographer working on-site I have a great deal of control, but I am also at one level simply recording what is there at that moment. The photographs are of plants – some of them sacred – places and the spirit or wairua that inhabits these places. These are things that are there, in the landscape, now. My intention is to sensitise my audience to what is all around them that is verdant, unruly, persistent and strong – but which is also staggering under the weight of humanity’s collective abuse.

What I discovered while shooting “Crown Coach Botanical” was that the ambrotype technique was allowing me to tap into a spiritualist or psychic aspect of photography. I was confronted every day by unexpected and apparently miraculous manifestations around the plants. I’ve been drawn further into that spiritualist aspect with the “Te Taniwha” work.

“Te Taniwha” is shot in Te Reinga, a rural settlement near the east coast in the central North Island of New Zealand that, despite its isolation, has also been transformed enormously by the modern colonial project. What was temperate rainforest is now largely farmland and many of the plants you see are not native. Many of its people have been economically obliged to leave their customary home, and a good number reside here in Melbourne and also in Western Australia.

But the site is sacred and its sanctity remains physically palpable to anyone who spends any time there. It’s occupied by an ancient water deity or taniwha named Hinekorako who takes the form of an albino eel, but has also manifested as a human woman. She once married into the local family line, before returning to the water, and is the ancestor of everyone in the hapū (or subtribe) known as both Ngāi Kohatu and Ngāti Hinehika. In photographing sites associated with the taniwha I was guided by my collaborator Richard Niania, who is the kaitiaki or guardian of Te Reinga marae and also of all the sacred and customary knowledge passed down through millennia regarding the origins of the land and its people.

I was aware, as was Richard, that sacred objects would result from my attempts to channel the taniwha’s spirit. The ambrotype and daguerreotype techniques that I use are open to such channelling, although so is photographic film. I don’t know that digital photography is useful for this kind of work. It is so malleable, so tuned to the whims of the artist that I don’t know that there is room for any other creative force to intervene, so I don’t use it in these kinds of places.

One thing that connects these three projects is that they are reflections on my various homes. I was raised in the Mangapoike Valley which neighbors Te Reinga where “Te Taniwha” was shot, and which is about 15 miles from the small town of Wairoa. I lived in Los Angeles for almost ten years, for three of those years in downtown Los Angeles, and am married to an Angeleno. As someone who grew up on a farm, I experience both landscapes as verdant living environments, something I hope the work reflects. Beyond my personal connection there are other relationships. Both sites were colonised at a similar moment in the mid-nineteenth century. That history informs both projects and underlies my use of nineteenth century photographic techniques. Los Angeles was incorporated as a city of 1610 people in 1850. From the mid 1860s, Wairoa was the stage for increasingly aggressive British colonial land seizures from Māori. In both cases, indigenous inhabitants experienced huge loss and alienation from the land. I am the product of this colonial process and photography has been a vehicle for understanding it better.

Beyond these personal and historical parallels, LA and Te Reinga share little else. For me, the interest in discussing them together has to do with the tensions between the places where I have lived – the different ways in which the processes of modernity have played out on the landscape: what has survived, what has been erased, what has moved in to take its place in the landscape. Both “LA Botanical” and “Te Taniwha” are attempts to trace a line back to the moment modernity came to a particular place and to take stock of what has come to, or become of, that place since.

Right now I’m thinking a lot about how deeply in the thrall of capital and science (and in their combination, technology) we have become and what that has meant for other forms of knowledge and other forms of life. I’m not discounting the profound importance of scientific knowledge or capital and political conditions, which are in themselves valid, but I am very concerned with the necessity of reinvigorating other knowledge systems which are equally coherent and complete and which come out of a realisation of our embodiment, our corporality, our animality and our visionary potential as it emerges in mythology, fiction, art. I honestly think the survival of our biosphere is at stake when we hand everything over to technology in the hands of capitalists.

The sanctity of some places and things is strong enough that it infuses everything that touches them with some of that quality. The hope is that contact with the sacred, even in a secondary form like photography, might provide the conditions for a kind of truth event – a breaking through of something other than science, capital and, in their sutured form, technology.

Given that we are bleeding the earth dry, and at a terrifying rate, I want seriously to engage in protest – but this is hugely challenging for me and many many others, because everything we make and do exists in this framework of capital. I need something anomalous to break through, and to reveal that there is an outside to capital structures and the atomisation, quantification and exploitation that comes from wedding capitalism to science in the form of technology. Because her origins precede those structures, because she is largely invisible to them, and because they do not believe in or acknowledge her power, the taniwha Hinekorako – who is at once sacred, primordial and corporeal – is such an entity. There are many others and we need them very badly right now.

I’m mostly interested in intellectual worlds largely beyond art – but I do use art – not as some kind of privileged realm, but to produce contexts in which they might make contact across paradigmatic divides. Art provides one potential conduit for that. It’s a realm that’s not completely ideologically closed off. The “Te Taniwha” work is really made with and for a very specific group of people, who come from Te Reinga but have largely been driven by economic forces to live away from their place – their tūrangawaewae. It is an attempt by myself and by my

collaborator Richard Niania, who has the authority and mandate to do so, to preserve an ancient oral tradition at the moment when it is most threatened. The photographs are, at one level, a pretext for this other work to go ahead and, at another level, a gift to someone I loved who died around 15 years ago. That I get to bring these images into contact with others in Australia and, later this year, in Southern California, and in doing so get to bring Richard to both Australia and California to make contact with family members long separated – to reinvigorate the extraordinary intellectual tradition that is their whakapapa and to which they are heirs, and to enter into dialogue with other thinkers from parallel intellectual traditions – that is the really exciting bit for me, and a genuine privilege.

One role that these projects – these artworks that are also archives – might play is to disrupt the overwhelming claim to truth staked out by capitalism sutured to science in the form of technology. This suturing is how everything everywhere gets to be accounted for in terms of capital – that we should save the Amazon because there may be organisms in there that will cure my cancer; that there is an economic calculus to be applied to the survival of that frog versus that condo development; that perpetual economic growth is viable and even desirable – that kind of thinking emerges out of suturing ourselves to capital as truth. So I am developing a way of seeing truth which acknowledges the cohesion and validity of such an analysis, but does not allow it to sit alone and hold total sway.

With this in mind, what strikes me is that truth procedures can not come into contact if knowledge systems have been lost completely. We need to imagine, or to re-learn, how to live outside capitalism if we are going to survive as a species in this biosphere, and we can only get there by trying things out physically and intellectually. Micro-utopian experiments are essential, as is speculative thinking of the kind that gets played out in some science fiction. But we don't have to make everything up from scratch. There is the past to refer to, and there are some people still living in an un-modern present. We can ask those who still remember or who still live outside modern systems how it is that we can live.

The deeper research behind "Te Taniwha" involves Richard interviewing knowledge-holders from Te Reinga, while I have committed to recording and processing these documents. While we're open to everything they have to tell us, many older people have enjoyed describing how they lived in the 1930s, '40s and '50s, when there was no electric power at Te Reinga, when Māori was still the first language (and an ancient and specific dialect was spoken) and when communal marae life was still the norm in that place. This was a community, now still very much within our intellectual reach, that was not based in capitalist practices, and which had a very limited interaction with modern technology. These elders have answered really simple practical questions about how to live a life of subsistence, but also raised deeper ideas about collective life, communal interdependence and family structure. There is a really viable model there, which we are hoping to record and discuss while those who experienced it are still able to describe it.

Knowledge systems can't make contact if they no longer exist. While I didn't know this at the outset, I've started to see a role for this work in supporting those who have knowledge in their bid to manifest and sustain it, and to channel its power.

The great threat of the present moment is the utter dominance of capital, sutured as it is to science in the form of new technologies. This propagates our current condition of hypermobility and with it the potential for the loss of entire knowledge systems. This is what is at stake when people from ancient communities in Aotearoa are drawn out into the deserts of Western Australia to dredge up commodities from which to fabricate iPhones and iPads, technological machines that will bathe us in images of horror, fantasy, ecstasy or release – while burying the very knowledge systems we need or sucking the life out of them at exactly the moment when we need them most – as our biosphere teeters on the brink of collapse.

Perspective

A HOLY GRAIL

Alan Bekhuis

As digital technologies have become more prevalent, so too have 'alternative' photographic processes within art photography. My perspective is that of a modern practitioner of daguerreotypy: the first publicly announced form of photography, which until recently has been at the tail end of the resurgence of historical processes.

Since the daguerreian era (c. 1840-60) there have always been people practicing the art. They are usually drawn to it because of a curiosity about the dawn of photography, or a fascination around the 'mirror with a memory' concept. Until the age of the internet they tended to be isolated individuals, and what community there was did not achieve the critical mass required to propel the practice forward into a fully-fledged art movement. Late nineteenth and early twentieth-century practitioners such as William M. Hollinger, Charles Tremear and Ray Phillips are well known amongst modern daguerreotypists, most of whom experienced the same difficulties one hundred years later in obtaining materials and equipment. Furthermore, in order to perfect the process, extensive practical application is required, whereby the practitioner becomes familiar with the subtle nuances of the method, and the information that can be gleaned from a written account naturally falls short of providing this. These challenges have meant that practising artists have always remained few and far between.

The mid-nineteenth century practice of the daguerreian art reached astonishing technical and artistic heights because of the medium's popularity with the public as well as the industry that it forged. This industry provided high-quality silver plates produced especially for the purpose, lenses made to the specific light sensitivities of the daguerreotype, and an abundant supply of proven chemical formulas. Most of all, though, one could learn first-hand from a daguerreotypist who had achieved a technical plate quality which is still to be equalled in the modern genre. In the daguerreian period in the United States alone it has been estimated that over 40 million daguerreotypes were made. The absence of such an established industry in modern times has been a significant hurdle to artists taking up the practice in the post-daguerreian era, but over recent years this has begun to change.

From the 1970s through to the early 1990s small bands of makers started to emerge. This occurred primarily in the United States and developed out of antiquarian photography collecting. There is a link between the study of the history of photography and the rise in alternative photographic processes, and the world's first photography museum, George Eastman House, in Rochester, New York, has played a ground-breaking role in this area as well as in the development of photographic conservation science. This has meant gaining practical knowledge of the various processes in order to better understand them; to this end, Eastman House has since the 1980s given tuition in nineteenth century processes. Together with the unparalleled technology and manuscript collections at Eastman House, this has fostered the flow of practical knowledge of processes, and many modern-day masters have spent time there.

The internet has played a critical role in the renaissance of the daguerreotype, allowing for the sharing of information, technology and support across the globe. Whereas the pre-internet modern daguerreotypist was an isolated individual, tending to closely guard his or her accrued knowledge and to see the process in technical rather than artistic terms, today's practitioner has access to the rallying point the internet has become, and can easily be informed of gatherings and exhibitions about the process. In 2008 I co-founded the website cdags.org with this in mind. It features artist and technology galleries, a wiki, and an integrated forum. In 2009, due to heavy promotion on cdags.org, 44 artists participated in an international exhibition in Daguerre's home town and resting place of Bry-sur-Marne.

Most recently, efforts to form an active daguerreian artist community have come to fruition in the form of the ImageObject event. Previously, the only event to focus on the contemporary daguerreotype was the Daguerreian Society's annual symposium, and only then as an adjunct to its main focus, daguerreotypes from the nineteenth century. ImageObject is an annual international contemporary daguerreotype exhibition, symposium and trade fair, and is held in New York City at the time of the AIPAD (Association of International Photographic Art Dealers) show. In the late 1990s it was rare to see contemporary alternative processes at AIPAD: such artworks at that time were held somewhat in the same regard as historical re-enactment images. At this year's event, however, I noted they stood out as an obvious trend in the gallery spaces. ImageObject aims to build on this, but in promoting the daguerreotype process and bringing the genre closer to the art market rather than keeping it as an adjunct to the antiquarian collecting market. In this way it will attract more artists to take up the practice, and the resulting sales will make it a self-sustaining pursuit rather than an expensive pastime.

My involvement in this genre came about a result of my background in photographic collection management. In 1997, I undertook a one-year certificate programme at the George Eastman House, entitled "Photographic Preservation and Archival Practice." Learning the historical processes first-hand set me on the path towards becoming an artist. These processes were something quite different from what I had experienced in my home darkroom: they imbued me with a desire to make something with more intimate presence than a black-and-white, resin-coated paper print.

Digital photography as a means of artistic expression leaves me with a sense of a creative void rather than with a feeling for an object that feeds inspiration back to me. I put this down partially to its lack of scarcity and intrinsic value that I believe constitute an artwork. In this respect the daguerreotype becomes the antithesis of a digital image: it is unique, not only because it is both positive and negative, but also because no copy can reproduce the extraordinary quality of the original. With a digital image, any number of copies can be made, all exactly the same as the original. This is less of an issue with a paper print from a positive/negative photographic process, but the product of such a process still offers a far lesser sense of immediacy than a daguerreotype does. When you hold a daguerreotype in your hand – a portrait of an important individual, say – you know that the plate was physically present in front of the sitter when the artist took the exposure. That knowledge brings an intimacy to the viewing: the image as a physical object speaks to the viewer in a way that a photograph, as mere information in a transitory vessel, never can. The daguerreotype, therefore, seems particularly well suited to the fine art photography market: the authenticity of a piece is unquestionable and the intrinsic value is high.

The process of making a single daguerreotype image is a far cry from the ease of conventional photography, or even many of the other 'alt' processes. So much effort is needed to prepare the plate that it is difficult to treat the actual exposure as a spur-of-the-moment undertaking. Practitioners usually take many years to overcome the hurdles of obtaining both the necessary equipment and the experience to cope with the difficulties of the process. Even once that level of expertise has been attained, the making of each individual image is something of a trial, and if the daguerreotypist makes his or her own silver plates it is further exacerbated. Copper plate is cut to size and polished and electroplated with silver; a process that can be a profession in itself. To prepare the plate for sensitisation it must be brought to a fine, mirror-like polish. It is difficult for the uninitiated to judge the high level of polish required to form the light-sensitive silver salt through exposure to the halogens of iodine and bromine. Only through trial and error will the appearance and subtle qualities of the necessary polish become apparent.

I need approximately three hours to prepare a single plate for sensitising, starting from mill finish (unlike most practitioners, I used cold-rolled Sheffield plate, which requires some extra steps). The halogens used need to be of the right concentration, and this working stock must be constantly monitored and adjusted, usually the day before shooting. The amounts of iodine and bromine applied to the plate must be proportionally correct: this is determined on the day by first shooting a test plate. For a test plate and, for example, two plates for exposure, this means at least a day's worth of polishing prior to the day of shooting. In exposing a plate to a scene, the exposure time is also judged based on experience. The ISO of a plate is about 0.02, but other factors will also determine the exposure, so practical knowledge plays an important role. Development of the image in the mercury pot and the

amount of gilding is also determined by experience and constant inspection. At any time in the preparation process, a calculation error in sensitisation, exposure, development and/or gilding can ruin an exposure. Alongside all this effort and concentration on technical matters, the daguerreotypist of course also needs to pay attention to artistic concerns. Common exposure times for my daguerreotypes range from two to 20 seconds, making still lifes a more attractive subject matter.

I present my daguerreotypes in high-quality, traditionally made enclosures. This presentation is not intended to serve as historical re-enactment, but to expand the experience of the image as a unique and revered object. The authentic presentation of a modern image, I feel, lends it a timeless quality. My plates are sealed in French-style passe-partout that have reverse painted cover glasses as matte windows. These in turn are presented in finely made wooden cases covered in Moroccan goatskin leather; all made by methods outlined in an 1854 catalogue.

The presentation of an image as an object of reverence – essentially a taonga – dovetailed well with my series on Māori culture. As Māori historian Amiria Henare has said, taonga represents the "connective tissue between generations." Other forms of taonga play an important part of portraiture as well: bone and greenstone carvings and precious woven cloaks were often worn historically by sitters for their portraits. Furthermore, the use of portraiture at tangi reflects the importance given to images as objects. All of these aspects come together in one of my favourite kuia portraits that I produced. Rangianewa, from the local hapū Ngāti Wāirere, wore the family taonga important to her for her sitting – a korowai and a bone hei tiki. I feel the portrait captures her grace and dignity, and as a daguerreotype it transforms what could have been a mere photograph into taonga. Rangianewa passed away later that year and I offered the portrait to the family. They asked me to keep it for the year following her death, and in accordance with tikanga they also asked for it to be kept hidden from view for that year. I stored it in a safe and presented it to the family at the unveiling of her tombstone at Taupiri urupā.

Looking to the future, I have recently updated my fuming boxes, mercury pot and camera setup in order to be able to shoot a larger format (that of whole plate, which is 6.5 x 8.5 inches). To me, this is the largest practical conventional format for the daguerreotype; beyond that, reflections make viewing difficult, especially if the image is hand held. Modern daguerreotypy is at an exciting turning point, and in organising the ImageObject event I hope to expand its popularity at a time when mainstream photography continues to move even further away from its origins.

Essay

STAGING THE MEDIUM IN BEN CAUCHI'S THE EVENING HOURS

Kevin Fisher

This essay was provoked by the 2012 retrospective of Ben Cauchi's photography: *The Sophist's Mirror*, and the subsequent book on the artist titled *The Evening Hours*.¹ The images were produced using the collodion wet plate method, which originated in the middle of the nineteenth century, and they are fixed either upon glass (ambrotypes) or metal plates (tintypes).² Cauchi has been working with this process for over a decade. The content of his images vary among studies of objects and anatomy, non-descript interior and exterior spaces, tools of the artist's trade, and self-portraits of the artist. Many of the images (and their titles) involve overt and subtle references to phantasmagoria, such as the levitation of objects and practices of alchemy.

Cauchi's devotion to an archaic form of mid-nineteenth century of photography, already outdated and largely abandoned two decades before the "invention" of cinema, strikes a chord with Rosalind Krauss's evocation of the power of obsolescence within the political economy of Walter Benjamin. His contention is that in becoming obsolete the medium is released from its developmental vector as a commodity within industrial capitalism and restored to a set of open possibilities that attended the utopian moment of its creation.³ Indeed, the first image in the "plates" section of *The Evening Hours* – showing the side of the building that houses the artist's studio – is titled "Utopia".⁴

I want to argue that this is more than coincidental and reflects the way that Cauchi's art creatively elaborates the utopian moment of which Krauss speaks by forging a dialogue between obsolete medium and subject matter. It is in this sense that I want to situate his work within what Hollis Frampton has referred to as the practice of metahistory. Although the term bears no direct relation to Hayden White's historiography – describing a mode of artistic production as well as writing – its critical thrust (to problematize the assumption of a natural evolution of media) is complimentary.⁵ For Frampton, "the metahistorian . . . is occupied with inventing a tradition, that is, a coherent, wieldy set of discrete monuments, meant to inseminate resonant consistency into the growing body of his art. Such works may not exist, and then it is his duty to make them."⁶ In this respect, metahistory is a fiction, but one which embraces its own constitutive act in juxtaposition to other received histories in which the presumption of natural evolution conceals a most unnatural selection by forces of the market.

Frampton's metahistory can thus be viewed as the creative correlative of Benjamin's project of "Ur-history" whose objective, according to Buck Morss, "was to rescue the historical objects by ripping them out of their developmental histories – of law, religion, art, etc. – into which fictional and falsifying narratives they had been inserted in the process of their transmission".⁷ Accordingly, Frampton welcomed the moment at which "cinema passed into obsolescence and thereby into art," an event "it is customary to mark . . . at the advent of video."⁸ Although Frampton referred to himself and other contemporary filmmakers specifically as metahistorians of film, as a theory of practice it was not restricted to any particular medium or, especially, any received definitions of medium-specificity. He once defined film as "whatever will pass through a projector" which of course includes photography.⁹ One of Frampton's best-known films, *Nostalgia* (1971) incorporates his own still photography and traces his personal development from photographer to filmmaker as a means to metonymically re-enact the "birth" of cinema, and question its incorporation of photography, which, echoing Krauss and Benjamin, he describes as "conceived in the belly of the muse, but later plucked from her ashes and nurtured in the thigh of commerce."¹⁰

If every metahistory qua fiction cannot avoid a return to origins, the move is signaled in Cauchi's *View from the Studio Window* (2005), which overtly references what is widely regarded as the first photographic image fixed to a substrate, Nicéphore Niépce's *View from the Window at Le Gras* (1826). Similarly, Cauchi's *The Start of It All* (2008) presents the fractured groundglass of an old camera mounted upon its stand: evoking severally the figure of the window as the governing metaphor of photographic indexicality; the material substrate to which early photographs were fixed; and the (literal and cultural) place – on this quasi-easel – that painting previously occupied. While Frampton's metahistory of cinema reflexively incorporates photography in films like *Zorn's Lemma* (1970) and *Nostalgia*, Cauchi's metahistory of photography references the instruments of painting, as in *Artist's Tools* (2006) or *White Lie* (2003), as well as the hand and gesture of the artist – as in *Hand* (2004) and *Self Portrait (A Gesture)* (2005), which the automatism of photography is credited with displacing, and in *Mirror* (2009), whose standard of perfect mimesis photography strove to emulate, but has now surpassed and leaves emptied in a vacated mise en scène.

Metahistory must also confront the fiction of the medium with rival fictions. On this point, I want to reflect on how Krauss's assertion of obsolescence takes shape within her critical genealogy of discourses on medium specificity in the visual arts from the 1960s onwards. She writes disparagingly of the "militantly reductive modernism that mandated absolute flatness in painting as a means to restore the medium to its material specificity by purging it of all extraneous elements."¹¹ However, in its attempts to escape the appropriation by the culture industry, the practice of painting:

contracted. . . and refracted by the prism of theory. . . had now become an object just like any other three-dimensional thing. . . The paradox was that the autonomy to which painting had aspired – being about nothing but its own essence. . . had proven chimerical, and that abstract art's very modes of production – executed in serial runs, for example – seemed to carry the imprint of the industrially produced commodity object, internalizing within the field of the work its own status as interchangeable and thus as pure exchange value.¹²

Thus the notion that "the medium [is] made specific by being reduced to nothing but its manifest physical properties" levels the art object to the very state of base materiality to which capitalism aims to reduce the world.¹³

Benjamin's ambivalence towards photography within capitalism was a product less of its own commodification (which also had progressive effects in terms of the destruction of aura as cult value) than its reification of a world of things reduced to base materiality, a reified abstraction that prepared the world for commodification.¹⁴ Curiously, Benjamin would refer to this deceptive power of the image as "phantasmagoria," emphasising its productive relation to what it pretended to reflect as a fact of nature.¹⁵ Jean Baudrillard would take the concept of phantasmagoria further by arguing that photography (and photographic-based cinema) produce and precede the extra-representational world of objects whose existence as things in-themselves it pretends to represent and verify.¹⁶ This conjuring act, he asserts, provided a crucial support for the reductive empiricism that informs both industrial capitalism and Western science. In this sense photography can be said to have a recursive relationship to the modern concept of the medium as material substrate. It may be somewhat responsible for producing the reductive objectification of the medium that Krauss critiques.

If photographic indexicality ironically conceals the medium's most persuasive (however disavowed) and enduring phantasmagoria – the conjuring of an objective world – I want to suggest that Cauchi's avowed foregrounding of overtly phantasmagoric themes provides a countervailing critical fiction within his metahistory. Specifically, the embrace of phantasmagoria recaptures the ontological possibilities of early photography as a medium able to see beyond the physical/empirical world rather than becoming a slave to its positivistic duplication. For example, the plate *Dead Air* (2003) depicts an object that resembles a needle or stylus suspended vertically within a cloudy glass chamber. The vessel recalls both Victorian aesthetic display and the sort of early modern scientific device used to isolate empirical phenomena. I'm thinking specifically here about the way such chambers were used for the experimental production of a vacuum, in which birds and other animals would be asphyxiated and resuscitated, as represented in Joseph Wright of Derby's paintings *An Experiment on a Bird in the Air Pump* (1768).¹⁷ The paradox attending to the empirical demonstration of an absence qua void situated the vacuum chamber at the boundaries of the scientific and the paranormal, and it was popular as a parlour trick. In Cauchi's work, the dead air within the chamber is also allegorical of the atmosphere within the photograph. Although oxymoronic in literal terms, the "dead air" captured within this apparatus of empirical science is nevertheless reified, made to exist. The work is thus a reflexive parody of experimental demonstration, which reveals the disavowed power of science to produce the phenomena it pretends to observe – a sleight of hand by which it deceives itself. The magically suspended object beneath the glass within the image foreshadows the later positivistic function of the photographic image as a container that produces its own laws of physics as *Self-Portrait with Hovering Cloth* (2005) and *Ghost* (2005). The plate titled *Pseudo-Levitation* (2003) takes on particular significance in this regard, as a book suspended above a table clearly reveals threads connecting it to the hand above. As a self-conscious performance on the artist's part, the image is a faked fake – a double negation. The aim again is not to prove but to parody. If it is parodying anything it is the folly of the later photographic conceit to attempt to reveal the empirical truth of the world without any contrivances, props or (in this case) 'strings attached.' If modern photography functions as witness to the autonomy of objects within the gaze of empirical science, it also reciprocally draws validity from the science of its material and technical base, in relation to which the medium is conceived as passive substrate. This faith in photography as grounded in the science of light and chemistry is problematised by Cauchi's invocation of alchemy (the Other of nineteenth century science) in plates such as *Potions* (2007) and *Mixing Solutions* (2003) that depict the combination of chemicals required for the collodion process. The relation of emulsion to medium is the subject of the plate titled *The Evening Hours* (2008). In this image a chemical bottle lies turned on its side on the floor with the cork nearby.

Here the *mise en scène* works to conflate the medium and the representation it enables, closing off any objective externality or referent. It is like M.C. Escher's *Drawing Hands* (1948) in which two hands reciprocally draw one another into being, but in this case as if the emulsion on the surface of the photograph had spilled out of the bottle from within its represented space. As elsewhere, Cauchi signals a recursive and mutually constitutive relationship between representational space and extra-representational referent, but here explicitly links it to the question of medium and materiality. In so doing, the image draws attention to a prominent feature of all Cauchi's work: the impression of a preserved fluidity and soluble depth within the emulsion despite its fixity. The effect is heightened through tension with a contrary recurring element in which the emulsion appears to separate and curl away from the substrate (especially around the margins of the images), as if refusing to alloy with it. Materiality itself stages a counter-reductive allegory in which the medium demonstrably enacts its non-identity with the substrate.

The redemptive power of Cauchi's work as metahistory is inextricable from his investigations of the specificity of its medium. However, the sense of the medium that can be derived is of a very different modality from the reductive materialism that both Krauss and the work itself critique. Indeed, the notion of medium specificity operative in Cauchi's work is much more closely aligned with an alternative movement within 1960s visual arts that Krauss refers to as the "filmic model," which she describes as phenomenological and aggregative.¹⁸ The model developed within structural film circles (of which Frampton was a part), and asserted that the medium of cinema (as an experience) could not be isolated within any individual component of its apparatus. As Frampton observed, "the act of making a film, of physically assembling a filmstrip, feels somewhat like making an object... but the instant the film is completed, the 'object' vanishes [and] the phantom work itself transpires upon the screen."¹⁹ What Krauss calls the "phenomenological vector" of structural film would attempt to construct an experience that was specifically enabled by the interdependence of the diverse elements of the apparatus, and bring this entire correlation to reflection within the viewing process.²⁰ She focuses on Michael Snow's film *Wavelength* (1967), in which the only camera movement is a steady 45 minute-long zoom. As film phenomenologist Vivian Sobchack points out, the zoom is quite distinct from the tracking shot insofar as it does not express an objective, physical movement through space, but rather enacts an intentional movement analogous to the act of attention. As she writes, "it is the film's view, not its material 'body,' that changes its address and situation in the world..."²¹ In *Wavelength* the phenomenological vector is expressed as a sort of optical and intentional corridor through space-time.

If Snow's film dwells on a form of movement that is both specifically cinematic and non-objective, Cauchi's photographs, I wish to contend, produce a type of duration that is also non-objective and specific to the obsolescence of his medium. I refer here to the long duration of exposure, whose redemptive powers Benjamin located in the way "the procedure itself caused the subjects to live their way into, rather than out of the moment... They grew into the picture."²² To the rhetorical question put by Geoffrey Batchen in the opening essay of the *The Evening Hours*: "Could this 'growing into' be the ultimate subject of Cauchi's art?"²³ I would answer an emphatic 'yes'. Moreover, as an expression of becoming and duration it generates a variation of the non-objective corridor realised in Snow's *Wavelength*, but visible only as trace of a slight blurring that results from the effort to keep camera and subject as still as possible for the duration of exposure. The effect is detectable in many of the images, though most demonstrably in the series titled *The Doppler Effect* (2010), and especially the self-portraits where it seems deliberately cultivated. The above title is instructive as it refers to an inherently temporalised phenomenon (discovered just a decade before the collodion process was developed) in which waves emitted from an approaching source compress together into a higher frequency, as often demonstrated by the sonic distortions of passing trains. Analogously, what the images present is not a frozen moment but a compressed palimpsest of lived duration, accessible to us in the duration of our own reception as a sort of supplementary dimension that stands in an ambiguous relation to space. The phenomenon is expressed in more schematic form in the plate *Dead Time* (2007) in which a levitating circular shape, blurred around the edges, oscillates between object and opening/vortex.

In the context of Krauss's second definition of medium specificity, we might well ask along what phenomenological vector does this corridor lead? Inadvertently perhaps, the graphic expression of the length of exposure (this "living in") effects the analytic separation of duration from movement by isolating that fourth direction (or fourth

dimension) of time in which everything is always moving even if standing still (if such a thing were possible). It is reminiscent of Muybridge's collodion prints of waterfalls which Frampton described as "tesseract," the graphic extension of a three dimensional object through the fourth dimension of time. "What is to be seen," he writes, "is not water itself but the virtual volume it occupies during the whole time-interval of the exposure."²⁴ However, by contrast, Cauchi's work resists mapping this effect onto any of the three directions/dimensions of space. *The Doppler Effect* thus manifests an expression of time de-linked from the illusion of spatialised movement that both the directional blur and the moving image would, according to Bergson, impose upon the experience of time.²⁵ It is also distinct from the later quick exposure, which reified the illusion of the static instant that Benjamin would contrastingly describe as "living out of the moment". Indeed, for Bergson, it is from out of this reified abstraction of the static moment that the cinematic illusion would "live" the fiction of time as movement: "we take snapshots, as it were, of the passing reality, and... we have only to string them on a becoming abstract, uniform and invisible, situated at the back of the apparatus of knowledge... [to] set going a kind of cinematograph inside us."²⁶ It is in this sense that Cauchi's work constitutes a photographic precursor of what Deleuze describes as "the time image" in which movement is subordinated to the experience of non-linear time, rather than time being subordinated to linear movement.²⁷

Within industrial capitalism this reduction of time to fixed instants also provides the correlative of the reduction of reality to objective matter. As D.N. Rodowick argues, "the rationalization of space, and the expression of time as space, renders the image susceptible to conversion as money, making it a warrant of capital."²⁸ Hence the critical force of Frampton's *Nostalgia* as metahistory, which uses the cinema to depict the burning of a series of photographs (unrelated except for the fact that they were all taken by the filmmaker) while narrating associated memories, rather than re-animating the photos to reconstitute those memories. For Cauchi as for Frampton, the metahistorian works simultaneously with and against the grain of the medium's automated aspects as a means to release it from the determinations of market forces within its industrial development. This discussion would seem to resonate Roland Barthes' insistence that any reduction of photography to its instrumental or material basis obscures the essence of the medium as time.²⁹ Although several reviewers of Cauchi's work invoke Barthes, particularly in relation to his thoughts about death and the punctum, I feel the application is not straightforward. For example, none actually identify the punctum, that detail of contingency and unintended affective charge, within his specific images.³⁰ Indeed, I would suggest that this is because Cauchi's work actually deters this type of analysis, which depends on the unintended element within the *mise en scène* or affect of the human subject. Cauchi's images are the antithesis of spontaneity and routinely foreground props and items of staging associated with studio photography. Objects do not seem to naturally belong in their spaces, but are rather placed there as in a temporary container: Figures are often cloaked, obscured and turned away from the camera. Even the self-portraits in which Cauchi faces the camera are decidedly affectless. All of this cuts against the personalizing thrust of Barthes' punctum, bidding us instead to look behind and in back of things, deflecting attention back to the medium itself.

There is, however, according to Barthes, "another punctum from the 'detail'... which is no longer of form but of intensity, the lacerating emphasis of the noeme (*that-has-been*)."³¹ For example, in Alex Gardner's photographic portrait of Lewis Payne prior to his execution in 1865, Barthes doesn't assign the punctum a specific location within the image, but asserts it as a general function of the temporal paradox: "he is dead and he is going to die."³² But even in this adjusted account of the punctum, the effect is still tied to the past-ness of the subject. In Cauchi's work, by contrast, it is not the figures that reach us from across time past through the medium, but a dead medium and its "dead time" that is resurrected in the present. In this sense it not only intermediates between different historical moments, but also invites the viewer to "live into" distinctly historicised temporalities. Here is where the redemptive power of the work lies.

THE OLDER PHOTOGRAPHY GETS, THE YOUNGER IT FEELS¹

Courtney Johnston

We live in an age of near ubiquitous connectivity, of computer/camera combinations that we carry around in our pockets, of liking and retweeting and pinning, of documenting and publishing our lives online, specifically through photographs. What underlies this seemingly primal need to capture and share our own likenesses and our impressions of the world?

In 1970, Edwin Land, the founder of Polaroid and the inventor of the instant camera, recorded a promotional film for the company. Laying out an idea he'd been working on for quarter of a century, he stands in front of a brand-new, empty factory.

"We are still a long way," he says, "from the camera that would be, oh, like the telephone: something that you use all day long... a camera which you would use not on the occasion of parties only, or of trips only, or when your grandchildren came to see you, but a camera that you would use as often as your pencil or your eyeglasses."²

This camera will be "something that was always with you," he says, and it would be frictionless. Point, shoot, see. It would be as simple and as natural as – and here he reaches into his coat – as taking a wallet out of your pocket, holding it up, and pressing a button.

In the late 1940s, cameras still only went with you on special occasions. You took your photos and sent your film to a processing plant, and received your prints in a week. In November 1948 Polaroid released the Land Camera. It developed its own film inside the camera in about a minute, the back of the camera popping open and letting you peel the negative away and expose the print. The first batch of cameras, expected to meet demand for weeks, sold out in hours. By the 1970s, amateur photographers were shooting over a billion photos a year.

Polaroid didn't just invent a new technology: they introduced us to a new style of casual documentary photography. In 1974 Land wrote:

A new kind of relationship between people in groups is brought into being... when the members of a group are photographing and being photographed and sharing the photographs.

It turns out that buried within us... there is latent interest in each other; there is tenderness, curiosity, excitement, affection, companionship and humour... We have a yen for and a primordial competence for a quiet good-humoured delight in each other.³

We live, of course, in the future Land described. We carry computers in our pockets that let us take photos wherever and whenever: we are photographing and being photographed and sharing the photographs, effortlessly. Every day, we are consciously crafting and embellishing our self-image, our personas, through the images we make and share. We have come to see every moment of our lives as something we can capture, record, pin down, pass on. More than this: the act of framing up our view is the way we grant our attention to a moment, mark it as and make it memorable.

- 1 *The Evening Hours: Ben Cauchi*, ed. Aaron Lister (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2013).
- 2 For a short history of the collocation process in relation to Cauchi's work, see Geoffrey Batchen, "The Way of All Things," in Lister, *The Evening Hours*, 12.
- 3 Rosalind Krauss, "A Voyage on the North Sea": *Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1999), 41.
- 4 Lister, *The Evening Hours*.
- 5 See Hayden White, "Introduction: The Poetics of History," in *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1973), 1-42.
- 6 Hollis Frampton, "For a Metahistory of Film: Commonplace Notes and Hypotheses," in *On the Camera Arts and Consecutive Matters: The Writings of Hollis Frampton*, ed. Bruce Jenkins (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2009), 136.
- 7 Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), 218.
- 8 Frampton, "For a Metahistory of Film," 136.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 137.
- 10 Hollis Frampton, "Some Propositions on Photography," in Jenkins, *On the Camera Arts and Consecutive Matters*, 6.
- 11 Krauss, "A Voyage on the North Sea," 9-10.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 10-11.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 7.
- 14 Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in his *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 225-26.
- 15 Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing*, 144.
- 16 Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulations* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1983), 48.
- 17 See David Solkin, "ReWrighting Shaftesbury: The Air Pump and the Limits of Commercial Humanism," in *Early Modern Conceptions of Property (Consumption & Culture in 17th & 18th Centuries)*, ed. John Brewer (New York: Routledge, 1995), 599.
- 18 Krauss, "A Voyage on the North Sea," 24-25.
- 19 Frampton, "For a Metahistory of Film," 138.
- 20 Krauss, "A Voyage on the North Sea," 25.
- 21 Vivian Sobchack, "The Active Eye: A Phenomenology of Cinematic Vision," *Quarterly Review of Film & Video*, 12:3 (1990), 25.
- 22 Walter Benjamin, "Little History of Photography," in his *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technical Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*, trans. Edmond Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter; eds. Michael W Jennings, Brigid Doherty and Thomas Y Levin (Cambridge MA: The Belknap Press, 2008), 280.
- 23 Batchen, "The Way of All Things," 14.
- 24 Hollis Frampton, "Eadweard Muybridge: Fragments of a Tesseract," in *On the Camera Arts and Consecutive Matters: The Writings of Hollis Frampton*, ed. Bruce Jenkins (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2009), 27-8.
- 25 Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (New York: MacMillan, 1954), 322.
- 26 *Ibid.*, 322-3.
- 27 It can only be a "precursor" insofar as for Deleuze the time image depends on montage, which exploits the interval between frames, whereas the photographs within *The Doppler Effect* series compress intervals through montage within the frame. For a discussion of Deleuze's concept of the "time image," See D. N. Rodowick, *Gilles Deleuze's Time Image* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).
- 28 Rodowick, *Gilles Deleuze's Time Image*, 236 n.13
- 29 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill & Wang, 1980), 20-21.
- 30 See Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 43-48.
- 31 *Ibid.*, 96.
- 32 *Ibid.*

Artist and technologist James Bridle has described how digital photography has changed our perception of events, and of time itself. Once, there was distance between the image-making process and the image-viewing process. No longer:

This is instant now. There's this kind of instant review. You can take a photo and see back instantly. It instantly makes that moment that just passed a thing that happened, a thing in the past, a memory. If our bodies are machines for negotiating space, our minds are machines for navigating time, and digital photography and technology in general is aimed squarely at our idea of time and our place in it. And there's no stronger view of that than photos and the ways in which they're presented back to us and change our perceptions of ourselves in time.⁴

In the same talk, Bridle touched on a topic of much discussion and derision: the instant filter effects available through various phone apps and social media sites, but exemplified by Instagram.⁵ The dozen or so filters available through Instagram tend to add a nostalgic haze, a beaten-in vintage effect, to these digital snapshots. You can add pinkish or goldish overtones, turn your photo sepia, make the colours super-saturated and add a scratchy border, all with a few dabs of your finger. Suddenly, an empty bus stop is the saddest place in the world, a sunset is the harbinger of the apocalypse, your bare feet with their painted toenails standing on the green grass look better than bare feet have ever looked. The ease of the filter – the way that with a grasp of the basic fundamentals of composition and a few dabs of your finger you can produce works that rival, in visual effect, those of trained photographers – has attracted the ire of those who value the traditional challenges of photography.

Author Teju Cole, writing about the cheapness of these post-processing effects, stated: "The result is briefly beguiling to the senses but ultimately annoying to the soul, like fake breasts or MSG-rich food." He continued:

All bad photos are alike, but each good photograph is good in its own way. The bad photos have found their apotheosis on social media, where everybody is a photographer and where we have to suffer through each other's "photography" the way our forebears endured terrible recitations of poetry after dinner. Behind this dispiriting stream of empty images is what Russians call *poshlost*: fake emotion, unearned nostalgia. According to Nabokov, *poshlost* "is not only the obviously trashy but mainly the falsely important, the falsely beautiful, the falsely clever, the falsely attractive." He knows us too well.⁶

It is precisely this false nostalgia that makes Instagram fascinating. Digital photography eliminated the elapse of time between image taking and image viewing. It is truly instant. And this immediacy has thrust us into an era not only of instant broadcasting ('Look at me NOW'), but also instant archiving.

Exactly as we fix our attention on the present moment, we are recording it and assigning it to the past. Social media – and the social sharing of photographs, especially these tricked-out insta-retro images – now makes us see the present as a potential documented past. We move through the world like butterfly catchers of experiences and events, plucking them from the air and pinning them down, admiring them in flight only insofar as we're trying to get the light right.

Some commentators argue that the rise of the faux-vintage photo points to an attempt to harness the power of the past – the emotional punch of nostalgia – to make our photos, and by extension, the moments of our lives they record, more important, more substantial. There is for some a sense that this is *cheating*. But recently Aaron Straup Cope, previously an engineer at Flickr, suggested that if the team behind the photo-sharing site (renowned for its strength of community) did anything wrong, it was to let people think their photos weren't 'good enough' to upload. Reflecting on this, he wrote:

... all it took to get all those people excited about the art and the craft of photography again – in ways of seeing the world as something more than a mirror – were those stupid filters.

Those stupid filters are really important because they re-opened a space in which people could maneuver. These are new things not least because I'm guessing that a sizable chunk of Instagram's user base was born after the 1970s and so there is no nostalgia to be asserted. The past is just a medium.

Sometimes the past is not a rejection of the present but a good and useful screen through which to look for patterns, to look for things we'd never have been able to see in the past.⁷

I think these photos are important. I think they are important not for what they depict, necessarily, but for what they say about the culture that took them. If we don't capture the mundane and inane alongside the important, we lose the texture of people's everyday lives.

I have had some vigorous conversations with colleagues in the web and cultural world about collecting and preserving and re-presenting the world's digital photos. Admittedly, this is a firehose that no-one is quite sure how to suck on. But when it comes to collecting the digital world, I think it's better to collect and then figure it out than to fear the complexity and risk losing out.

I also think that our heritage institutions generally do a poor job of collecting the present moment. It is hard to tell what will be important in 50 years' time, and grabbing the present requires energy and fleetness of foot. It is easier to hunt the slow-moving past than the blink-of-an-eye present.

So here's my wish. I want to be able to tweet my photos to the National Library, and have them automatically passed through to the digital collections. We can have a little code phrase, if you like – we can sign up in advance and agree to a nice open Creative Commons license too. And who cares if what I've shot is my coffee or a car crash, a sunset or a street fight. If I bother to send it to you, you can assume I've decided it says something of some importance. Just make it easy for me to help you build a picture of tomorrow's past.

But let us circle back to the starting premise of this train of thought. Has the internet killed photography? And what does it mean to look at Ben Cauchi's determinedly analogue photographs in light of the digital photography explosion?

The more I reflect, the more I wonder whether the tsunami-like nature of digital and social photography has any relevance to Cauchi's work. What I think it *does* do is accentuate one of the major critical risks for his career, which is to fetishise the process.

Cauchi himself is very aware that this aspect of his work – a highly seductive physical process that is skilful, laborious, alchemical – is both the hook that brings people in and a potential sinkhole. An extended version of an interview Guy Somerset did with him for the *Listener* had 80 questions: over a quarter were about his process, equipment, cameras, chemicals.⁸ In the interview they do discuss this trap – where the process becomes the end, the point of discussion and focus and interpretation, rather than a means to an end.

A friend said to me, when I was talking to him about all this, that it feels to him that the older photography gets, the younger it feels. We have the cameras Edwin Land talked about, the cameras we use as often as we use pencils – arguably far more often – but also we have the curious, affectionate, humorous network he spoke of. In an article I read recently, a professionally trained photographer went with a naysaying journalist to an Instagrammer meet-up in London, centred on an exhibition of printed Instagram images. And the photographer said this:

Looking at all the images together like this, you notice a huge repetition. And it's not as if the repeated images are even particularly interesting, they're things you see every day – a London phone box, or a burger – only everything's in black and white, bar the red of the phone box or the logo on the plane wing, or whatever. What you do start to see is examples of the basic principles of photography.

It's as if acquiring the app is like taking the first couple of months of my GCSE photography course. Users start learning to use the Rule of Thirds and depth of field and that kind of thing, which is why everything looks like a college project. For example, we were told to take pictures of tube walkways in college because they're full of straight lines, which are pleasing to the eye, and you see thousands of photos of tube escalators and platforms on Instagram all the time.

... What I don't think most users understand is that, to create a good image of something millions of people see every day, you have to go the extra mile and approach it from a different angle, rather than just standing in front of it, buying a new £3 filter and snapping away.⁹

First, it was a lightbulb moment for me to think that Instagram has encouraged millions of people to master the basic vernacular of photography: to educate themselves in why certain set-ups are harmonious or jarring; to explore how the affect of an image can be manipulated through colour and tone. But second, I disagreed with his conclusion. I would argue that these photographers – amateur, vernacular, social, call them what you will – are engaging with the world in a more observant and intense manner than they used to. Just as teenagers today write more than ever before, our contemporary camera-brain is learning to see the world differently, and our visual databases are expanding.

- 1 This article is a version of a talk given on the occasion of the exhibition "Ben Cauchi: The Sophist's Mirror" at City Gallery Wellington, 19 October 2012 – 17 February 2013, <http://citygallery.org.nz/exhibition/ben-cauchi-the-sophist-s-mirror>. (The talk's original title – only ever intended to be a throw-away – was 'Has the Internet killed photography?') A fuller version of this talk, which includes more about nostalgia and also delves into projects that play with this idea and also what technologist and writer Robin Sloan calls the 'digital flip-flop', is available at <http://best-of-3.blogspot.co.nz/2013/02/photos-nostalgia.html>.
- 2 Cited in Christopher Bonanos, "It's Polaroid's World – We Just Live in It," *The Wall Street Journal*, 9 November 2012, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424127887324439804578108840573155684.html>.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 James Bridle, transcript of "Waving at the machines," keynote lecture given at WebDirections South 2011, <http://www.webdirections.org/resources/james-bridle-waving-at-the-machines/#transcript>.
- 5 Instagram is a social photography app that lets you take photos, apply filters to them, then share them in various ways. Distinctively, it confines photos to a square format, reminiscent of Polaroids, rather than the rectangular format native to digital cameras.
- 6 Teju Cole, "Dappled Things: Pinkhassov on Instagram," *The New Inquiry*, 23 September 2012, <http://thenewinquiry.com/blogs/dtake/dappled-things-pinkhassov-on-instagram>.
- 7 Aaron Straup Cope, "Stories from the New Aesthetic," notes from a panel discussion at the New Museum, New York, October 2012, <http://www.aaronland.info/weblog/2012/10/08/signs>.
- 8 Guy Somerset, "Ben Cauchi Interview – The Long Version," *New Zealand Listener*, 3 November 2012, <http://www.listener.co.nz/culture/art/ben-cauchi-interview-the-long-version>.
- 9 Jake Lewis, quoted in Clive Martin, "I Still Don't 'Get' Instagram," *Vice Magazine*, January 2013, http://www.vice.com/en_uk/read/i-still-dont-get-instagram.

Perspective

HALIDES OR DOTS AND DASHES?

Brian Scadden

Silver; the bane of countless indigenous South Americans who happened to be living on mountains of the stuff when the Spanish conquistadors arrived, became the miracle metal to early photographic pioneers who found that its properties heralded an amazing era which has lasted over 150 years.

The wet-plate process invented by Englishman Frederick Scott Archer was a negative/positive process which utilised silver halides with glass as a support for the collodion light-sensitive layer. This gave sharper, clearer negatives than the paper negatives produced by the calotype process, in a fraction of the time. The main drawback with this process was that the sensitised collodion lost sensitivity very quickly. This meant that a portable dark tent had to be close at hand for preparing and developing the image. Plates were coated, sensitised, exposed, developed and fixed all within a few minutes – hence the name 'wet plate.'

Negatives produced by this method could be contact-printed back onto albumen paper, or if slightly underexposed and viewed upon a black background these ambrotypes would appear as a positive image.

The advent of dry plates in 1880 spelt the end of the wet-plate era. Glass plates could be loaded into double holders, and exposed and developed weeks or months later with no adverse effect on the image. The wet-plate process lived on into the twentieth century in technical applications or as a seaside novelty, but its heyday was over.

The revival of the process really began in the early 1980s, along with many other 'archaic' processes such as platinum, cyanotype, kallitype, gum bichromate and daguerreotype. Although digital photography was in its infancy, photographers worldwide were already beginning to explore the origins of traditional image-making.

I began dabbling in the 'black art' of wet-plate photography in the 1980s, as I worked for the National Film Unit laboratory and had ready access to an endless supply of chemicals. Although I had trouble sourcing all of the necessary ingredients I slowly obtained enough to be able to make passable images. One book was all the literature I had to teach myself this demanding process. Slowly I gained experience in the process, but even now after nearly 30 years of practising the art I still can't claim to know all of its secrets.

Equipment was another problem which needed to be overcome by a budding collodion artist. As a collector of early cameras and equipment, I had plate cameras which I could adapt to take wet plates without any modifications impacting on the value of the apparatus. This solution was fine to get me started, but later I started making cameras and equipment purpose-built for my needs. A portable dark tent, followed by a darkroom wagon, was my answer to having a darkroom on location. Several cameras followed, with the largest being a 20" x 24" 'Behemoth' built for Ben Cauchi, a collodion artist and long-time friend from Wanganui. This camera is so big that it needs a trailer to transport it to the chosen location. Really only designed as a studio camera, it is currently with Ben in Germany while he attends a 12-month residency in Berlin. I joked with him when it was completed that if ever he was caught in a blizzard, he could always take shelter inside the camera.

People who want to pursue this process must be prepared to either source original cameras or purpose-build equipment to suit their needs. The same applies to the chemicals required. Collodion, the key ingredient in the wet-plate process, is highly flammable and cannot be transported by air, making supply a problem. Many of the necessary chemicals are volatile or toxic, so extreme care must be taken in their use. One cannot journey along this road without expecting many pitfalls and frustrations along the way.

Over the past year, I have been amazed at the interest generated worldwide in wet-plate photography. When I started, there was only a handful of 'crazy' folk worldwide practicing the process. Now that number has increased to hundreds, and interest is growing at an amazing rate. Last year I ran one wet-plate workshop, whereas this year the number will be at least eight. It seems that every week I am fielding enquiries regarding tuition or the availability of chemicals.

Social media sites abound with groups dedicated entirely to wet-plate photography, and instruction in the process can be had through any of the countless sites on the internet. Although there can be no substitute for hands-on tuition, budding wet-platers can access online tuition via sites such as YouTube, with this sort of exposure to the process only serving to fuel the growing interest in the medium.

So what is causing this renewed interest in such an old and difficult process? Well, I firmly believe that with technology advancing at such a rate, people are beginning to rebel against the tide and have the desire to take back some control before these advances remove the craft from so many facets of our daily lives. Photographers around the world are tired of enabling an electronic device to take complete control of an art form which should remain the domain of the photographer.

Applying this purely to wet-plate photography, there is nothing quite like seeing an image appear when the developer is poured upon a plate which you yourself have prepared from a handful of chemicals and a piece of glass. There is an indescribable sense of accomplishment as you gaze upon a totally self-made image which not only is hand-crafted, but has a beauty all of its own.

It never ceases to fascinate me how this form of photography has such an effect on people. It is almost addictive in its grasp on newly initiated, rather bewildered practitioners. Fingers blackened from silver nitrate and eyes glazed over from the effects of the strong alcohol, ether and collodion fumes are regarded as a badge of honour by those who have fallen under the spell.

When George Eastman introduced the Kodak camera in 1888, photography came within reach of millions of people, where before it had been practiced exclusively by professionals and the wealthy. The camera was sold loaded with 100 shots and was returned to the factory for processing and reloading. The advertising slogan, 'You press the button, we do the rest,' got the message through as to the simplicity of the new apparatus. This was the beginning of popular photography and hardly any home could be found without a film camera by the mid-twentieth century. Of all the photographic processes and supports for holding emulsion, roll-film has enjoyed the longest and most successful career – that is, until now.

Kodak introduced the first true digital camera in 1986, little knowing that this would have such a dramatic impact on their future business and recently take them to the verge of bankruptcy. Since then, digital imaging has had such a profound effect on photography that film itself is now considered almost archaic.

I must confess that I do own several digital cameras and that the majority of images I shoot are digital. The ease with which perfectly focussed and exposed photographs can be produced is mind-blowing. We now have cameras and telephones which can be held above the photographer's (a loose term) head, which will not only focus and correctly expose the image, but will even compose the photograph and only trip the shutter once everyone in a group is smiling!

This is not to say that digital photography is not an artform in its own right. Modern digital cameras and particularly DSLRs are capable of truly awesome results, many times in situations where film would struggle. In many cases, digital images are superior to those captured on film. These cameras are truly the tools for future image-making and will continue to evolve and improve. However, there are still those among us who appreciate the organic, handmade quality that traditional processes bring with them.

Until recently I was Head of Laboratory at Peter Jackson's film facility in Wellington. I have been involved in motion picture laboratory work since 1976 when I started work at the National Film Unit. Now the laboratory has gone – a casualty of changing times and a victim of technological change. Film is now considered obsolete and only the die-hards are left to keep this medium alive. For all the arguments extolling the virtues of digital capture, there are still those among us who love the 'organic' look of film.

Digital images have a very pixelated structure, unlike film and wet-plate images which have random or very little grain structure. Sure digital images are clean, crisp and blemish-free, but I feel the way we view the world around us is becoming too structured, too defined, almost too clean. Film and alternative processes help keep us focused on what can be achieved outside of the technological storm that is engulfing us.

Many of us are now relying too heavily on digital cameras without knowing even the basics of how these instruments capture an image. This is not to say that we all need to be techno-wizards, but we do need to understand the tool to be able to maximise its full potential. The instruments that we use for wet-plate photography are really no more than a hollow box with a lens attached. They have no shutter and very often little or no aperture control. Yet with these basic cameras we can create images that are both visually stunning and totally unique.

I feel that returning to the grassroots level of image-making gives the photographer a sense of power and control which is lacking in both film and digital capture. You feel that you are the master of your photographic destiny, the alchemist, the maker of images, a 'keeper of light.' The satisfaction that this gives is what drives us to persevere with these early processes.

Looking at motion picture capture, there are valid arguments against film. Film-stock and processing costs, combined with distribution overheads all conspire to make film uneconomical – but there is still that random grain, organic look that makes film unique. With laboratory services now being taken over by Archives New Zealand, we at least can still look forward to continuing negative processing in Australasia. Film is not dead and will continue to appeal to those who wish to pursue that natural, photochemical look that has appealed to filmmakers for decades.

There is also the question of longevity. I have wet-plate and daguerreotype images in my collection that are over 150 years old, but appear as good as the day they were made. Archives New Zealand and The New Zealand Film Archive have in their collections nitrate movie films which are over 100 years old and although most are not in perfect condition, they are still viewable. Contrast this to digital files, CDs and DVDs which, if not backed up and migrated every few years, run the very real risk of data being lost completely. Currently, there is no digital format that matches film and some of the 'archaic' processes for archival permanence.

This piece is being penned by the now Head of Picture at Park Road Post Production, managing the digital team working on the second *Hobbit* film. Yes, I have gone to the dark side but still maintain the view that capture on film will make a comeback in the next few years or as long as film stock is available. We are constantly receiving enquiries from individuals, film schools and production companies requiring film processing. These are people who recognise that shooting on film is an expensive proposition compared with digital, but who also cherish the organic look of film and who will go on shooting it, teaching and gathering converts as long as the negative is available. Much like the revival of vinyl in the music industry, in some cases newer isn't necessarily better to everyone.

I do believe that alternative processes like wet plate will continue to thrive and attract those who value the art of making an image by hand far above the technological marvels that are poised to engulf our craft.

Perspective

PRODUCTION PROGRAMMES: CAROLINE MCQUARRIE'S "ARTIFACT"

Mark Bolland

In the 1830s, the introduction of machines using Jacquard cards into the lace-making industry enabled the mechanical production of lace, and this programme for production became a key ingredient in Charles Babbage's development of the Analytical Engine, the forerunner of modern computers. Contemporaneously, William Henry Fox Talbot, the inventor of the first positive/negative photographic process, was making 'photogenic drawings' of

pieces of lace by placing them directly onto paper that had been coated with a light-sensitive emulsion. Also at this time, Samuel Morse was creating the first instruments for electric telegraphy. These more or less simultaneous developments represent the first emergence of all the ideas, desires and technologies for the production and dissemination of digital photographic images. They also represent a moment when 'technical images' and machine-produced artefacts imitated and then superseded their handmade predecessors. These new kinds of objects, images and communications quickly became accessible to many, as they are programmatic and the programme is a model that can be shared.¹

The lace photographed by Talbot and reproduced in his book *The Pencil of Nature* (1844) was machine-made and it was presented with a text that elucidated his new, also mechanical, 'drawing' process and explained the difference between a direct contact print – a negative image – and its positive copy. In an essay on the past and future of both photography and computing, Geoffrey Batchen has suggested that Talbot's reproductive technique, the contact print or photogram, "rendered the world in binary terms, as a patterned order of the absence and presence of light."² Batchen has also highlighted the 'pixelated' structure of the material revealed by Talbot in a picture of lace magnified one hundred times.

A famous story of early responses to Talbot's images of lace is equally revealing: Talbot's friends thought that he was playing a trick on them, and were sure that he was showing them the lace itself, not a reproduction. This is photography's equivalent of Pliny's story of the competition between Zeuxis and Parrhasius, wherein Parrhasius produced a painting so realistic that it fooled the expert eye of Zeuxis. Both stories mark a moment of progress in the Western quest for ever more realistic representations, but it is photography's ability to reproduce that sets it apart. Talbot's negative process provided a detailed lifelike image that could be reproduced infinitely, and this enabled images to become mass-produced commodities. These were the first truly technical images, produced by a programme. These programme-produced commodities had the power to convince us that the thing reproduced was real, because the image is, in some senses, caused by the object – a trace of the real world.

This 'trace' of reality is evident in the accidents of early photography whereby a necessarily long exposure often led to a small movement of the subject, causing a blur to be registered instead of the sharp definition that was the desired result. Such moments are extremely revealing, pointing to the mechanism by which the image was created rather than the subject. It is these instances, when the transparency of the photographic image is denied, that allow us to reflect on the processes that are now so commonplace and ubiquitous as to be almost invisible.

The contemporary equivalent of Talbot's contact printing process is the digital scan, and the digital 'artifact' that disrupts the scanned image by revealing its coloured pixels is akin to the accidental blur. These 'artifacts' are produced in the same way as a blur, by movement during a long exposure, as in a camera image. But the scanner image, like the contact print, is devoid of perspective and, as with the contact print, it makes explicit the 'directness' of the photographic image. This directness has historically suggested that the photograph's meaning is the same as its cause, and that no decoding is required. The presence of the 'artifact' suggests otherwise, unveiling the process of encoding and decoding that takes place during the creation and reception of photographic images, revealing their presumed naturalness as illusory.

Caroline McQuarrie's work "Artifact" takes mass-produced objects that mimic the handmade and reproduces them on the scanner, drawing a parallel between the objects and the process. The pictures suggest that we look again at the aphorisms reproduced on the scanned objects and find a tension between their mass-produced, clichéd, messages and the handmade, homely style they imitate.

1 The phrase 'technical images' and the accompanying information are derived from Vilém Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* (London: Reaktion Books, 2000), 14.

2 Geoffrey Batchen, "Obedient Numbers, Soft Delight," in Geoffrey Batchen, *Each Wild Idea: Writing, Photography, History* (Cambridge MA and London: MIT Press 2001), 164-75 at 167.

Artist's Statement

THE GOLDEN YEARS

Ted Whitaker

This is a look, a style, a pattern that didn't previously exist in the real world. It's something that's come out of digital. It's come out of a digital way of seeing, that represents things in this form. The real world doesn't, or at least didn't, have a grain that looks like this.'

James Bridle

Noise, grain, altered colours and square frames are fundamental visual traits of amateur filmmaking from a time before I was born. Instamatic and motion picture film cameras have never been used conventionally in my lifetime, nor have they been easily accessible. I am familiar with digital image-making, still and moving: a process that is second nature for my generation and culture. Instagram, the popular smart-phone application, arrived with golden hues to the mobile phone 'app' market in 2010 and has increased dramatically in popularity ever since. Instagram is well established as a leader in forming a contemporary aesthetic for vernacular photography, with strong nostalgic ties. As an Instagram user, I participate in this image forum, sharing immediate visual experiences with minimal post-production manipulation. With a limited range of slap-on filters and vignettes, Instagram is directing a visual continuity, contrasting with the infinity of digital photographic manipulation available through other programmes.

Classic surfing films of the 1960s and 1970s such as Albert Falzon's *Morning of the Earth* (1970) and Gary McAlpine's *Children of the Sun* (1968) have contributed to the aesthetic adopted by Instagram filters. These vibrant and playful depictions of surf culture create an odd sense of faux nostalgia, nostalgia for something never experienced. Captured in vivid colours on Super8, 16mm and 35mm celluloid, these 'authentic' films illustrate the style of an era. Photo-apps like Instagram recapitulate the preceding aesthetic to 'enhance' a seemingly banal digital image.

My short surfing film *A Neo-Modern Aesthetic* (2013) adapts the visual, performative and user functionality elements of an Instagram aesthetic to a surfing culture context.² The dialogue in the film is taken from text responses attached to images on Instagram. Streaming this fragmented language of one-liners, accompanied by verbal 'hashtags', highlights the mutterings and new language born from mobile-device communication. The audio track recreates exchanges between two users, perhaps oceans away from each other, or living in the same neighbourhood.

A process common to 'appographers' is the post-production edit, widely regarded as integral to creating a successful image: the instant slap-on filter is considered a beautifying element. *A Neo-Modern Aesthetic* simulates an Instagram colour grade, replicating the exact filters of Instagram.

While paying tribute to the 'look' of 1970s surfing films, *A Neo-Modern Aesthetic* is a reaction to the nostalgic concept of the 'golden years' through a re-contextualisation of the earlier films' visual properties. The opening credits establish more than those responsible for making the film. Interfaces from iOS and Photoshop, embedded in the title sequences, establish a specific period of technological development. The operating system interface featured here has already been superseded, thus locating the film in a specific period in time.

Instagram can no longer be regarded as a derivative of analogue photographic techniques, but now stands alone, describing a new visual and textual culture. The aesthetic that shapes a visual culture is derived from its machines. From the hand-held digital device to sophisticated post-production tools, design determines the image that results.

1 James Bridle, "Waving at the Machines," Web Directions South, Sydney, 11-14 October 2011, <http://lanyrd.com/2011/web-directions-south/shyrk>.

2 *A Neo-Modern Aesthetic* was selected for the 2013 inaugural Aotearoa International Film Festival, one of two films representing Aotearoa.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE FUTURE

Dan Estabrook

My long-standing passion for early photographic processes may have begun with the simple joys of alchemy and arcana – a way to let a frustrated painter make photographs by hand – but after more than 20 years I have come to believe that the work creates the worldview. The further I explore the methods of the nineteenth century, the more I find a new perspective on time, and my place in it. The photographic past is relatively close (think of the painters and the caves of Lascaux!), but already much of it is gone and fading fast. As we move rapidly into a new form of the medium, one which favours impermanence and speed, I have discovered that I am not, in fact, the one left behind. Far from being lost in the past, I am facing the future with the clearest eye.

It has never been in my interest simply to revisit or revive the processes of the nineteenth century – to make a 'perfect' calotype or albumen print, for instance. Nor do I wish to build a completely believable fiction of the past, each actor in a tableau seamlessly costumed and coiffed to match the period. No, the past I want to evoke is the broken one I first saw with my own eyes – the small boxes of found tintypes fondled and scratched at the flea market, or the odd groups of eclectically framed photographs in the pass-through galleries of the museum, barely saved from disappearing. This is a history that has decayed and fallen into disrepair in the intervening century and a half, and it seems to hold secrets worth working out. I like to imagine I could scan the nameless faces in those old tintypes for lost knowledge, or find codes hidden in the arrangement of foxing on the surface of a *carte de visite*.

Yes, the desire to find a readable pattern in the stains and spots of an old print seems absurd at first, but isn't this a closer approximation to our subjective experience of time? We sift through the slippery facts of the past, piecing together an incomplete puzzle from fragments, looking for order and using our best guesses to fill in the blanks. We call this History, and it shifts behind us, changing course with each new theory, each new scrap, dependent as much on our present and future biases as on any artifacts uncovered. It is not solid ground.

My work starts here, trying to make evident the passage of time, not only in evoking a past that slips and sways, but in acknowledging the fact that things fall apart and fade. Using the techniques and formulae of the nineteenth century, I create my own imaginary studies and still lifes, fabricated from an incomplete history. They are like strays from the canon, too imperfect to keep, too personal to show. With fake stains and rips and folds, these objects aim to make clear just how far we are now from those early times. My past didn't actually exist in the past: it is a re-invention of a time that never was. I want you to be fully aware that you're looking at a fake relic, in order to see that history itself is artificial. Surprisingly, a credible illusion is enough. Browned paper says 'old' just like a photograph says 'real,' no matter how much we know this to be false. Some visceral trigger is pulled nonetheless, and when it works, time shifts around us.

One of the fundamental flaws with a digital lifestyle is simply this: we have bodies, and these bodies age and die. It seems easy to forget that computers and hard drives and circuits are also physical things, just as subject to decay, and sometimes more so. By keeping our heads in the clouds we risk a wider and more evanescent loss – one hard drive crash and your archive could be gone. On the computer, our artwork is constructed from the same irreducible bits of information as our emails, to-do lists and taxes. The snapshots from a friend's birthday become equal to our most profound images, as well as to the spam in our inbox, flattening the meaning and importance of it all, and all

at once. Anyone who's seen an old science fiction film with its wild predictions about the future – our present – knows how old ideas about what is to come quickly seem ridiculous. Chasing the apparent future with each new technological advancement means constantly becoming obsolete: in fact, you've just bought the past. Should we be chasing obsolescence or accept the simple fact that the only thing sure to come is entropy? What better way to speak of the future, than in the only language it speaks?

As I work, each piece becomes a sort of *vanitas*, created as a reminder that I live in a physical world (despite some digital claims to the contrary) and that as long as I have a physical body, I will be interested in physical things. Even a paper photograph has weight. The materials I use – raw chemistry on paper, paint and pencil marks – are designed to exist as our bodies do, and they will last even longer than us. For many years after today's newest technology becomes an inert pile of plastic and metal, these images will continue to recall my time and my pleasures, linking not only our present moment but the knowledge of 175 years, passed forward to our ancestors in the future, where they belong.

POLAROID SX-70: AN ERA OF INSTANT PHOTOGRAPHY

Gary Blackman

In 1972 the Polaroid Corporation released its SX-70 camera and integral print film which, within a few minutes of pressing the button and without further intervention by the photographer, created a colour print in full daylight. This astonishing process not only captured the public imagination, it also attracted seriously inclined photographers and artists who saw its potential as a means of expression. The eight centimetre square image, framed within a white plastic surround, and with its enamel-like surface and distinct colour quality, was in the hand a unique object to be treasured like a small icon or magically coloured daguerreotype. And curious photographers soon discovered and exploited the initial susceptibility of the image to manual manipulation.

SX-70 cameras arrived in New Zealand in 1973-74. I bought a used camera in 1978 and relished the experience of seeing a full colour image emerge within minutes before my eyes, potentially a work of art in miniature. The square format suited me. The challenge was to create imaginative images within a small compass. By 1977 SX-70 photos were being shown in photo galleries in New Zealand, and soon in one or two public galleries – in 1982 the National Art Gallery invited Janet Bayly, Jane Zusters and me to show SX-70s under the title "Polaroids." Instant photography had been established as a niche medium of photography. At the end of 2003 McNamara Gallery surveyed the Polaroid SX-70 in New Zealand by exhibiting work dating from 1977 by 13 photographers in a show entitled "Tracing Polaroid SX-70." This survey did not foresee the obsolescence of this form of instant photography when in 2008 Polaroid ceased making SX-70 print film, 36 years after its introduction. Thus, as with other innovations in photographic technology, an era of photography has ended: the era of Polaroid SX-70 instant photography.

Artist's Statement

SHALL I KNIT YOU ONE?

Rachel H.Allan

I am neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object.

Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (14)

Photography is always changing. A state of flux is ongoing. How we as photographers choose to present our work has powerful ramifications for the final reading.

"Shall I Knit You One?" was exhibited at Dunedin School of Art Gallery in April 2013. The exhibition consisted of 1120 digital chromogenic prints, nine electrophotographic books, six black-and-white Polaroids, three donor Polaroids, five tintypes, three digital four-colour prints, three colour Polaroids, one digital tintype, one digital Polaroid and one chemical-digital tintype hybrid that combined to create an auto-fictional narrative that explored the melancholic relationship between that which is being photographed and that which is viewed, what is shown and what is hidden.

"Shall I Knit You One?" was an exercise in time and in mechanics. It sought to delve into the place where fetishistic compulsive wants implement obsession, and love and death prosper:

Embedded within a dialogue where photographic history and processes are common currency, I find myself inevitably speaking about the mechanics of what I have made and how it relates to or effects my contemporary process. I am aware that I produce melancholic works tinged with nostalgia – but by amalgamating the antiquated with the app, my work speaks to contemporary discourse on the use and integration of new media within photography.

The Polaroid can be thought of as a modern interpretation of the tintype. Both are unique forms of photography that produce no discernible negative. However, the Polaroid process is more recognizable today than its predecessor. Recently, both these relatively instant forms of photography have been transformed into hipstamatic applications. By engaging with obsolete technologies and placing them alongside modern interpretations, the works in this exhibition point to the ever-changing world of photography.

Anxieties about new technologies are frequently abated by engaging in time-honored chemical-based photography, but something new is created by combining the two. Something distinct. Historical and contemporary processes amalgamate and become something different, something not easily recognisable.

Discrete and analogue sit side by side and meld together to create a chemical-digital Polaroid-tintype, with a physical ground that is anchored in historical processes yet producing a final image that is digitally acquired. A simulated tintype and remixed Polaroid confuse the viewer further by mimicking or pretending to be something they are not.

The *Ladydrive* series consists of 1120 digital chromogenic prints. The term 'ladydrive' refers to a motoring trip undertaken by two women. A ladydrive has no set destination. It is an exercise in modern-day wandering. All that is required is a full tank of gas and a willingness to explore, albeit from the safety of a vehicle. Ladydrives also demand a soundtrack and cigarettes.

Through time and with subsequent reproductions, all images, like our memory and recall, become somewhat distorted. There is a fondness toward the past that is perverted by incomplete recollections. In *Ladydrive* I employed particular 'film' applications that produced hues similar to those in Kodacolor prints, particularly when the couplers and thermal dye were unstable. Then the weakest dye, cyan, produced a reddish tone as it moved towards its complementary hue.

When viewing *Ladydrive* as a whole, the images merge together and become waves of colour. This directly references the progression of Kodacolor prints into stable images. However, the images are not nostalgically driven. Although they allude to the past through their colours, their creation is entirely contemporary photography.

Ladydrive has been exhibited in a number of ways, with each variant producing a specific response in the audience or viewer. An impetuous 10-year-old boy saw the work as relating to spectrums, radio waves and channel surfing. There was no mention of Polaroids or nostalgia. This critique, and others by the under-thirties, has led me to believe that the work has a generational aspect. It seems that the youth see it for what it is – they don't insist that it be about modes or method. They don't see nostalgia. They see the images.

"Shall I Knit You One?" was ultimately an ode to photography. It asked viewers to become invested in a dialogue about the photographic process by encouraging them to inquire into the origin of the prints they were viewing while providing a discernible narrative within a non-specific framework.

Artist's Statement

STATEMENT

Andrew Beck

A displacement of space and volume through the photograph.

Scope Photography Contributors' bios

Vikky Alexander is one of Vancouver's most acclaimed artists. Her work has been recognized within Canada and internationally. She is a professor in the Visual Arts Department at the University of Victoria. She lives in Vancouver and is represented by the TrépanierBaer Gallery in Calgary, Alberta, Canada.

Rachel H. Allan is an artist based in Dunedin, New Zealand, where she has recently completed an MFA at Dunedin School of Art.

Keliy Anderson-Staley is an assistant professor of photography at the University of Houston. Her work is in the collections of the U.S. Library of Congress, Museum of Fine Arts-Houston and the Portland Museum of Art (Maine). Her book of tintype portraits, *On a Wet Bough*, was published by Waltz Books in 2013.

Eugène Atget (1857-1927) was a French photographer whose photographs of Paris have, posthumously, become some of the most widely published and influential in the histories of the medium.

Geoffrey Batchen teaches the history of photography at Victoria University of Wellington in New Zealand.

Andrew Beck is an artist who lives and works in Auckland, New Zealand. He has exhibited widely since completing his MFA at Massey University School of Fine Arts, Wellington, New Zealand, in 2010.

Alan Bekhuis is a daguerreotypist artist and artisan. He is known internationally as the premier maker of traditional daguerreotype enclosures. He is also a founding co-editor of Cdags.org (the international community website for contemporary daguerreotypists) and founder of ImageObject.com, an annual exhibition for contemporary daguerreotypists internationally held in New York City each year.

Gary Blackman is a photographer based in Dunedin, New Zealand. He has been photographing and exhibiting his photographs for nearly 70 years, and his photographs have been collected by several major institutions in New Zealand.

Mark Bolland is an artist and writer. He is studio co-ordinator for photography and electronic arts at Dunedin School of Art, Otago Polytechnic, New Zealand.

Joyce Campbell is an interdisciplinary artist working in sculpture, photography, film and video installation. She is a senior lecturer at Elam School of the Arts, the University of Auckland, New Zealand.

Ben Cauchi is an artist from New Zealand, currently living in Berlin, Germany. He has exhibited widely and has work in many public collections. A monograph of his work, *The Evening Hours*, edited by Aaron Lister was published by Victoria University Press in 2013.

Dan Estabrook has exhibited widely and has received several awards. He is the subject of a recent documentary by Anthropy Arts, and is represented by the Catherine Edelman Gallery in Chicago, Daniel Cooney Fine Art in New York and Jackson Fine Art in Atlanta. He lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.

Kevin Fisher is a senior lecturer in the Department of Media, Film & Communication at the University of Otago. His essays have appeared in the anthologies *Meta-Morphing* (2000), *The Lord of the Rings: Studying the Event Film* (2007), *Cinephilia in the Age of Digital Reproduction* (2008) and *Māori Media in Aotearoa/New Zealand* (2013) as well as various journals.

Jai Hall is an artist and writer based in Dunedin, New Zealand. She works with alternative photographic processes, sculpture and drawing. She publishes a monthly zine, made using a typewriter.

Courtney Johnston is the director of the Dowse Art Museum. Courtney has a long association with Digital New Zealand, a project based at the National Library of New Zealand and with the National Digital Forum. She blogs at www.best-of-3.blogspot.com and is the visual arts commentator for National Radio's Nine to Noon programme.

Matthew Lindsey is a writer and lecturer in photography at University for the Creative Arts, Farnham. He is currently writing for Wiley-Blackwell's Companion to Photography due for publication in 2014.

Caroline McQuarrie is an interdisciplinary artist and a Lecturer in Photography at the School of Fine Arts, College of Creative Arts, Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand.

Brian Scadden has worked in film since 1976 and currently works for the post-production company Park Road Post. He has been working with wet-plate photographic process since the 1980s. In 1998 he built a small portable darkroom styled on a 19th century photographer's cart, which he uses to travel New Zealand demonstrating of the wet-plate process. Anyone wanting further information on alternative processes, particularly wet-plate photography, can contact the author at brian.dag@xtra.co.nz or visit his website <http://brianscadden.co.nz>

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Ted Whitaker graduated from the Dunedin School of Art with a BFA in 2010, and has exhibited regularly since then. Ted is the curator for the DART (Dunedin Augmented Reality Art) Collective and editor of Black Wax surf culture zine. He teaches photography and electronic arts at the Dunedin School of Art.