Her Glass Skin: Photography and the Sense of Touch
Declaration of Originality

I, …………………………………………………….. hereby declare that the thesis here presented is the outcome of the research project undertaken during my candidacy, that I am the sole author unless otherwise indicated, and that I have fully documented the source of ideas, references, quotations and paraphrases attributable to other authors.
Her Glass Skin
Acknowledgements

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For Disa.
Abstract

Cathryn Vasseleu writes of the exquisite tactility of light via an evocation of sensations such as penetration, dazzlement, ecstasy and pain. This concept, encountered early in my candidacy, became something of a technical guide to the operation of my camera, a methodology for practice-led research through which the sensuous qualities of light might inform the making of a photograph.

Such close attention to the exquisite nature of light altered also my processes of observation. By attending to the behaviour of light in the photography of Francesca Woodman and the materiality of her imagery, my research finds that Woodman's photography taps into a significant moment in the history of contemporary studio glass and the early years of the renowned Pilchuck Glass School. This aspect of Woodman's practice, which is absent from the immense body of literature concerned with her photography, calls for a deeper reading informed by theories of light that may be shared equally between the materiality of both glass and photography.

The photographic works that are the outcomes of my studio research take this finding as a point of departure, deepening my exploration into the iconography of Woodman's imagery by passing through Michael Fried's kaleidoscopic readings of Caravaggio's paintings, representations of the body and grace in Ancient Roman and Renaissance art and feminist theory. In this way my studio practice shifted from subjects of the sublime and of landscape, spiralling tightly inwards before coming to rest in a poetic re-configuration of self-portraiture.
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There is a widespread assumption that if one is interested in the visual, one's interest must be limited to a technique somehow 'treating' the visual. Thus the visual is decided into categories of special interest: painting, photography, real appearances, dreams and so on. And what is forgotten – like all essential questions in a positivist culture – is the meaning and enigma of visibility itself.¹

Introduction

The photographic works that are the outcomes of my practice-led research feature a series of composites: pairs of black and white photographs printed together so as to evoke visual resonances and harmonies between disparate imagery (fig. 1). Bringing these works together reflects the processes through which significant relationships are established between individual works of art. In this way, my thesis, my photographic works and the exegetical writings that support them, became an intricate tapestry through which practice, process and materiality has been interwoven with theoretical and historical considerations. Never linear, my writing at all times attempts to embody the kind of thinking that occurs both in the studio and out in the field. The structure of my exegesis is therefore presented in a somewhat unconventional form that more accurately reflects my research methods, privileging praxis above all else.

The premise of my research seeks to establish an approach towards photography that is acutely conscious of the material interaction between light and the lens as an object made of glass. The Glass Skin, an exhibition of contemporary studio glass curated by Helmut Ricke, Susanne K. Frantz and Yoriko Mizuta in 1994, explored the material properties of glass as a constellation of unique physical characteristics that extend beyond the malleable, transparent and refracting qualities that allow glass to operate as an optical device. Within the context of this exhibition and the accompanying catalogue essays,¹ the skin of glass is discussed as having a surface depth that

¹ Helmut Ricke, Susanne K. Frantz and Yoriko Mizuta, The Glass Skin, (Corning Museum of Glass, Kunstmuseum Dusseldorf,
troubles the clear demarcation between an interior and an exterior space, a “transition point” that allows for a “third phenomenon” or simultaneous perception both of an inside and an outside.

The glass skin is described not simply as a surface but “also a wrap,” a boundary, many layered like human skin, “where everything comes together.”

The material traits inherent to the glass skin can be described as raw, opaque and serene, a constellation of surface properties that may be perceived simultaneously activated and obscured by subjectively experienced reflections of light:

“There is a strange allure to a material that is a mere carrier of light and that must be violated in order to be exploited... Any shift in plane – a scratch or a bruise, a bulge, or a smudge of oil – is sufficient to bend and scatter the light, pulling attention back to the dermis and to light itself.”

Borrowing from contemporary glass theory to inform my approach towards the camera, the glass skin of the lens takes on the capacity to “sensitise and evoke” sensations of light (figs.2-3). Raw, opaque, and serene, these material properties evocative of corporeality may then be taken further as metaphors of vulnerability and illusion to disrupt conventions of photographic representation such as objectivity, transparency and the invisibility both of the camera and of the photographer.

Hokkaidoritsu Kindai Bijutsukan, 1999).

2 Ricke, Ibid. 9
3 Frantz Ibid. 12.
4 Ricke, Ibid. 9-11.
5 Ricke, Frantz, Mizuta, Ibid. 7.
6 Frantz, Ibid. 12.
7 Ricke, Ibid. 10.
8 Ibid. 7
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One of the artists featured in the exhibition The Glass Skin.
My project is informed by a dovetailing between such material thinking and Cathryn Vasseleu’s writings on the tactility of light via evocations of the sensations of vision such as penetration, dazzlement, ecstasy and pain. Embodied by the constellation of properties inherent to the glass skin, this concept of light’s tactility became something of a technical guide to the operation of a camera; a methodology through which a heightened sense of the material properties of light might inform the making of my photographs. Concerned with Luce Irigaray’s feminist engagement with the philosophies of vision of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Emmanuel Levinas, Vasseleu’s text figures light as a fabric or texture woven from the visible and invisible qualities of lux and lumen: the visibility of light as it illuminates the material world and the invisibility of light as it travels through air and space. On visible and invisible light, Vasseleu writes that the distinction between lux and lumen:

"is an ancient one. Lumen refers to the physical movement of invisible rays of light whose perfect linearity is the essence of illumination and requires no organ of sight. The passage of lumen is transparent and imperceivable. On the other hand, lux refers to the phenomenon of light, or as light as it is experienced in sight, composed of colour, shadow and visible qualities. Generally speaking lux is the subjective experience of light."

Understood as such, light becomes inseparable from things that are seen, from the embodied perception of vision and from the circumstances of light’s cultural and historic meanings. In this way Vasseleu figures light as the language and materiality of visual practices and an historic site within which active intervention is called upon.

Establishing a concept of light as an exquisite tactility informed by The Glass Skin and the Textures of Light, my research asks:

What are the implications of the sensations of vision to the materiality, language and history of photographic practice?

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10 Vasseleu, Textures of Light, 129.
11 Ibid, 128.
12 Ricke, Frantz, Mizuta, The Glass Skin, 4-15.
13 Vasseleu, Textures of Light, 12.
Broken into three chapters, part one of my exegesis surveys the theories, visual practices and technical processes significant to my project. Spiralling outwards from Vasseleu's writings on vision and touch towards Teju Cole's essay on the photographic representation of black skin, my first chapter, **Light Theories**, traces these concerns throughout the literature that informs my project. Like the significance of *The Glass Skin*, my second chapter, **Light Practices**, then elaborates upon material thinking that may be brought across to photography from outside; a form of cross pollination that draws upon my position as an outsider to photographic practice via contemporary works of art that play with light and/or skirt the peripheries of photography. My third chapter, **Light Works**, outlines the technical basis of my studio and field work by exploring how Vasseleu's *tactility of light* informs the operation of my camera.

As Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt discuss in their writings on practice-led research, "the outcomes of creative practice cannot be predetermined." Early in the course of my candidature, an original finding significant to art history brought about an immense shift in the direction of my project. Part two, **Her Glass Skin**, traces a connection between the photography of Francesca Woodman and the birth of contemporary studio glass practices, effectively rewriting a number of early texts that underpin the literature on Woodman's photography. As already noted, Vasseleu figures light both as the language and materiality of visual practices and an historic site within which active intervention is called upon. Drawing upon the shared significance of light to the materiality of both glass and photography, this chapter seeks to bring multiple meanings to a pair of Woodman's untitled photographs, both of which turn upon an object made of glass that is held by Woodman at the centre of the imagery. A process that lead my research towards entirely new and unanticipated areas of enquiry, this chapter also establishes the subject matter of my own photographs which seek to decode certain iconographies and the embodied nature of Woodman's imagery via the latent presence of Caravaggio's brush and the use of mirrors which can both be traced throughout traditions of self-portraiture.

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15 Vasseleu, *Textures of Light*.


17 Ibid 128.
Continuing to mine art history for representations and evocations of light, the photographic works that are the outcomes of my project articulate certain arabesques that, over the course of my candidature, began to crystallise in the gaps that practice-led research attempts to illuminate and address. These photographic works, supported by the third and final part of my exegesis, *Praxis*, embody and continue research undertaken for the previous chapter. Drawing upon representations of the body and grace in Ancient Roman and Renaissance art, feminist theory, Michael Fried’s kaleidoscopic readings of Caravaggio’s paintings, and the relationship between vision and sound in Hans Blumenberg’s philosophical text on the history of light, my photographs shift from the original intentions of my project and spiral tightly inwards; from representations of landscape towards a poetic re-configuration of self-portraiture, and explore the implications of the sensations of vision – of penetration, dazzlement, ecstasy and pain to the materiality, language and history of photographic practice.
Part 1
Catheryn Vasseleu’s *Textures of Light* is the key text to which my practice-led research refers. This chapter follows a number of threads that interweave certain texts, allowing the theoretical concerns of my research to take on a mailable, material quality accessible to studio practice and material thinking. Beginning with Hans Blumenberg’s *Light as a Metaphor for Truth*\(^1\) – a text to which Vasseleu’s writings on the textures of light refers, this survey of the literature that informs my research will be followed by an exploration of visual practices in the chapter *Light Practices* | *Material Works*.

Hans Blumenberg’s *Light as a Metaphor for Truth*,\(^2\) figures the blinding experience of light as the founding principle of all mysticism, a *contact* through which perception passes from the eye to the ear via the sensation of touch.\(^3\) This *contact* is echoed in Catheryn Vasseleu’s evocation of light’s texture which explores vision and touch via Luce Irigaray’s concept of the simultaneous sensations of feeling and felt.\(^4\) Irigaray similarly informs Amanda Boetzkes’ writings that bring a “sensuous contact” to her *Ethics of Earth Art*,\(^5\) a text that, like Liz Wells’ *Land Matters*, makes explicit the distinctions between photographic representations of landscape and the use of photography to document earth art practices.\(^6\) Disruptions to the conventions of photographic representation such as the transparent presence of the camera/photographer, are then explored via Melissa Miles’ *The Burning Mirror*,\(^7\) who’s methodology\(^8\) is informed by Elizabeth Grosz’s analysis of the

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2. Ibid.
3. Ibid 45.
relationship between nature and culture, and Jacques Lacan’s writings on light and the gaze. Drawing on the feminism of Julia Kristeva and the phenomenology of Gaston Bachelard, Wells evokes a similar process of disruption via “the ‘feminine’ operation of poetics to disrupt,” an affective sensibility that is also found at the juncture between Catherine de Zegher’s Inside the Visible, an Elliptical Traverse of Twentieth Century Art, In Of and From the Feminine and Susan Best’s Visualizing Feeling, Affect and the Feminine Avant-Garde. Evoking the sensation of touch to disrupt the conventions of photographic representation by highlighting the relationship between light and skin, brings this chapter to a close with Teju Cole’s writings on the photography of Roy DeCarava and the Caribbean philosopher Édouard Glissant. In A True Picture of Black Skin, Cole traces the technical challenges associated with the depiction of black skin throughout the history of photography that make explicit the limitations of photographic representation. These texts establish light as a materiality that may be shared between theory and practice, a relationship that will be further discussed in the following chapters.

Light can be a directed beam, a guiding beacon in the dark, an advancing dethronement of darkness [Finsternis], but also a dazzling superabundance, as well as an indefinite, omnipresent brightness containing all: the ‘letting appear’ that does not itself appear, the inaccessibility of things. Light and darkness can represent the absolute metaphysical counter forces that exclude each other and yet bring the world-constellation into existence. Or, light is the absolute power of Being, which reveals the paltriness [Nichtigkeit] of the dark, which can no longer exist once light has come into existence. Light is intrusive; in its abundance, it creates the overwhelming, conspicuous clarity of which the true “comes forth;” it forcibly acquires the irrevocability of Spirit’s consent. Light remains what it is while letting the infinite participate in it; it is consumption without loss. Light produces space, distance, orientation, calm contemplation; it is the gift that makes no demands, the illumination capable of conquering without force.

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13 Wells, Land Matters, 4-5.
17 Teju Cole, A True Picture of Black Skin.
18 Translator’s note: “In German, there are several words for darkness: Finsternis, which has connotations of utter and forbidding darkness, Dunkelheit, which connotes an obstruction of vision; and das dunkel, which generally corresponds to the English ‘the dark’. Joel Anderson, trans. Light as a Metaphor for Truth, 55.
19 Blumenberg, Light as a Metaphor for Truth, 31.
Hans Blumenberg’s 1957 *Light as a Metaphor for Truth* traces a history of light via subtle shifts in meaning, metaphors and representations throughout the western tradition.\(^20\) From the earliest concepts of light as a dualism in the poetry of Parmenides,\(^21\) to metaphors for truth and Being, to the advent of artificial lighting and the obliteration of the stars of the night sky and our ability to believe, metaphors of light behave as a code through which may be deciphered transformations in world and self understanding.

In Blumenberg’s text, a fragment of which appears on the previous page, the dazzling effect of pure light is spoken of as “the fundamental confirming principal of all mysticism,”\(^22\) a transcendence through which light is passed into perception via the sensation of touch. Here, light is experienced as a “contact” and the distance in vision is lost to a moment of “nonvisual belonging.”\(^23\) Blumenberg makes use here of the German *gehören*: to belong, also to hear, and evokes the gesture of shutting and shielding one’s eyes against the painful presence of dazzling light. Thus, perception moves into the sensory realm of the ear in much the same way that metaphors have circulated between the aural and the visual, sound and light, and between the language of the Old Testament and the visuality of the Greek tradition.\(^24\)

Blumenberg’s history traces two and a half thousand years through which light travels as metaphors of “incomparable” and “expressive power,”\(^25\) the most significant of which is as a metaphor for truth. Such metaphorisation, as Vasseleu writes, is described by Irigaray as a “labyrinth” that conceals corporality.\(^26\) As such, both the tactile materiality of light and the maternal nature of reproduction is lost.\(^27\)

The concealment of corporality via metaphorisation in philosophical discourse is mirrored within western traditions of landscape that, through the visual representation of untouched wilderness, seeks to establish a “fantasy of not belonging to the totality of terrestrial life”\(^28\) (my emphasis). Amanda Boetzkes notes that this “fantasy of not belonging” emerges from the tendency to view

\(^20\) Ibid, 30-62.
\(^21\) Ibid, 32.
\(^22\) Ibid, 45.
\(^23\) Ibid.
\(^24\) Ibid, 46-47.
\(^25\) Ibid, 31.
\(^27\) “The continuous forgetting of sexual difference in the erasure of the materiality of reproduction is the very condition of possibility of metaphysics. With the re-origination of discourse through the metaphorical displacement of maternal origin the representation of feminine participation in reproduction is subsumed within an exclusively patrilineal economy, where it remains supplementary to a fantasy of masculine autogenesis.” Vasseleu, *Textures of Light*, 6-7.
\(^28\) Robin Kelsey in Boetzkes, *The Ethics of Earth Art*, 17.
the earth as a “territory belonging to us” and positions earth art, from the 1960’s to present day contemporary practices, as a point of difference through which “the point of contact between the body and the earth” is explored as the “basis” through which to experience “natural phenomena such as water, air, light, growth and decay.” Boetzkes writes: the “use of elementals, such as lightrevives the phenomenological condition of the body’s contingency on the earth.” Here, like Vasseleu, Irigaray’s critique of Merleau-Ponty underpins Boetzkes’ writings that explore within earth art practices an ethical stance towards the earth defined as “an insistence on troubling vision and revealing lapses in signification [as] cues to a practice of withdrawal from the impetus to represent nature.” Here, a loss of sight occurs as “elemental phenomena escape the parameters of the artwork.” One aspect of what Boetzkes describes as the “aesthetic territory of earth art” is a kind of “sensual contact ... an open and receptive mode of touch that does not attempt to enclose but reinforces the parameters of difference.” Vasseleu evokes such a touch via Irigaray’s simultaneous sensation of feeling and felt that occurs between the lips, between the palms of the hands held open and pressed together. Here, vision passes to the tactile; a movement, not a conflation, between the interior and the exterior. Irigaray’s simultaneous sensation of feeling and felt that occurs between the lips “can also be performed with the gaze” via the blinking of the eye which maintains the soft optics of living tissue:

“the eyes meet in a sort of silence of vision, a screen of resting before and after seeing, a reserve for new landscapes, new lights, a punctuation in which the eyes reconstitute for themselves the frame, the screen, the horizon of a vision.”

Similarly, such earth art practices that actively withdraw from representation, behave as thresholds through which elementals such as light, exceed the limits both of perception and the work of art. Boetzkes argues that:

29 Lucy Lippard, Ibid. 17.
30 Ibid 17.
31 Ibid 15.
32 Boetzkes references the practices of James Turrell, Olafur Eliasson and Chris Drury. See Boetzkes, The Ethics of Earth Art, 15.
33 Ibid, 20.
34 Ibid.
36 Vasseleu, Textures of Light, 56.
“earth artists develop an ethical stance by positioning the artwork as a receptive surface... receptivity [meaning] both a literal surface of visibility, on which elementals appear without being formalised into a pictorial image or stable object, and a distinct stance of recession and openness to the excess of sense that elementals deliver.”

The transient and ephemeral nature of such practices that mediate “temporality, rhythms, and materiality of elementals” often require a form of documentation through which earth art might enter into contemporary discourse. As such, the use of photography is frequently an “integral part of much earth art practice,” a view shared by Liz Wells who distinguishes between the photographic “outcome of intervention” in the land as being distinct from the photographer’s primary drive of “observation.” Wells argues that “landscape pictures composed in accordance with the rules of perspective, offer a single, central viewing position; this draws upon and contributes to reaffirming the Cartesian ... emphasis on unique subjectivity.” Wells goes on to state that, rather than being an inherent quality of the medium itself, it is the “authority” of the photographer that elicits from the “spectator,” even for those “highly tutored in the effects of aesthetic and photographic coding,” a sense of looking “through” the photograph to that which is being represented. Thus, indexicality manifests as an “apparently unmediated” relationship between photograph and subject. As such, within the conventions of photographic representation, the corporeal presence of the photographer, the physical operation of the camera and the materiality both of the lens and of light, are all but concealed.

However, as Wells writes, “pictorial constructs echo human vision” and the rule of thirds is founded in natural phenomena and the visual experience of the land itself. From its basis in the architectural principles of Filippo Brunelleschi, Wells traces conventions such as perspectival representation and landscape aesthetics through Leon Alberti’s geometry of perspective and the aesthetic modes aligned by da Vinci with the human desire for order. Arriving at the camera obscura, Wells argues that “perspective as a basis for visual organisation is founded on a natural effect – it is what light does when siphoned through a gap.” A gap may be found in the aperture of a camera lens, in the entrance to a cave, in the pupil of the eye; in technology, the earth and biology; and landscape is a source/site of the elemental phenomena of light.

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40 Ibid.
41 Boetzkes references the practices of Ana Mendieta and Robert Smithson. See Boetzkes, The Ethics of Earth Art, 20.
43 Ibid, 5.
44 Ibid, 7.
To create a photograph by, for example, turning the camera directly towards the sun is, as Melissa Miles points out, to break the first rule of photography.46 The volatile nature of light’s excessive qualities when manifested in photographic representation, is the subject of Miles’ “investigation into the very limits of photography,”47 a text through which Miles argues that light and its metaphorical implications to phototrophic histories, theories and practices has traditionally escaped critical attention leading to a persistence of binary thought via “metaphors of illumination, revelation, truth and mastery that saturate photographic histories and theories.”48 Informed by Irigaray’s feminist philosophy and Vasseleu’s Textures of Light, Miles evokes the action of a burning mirror as a metaphor for the camera;49 a resplendent surface from which to expose an “excessive, blinding and volatile light” upon the photologies of philosophy and art history.50 What is striking about Miles’ approach is the way in which she brings to critical theory a kind of material thinking that exposes the theoretical concerns of photography to the materiality of the medium itself and:

"seeks to reveal the unprecedented radiance that incites metaphors of illumination in photographic histories and theories, and investigate ways in which this relationship might be accommodated materially, visually and theoretically."51

This is achieved via a methodology52 informed by Elizabeth Grosz’s analysis of the relationship between nature and culture53 that Miles employs to evade the post-modern notion that nature is cultural and instead “allows for a light which exists prior to cultural inscription;”54 and Jacques Lacan’s writings on light and the gaze55 through which Miles writes of photographic glare and lens flare as points of light that look back at the viewer and disrupt the normally imperceptible relations between light, the laws of geometric optics and the knowing subject of the gaze.”56

Via points of reference between the feminism of Julia Kristeva and the phenomenology of Gaston Bachelard, Wells evokes a similar process of disruption to the conventions of photographic

46 Miles, The Burning Mirror, 213.
48 Ibid, 3.
49 Ibid, 16.
50 Ibid, 1.
51 Ibid. 8
52 Ibid, 2-3.
54 Miles, The Burning Mirror, 8.
56 Ibid. 17.
representation via the potential for “the ‘feminine’ operation of poetics to disrupt,” and for the human imaginary to induce depths of “sensory response to the extent that an image or feeling resonates and haunts.”57 Here, subjective responses to viewing art are figured as emotional responses that “elide precise definition” within contexts of systematic and logical analysis.58 The omission of subjective experiences of emotion from mainstream art history is the subject of Susan Best’s *Visualizing Feeling: affect and the feminine avant-garde*, in which Best places the “affective dimension of art” alongside materiality and process as a locus of “innovation”, and as “a quality of perceptibility that feminist theory should illuminate.”59 Best refers here to Catherine de Zegher’s curatorial premise for the exhibition *Inside the Visible: An Elliptical Traverse of Twentieth Century Art in of and from the Feminine*; the first significant survey of women avant-garde practices through which de Zegher identifies common threads that “make palpable” the immaterial nature of ideas and conceptual engagement with “beginnings.”60

The immaterial nature of thought has, throughout the western tradition, been metaphorically aligned with the *luminous* quality of light that, unlike the aesthetic nature of *lux*, cannot be perceived and is thus spoken of as a *noetic* light; a light of the mind and of reason; a light through which Descartes evaded the “vagaries of the senses” via a metaphoric tool “prone to technological invasions” and through which phenomena may be placed into perspective via distanced and objective examination.61

Whilst Blumenberg’s history of light follows an “annunciation” of such metaphors via a series or course of events,62 Vasseleu traces not a history, but a *genealogy* of light: a “continuous reinscription of light as a natural event” that embraces the participation of the feminine and thus “attends to the traces or material conditions of [Light’s] articulation.” Vasseleu’s text seeks to address the “discomforting” impossibility of “seeing identically” whilst arguing against a “neutral” light that would erase “all traces of sexual difference”. Here, Vasseleu evokes an erotic light that illuminates via the sense of touch the “tangible invisible”, the “tactile imaginary”: a light that resists any formalisation of the feminine whilst illuminating her sensible being in a constant state of “taking form.”63

57 Wells, *Land Matters*. 4-5.
58 Ibid. 4.
59 Best, *Visualizing Feeling*, 3.
60 de Zegher in Best, *Visualizing Feeling*, 3.
62 Ibid, 11.
63 Ibid, 128.
Certain conventions of photographic representation conceal the physical presence of the photographer’s body in favour of an indexical or apparently unmeditated link between a subject and its image. Such concealment of the corporeal re-affirms a Cartesian standpoint that assumes that the act of seeing is experienced identically and universally. Such conventions however cannot be disrupted via feminist philosophies and poetics without also considering the insidious conflation between representations of light, the white substrate of an image and/or text, with the white skin of an idealised male subjectivity that is metaphorically aligned with moral values and embedded within all dominant forms of representation.

Writing on the photographs of the civil rights movement by Roy DeCarava, Teju Cole notes that throughout the history of photography, technologies – encompassing both black and white and colour film, digital photography and facial recognition technologies – are calibrated for white skin and “have rarely made it easy to photograph black skin ... photographic technology is neither value-free nor ethnically neutral.”64 To photograph the “human dignity” of black skin thus requires interventions in photographic processes. From how light is metered to the purposeful underexposure of film, to virtuosic darkroom printing in which whites are rendered as soft greys so as to afford priority and nuance to the expression and humanity of a black face without any attempt to “brighten” that blackness. Of DeCarava’s photography Cole writes that:

“What is dark is neither blank nor empty. It is in fact full of wise light which, with patient seeing, can open out into glories...These pictures make a case for how indirect images guarantee our sense of the human.”65

Cole draws upon the writings of Caribbean philosopher Édouard Glissant66 whose anti-colonial project was to explore the linguistic considerations of the word opacity as a stance against the “expectations of transparency embedded in the French language.”67 Glissant evokes from the multiplicities within and between french languages, a poetics of relation:68 “evolving opacities of an author or a reader” whereby an encounter with a certain text necessitates a process of translation, or of learning of a new language.69 It is through such encounters that poetics occur as opacities:

64 Ibid
65 Ibid.
66 Édouard Glissant, Poetics of Relation.
67 Cole, A True Picture of Black Skin.
68 Glissant emphasises that there are multiple French languages, likewise there are multiple Spanish and English languages. Glissant, Poetics of Relation, 118.
69 Ibid, 111-120.
“Transparency no longer seems like the bottom of the mirror in which western humanity reflected the world in its own image. There is opacity now at the bottom of the mirror, a whole alluvium deposited by populations, silt that is fertile but, in actual fact indistinct and unexplored even today, denied or insulted more often than not, and with an insistent presence that we are incapable of not experiencing.”

Expectations for transparency in language are figured as a form of *diglossia* by Glissant: “the domination of one language over one or several languages in the same region.” Whilst Glissant writes on the implications of *transparency* and *opacity* to language, the terms themselves are light metaphors, and are thus equality relevant to a consideration of photographic representation.

Predating culture and exceeding the limitations of representation, light occurs and re-occurs as natural phenomena: an elemental that, when allowed to manifest upon a “surface of visibility,” renders the formalities of representation as unstable, opaque and poetic (fig. 1). Triggering sensations of pleasure and pain, the point of contact between light and the eye that occurs when the lens is directed towards the sun, evokes sensations such as penetration, dazzlement, ecstasy and pain; reminding us of the body by punctuating vision with the blinking of the eye. These tactile sensations of vision that disrupt sight, objectivity and ownership associated with the “triumphant gaze,” shifts perception further towards the subjective perception of sound to which we harken and belong. These sensory perceptions trigger also feelings; ineffable emotions and thoughts that become palpable; qualities of perceptibility that ultimately disrupt Cartesian perspective and the transparency both of the camera and of the photographer. Shared between theory and practice, exquisite light as a materiality is explored further in the following chapter through which contemporary visual practices that play with light and/or skirt the peripheries of photography culminate with an indexicality mediated by touch in the earth-body works of Ana Mendieta, and Megan Daalder’s optical device capable of facilitating embodied experiences of empathy, both of which are illuminated by a light that Levinas may have found to be of a discursive quality.

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70 Ibid.
71 Ibid, 118.
72 Boetzkes, 21.
74 Vasseleu, *Textures of Light*, 12.
75 Catherine de Zegher writes in the exhibition catalogue for *Inside the Visible*, that some women artists have been, for decades: “re-politicising the body, the ceaseless play of unravelling (hidden) traps in language, and challenging the triumphant gaze...[Inside the Visible] examines another possibility of seeing than the gaze as analysed and recognised by phallocentric theories. See: de Zegher, introduction to *Inside the Visible*, 21.
76 Best, *Visualizing Feeling*, 3.
fig.1. Genevieve Swifte, landscapes with lens flare from the series Light Work, 2012-2016.
Before culminating in a theory of light informed by Emmanuel Levinas and Amanda Boetzkes’ *Ethics of Earth Art*, this chapter explores material thinking brought to my photography from outside. The background of my practice, which is grounded in drawing, is first explored via the significance of Vija Celmins’ meticulous representations of landscape that transcend traditions of painting, drawing and photography via a heightened process of observation and an extended temporality of making and viewing that places the artist within the subject matter of her work. My journey from drawing to photography is then explored via a series of reflective metalpoint drawings made between 2007 and 2010, followed by an artist in residency project undertaken in Northwest Greenland in October 2010. Optical phenomena and the quality of Arctic light became the point of departure for my practice-led research, an encounter with light that I then trace through the installations of Olafur Eliasson and Ann Veronica Janssens, and bring to the optics of empathy in the *Mirrorbox* of Megan Daalder. I then locate the context of my practice-led research between the distinct roles of “landscape photography” and the documentation of earth art practices via the readings of Ana Mendieta’s Silueta works by Susan Best,¹ who explores the affective dimension of the photographic representations of Mendieta’s later earth-body works, and Amanda Boetzkes’ exploration of the indexical nature of touch performed between Mendieta’s body and the Earth.² The implications of these practices to my own processes are then further discussed in the following chapter.

¹ Best, *Visualizing Feeling*, 105.
Since encountering the pollen fields of German artist Wolfgang Laib (fig.1) in 1999 – the first year of my undergraduate degree – my practice has been primarily concerned with materiality. However, before stepping outside the studio, I began to look for materiality within; exploring the classical drawing technique of metalpoint which allows for an almost surgical precision via marks made with fine lengths of metal wire (figs.2-3).

My drawings were influenced by the meticulous work of Vija Celmins whose fields of ocean and desert surfaces and celestial phenomena (figs.4-5) contain within them the hidden presence of the camera lens and an amplified process of observation through which a photograph – a snapshot by the artist, or a scientific image for example – is treated by Celmins as “an object to scan.” Via painstaking processes of mark-making and applying oil paint, Celmins’ practice comes close to obliterating the line between drawing and painting, whilst the lens remains folded within each – much as it has been tacitly embedded within traditions of western painting since the 14th century. Such close observation, such detailed work requires the assistance of optics: of vision fixed to two dimensions and the infinite reach the telescope. From the “anonymity” of the scientific photograph, from the photograph as object, Celmins’ hand lifts the imagery and caries it across:

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3 Vija Celmins quoted by Lane Relyea in “Survey” in Vija Celmins, Lane Relyea, Robert Gober and Briony Fer, (London: Phaidon, 2004), 68.
fig.2. Giovanni Antonio Boltraffio, *Study for a drapery for the Risen Christ*, c. 1491, chalk and silverpoint, heightened with white, on prepared paper.

“The thing I like about painting, of course, is that it just takes a second for the information to go 'bam' all the way in, and then you can explore later. I have been painting this image [a field of white stars on a black ground approximately 45 x 60 cm] well, for maybe three years on and off. So, you know, tedious for some. For me its kind of like being there... I like the idea that I have a work in North Uist, that its a remote place. Its almost like a part of me is in that place.”

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Fig 6. Genevieve Swifte, Cluster ii, 2009, reflected light, gold platinum, steel, watercolour on paper.
Within my own practice, the metalpoint drawings developed to the extent that I began to exploit the reflective nature of gold and platinum exclusively. This refinement allowed me to draw upon paper with reflected light (fig.6) provided via spotlights installed within the gallery space (fig.7). After a period of five years, these drawings which described aerial landscapes – stars, clouds, the surface of the moon – all but evaporated in the attempt to describe light. This crisis coincided with an art residency in the High Arctic of Northwest Greenland; a landscape defined by visceral qualities of light amplified by the prevalence of ice within the environment – in the water, on the water, on the earth, in the air. In the High Arctic, the landscape intervenes upon the body via ice that crystallises upon the eyelashes and refracts light, hampering focused vision. As such, where the frost bites, there is no distance between the horizon and the skin; a “contact” through which, to borrow from Boetzkes, “new landscapes” or “horizons of vision” may be “founded.” In a place where subjective experiences of optical phenomena may be encountered daily – intersecting arcs of refracted light, parhelic circles, haloes, sun pillars and sun dogs (fig.9) – the camera seemed the only possible way to respond. I then began to draw upon my photographs, extending imagery of landscape beyond the photographic frame and in this way, the Arctic was the catalyst through which the lens became the primary basis of my practice (fig.8).

Fig.7. Genevieve Swifte, Map and Light, 2008, triptych, reflected light, gold, platinum, steel, watercolour on paper, spot light.

5 Boetzkes, The Ethics of Earth Art, 161
fig.8. Genevieve Swifte, *She is Always Beautiful*, 2011. graphite drawing on pigment print from black and white negative on Hahnemühle.

I have found encounters with such phenomena – the exquisite tactility of light – articulated within the practices of Olafur Eliasson and Ann Veronica Janssens; in Eliasson’s Beauty (fig. 10) – an installation within a dark space of fine water droplets falling through a shaft of light to produce shifting refractions that, as the viewer steps through, resolve to an aurora, a halo, a bow; and before Janssens’ Rose (fig. 11) – a star like formation of seven roseate spotlights made visceral by artificial smoke and directed outwards, towards a single point in such a way as to arrest the viewer via direct points of contact between each light and the eye. Within these works, light is encountered subjectively; defined by the impossibility of sharing visual perception with another; defined by the geometry of the viewer’s position in relation to the work.

In Megan Daalder’s Mirrorbox (figs. 12-13) however, the exquisite tactility of light is encountered within relation to another’s gaze. Currently a part of a neuroscience research project at the Brain and Creativity Institute, University of Southern California, Daalder’s Mirrorbox induces profound experiences of empathy and lingering sensations of a shared or third body between two individuals who simultaneously experience shifting reflections of their own face interwoven with the face of another. This experience occurs in real time and takes place within the intimate proximity of what might be described as a helmet for two. Here, an optics of empathy is built from shifting light and a sheet of glass; from interplays between transparency and reflection placed between one face and another.

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7 “USC Residency Ongoing since February 2-12 USC Brain and Creativity Center” see The Mirrorbox “Upcoming” http://www.themirrorbox.info (accessed 2 June 2016).
Whilst Eliasson’s *Beauty* and Janssens’ *Rose* are defined by the soft optics of living tissue within the eye and the position of a single viewer in relation to the work, the optics of Daalder’s *Mirrorbox* weave together the visual experience of two individuals via a light that might be evoked by Vasseleu as “the light of a voice,” a light through which “one hears and speaks to a face.” Referring to Emmanuel Levinas, Vasseleu argues that:

Rather than a light establishing its existence or visibility, the face is lit by a light which establishes discursivity. This light is a communication whose fragility exceeds the face’s visibility. The light of the face has a gentleness which, while disrupting figuration, assumes the unapproachable proportions of divine command.

As Vasseleu writes, for Levinas, “existence in the world is defined as a sphere of light,” a sensuous element that sustains consciousness. Similarly, Amanda Boetzkes brings Levinas to her writings on the ethics of earth art, locating the encounter between faces within the elemental described as “the medium through which texture, contour, and boundaries are sensed.” Boetzkes asks:

“Can the elemental yield the earth as a face, as an unnameable alterity, and as an ethical imperative? Can we receive the elemental as a means of giving the earth a voice without anthropomorphising it?”

In this Boetzkes refers to the photographic documentation of Ana Mendieta’s *Silueta* works (figs. 14-18), of which twelve are held in the collection of the Art Gallery of New South Wales. These photographs of Mendieta’s earth-body works document interventions in the soil, sand, mud and forest with her body via sculpting and marking with earth, flowers and even fire, the silhouette of her form. The photographs dating from between 1976-78, were made after a point identified by Susan Best as representing a shift in Mendieta’s practice from photographs that document her immersion in the earth/her art (fig. 14), and marking the withdrawal of Mendieta’s body from the photographic frame (figs. 15-18). As such, a number of these photographs might be

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8 Ibid, 92.  
9 Ibid. 91.  
11 Ibid. 93.  
12 Ibid. 78.  
15 Ibid.
located between the distinction made by Liz Wells of the landscape photographer’s primary drive of “observation”, and the photographic “outcome of intervention” in the land; between “belonging”, and “annexation” with/from nature.  

Here, at the hinge between documentation and observation, may be placed those of the Silueta series that Best notes are dominated by larger expanses of landscape (fig.18). Best writes of the “affective dimension” of these photographs that, though a:

“blissful union with the world may have been Mendieta’s experience when making the Siluetas [this] is not the prominent feeling of the resulting images. On the occasions when larger amounts of landscape are visible, the locations are deserted, and often desolate... the traces of the solitary figure in these images evoke a strong sense of isolation, aloneness, even loneliness, alongside the assertion of a temporary place in nature.”  

However, in these photographs that behave “as a record of the performed corporeal gesture,” gestures that, as Boetzkes writes, are bound with the elemental, the simultaneous offering and withdrawal of the body, and thus “the subject’s perceptual expectations,” is precisely the act through which Mendieta stages a “facing of the earth.” Here, within the impression created via the contact of Mendieta’s body upon the earth, and the elementals that the Silueta series make visible, Boetzkes finds the conditions with which to found “a new landscape” or “horizon of vision”. This is achieved via a touch that evokes the restorative contact between the lids at the closing of the eye; a sense of touch that Boetzkes aligns with the indexical nature of the imprint made via the withdrawal of the body.

The withdrawal of Mendieta’s body may also suggest that the role of the photographer was performed by herself, that she was unaccompanied and unassisted and was thus required to step away from the earth to a position located behind the camera lens. Such movement, which marks an end to Mendieta’s immersion in the earth/her art by vacating her body from the frame, could be

16 Wells references the practices of Richard Long and Andy Goldsworthy. See Wells, Land Matters, 8.
17 Best, Visualizing Feeling, 105.
18 Ibid, 104
19 Nancy Spector quoted in Best, Visualizing Feeling, 93.
20 Best, Visualizing Feeling, 104.
21 Nancy Spector quoted Best, Visualizing Feeling, 93.
22 Boetzkes, Ethics of Earth Art, 161.
23 Ibid, 150.
read as *specular* via Michael Fried’s approach to Caravaggio’s paintings in which the representation of excessive light glancing from reflective surfaces renders the artist’s relationship to their work as “optical” in nature, ending the immersive relationship embodied, like Mendieta’s silhouette, by the artist’s self-portrait. Mendieta’s photographs of her silhouette might thus be considered as a series of *specular* reflections that interweave, like Daalder’s *Mirrorbox*, her own gaze with the gaze of the earth via a light that is both discursive and elemental; a light that transcends genre and interweaves landscape with portraiture. My next chapter considers how such a light might be handled photographically in the field and explores the way in which these concerns inform my own practice-led research, whilst chapters four and five will return to Fried’s moments of immersion and specularity in depth.

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In this chapter I outline the processes and technical basis of my studio and field work by exploring how Vasseleu's texture of light,¹ and the theories and practices discussed in the previous chapters, inform the operation of my camera. Beginning with the Exposure Value Index which is built into the 40mm, 80mm (uncoated) and 120mm lenses of my medium format Hasselblad 500CM, I discuss three charts that detail various qualities of light, their corresponding aperture and shutter settings and reciprocity failure calculations necessary to make photographs in the dark. I then explore the significance of deep listening² to my field work and discuss how this practice allowed me to address the fullness of sensation and the representation of the photographer’s corporeal presence within the heightened visuality of my studio work. Returning to the technical operation of my camera, and the analogue and digital processes I have used, I then detail photographs made of ornithological specimens via long exposures and a technique known as painting with light, before addressing the tacit or personal circumstances of my project and the blind spots that such circumstances implicate within the context of university research.

¹ Vasseleu, Textures of Light.
² Deep Listening is a philosophy developed by pioneer composer Pauline Oliveros that “explores the difference between the involuntary nature of hearing and the voluntary, selective nature – exclusive and inclusive – of listening. The practice includes bodywork, sonic meditations, interactive performance, listening to the sounds of daily life, nature, one's own thoughts, imagination and dreams, and listening to listening itself. It cultivates a heightened awareness of the sonic environment, both external and internal, and promotes experimentation, improvisation, collaboration, playfulness and other creative skills vital to personal and community growth.” “Deep Listening Institute (DLI) promotes the music and Deep Listening practice of pioneer composer Pauline Oliveros, providing a unique approach to music, literature, art, meditation, technology and healing. It fosters creative innovation across boundaries and across abilities, among artists and audience, musicians and non-musicians, healers and the physically or cognitively challenged, and children of all ages.” See: Deep Listening Institute, “About” http://deeplisten.org/site/content/about (accessed 31 April, 2016) and: “Mission Statement” http://deeplisten.org/site/content/about (accessed 5 June 2016).
Poetics of Exposure

In response to certain qualities of light – the roseate rays of a setting sun, a refracted bow arcing across the sky – or the face of a loved one, the impulse is the same; when we are touched, when we are moved, we reach for the camera; a drive that may be located somewhere between the subjectivity of Olafur Eliasson’s *Aurora* or Ann Veronica Janssens’ *Rose*, and the inter-woven reflection of two faces within Megan Daalder’s *Mirrorbox* (See figs.11-12 of pervious chapter). Susan Sontag wrote that “what moves people to take photographs is finding something beautiful;” an aestheticisation that has no limits and that may be extended even to horror, and that Sontag links to Talbot’s 1841 patent; the *calotype* – from *kalós* or beautiful. Like the optics of empathy within Daalder’s *Mirrorbox*, privileging the sensations of vision that arise when light makes contact with the eye; when visual perception is experienced as an affective perceptibility, works to undo the distancing effect associated with objectivity. Vision as a sense of touch brings us closer to the world via an exquisite light that is both discursive and elemental.

Encountered early in my candidacy, Cathryn Vasseleu’s concept of light’s tactility became for me a technical guide to the operation of my camera, a methodology through which vision and touch may be interwoven via a heightened and entangled sensibility for the tactile and visible properties of light. This methodology led to an interplay between the sensible qualities of light – warmth, pain, visibility and brilliance – and the material, chemical and digital processes of photography. Vasseleu’s exquisite tactility of light, of *lux* and *lumen*, led me to consider a third quality of light, a photographic or *actinic* light defined by Bunnell and Sobieszek in their encyclopedia of photography as “the property of light that causes chemicals to combine and decompose.” Within the always shifting parameters of science and technology, *actinic* light began as an inherent property of the ultraviolet, violet and blue range of the spectrum to later incorporate all forms of visible light and beyond, including that “vast region of the spectrum lying beyond the red and to which our eyes are not sensitive, but which we are conscious of in the form of heat.” From ultraviolet to infrared and incorporating wavelengths of a *polysensual* range, *actinic* light can thus be considered to weave invisible and tactile aspects of the spectrum into the heightened visuality of photographic imagery. These ideas may be translated to the camera via combinations of aperture settings and shutter speeds that, on the lenses of my medium format camera, lock

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4 Best, *Visualizing Feeling*, 3.
6 Ibid, 302.
7 Susan Sontag uses the term “*polysensual*” to refer to a kind of seeing that is “not cut off from the other senses”, a concept to which I will return in the conclusion to this exegesis. Sontag, *On Photography*, 93.
fig.1. Exposure Values & Interlocked Shutter Speed/Aperture.


fig.3. Genevieve Swifte, *Untitled* (end of day), 2015.
together at an exposure value index (fig.1). This index allows for all possible variations of depth of field and exposure times to be easily adjusted for a given quality of light. Operating a lens in this way circumnavigates photographic technology and the reliance on light meters; privileging instead judgement based upon experience and a memorised understanding of environmental conditions (both natural and artificial) and the exposure value or quality of actinic light that accompanies them.

From the Sunny f16 rule of thumb, and antiquated exposure tables listing subjects such as boats at sea, cottages, the aisles of churches and cathedrals – subjects that read as an old fashioned itinerary for the amateur photographer – to Fred Packer's invaluable online resource, it is possible to draw upon crystallised experience when operating the camera under a full sun, starlight and – with the exception of specialised or studio lighting – almost everything in between. For me, one of the benefits of working in this way is that I always feel orientated; a sense that I am always evaluating the light around me. When a specific quality of light occurs – for example when a candle is lit (fig.2), or the contrast falls between light and shadow at the end of the day (fig.3), – the result will usually be a desire to make a photograph.

The qualities of light described in the Exposure Value Chart on the following page lend the exposure value index (fig.1) to working with landscape and making photographs under the sun, moon and stars. A second chart is provided on page 49 and both are intended to be cross referenced. Chart 1 outlines certain phenomena; weather conditions, artificial light, etc. Each value is equal to twice the amount of light represented in the value immediately below. As can be seen in the second chart, each of these increments represents a stop equivalent to the aperture and shutter speed settings on a camera, and the and iso rating of the film. Once exposure times exceed one second – for example, once the sun has set – it then becomes necessary to refer to the third chart on page 50 to accommodate for reciprocity failure. Thinking through exposure in this way is similar to practicing scales; like music, if a photograph is to be made, what key will it be composed in?

Following these charts, photographs taken in the field are accompanied by their exposure values to further explore these ideas.

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8 The sunny f16 rule is a simple method used to evaluate available light. The shutter speed is set to match the iso rating of the film (for example: 100 iso = 125th of a second) and the aperture is set to f16 for full sun with hard shadows, and opened one stop each for soft sun & soft shadows | bright clouds & no shadows | heavy clouds | open shade | twilight.
11 Adapted from Fred Packer, “Ultimate Exposure Calculator” Ibid.
12 This chart serves as a general reference only, always check the product information provided by manufacturers for specific film stocks. Adapted from information provided by the British Journal of Photography in Andrew Sanderson, Night Photography. (Argentum: London, 2001), 29.
### Exposure Value Chart 1

**iso 100**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EV</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
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<td>full sun over sand and snow</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>full sunlight, hard shadows</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>soft sun, soft shadows</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>bright clouds, no shadows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>heavy clouds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>golden light • open shade • rain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>twilight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>fire • spotlight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>bright day interior • bright streetlights at night</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>under rainforest canopy • streets at night</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>shady day interiors • bright night interiors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>light by fire • average night interior</td>
</tr>
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<td>4</td>
<td>lit by a candle • under bright streetlights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>under average streetlights • dim night interiors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>lightning • total eclipse of the moon</td>
</tr>
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<td>very dim artificial light</td>
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<td>-2</td>
<td>snow or sand under full moon</td>
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<td>-3</td>
<td>subjects under full moon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-4</td>
<td>subjects under half moon</td>
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<td>subjects under crescent moon</td>
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<td>subjects under starlight</td>
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### Exposure Value Chart 2

*iso 100*

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Exposure Values with corresponding aperture and shutter settings.
Data can be adjusted depending upon iso (for example, the first shutter speed of 60 would be adjusted 2 stops faster for 400 iso = 250).
Exposure times greater than one second are presented in grey and require further calculations to accommodate for reciprocity failure when using film. See Reciprocity Failure Chart on the following page.
### Reciprocity Failure Chart

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 minute 4 seconds</td>
<td>3 minutes 36 seconds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 minutes 8 seconds</td>
<td>8 minutes 49 seconds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 minutes 16 seconds</td>
<td>21 minutes 40 seconds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 minutes 32 seconds</td>
<td>52 minutes 50 seconds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 minutes 4 seconds</td>
<td>2 hours 15 minutes</td>
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In the Huon valley of Tasmania, I photographed the bleached timber of a dead tree that hung over the surface of the Lune river at the end of the day. From the small boat where I sat, the landscape around me was reflected by the almost still surface of the river; resolving to a double image. The light reflecting from the dead branches lifts the tree out of the dense foliage behind; suspending it in the air above the water (fig.4). In windswept Patagonia, similarly twisted trees – this time living, but at the time that I was there, without leaves – grew to a dense matrix through which the wind could be heard to breathe (fig.5).
Like the tortured branches of the trees, large thorns held the earth down against the elements. Mountains here generate their own weather systems; turbulent clouds, and snow that fell over sharp pinnacles of stone (fig.6) and the brittle ice of the glacier (fig.7)
EV16:

Water as ice, as vapour, as shimmering and reflective bodies; as rivers, as the ocean, is always either disrupting or amplifying the quality of light in the environment. Along the Southeast coast of Australia, between Rosedale in the South and Brisbane to the North, lens flare, and fierce stars cut by the aperture of my lens, grains of sand that entered my camera via the dark slide of the film magazine, together burn and blemish my negatives (figs.8-10). Exposures are fast in the heightened light, and the photographed surface of water is depicted as opaque, visceral and frozen like ice.

figs.8-9. Genevieve Swifte, examples of lens flare and sand on negative.

fig.10. Genevieve Swifte, example of lens flare.
EV10:
Once the sun has set, the water becomes darkly transparent and – with the lens stopped down – exposures may be lengthened to trace the collapse of a wave against the stillness of granite lined with quartz (fig.11).

Depending upon the quality of light and the contrast between light and shadow, further intervention is undertaken in the darkroom. My studio practice is grounded in the exposure latitude of black and white film and the mailability of analogue processes that allow for the thoughtful disruption of a film’s given dynamic range or sensitivity, so that, even as I am taking the photograph, I am also feeling the fluid weight of the film processing tank inverted either briskly or with the extreme care of one slow, deliberate movement per minute. Such interventions, guided by muscle memory, either introduce fresh, active developer to those silver salts that have received the most exposure – increasing the contrast between the highlights and darker tones with every shake – or – allow the chemistry to become rapidly exhausted at those points where the film received the most exposure; thus allowing a more gentle activation elsewhere in the tank to take place and enable the development of the shadows to catch up with delicate evocations of splintering light (figs. 12-13).
wind and, as the fall of my foot played rhythmically with the lay of the land, every step was shaped by blades of grass, small rocks, mud and dry leaves. As I moved through the field, the resonance of the landscape evolved over stone, plane and hillside. The conscious practice of acute auditory awareness between one’s surroundings and an acoustic horizon, *Deep listening* alters the way landscape is perceived; no longer located in the distance or populated by disparate objects distinct from one another. The experience of *deep listening* could thus be described as an interplay between the sounds of the self, the sounds of others, and the sounds of the earth.\(^{13}\)

I began to bring the practice of deep listening to my photography via field work undertaken in the Andean landscape of Patagonia and the Huon Valley of Tasmania in 2012, The Wollemi and Royal National Parks of NSW in 2013, the ANU Kioloa campus in 2015 and the East coast of Australia between Rosedale in the South and Brisbane in the North. Manifesting in my photography via a heightened attention to texture and detail of, for example; ice (fig.14), forests (fig.15), water (fig.11), and geological forms (fig.16).

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\(^{13}\) Special thanks to Doug Quin and the Wired Lab, an Artist Run Initiative based in rural South West NSW, for a workshop in field recording, a sound walk and a visit to *The Wires*. Doug Quin, Ph.D., is a world-renowned sound designer, naturalist, public radio commentator and music composer who currently teaches in the Department of Television, Radio and Film at the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University. For more information see: dqmedia, http://dqmedia.com/home.html. Doug Quin was in residence at the Wired Lab in June, 2012. For more information about *The Wires*, see: Wired Lab, http://wiredlab.org.
fig. 15. Genevieve Swifte, Forest Phrase i, 2015.

The layered intricacy of environmental sound is the subject of an ongoing collaboration between myself and U.S. composer Cheryl E. Leonard, whose compositions are written from the aural expression of the environment and performed upon natural objects found within the landscapes of her recordings. In Leonard's hands, instruments crafted from stones, shells, feathers, bones, sand, wood and bark, emit sounds poetically linked to their place of origin and evocative of a vast and immersive environment (figs. 19-20). Whilst our project, which began in 2011, extends beyond the scope of my university research, the heightened awareness of sound that I have brought to my photography, and my interest in deep listening, stems from our collaboration which culminated in a conference paper that I delivered in 2012 at the IV Antarctic Art and Culture conference and festival in Buenos Aires, a period of collaboration and field work at the ANU’s coastal campus at Kioloa, NSW, and an exhibition with live musical performance at the ANU School of Art Gallery in 2015 (figs. 17-24).14

Our collaborative processes began with a shared sensibility for the heightened qualities of light and sound found in the Polar Regions where we have both worked extensively in the past. In the context of the Australian landscape and our work together in 2015, the point of reference between our practices occurred at dawn when the silence of the human world, the prevalence of bird song and quality of early morning light, provided the ideal conditions for both field recording and photography. Rich with bird song – from lyrebirds hidden in the dense forest to the noisy chatter of parrots around the historic cottages of the Kioloa campus – Leonard's field recordings were made as I took photographs just beyond earshot. With her sounds, I collated a sequence of photographs through which the audience might move deeper into the forest to where the light is scattered by the canopy overhead (figs. 12, 15 & 18). Between this forest and the nearby ocean, we collected resonant shells, stones, wood and bark upon which Leonard performed compositions written to accompany four works on paper combining drawing and photography.

I had earlier printed these photographs onto fibre-based paper in the darkroom and had proceeded to draw the surface of the water beyond the photographic frame with graphite pencils (figs. 17 & 21-24). For these works Leonard composed and performed music upon sand, glass, stones and steel with field recordings from Aoraki National Park and a sea cave at Sutro Baths in San Francisco.

14 Cheryl E. Leonard is a composer, performer, and instrument builder whose works investigate sounds, structures, and objects from the natural world. She uses microphones to explore the subtle intricacies of sounds and develops compositions that highlight these unique voices. Her projects often feature sculptural natural-object instruments and field recordings from remote locales. Leonard has received grants from the National Science Foundation's Antarctic Artists and Writers Program, American Music Center, American Composers Forum, and ASCAP. Her commissions include works for Kronos Quartet and Illuminated Corridor. She has been awarded residencies at Djerassi, the Arctic Circle, Oberpfälzer Künstlerhaus, Villa Montalvo, and Engine 27. Between 2011 and 2016 Cheryl E. Leonard and Genevieve Swifte have presented collaborative work together in Argentina, Mexico, Australia and the United States. For more information See: Always North, http://www.alwaysnorth.com.


I began to make works that fuse photography with drawing in 2011 following the residency I had undertaken in the High Arctic of Northwest Greenland the previous year (fig.27). The primary focus of these works is the photographic frame which is made almost to disappear between the photograph and meticulous marks made on the surrounding paper. The effect is such that the sublime quality of the landscape is evoked via the drawings that work to subvert the limitations of photographic representation, at the centre of which lies the immense glacier of Sermeq Kujalleq (fig.25).

To pickup from where I had left off, I began my candidacy with field work in the Andean landscape of Patagonia where I photographed the Perito Moreno glacier in 2012 (fig.26). Visually intricate with labyrinths of deep fissures, pinnacles and spires of ice, glaciers make for delicate and fascinating subject matter. However, the fullness of sensation; perceptions of sound and feeling experienced within environments characterised by ice, lies beyond the limitations of photographic representation. Beyond the photographic frame, the air is cold and the sound of ice collapsing is not only heard with the ear, but is felt within the resonant spaces of the chest cavity. When viewed under snow-fall, glaciers recall the distance, ephemerality and whiteness of an overcast sky. On a clear day, an endless field of glass; excessively and blindingly bright. To the eye, the ice is of the mathematical sublime in its almost limitless immensity. Aurally, it is like the ocean; utterly fractured; calving ice in arrhythmic waves and forcing stone beneath to give way to water that, whilst frozen for millennia, is seismically unstable and explosive. Glaciers recall marble, clouds and waves; they are dry like the desert and chill the air with a specific and unmistakable scent.
Tactility travels easily into the visual: the sharp splintering quality of the glacial photographs that I made in Patagonia were softened by an overcast sky and falling snow. Causing the dark root of a mountain to shift tonality from black to a lighter grey, the snow worked upon stone like rosin dust on an etching plate. This evocation of the aquatint is reminiscent also of the organic grain structure of a faster film than was in fact used – the photograph having been taken with a slow film with a fine grain structure ideal for the overcast light and endless detail of such a landscape. At the bottom left – at the limit of the glacier where the icebergs calve – the ice presses outwards like a pair of hands, forcing this detail and a plane of focus towards the surface of the print. Here, the photograph is raw and rough and in stark contrast to the softness of the overall image.

I struggled with this photograph for two years, it is problematically beautiful/formal/conventional, and the frame is so tight – taken with a 120 mm lens – that all of the infrastructure of the site – the context of the tourist: the metal boardwalk, the buses, the take-away restaurant, the gift shop, the cruise ships, the people, are all hidden from view. It is a fantasy of an untouched wilderness. Initially I printed the photograph, with many other landscapes, repeatedly in the darkroom before it occurred to me that, rather than attempt to draw around the photograph, I should try to re-take it and create a mirror image of the composition: the triangular shape of the mountain and the horizon of ice. I bought a series of extension tubes that allow my lenses to focus exceptionally close and – as the waist level viewfinder of my medium format camera allows me to look down into the camera, not through it, I turned the camera around and photographed myself (fig.30). This process resulted in a pair of photographs that mirror one another: Echo and Narcissus (fig.28) named for the myth of visual and auditory reflections, both of which occur within the natural world via the reflective surfaces of water and stone.\textsuperscript{15} The photographs are printed together so that the ice and the lace of my clothes echo one another, so that the shallow depth of field and the snowfall spill into one another, so that the darkness of the negative space behind my body answers to the triangular cut of the mountain as does the band of detail in the intricate fabric of lace. With this work I sought to articulate the fullness of sensation that lies beyond the photographic frame via abstraction, performance and metaphor.

\textsuperscript{15} Ovid, \textit{Metamorphoses}, translated by Charles Martin (New York: Norton, 2005), 104-111.
fig. 27. Genevieve Swifte, from the series She is Always Beautiful, 2010.

fig. 28. Genevieve Swifte, Echo and Narcissus, 2014.
This process, which became a point of departure for my project, was also informed by Melissa Miles’ *Burning Mirror* and the disruption of clarity and transparency associated with the conventions of photographic representation via, for example, turning the camera directly towards a source of light, such as the sun. In practice, the opacity that occurs when photographing the sun elicits a sense of corporality, alluding to the physical presence of the photographer. Turning my camera full circle produced a similar effect, allowing me to make imagery that incorporates my own body without resorting to literal representation; disrupting the formality and conventional perspective of my landscape photographs in a way that recalls both Mendieta’s *Silueta* series and Lynn Silverman’s *Horizons* (fig. 29). This is an approach that I later explored via the use of mirrors – a process or tradition that has been employed by artists since the 14th century – and via metaphors for the body such as photographs of clothing that speak to the surface of the skin and the perception of touch, and the bodies of birds that reference Baroque and Renaissance iconography, mythology and the ecological context of the scientific archive.

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17 The use of mirrors to create self portraits, Baroque iconography and mythology will be explored in detail throughout the following chapters.
A significant shift in the trajectory of my project is marked by a series of photographs that explore the bodies of birds. I began to photograph these ornithological specimens at the ANU School of Biology in the second year of my candidacy with a macro lens and a configuration of extension tubes that allowed me to work exceptionally close. The first wings I photographed were those of a small native parrot whose feathers were comprised of fine, translucent barbs that, when enlarged to approximately five times their physical size, resolved to a moire pattern that emerges from between the overlaying coverts. Like the photograph of my own body placed against the glacier, these wings are paired with a photograph of a mountain (fig.31) and as such the birds became metaphors for the body, and the body in relation to the earth.

I later made a number of photographs of birds at the CSIRO which houses the National Wildlife Collection including the largest archive of ornithological specimens in the Southern hemisphere. The door to this collection acts as a heavy seal to a chill and musty warehouse where row upon row, draw upon draw of birds identified by their Latin names are arranged according to genus and species, the smallest of which are placed together in exquisite taxonomies detailing for example, varying intensities of colour within a single, wide and shallow drawer:

The larger birds in the collection are challenging to work with as the taxidermist sets the bodies for scientific purposes only, unconcerned with the aesthetic appeal of the skins. The hollow eyes of the birds sprout cotton wool, their beaks are often misaligned, their sides pressed flat by the weight of their bodies upon the base of the steel drawers. Larger still, the swans are big enough to photograph in parts with their graceful necks carefully folded over their bodies, their heads hidden from the lens as though resting behind a wide black wing (fig.32). Much time was spent straightening and cleaning sawdust from their feathers. As I was unable to take the birds from the collection, I established a small make-shift studio in a vacant office using a piece of black velvet upon which I placed the dusty forms of the birds. The velvet allowed me to carefully light the birds, providing a deep black background that is intensified by the inkjet technology I have used to print the photographs. These black spaces became the constant element of my photographs, a series of graphic and abstract forms that link one work with another.
The smaller birds in the collection are less damaged: looking as though they had only recently been found lying peacefully upon the ground. The New Guinean birds of paradise are the jewels in the crown; iridescent to the point of incomprehension. Likewise: kingfishers and kookaburras have within their wings, feathers that trigger a spectacular scattering of available blue light. There is also, within the archive, a small, dark room with a UV bulb. Under this light, the feathers of parrots will glow an otherworldly fluorescence, revealing which feathers reflect ultraviolet light and the degree to which certain birds are sensitive to a wider spectrum than that of human vision: making explicit the subjective and biological conditions of sight (fig.33).

**Painting with light**

To take a photograph in low levels of light, it becomes necessary to leave the camera shutter open for extended periods of time, thus allowing actinic light to accumulate like brush strokes upon the emulsion. Similar to making a photograph once the sun has set, *painting with light* is a process that exploits the reciprocity failure inherent to film, an exponential increase in exposure times that begins at one second and can be calculated for periods of up to a year (figs.34-35). These long exposure times allow the camera to be flooded with a temporal and metamorphic quality that can produce a sense of movement, an otherworldly radiance, or allow light to fall from all directions. I began to use the technique during the winter, when I had no opportunity to travel for field work. Turning the camera away from landscape towards the interior of a scientific archive, I used a small handheld torch to explore the potential of an artificial, directed light: a light of *examination*. Such light may be presented focused and precise, or be expressively applied like pools of honey poured over, for example, the still life photographs of Marian Drew. This is a process that I was fortunate to discuss with Drew in 2014, but my results are far colder and more controlled than Drew’s warm and exquisite works (figs.36-37).

18 The theory of such a light will be discussed in depth in the final chapter.
19 I met Marian Drew at the *Photography and Fictions* conference, Queensland Centre of Photography, 2014.
fig. 34. Regina Valkenborgh Days in the Sun, 2012. “From solstice to solstice, this six month long exposure compresses time from the 21st of June till the 21st of December, 2011, into a single point of view. Dubbed a solargraph, the unconventional picture was recorded with a pinhole camera made from a drink can lined with a piece of photographic paper. Fixed to a single spot for the entire exposure, the simple camera continuously records the Sun’s path each day as a glowing trail burned into the photosensitive paper. In this case, the spot was chosen to look out over the domes and radio telescope of the University of Hertfordshire’s Bayfordbury Observatory. Dark gaps in the daily arcs are caused by cloud cover, whereas continuous bright tracks record glorious spells of sunny weather. Of course, in June, the Sun trails begin higher at the northern hemisphere’s summer solstice. The trails sink lower in the sky as December’s winter solstice approaches. Last year’s autumn was one of the balmiest on record in the UK, as the many bright arcs in the lower part of this picture testify.” See: Astronomy Picture of the Day, “2012 January 21“ http://apod.nasa.gov/apod/ap120121.html (accessed 1st May, 2016).

fig. 35. Olafur Eliasson, Analemma for Kunsthuis Zug. 2009. "A camera situated at the Milchsuppenstein in Zug took a series of photographs always from the same position and angle and at the same time of day for a year. The resulting image presents an array of multiple suns in an elongated figure-eight arrangement known as an analemma. The distortion of the figure eight reflects the tilt of the earth’s axis and the variation in its orbit. By tracking the changing position of the sun in the sky, Analemma for Kunsthuis Zug makes the movement of the earth over the course of a year explicit.” See: Olafur Eliasson, “Analemma for Kunsthuis Zug, 2009” http://olafureliasson.net/archive/artwork/WEK100267/analemma-for-kunsthuis-zug#slideshow (accessed 30th April, 2016).

Using an analogue light meter to gauge exposure times according to the movement and intensity of the light to be used, and a chart for reciprocity failure that details the exponential increase of time required to create analogue photographs in low light, I directed my torch like a brush onto the bodies of birds: parrots, owls, swans and a vulture. This painstaking process is a slow form of photography that allowed me to become immersed in the process and indulge my fascination for the subject - every millimetre of which has been carefully and physically illuminated via gestures that resemble the rapid application of paint. Despite the similarities – both technique and subject matter – between Drew’s road kill still lives and my photographs of birds, the works are vastly different. My images are more like landscapes (fig.32); representations of the earth from which the birds are an integral part. Their representations in my work are anthropomorphised to evoke the body, tightly cropped and abstracted compositions with encoded meanings brought across from ecology, mythology and iconography (figs.38-39).

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20 See page 50.
21 These will be discussed in the following chapters.
Like Hiroshi Sugimoto's cinematic exposures of movie theatres (fig.40), a creative project spanning such an extended period of time takes on a transcendent quality, so that the parameters of the work – the photographs, research and writing – can no longer be easily defined. Children grow up and life's circumstances change; circumstances that, whilst having the greatest impact on the outcomes of studio research, belong to a tacit, transparent space exceeding the context of university research.

Many photographs have been taken that cannot, within this context, be shown. I came to the end of my project feeling as though there is a bright hole at the centre. Like Sugimoto's film burnt to white, the content is there but it cannot be represented directly.
Standing in for the personal and the self-censored aspects of a long standing photographic project, wild birds/live birds became metaphors for tacit knowledge: their frequent presence a trigger, a common thread, an emotion, a child, a departing soul. Taken spontaneously, these images underscore the complexities of present day photographic practice and, like Taryn Simon’s *Birds of the West Indies*, (figs.41-42) are singled out from wider contexts such as landscapes, domestic scenes, intimacy and the private realm of family, love and home. (figs.43-46)
fig. 45. Genevieve Swifte, from the series Light Work, 2012-2016.

fig. 46. Genevieve Swifte, from the series Light Work, (In Memory of Skye) 2012-2016.
In 2013 I spent time in the Blue Mountains of NSW, undertaking field work via an artist in residency program on the border of the Wollemi National Park. At the time that I was there, light filtering through the trees of the Wollemi took on a volatile quality, shimmering with the deafening sound of cicadas, heat and bush fires that would devastate the area only days after my departure. In the sandstone overhang of a cliff that formed a network of caves in the area, I photographed an opening that resembles an ear or an eye (fig.47), and I photographed the combustible view of the window and the Wollemi outside reflecting on the surface of my lens (fig.48). The photograph, which depicts the large surface of an old, wide angle lens, was taken on my digital camera and in this way evokes the process through which all of my black and white photographs have been made; each having passed through a lens twice: first to be captured on film, and later to be scanned via the sensor of my digital camera.22

22 A digital slr with a macro lens may be used over a light table to scan negatives. This is simple, fast, accessible and high quality method of digitalisation.
My negatives are edited in Photoshop using light-handed approaches via the curves, saturation and heal tools to hide dust, heighten contrast and exploit the best of both worlds; analogue and digital. The project thus emerged from between the old glass of my lenses and the rich black of the inkjet technology that I used to make my prints. These digital processes added their own qualities and a great sense of freedom to my project, structuring my photography around graphic and abstract forms that reference my background in drawing and print making, heightening the tactile qualities of my imagery and allowing me to print larger than otherwise would have been possible. Without the darkroom, the material processes of making became very much tethered to my cameras, and I have carried them throughout my candidacy almost like prosthetics: an extension both of the hand and of the eye.

*fig. 48. Genevieve Swifte, Poetic Lens, 2014.*
When photographs are made there is a conscious heightening of the senses, an awareness that takes in the constellation of a scene, natural phenomena, heat, the quality of light. Tacita Dean filmed the sun setting over the ocean from the island of Madagascar and captured, on 16mm colour film, the elusive green ray of the sun (fig.49). This phenomenon is rare to see and failed to be recorded by the digital cameras that others on the beach were using at the time. Analogue photographic processes refuse to clip the exposure and thus handle the exquisite tactility of light in a way that digital technologies cannot. Miles’ evocation of the camera as a *burning mirror*; a coalescence of light that gathers and accumulates, is also a coercion to break the rules of photography and point the camera directly at the sun. By turning the camera towards myself I attempt to achieve a similar disruption, and by weaving together deep listening with evaluating the light whilst out in the field, waves of light and sound become interwoven within photographs that have been interpreted as musical scores.

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24 Miles, *The Burning Mirror*, 16.
25 Ibid. 213.
Discursive, elemental, tactile and auditory, Sontag’s *kalós* drive\(^{26}\) to make a photograph can be traced through my photographs of birds and a series of landscapes suffused with exquisite light (figs.50-52). Each photograph of a bird in flight is fleeting rather than formally composed – most of which have been taken with a pocket sized rangefinder on 35mm film, a Leica CL with either a 40mm or a 90mm lens that I carry with me at all times. The goal of these images simply being to capture the birds within the frame, whilst the series of landscapes depicted are only the scaffolding upon which exquisite light is momentarily suspended.

Such material thinking is, as Miles points out, multifaceted; it fuses imagery with materiality, and subject with technique:\(^{27}\) a methodology that may be brought across from studio practice and field work, to theory and to art history. The following chapter diverges from landscape and explores implications of exquisite light to the photography of Francesca Woodman, tracing a multitude of meanings through classical iconography, musicality and the latent presence of Caravaggio’s brush found throughout traditions of self-portraiture. A study that brought about an immense shift in my studio work, this chapter will be followed by a detailed discussion of my later photographic works that draw upon representations of the body and grace in Ancient Roman and Renaissance art, and feminist theory, Michael Fried’s kaleidoscopic readings of Caravaggio’s paintings,\(^{28}\) and the relationship between vision and sound in Hans Blumenberg’s philosophical text on the history of light.

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26 See page 45.
27 Ibid.
28 Fried, *The Moment of Caravaggio*. 81
Part 2
As it fosters multiple, double perspectives, the burning mirror opens up a multidimensional means of engagement with photography. Above all the burning mirror is an instrument of multiplicity and inclusivity. Under its discursive boundaries that routinely separate light from matter, and the photograph’s content from the technical means through which it enters representation, dissolve.¹

¹ Miles, The Burning Mirror, 213.
The theory behind a work of art is important
but for me it is always secondary to the satisfaction of the eye.¹

but lately i find A sliver of Mirror is simply to slice an eye lid²

¹ Francesca Woodman in Giuseppe Casetti and Francisco Stocchi ed. Francesca Stern Woodman; Photographs, (AGMA, 2001) 125.
Seated on a wooden bench at her home in Colorado in 1972, Francesca Woodman at the age of thirteen made what is believed to be the first of countless photographic self portraits (fig. 1). Tethered to a camera given to her by her father, the artist is pictured holding a long cable release in her left hand, with her head turned away from the lens and towards the source of light that illuminates her. Pouring in through a window just beyond the limit of the photographic frame, sunlight falls short of Woodman’s figure and overexposes aspects of the room behind her: a white chair in the background, the floor beneath her, and the knitted woollen fabric of her sleeve. The classical form of her fingers is fiercely backlit with brilliant light evoking the sensation of radiant heat. Here, the exquisite tactility of light stains her right hand as though with paint. In Self Portrait at Thirteen, Woodman mediates and shapes this light as though she were in the darkroom, she dodges and burns, sits and photographs for her self simultaneously.
Made when the artist was still a child, *Self Portrait at Thirteen* establishes a gestural language that would come to characterise Woodman’s entire body of work. With her eyes concealed, we are denied direct contact with her and are thus compelled to linger over the image, scanning for an aspect that might look back. Visibly triggering the cable release at the centre of the photograph, it is her left hand, not her eyes, that returns our gaze. Here, a foreshortened line drawn between her hand and the camera brings our attention to a distorted space that falls beyond the minimum focusing range of the lens, a limit to photographic representation that disrupts our gaze as though with a lacrimal clouding of the eye.

The most authoritative text we have on the photography of Francesca Woodman was written by her friend and collaborator Sloan Rankin¹ who worked closely with Woodman throughout their shared time at the Rhode Island School of Design. Such was the level of their collaboration that there are times when it is unclear who is in front and who is behind Woodman’s camera. This singing in rounds gives to Woodman’s photography a kind of breathless quality that is wholly uninhibited. The photographs are intimate, performative and full of risk.² As such, Rankin is placed in a position of authority from which to identify crucial elements of Woodman’s practice, amongst them: emotion; the careful planning of photographs in such a way as to embrace chance occurrences of light and space, spontaneity; the individuals whom Woodman photographed and the tactile nature of her work.³

By taking Vasseleu’s concept of light’s texture as my point of departure,⁴ the tactile nature of Woodman’s imagery as described by Rankin takes on a heightened degree of significance as photography passes from vision to touch at the point of contact between light and the body. As such, my approach towards Woodman’s photography considers the significance of light as the language and materiality of her photography.⁵

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² Claire Raymond writes of Rankin’s collaborative presence as permitting the risk performed in Woodman’s self portraits. See: Claire Raymond, *Francesca Woodman and the Kantian Sublime* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 132-3.
³ Rankin, “Peach Mumble, Ideas Cooking,” in *Francesca Woodman*, 35.
⁴ Vasseleu, *Textures of Light*.
⁵ Ibid, 128.
Woodman’s mediation of the exquisite tactility of light in *Self-Portrait at Thirteen* can inform a pair of untitled photographs made in New York seven years later and after Woodman’s graduation from the Rhode Island School of Design (figs. 2-3). Here, as Woodman is pictured standing before a weathered wall, the camera establishes a “poetics of mirroring”\(^6\) between her body, the garden of ferns printed on the fabric of her dress and a metal armature that has emerged through the ruined surface of the wall. Into this constellation, Woodman’s hand places an object to the skin of her naked back in the one photograph, and raises it to her left shoulder in the other. Whilst in *Self-Portrait at Thirteen*, Woodman’s hand mediates the exquisite tactility of light as it pours in through the window, in the pair of untitled photographs, it is the object itself that defines the behaviour of light within the imagery; catching and refracting like a flare within the lens.

Throughout what is an immense and problematic body of literature, there is a consistent misreading of these untitled photographs, most notably in Phaidon’s influential publication *Art and Feminism*\(^7\) from 2001 where the photograph in which Woodman has turned to face the wall was published to represent her body of work. The brief text by Peggy Phelan which accompanies the image asserts that: “…the patterns on her clothing and the form of the fishbone set up a series of mediations between the artist’s body and the features of the wall behind.” Phelan concludes by stating that “Woodman at once invites and repels the voyeurism conventionally invoked by depictions of the female body.”\(^8\) Phelan’s reading stems from an earlier text written by Margaret

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\(^6\) This concept, to which I will return, is borrowed from Michael Fried’s writings on Caravaggio and refers to the use of mirrors in 16th century Baroque painting. See: Fried, *The Moment of Caravaggio*.


\(^8\) Ibid, 109.
Sundell and published in 1994 in the catalogue for the exhibition curated by Catherine de Zegher, *Inside the Visible, an Elliptical Traverse of 20th Century Art: In, Of and From the Feminine.* This exhibition established an important context from which to examine women's avant-garde practices in 20th century art, an appropriate place from which to consider Woodman's photography. However, by facilitating a process of classification whereby each aspect of the photograph is described one after another, Sundell's essay failed to consider Woodman's work within the premise of the exhibition. This approach foreclosed Woodman's imagery to de Zegher's curatorial aims when it identified, separated and fixed difference within the image. Classified as “fishbone,” the meaning of the object held in Woodman's hand has remained fixed in place as a symbol of abjection from which Sundell and Phelan both drew notions of madness and “voyeurism” that remain associated with the way in which Woodman photographs her body.

In a letter written to a friend in 1980, Woodman describes her own response to voyeuristic approaches to her body and her work:

"This fall 3 separate dealers insinuated in various ways that to understand my work they would have to sleep with me and the idea that my pieces seems to evoke that kind of response revolts me is dramatically opposed to what I was trying to express."

De Zegher’s curatorial premise for *Inside the Visible* explored “how women artists develop an intrinsically direct visceral language.” Given Woodman's statement above, my approach to the “visceral language” of her photography and the way in which Woodman represented her own and other bodies, proposes that it is necessary to consider her work independently of the male gaze. My own position returns to de Zegher’s curatorial aims through which may be established “new beginnings” for Woodman’s work. This is achieved by redressing the persistent misreading of the object central to Woodman's untitled photographs as a signifier of madness, voyeurism and abjection.

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10 Referring to Francesca Woodman, Susan Best notes the affecting nature of the works included in the exhibition *Inside the Visible.* Whilst Best does not give a detailed account of Woodman’s photography in her own text, I will draw upon Best’s approach later within this chapter, and the important juncture between Best's *Visualizing Feeling* and de Zegher’s *Inside the Visible*, throughout my exegesis. See: Susan Best, *Visualizing Feeling*, 2.
11 de Zegher, introduction, 21.
14 Milena Kalinovská, forward to *Inside the Visible*, 9.
15 de Zegher, introduction, 21.
When looking at this object, and the quality of Woodman's performative gesture, I am unable to accept it is a "fishbone" that she holds in her hand. The manner in which Woodman holds this thing is such that I am reminded of the way in which a musician holds the twin aspects of a violin – with graceful, performative intent. Looking ever more deeply into the imagery reveals that neither the materiality nor the form of the object have anything to do with bone at all. It is made of glass: the central spine is liquid and transparent, the base of which tapers to a fine transparent point, like the calamus of a feather (fig.4).

So as to be sure of their nature I took the photographs to a biologist at the Australian National University who confirmed for me that there is nothing fish-like about the object, that its symmetry and structure more closely resemble feathers and plants; like the ferns printed on the fabric of Woodman's dress. There is also nothing natural about the object's origin, it clearly has been fabricated and its intricate design invites further investigation. Looking back through Woodman's photographs will reveal a number of glass props (figs.5-7), the most striking of which is the form that emerges from Woodman's mouth in Self Portrait Talking to Vince (fig.5), which, like the glass object in the untitled photographs, would have been flame-worked from borosilicate.17

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16 Dr. Christopher Fulton, Research School of Biology, College of Medicine, Biology & Environment, the Australian National University, personal communication, 2013.

17 Lea Douglass and Dr Richard Whitely, The Australian National University School of Art, personal communication, 2013.
fig. 5. Francesca Woodman, *Self-Portrait Talking to Vince*, 1975-78.


Fig. 9. Postcard from Francesca Woodman to Edith Schloss, 1979.
In the summer of 1979, Woodman sent two postcards (figs.8-9) to a friend in Italy from Washington State where she was visiting her boyfriend at the Pilchuck Glass School. In the 1970’s, Pilchuck and the glass department at the Rhode Island School of Design operated under the directorship of Dale Chihuly, who, in the 1970’s created architectural glass at Pilchuck like the Corning Wall (fig.10), the panels of which resemble a fragment of glass imbedded with a circular form that rests against the skirting board of a room at RISD in another of Woodman’s untitled photographs (figs.11-12). In another pair, White Socks and Untitled (figs.13-14), Woodman holds a circular glass form evocative of Chihuly’s iridescent rondels through which streams wavering light that falls upon the skin of her body from a window beyond (fig.17).

Founded in 1971, Pilchuck (figs. 15-17) became an international centre for glass artists who converged each summer for workshops where "artists taught artists" and experimental approaches to glass met with traditional techniques brought to the school by visiting masters from Europe. In the spirit of the 1970s, the community of glass artists at Pilchuck fostered an exploration of the materiality of glass and gave birth to contemporary glass practices as theoretical concerns of materiality and form were being forged in the hot-shops and before the radiance of the glory-holes.  

19 Dr Richard Whitely, personal communication, 2013.
Woodman wrote of the glass cases used in her series Space2 (figs. 18-19), that “Glass makes a nice definition of space because it delineates a form while revealing what is inside / it is also a cold and somewhat harsh material.”20 These words demonstrate that Woodman had a considered awareness of glass as an art-form and as a material that allows visual access to an interior space that otherwise would be hidden beneath an opaque surface. The surface of glass, with its transparent and reflective qualities, behaves as a skin upon which light gathers and intensifies.21 Here, forms made from glass and photographic processes share via the materiality of the lens, an essential relationship with light's texture; evoking a matrix woven from brilliance, reflectivity and translucency. The contemplative and haptic response to light's texture in Self Portrait at Thirteen thus resonates with the untitled photographs. Within each image, light is not so much something that is seen, as it is something that is held.

Given Woodman's meticulous approach towards her photography,22 it is likely that the glass object was made specifically to Woodman's design and, as the photographs are identified as having been made in New York, a vast distance from Pilchuck, it is certain that the photographs are the result of considerable preparation, yet they do not appear contrived. The finely wrought structure of the glass object and Woodman's affiliation with the glass scene at Pilchuck indicates that Woodman had access to, and collaborated with, a vibrant community of highly skilled and experimental glass artists. As such, Woodman's untitled photographs tap into a significant moment in the history of contemporary studio glass and reveal the extent to which Woodman's practice was interdisciplinary, collaborative, and her photographs deeply considered compositional works. Such a depth of means, process and materiality asks that the photographs be re-read, and at the heart of my reading lies an evocation of the exquisite tactility of light, a sensibility inherent to the mediums of, not only glass and photography, but also the long tradition of western painting. Here, light takes on a more entangled and ambiguous nature than the absolute light of photography and my concerns lie with the use of mirrors in 16th century Baroque painting as described by art historian Michael Fried. Such mirroring brought to traditions of self-portraiture certain gestures of artist-sitters consistent with the embodied nature of Woodman's imagery and the iconography of her untitled photographs.

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20 Francesca Woodman "Journal Extracts" in Francesca Woodman, Townsend, 241-246.
22 Rankin, Peach Mumble, Ideas Cooking, 34.
A wider and wilder context: beyond the male gaze.

In Chris Townsend’s monograph on the photography of Francesca Woodman, he refers to Caravaggio’s Bacchino Malato (fig. 20) and the writings of Bersani and Dutoit in which they describe Caravaggio’s paintings as initiating “the conditions under which a visual field more or less urgently solicits and resists its own symbolisation.” Here, Townsend writes that Woodman’s untitled photographs “remind us of the way in which Woodman replicates herself in other forms” via what he describes as a “plastic fishbone” that is held to Woodman’s spine and the wall, and in relation to her dress. Townsend comes close here to recovering something more about the materiality and potential meanings of the imagery but, just as he fails to investigate the nature of the object any further, so too do the deeper meanings of relationality and subjectivity behind Bersani and Dutoit’s position on Caravaggio. When Townsend evokes similarities between Caravaggio’s models and the way in which Woodman photographs her body, he finds it necessary to claim that he does not imply that Woodman “consciously” used “Caravaggio’s representational model” and that she was “a mature enough artist to work out how she wanted to place herself in the space of the image” and thus fails to consider the significant extent Caravaggistic imagery may have to Woodman’s photography. I however, would argue that not only was Woodman a sophisticated enough artist (in fact there is no other artist who can touch Woodman’s ability to inhabit pictorial space) but that she possessed a deep and conscious awareness of the implications of Caravaggistic imagery, a visual lexicon in which Woodman was fluent. Townsend defers to, and reinforces, the traditional readings of the untitled photographs by confining his critique to their erotic charge as they “oscillate between solicitation and concealment.” essentially reducing the photographs to a strip tease. In this, Townsend refers

23 Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit quoted in Townsend, Francesca Woodman, 58.
24 Townsend, Francesca Woodman, 57.
25 Ibid, 58.
26 Ibid, 58.
to an obscure text on Woodman’s photographs published in 1988 entitled “The Body in Ruins”
(27) in which the authors, within a brief and erratic one and a half pages, distil Foucault’s Discipline
and Punishment: The Birth of the Prison (28) onto Woodman’s imagery of the/her body as “the locus
of a dissociated self.” (29) Townsend’s use of the text which appeared in a publication entitled The
Postmodern Scene: Excremental Culture and Hyper-Aesthetics (30) seems bizarre given his position that
Woodman was a pure modernist. (31) Within the context of “The Traditions of Self-Portraiture,” (32) this
text bears little relevance whatsoever, other than to give license to Townsend’s understanding of
Woodman’s “equivalence” between objects and genitalia, as a “parodic play of the pornographer’s
art,” (33) an evocation from which Townsend appears to be unable to recover. Thus, the untitled
photographs are again lost to the dynamic of voyeurism so deeply ingrained within the literature.
From here, Townsend’s analogy between Woodman and Caravaggio falls to their “troping of sexual
organs” (34) and he equates the “equivalence” found within Woodman’s imagery with “displacement”
and “dispersal” (and with “fantasy” in general). (35)

Here, I would argue that the readings of Woodman’s untitled photographs by Sundell, Phelan and
Townsend are problematic, not only because they misinterpret the imagery, but because they only
consider the photographs from the perspective of the male gaze. However, taking Melissa Miles’
approach in The Burning Mirror as an invitation to set fire to the traditional readings of Woodman’s
untitled photographs, (36) it is possible to find amongst the ashes an exquisite object; a work of art
within a work of art.

(27) Arthur Kroker and David Cook, “The Body in Ruins” in The Postmodern Scene: Excremental Culture and Hyper-
Aesthetics, (Montréal: New World Perspectives, 1988) 243-245.
(29) Foucault quoted in Kroker and Cook, The Postmodern Scene, 244.
(30) Ibid.
(33) Kroker and Cook as quoted in Townsend, Francesca Woodman, 58.
(34) Townsend, Francesca Woodman, 58.
(36) Miles, The Burning Mirror, 1.
Perfectly, this glass object fits to the dimensions of Woodman’s back (*fig.21*) and reflects both the printed fabric of her dress and the surface of the weathered wall. Either altered or sewn by hand, the hem of her dress is raw and, as the collar is worn high at her throat, it is almost certain that she wears it back-to-front. Worn in this way, the dress emphasises Woodman’s back and frames the object against her skin where the fabric is cut and folded away from her shoulders to her waist before being tacked tentatively together from behind. The tonality of the fabric in Woodman’s dress in black and white echoes the soft grey paint of the wall through which is visible a strata of lighter tones similar to the white print of ferns. The wall itself may be either a ruined interior or a weathered exterior, we simply have no way of knowing.

*fig.21. Francesca Woodman, Untitled, 1979.*
Hidden by Woodman’s body in the one photograph, the other reveals a sharp line that extends briefly below Woodman’s elbow (fig. 22). To the right of this cut, an internal structure embedded within the concrete has been exposed by an action perhaps more brutal than mere exposure to the elements, suggesting that the deteriorating surface has not only been weathered by the slow action of time, but might also be a palimpsest: damage inflicted via the removal of an aspect of the architecture. The wall thus, with its history starkly revealed, possesses a Bachelardian poetics that, under the close proximity of Woodman’s body, takes on a spacial intimacy evocative the solidified memories that Rachel Whiteread would later cast from abandoned houses and domestic interiors (fig. 23).
An entanglement of interior and exterior space, Woodman’s camera frames the wall from directly opposite, an unusual approach for the photographer who tended to tip the photographic frame against the right-angles of architecture. Parallel to the picture plane, the wall’s surface relates directly to the surface of the photographic print and Woodman’s closeness, her almost penetration of the wall’s surface, is as intimate as painting distance, making the wall a ground upon which she works; a canvas beneath a curious brush forged from the same material as the optics of her lens.

So as to engage with Woodman’s imagery in a way that embraces her agency as an artist deeply familiar with Italian art, and so as to more fully explore the possible implications of the Baroque to her photographs, I turn to Michael Fried’s reading of embodiment in Caravaggio’s paintings so as to argue that the poetics of mirroring facilitated by Woodman’s glass object establishes what Fried describes as a “flouting of boundaries in the interest of continuity both between the painter and the painting” within which lies a “primordial relationship” between painting and painter which is “succeeded but never wholly supplanted, by other viewers” or “us.” Here, Fried’s use of the word “beholder” is crucial: a concept through which it is possible to abandon notions of voyeurism present in Sundell, Phelan and Townsend’s critiques. Instead, by approaching Woodman’s photographs via Fried’s “beholder,” it might be possible to shift the relationship between Woodman and her audience from one traditionally defined as “voyeuristic complicity” to a relation of embodiment between the artist-as-sitter and the viewer-as-beholder which turns upon shared capacities for empathy.

37 Fried uses the term “painting distance” to describe the violent proximity between the figures in Caravaggio’s The Martyrdom of Saint Ursula, a painting that I will discuss in the following chapter. See: Fried, The Moment of Caravaggio, 222.
39 Ibid, 12.
40 Ibid, 12 & 157.
41 Sundell, Vanishing point, 435.
42 Fried writes: “the invention of absorption in painting as calling for something like a new, more concentrated… form of empathetic projection on the part of the viewer… who knows himself to be confined from the mealy painted figures… the painting’s presentness to the gaze, would seem on the side of dissolving … the viewers sense of confinement” Fried, The Moment of Caravaggio, 106.
Like the glass object in Woodman’s untitled photographs, works of art are not always as they at first appear to be. As Michael Fried points out to us, what at first might look to be a series of ripples on the dark surface of a glass of wine, are revealed upon “close and committed looking” to be concentric or parallel spirals embedded within the glass itself as it is offered to the viewer by Caravaggio, the artist-sitter depicted as the god Bacchus (figs. 24-25).  

As paint approached the photographic via the dramatic use of chiaroscuro and radiant representations of light, the Baroque evokes tactility via a turn towards a heightened degree of realism and marble carved to the softness of skin. Baroque paintings, such as those by the Caravaggisti, are an appropriate context from which to approach Woodman’s imagery as the photographer not only spent her honours year in Rome where she exhibited and established significant relationships with Italian artists, but also, as the daughter of artists, she grew up partly in Florence, could speak fluent Italian and was throughout her childhood immersed in galleries, museums and the creative world of her parents.  

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43 Ibid, 60.
44 See the following chapter for an account of circumspect disimulation and the conflation of touch and vision in classical Italian art.
45 Isabella Pedicini's links Bernini’s Apollo and Daphne to a series of photographs Woodman made whilst a resident at the MacDowell Colony in the summer of 1980. In these photographs, curls of bark stripped from birch trees are wrapped around Woodman’s wrists, fusing her arms with the forest behind and evoking the moment of Daphne’s metamorphoses into a laurel tree. See: Isabella Pedicini, Francesca Woodman, The Roman Years: Between Flesh and Film, (Rome: Contrasto, 2012) 97-104.
46 See: Edith Schloss The fierce poetry of Francesca Woodman.

fig.27. Francesca Woodman, Temple, 1980.

fig.28. Dennis Jarvis, Caryatids from the South Porch of the Erechtheion, Athens, Greece, 2005.
It is thus certain that Woodman's understanding of Italian art was not only academic, but that she also would have encountered countless examples in the flesh. As such, I argue that, just as ancient Greek architecture and sculpture informed Woodman's Temple Project and Caryatid (figs. 26-28), Italian art, specifically of the Baroque period, similarly informs many aspects of Woodman's imagery, giving a context for her darker performances such as is found in a number of photographs from her time in Italy including Angels (fig. 29), a photograph in which dark paint is brushed in great arcs like blood upon the surrounding walls as Woodman contorts her body and face, a performance that echoes the violence of Caravaggio's Judith beheading Holofernes (fig. 30), which hangs at the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica in Rome and in which Fried reads the action of the blade in Judith's hands as one that stands in for the artist's brush.

48 Originally exhibited at the Beyond Photography 80 exhibition at the Alternative Museum in New York in 1980, Woodman's artist statements reads: "For a Temple of classical proportion made out of classically inspired fragments of its modern day counterpart the bathroom. Bathrooms with classical inspiration are often found in the most squalid and chaotic apartments of the city they offer a note of calm and peacefulness like their temple counterparts offered to wayfarers in ancient Greece." Woodman and Keller, Francesca Woodman, 181-2.
Caravaggio's figures often appear in pairs – like the young and the old women in *Salome with the Head of John the Baptist* (fig. 31) – sharing, bodily space and reflecting one another as emotional intensities are shared between objects and figures – like the frown on the face of Judith which is reflected in the folds of the red cloth as she severs the head of Holofernes (fig. 32) – via mimetic behaviours that breach boundaries of individual elements and forms. Within these aspects of Caravaggio's paintings and those of his followers, Fried finds the “latent presence” of what he describes as right-angle dispositif and mirror reversal; the first alluding to self-portraits made by positioning a mirror at right-angles to the canvas (figs. 33-36) and recognisable by a slight turning of the artist-sitter's torso; the latter referring to the position of the hands when they have been corrected so as to maintain a consistent right-handedness or bodily mode of representation. Right-angle dispositif and mirror reversal are, as Fried writes “glimpsed in self-portrait after self-portrait including many in which the instruments of painting do not appear.”

Here, in place of the artist's brush, can be found swords (fig. 30), staffs, lanterns (fig. 36), musical instruments (fig. 38), and the martyr’s palm (fig. 37); examples of classical iconography that, I argue, have direct significance to the glass object in Woodman’s untitled photographs.

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50 Ibid, 22.

fig. 34. Henri Matisse, *Self-Portrait*, 1918.


Returning to Caravaggio’s Bacchus (fig.39), though we do not see either right-angle dispositif or mirror reversal in this painting, as Fried points out, the mirror and the canvas are instead conflated,\(^{51}\) just as the weathered wall and the surface of the photographic print is in Woodman’s untitled photographs. Bacchus can thus be read as a direct, mirror reflection of the artist who, rather than offering a goblet of wine with his left hand, instead stretches forth his right arm, a brush this time in hand, towards the surface of the canvas\(^{52}\) (fig.39-40), a gesture that can be found replicated in Woodman’s Self Portrait at Thirteen as she triggers the cable release held in the centre of the image (fig.41).

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51 Ibid, 59.
52 Ibid.
The embodied presence of the artist in the act of painting is significant also to the body of the angel in Caravaggio’s *Rest on the Flight to Egypt* and, given the significance of the angelic form to Woodman’s wider practice, it is here that Woodman’s untitled photographs and her performative gesture might be closely read (figs. 41-43). Like Woodman’s, the body of Caravaggio’s angel has been depicted from behind and the centrality of the angel to the composition is “congruent,” as Fried writes, first with the artist and ultimately with the beholder’s bodily orientation before the canvas.53 In this painting, a weary Joseph, Mary and child shelter beneath an oak tree as an angel performs for them the *Song of Solomon* from a bound score held aloft by Joseph. In the untitled photographs, Woodman is depicted in one from behind, the glass object held to the skin of her back which is as naked as that of Caravaggio’s angel. Placed thus, the fine barbs of glass and the tapering, transparent spine, evoke the large feather of an angel’s wing and the gesture hidden in the space between the two photographs – that of Woodman raising the object from behind – also evokes the raising of a wing in preparation for flight. Here, Woodman holds the glass object at her collarbone where the barbs become almost entangled with the wall’s embedded wire. As her body leans inwards towards the glass, it is as though she holds a violin and prepares with her right hand to draw a bow downwards upon the instrument, only this bow is one and the same with the instrument itself. Here, Woodman’s eyes become the eyes of the skin and her deeply absorbed state evokes the activity of listening, as though she harkens to a resonance audible between the glass in her hand and the wall at her side. In *Rest on the Flight to Egypt*, Caravaggio’s angel also plays for us a violin, an instrument that, like painting with a brush and palette, is an activity that requires both hands and “there is a crude sense” writes Fried “in which the violinist’s bow wheeled in the angel’s right hand may be analogised to the painter’s brush.” 55

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53 Ibid, 142.
55 Ibid 130.
fig. 44. Caravaggio, *Rest on the Flight to Egypt*, c.1597.

**Poem about 14 hands high**

i am apprehensive it is like when i
played the piano. first i learned to
read music and then at one point i
no longer needed to translate the notes:
they went directly to my hands. after a
while i stopped playing and when i
started again i found i could not
play. i could not play by
instinct and i had forgotten how
to read music.

Between the two closely positioned figures of the man and the angel in Caravaggio’s *Rest on the Flight to Egypt* (fig. 44), the deep liquidity of the donkey’s watchful eye makes contact with our own and draws us into the intimate space of the musical performance. Here, perception moves to the sensory realm of the ear as each figure is engaged in the act of listening; a recurrent theme in Caravaggio’s paintings in which figures harken to sounds that are perceived beyond the pictorial frame. Fried notes that Caravaggio, who painted with no preparatory drawings, first marked out the ears of his figures with a palette knife pressed into the pliant surface of the canvas before painting the eyes in last; a deferral of the visual that can also inform the significance of Woodman’s own withholding of her face/gaze from most of her photographs.

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56 Poem about 14 Hands High, see page 111. From: Rankin, *Peach Mumble*, 36.
57 In the following chapter I will explore Hans Blumenberg’s *Light as a Metaphor for Truth* in which the dazzling effect of pure light is spoken of as a threshold through which perception is passed from the eye to the ear via the sensation of touch. See: Blumenberg, *Light as a Metaphor for Truth*, 45.
fig. 45. Francesca Woodman, *Then at One Point I Did Not Need to Translate the Notes; They Went Directly to My Hands*, 1977.

If sound is what is being privileged in Woodman’s imagery, the gesture may be read as musical; an aspect of her practice documented within Woodman’s own writings:

“What happened is that I played music for a very long time. The pieces I played most were themes on variations, Scarlatti, etc. This occurs in my imagery.”

Such musicality is most evident in the series I Could No Longer Play, I could Not Play by Instinct (figs.45-48) accompanied by Woodman’s Poem about 14 Hands High, and ending with a photograph depicting Woodman’s figure from behind and inscribed with the words: then at one point i no longer needed to translate the notes: they went directly to my hands. Here, Woodman crouches beneath a large curl of wallpaper torn from the damaged wall to which she places her hands as though to the keyboard of a piano (fig.45).

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59 Francesca Woodman in Francesca Woodman, Corey Keller ed. 174.
60 Poem about 14 Hands High, see page 111. From: Rankin, Peach Mumble, 36.
fig. 49. Francesca Woodman, *Untitled*, 1975-76.
I would argue that similar musical gestures occur in a number Woodman’s photographs, including two untitled photographs, the first from 1975-76, in which Woodman stands with arms raised in mid-musical flight – as though she stands before a piano (fig.49), and the second from 1980 within which a series of triangular shapes are formed by the negative space between Woodman’s left wrist and biceps, between her right forearm and left underarm; gestures that together suggest the acts of holding of the violin’s neck, bowing the instrument and playing the higher notes where the strings are stretched over the body of the instrument (figs.50–51). These gestures are also present in the last photograph of the series I could no longer play (fig.48) in which the tips of Woodman’s fingers touch her left shoulder as her right hand, palm facing upwards, bares a slip of text that is held beneath her breast, mirroring the action of a hand drawing a bow across the strings.
In the abandoned house where Woodman made the first photograph for the series *I could no longer play*, and where many of Woodman's most well known photographs were made (figs.52-53), debris – wallpaper, paint and plaster crumbling from the walls and ceiling – and leaves blown in through an open or broken window, can be seen scattered upon the floor like the broken and shattered musical instruments that lay at the feet of Raphael's St Cecilia (fig.54) and evoke the saint's perception of heavenly music.
In such paintings, perception of sound is also implied via a gaze directed beyond the pictorial frame. This can be seen for example in Artemisia Gentileschi’s *St. Cecilia Playing a Lute* (fig.55) and in another portrait of the saint attributed to her father Orazio Gentileschi\(^\text{61}\) (fig.56). In this painting, Saint Cecilia stands startled and distracted from her instrument, her left hand raised and her attention shifted towards a sound from beyond the pictorial frame. Behind her, and at her right hand, an organ can be seen obliquely, its pipes and their shadows foreshortened and forming a rhythmic, geometric backdrop for the drama of the Saint’s affected state. At the very point at which the tapering pipes meet their shadows, a palm leaf rests between the cloth of Cecilia’s gown and the organ. The curving spikes of the frond reflect the pipes of the instrument and the fingers of Cecilia’s right hand as it rests between the geometric play of the pipes and the sensuous folds of red and gold silk that drape the body of the saint. Into this fabric is woven a floral pattern on the one side, and a geometric arrangement of golden oak leaves on the other.

Like the constellation between Woodman’s glass object, her dress, her body and the wall in the untitled photographs, the visual rhymes between the palm, the organ, Cecilia’s hand and the fabric of her gown, link the body of the saint to the instrument behind her via a repetition of geometry and iconography.

\(^{61}\) Dr. Roberto Contini has attributed the painting to Orazio Gentileschi and the work was exhibited in the exhibition *Artemisia Gentileschi* in Milan as Orazio Gentileschi. However, prof. Claudio Strinati has also attributed the painting to Mao Salini. See: Bigli Art Broker, “Mao Salini.” http://www.bigli.com/artwork/545/mao-salini/st-cecilia.aspx (accessed 16 June 2016).
fig. 56. Orazio Gentileschi, St. Cecilia, c. 1603-05.

fig. 58. Orazio Gentileschi, Sts Cecilia, Valerianus and Tiburtius c. 1620.
Throughout classical painting, Saint Cecilia is depicted as such, within a rich iconography pertaining to her place as the patron saint of music: with viola da gamba, organ, violin, lute or the martyr's palm as it is passed by an angel to the Saint at the moment of her martyrdom (figs. 54-59). With the invention of photographic chemistry three hundred years later and in the photographs of Julia Margaret Cameron, such iconography shift from the context of paint to that of the glass plate negative. In Cameron's photograph *St. Cecilia, after the manner of Raphael* (fig. 60), a woman holds a replica of the painting's organ – a small instrument that, in the hands of Raphael's affected saint, tips and begins to spill its pipes upon the ground. In Cameron's photograph, the organ is made from a crude wooden frame with slender sticks standing in for the instrument's pipes. This wooden form is held again in another photograph depicting the Greek poet Sappho (fig. 61) and in which can be seen, via the slight turn of the sitter's torso, the migration of right-angle dispositif from self-portraits created between a mirror and a canvas, to the conventions of formal photographic portraiture. Tracing the embodiment of right-angle dispositif from paint to photography thus opens the potential meanings of Woodman's glass object to musicality, classical iconography and the martyr's palm; objects that throughout the centuries evoke the full spectrum of the senses and remain grounded in the latent presence of the artist's brush.


*fig. 60*. Julia Margaret Cameron, *Saint Cecilia after the manner of Raphael*, 1864-5.
fig.61. Julia Margaret Cameron, *Sappho* 1865.
In Julia Margaret Cameron’s photograph *Cupid’s Pencil of Light* (fig. 62), a small child sits alongside a glass plate negative that reflects a bright light directly at the camera lens and recalls the use of mirrors in the production of self-portraits throughout the tradition of western painting. The rectangular plane of glass is not only resplendent, but also infectious; scattering an excessive light throughout the image. This halation appears as a softness around the sharp edge of the glass by Cupid’s side, a phenomenon shared at those places where light also strikes the white skinned body of the child. Bunnell and Sobieszek define *halation* in their encyclopedia of photography as:

“A halo-like blurred effect, frequently seen surrounding a brightly lit portion of a photographic image, caused either by reflection from the back of the glass plate or by lateral spreading of light in the film. The defect has been observed from the earliest days of photography, but it became more common on the introduction of glass plates. It is believed that the first mention of the word in print occurred in the year 1859. Halation is usually seen in its most aggravated form in the photograph of a dark interior which includes a bright window. The latter will not be clearly outlined, and all round it there will be fog. Halation also appears sometimes when the roof of a house or a tree cuts against the sky; around a white collar or dress in a portrait; and in fact in all subjects where a very bright line comes in sharp contrast with a deep shadow. The chief causes of halation is the reflection from the back of the plate – of the bright
beam of light that reached it...The thicker the glass plate the greater will be the extent of the halation, because of the wider angle formed by the reflective rays...

A contributory cause of halation is under-exposure and forced development, conditions that are more often responsible for the defect than are the direct causes. As a rule, the quicker a plate is developed the less halation will show."

Where he otherwise might be armed with a bow and arrow, Cameron’s Cupid holds in his hand a stylus as if to mark the surface of the glass negative which represents a textbook illustration of the effects of halation. Though we do not see the child’s back, a number of related images by Cameron depict children with large bird wings strapped to their backs, their hair tousled and with flairs or arcs of light caused by painterly applications of emulsion at the very top of the photographic space. In her book *The Burning Mirror*, Miles explores the terminology Cameron used in the naming of *Cupid’s Pencil of Light* and the significance of light within the image. As an allegorisation of the infant photography via a child who writes with a luminous pencil, Miles argues that *Cupid’s Pencil of Light*, draws upon those light metaphors borrowed from western thought and theology that have been “written into the very heart of light writing.”

Miles connects Cameron’s title with *The Pencil of Nature*, a phrase coined by Cameron’s friend and inventor of photography, William Henry Fox Talbot. As Miles points out, Catherine Rogers connects Talbot's *Pencil of Nature* to that of the *Pencil of Light*, a phrase originating from natural philosophy and used within optical geometry to signify a ray of light and the point at which light strikes an object. The implications brought to photography via the use of this phrase becomes explicit, as Miles points out, in the writings of Oliver Wendell Holmes who refers to a *pencil of fire* taken from the hand of an angel as a metaphor for the newly discovered processes of photography:

> it will be recognised that a new epoch in the history of human progress dates from the time when He who
> – never but in uncreated light
> Dwelt from eternity –
> took a pencil of fire from the hand of the ‘angel standing in the sun’ and placed it in the hand of a mortal.

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64 Miles, *The Burning Mirror*, 127.
65 Ibid, 22.
66 Ibid, 251.
These phrases, as Miles concludes, implicate within photography notions of the miraculous and the divine via a precise light derived from a natural sun and of the order of geometry. For Miles, such metaphors have in common a phallic quality and a disavowal of light's potential to disrupt photographic processes via light's propensity to burn and to blind, to overexpose and to spread, like the phenomenon of halation, unchecked throughout the image. However, I would further Miles' argument by borrowing from contemporary studio glass theory to emphasise the resplendent materiality of glass at the centre of Cupid's Pencil of Light. Whilst Cameron employed light metaphors via the use of classical iconography, she also facilitated the volatile phenomenon of halation, not as an accidental defect, but as an intentional mediation of light; an amplification that underscores the potential for glass, both in the plate negative and the optics of the lens, to shift from a transparent medium to the poetic opacities of reflection. These physical properties of glass gesture away from the malleable, transparent qualities that allow glass to operate as an optical device. The interference that occurs at and between the surfaces of glass through which light must pass before facilitating photographic exposure, evokes also the presence of a physical boundary between an interior and an exterior space. Like the capacity of the skin of a glass surface to become simultaneously activated and obscured by subjectively experienced reflections of light, interferences such as halation may be raw and opaque; physical properties that may be further taken into a metaphoric space as signifiers of "vulnerability and illusion", and literally may be taken as "an appropriate means to evoke the body"; to evoke the sensation of touch.

Whilst the defect of halation represents an obsolete limitation to photographic processes, so too are the slow, shifting exposure times in which traces of movement such as the blinking of an eye are accumulated upon the plate as a fog-like blurred effect. Whilst advances in film production – the application of dyes to absorb light, and higher sensitivities of film – render obsolete both the defects of halation and slow shutter speeds, Woodman, in her mediation of photographic processes, established imagery within which both the photographer and the camera both become palpable and opaque.

“You cannot see me from where I look at myself / I show you what you do not see, the body’s inner force.”

69 Miles, The Burning Mirror, 128.
70 Ricke, Frantz, Mizuta, The Glass Skin. 6-7
71 Ibid, 7.
72 It is interesting here to note that Cameron’s experimentations, such as the manipulation of the viscosity of her emulsions, attracted at the time relentless critique which was not only directed towards the material and technical aspects of her craft, but extended to the manner in which the bodies of her female models were depicted. This will also be discussed in my conclusion. See: Marta Weiss, Julia Margaret Cameron, Photographs to Electrify You With Delight and Startle the World, (London: MACK, 2015) 141.
73 Woodman in Francesca Woodman, ed. Harvé Chandès,10

fig. 64. Francesca Woodman, *From Angel Series*, 1977.

fig. 65. Anton Bragaglia, *Change of Position*, 1911.
In a great many of Woodman's photographs, movement of the body is privileged via a reciprocal relationship between slow shutter speeds, a depth of field that renders everything in sharp focus and low levels of light specific to interior spaces (figs.63-64). Here, Woodman's handling of her camera is not to be confused with the use of long or time exposures that last for one second or more. Woodman instead would have used slow fractions, most likely 1/15 to half a second; shutter speeds that capture just enough movement to describe the body as active within a space without losing it all together. This use of an excessive time allowed Woodman's body to spill beyond the demarcation of vision, an effect that is traditionally read to be one of disappearance. However, I would argue that Woodman's way of picturing the body shifts from vision towards the sensation of touch, much in the same way that the "photodynamism" of Italian Futurist Anton Bragaglia (fig.65) was concerned with describing "that area of movement which produces sensation."  

We want to render what is not seen on the surface: we want to register the living sensation of a particular reality's deep expression, and we are seeking its sensation of movement because that is rich with magnificent, hidden depths and emotive sources that render it unspeakable and ungraspable.  

Similarly, Woodman's shutter speeds allude to an affective time, to cognitive delays between thought, feeling and action that reveal the body as an active presence within the image and indulge the temporal aspect of the photographic act. In this way, Woodman's imagery is made haptic and embodied as her representations of an affective, unboundedness of being spills beyond the thresholds of what we normally consider to be the limits of the body (fig.66). As such, Woodman's technical and performative approaches towards photography allowed her to represent the self from within. This is photography turned inside out, a visceral mode of imagery that emerges from inside the visible and evokes the now rare effect of halation, a phenomenon curtailed by advances in film technology. Though, in the untitled photographs (figs.67-68), Woodman stands perfectly still, the movement of her body as she twists the glass object from behind her back and raises it to her left shoulder, is suspended in the space between the two photographs. Here, like all physical movement perceived with the eye, Woodman's performances elicit from us an empathetic response, an affect similar to that which is experienced when we perceive a body dancing, as a mirroring of movement felt from within.  

74 Anton Bragaglia, "Futurist, Photodynamism" 1911 in Modernism/Modernity, 15.2, 2008, 363-379  
75 Ibid.  

Woodman heightens these performances by inverting her imagery (fig.69-70) and installing photographs high above the heads of her audience (fig.71). Angels, Rome, for example, is shifted to a frightening, angelic register by rotating the imagery 180º, a device, along with arched backs and, as Raymond writes “breasts [that] become a pair of wings” through which to evoke flight\(^\text{77}\). The bodies of Caravaggio’s angels (figs.72-75) are similarly depicted spinning, swooping, hovering, not as they might be seen from below, but as though Caravaggio painted his models from a great height. Beholding the bodies as such, the viewer is tipped also into the air. Similarly, Woodman’s honours work Swan Song (fig.76)– a series of large photographs made upon her return from Italy in 1978 – were taken with a camera placed above a hole in the ceiling through which the lens looks down upon Woodman’s body. Woodman installed these photographs at the very top of the gallery space; sweeping the viewer up into a mesmeric point of view; like Caravaggio’s angels, we view her from above, we view her from below.

\(^{77}\) Raymond, Francesca Woodman and the Kantian Sublime, 109.


fig. 73. Caravaggio, *Nativity of Saint Francis and Saint Laurence*, c. 1600.


Inside the Visible: In Conclusion

In Sundell's essay for *Inside the Visible*, published in 1994, the object as “fishbone” is read to be an analogy of Woodman's spine, and the untitled photographs, a “chain of associations – spine, skeleton, dress, wall” – within a closed system that has no wider context other than that of disappearance and madness in the form of psychasthenia, a condition that leaves an individual unable to differentiate between their body and their surroundings. Seven years later, in the publication *Art and Feminism*, Peggy Phelan reaffirmed Sundell's reading of the object as a “fishbone,” associating voyeurism and abjection with the dynamic between Woodman's representation of her body and the object central to the imagery.

The following year, Phelan published an article in which the writer argued that “Woodman's artistic practice might be understood as a way to rehearse her own death.” Erroneously claiming that Woodman leapt through her apartment window, Phelan pictures the twenty two year old artist in the act of making photographs at the time of her death and asks “are we certain that her suicide is a tragedy?” Underpinning this false understanding of the circumstances surrounding Woodman's death is in an earlier text by Philippe Sollers published in 1998 in which it is claimed that Woodman leapt through one of her apartment windows before the author weaves into his narrative a sexual encounter in which the he plays the central role. Phelan too creates a fantasy, with herself pictured as art critic searching for a sign that might portend the psychic condition of the artist and visualising Woodman's act of suicide as a “composition that suited her.” Whilst it is true that Woodman fell to her death, the circumstances of her suicide differ from those presented within these texts. An account given by friends and family in a 2010 documentary makes clear that Woodman sought help to prevent her suicide and that she was not actively creating photographs at the time of her death or during her depression. On the day of her death Woodman made several attempts to seek help but having found no one at her parents' home, she then climbed to the top of a public building.

79 Ibid, 438.
82 Ibid, 983.
83 Ibid, 999.
84 Ibid 984.
86 Peggy Phelan, “Francesca Woodman’s Photography: Death and the Image One More Time” in *Signs*, 988
87 Ibid, 999.
88 Wills, *The Woodmans*, 2010
89 Ibid.
**fig. 77.** Francesca Woodman, *Untitled*, 1979-80.

**fig. 78.** Francesca Woodman, no details given.
The aestheticisation of Woodman’s suicide via the evocation of her window is not only misguided but is also highly problematic as the importance of the architectural and photographic frames as they relate to the body and space within Woodman’s work cannot be overstated (fig.77-78)\textsuperscript{90}. Similarly critical of Townsend, Phelan and Sollers, Raymond’s approach towards Woodman’s photography examines the significance of the frame within her imagery through the Kantian sublime.\textsuperscript{91} Raymond thus demonstrates the immense theoretical possibilities of Woodman’s imagery once metaphors of death have been placed aside. Whilst Phelan writes that “Ignoring or down playing suicide in the critical literature devoted to a gifted artist can obscure what may well be a central achievement in the artist’s work and life,”\textsuperscript{92} Raymond makes clear that Phelan’s approach foreclosed and obscured the nature of Woodman’s imagery.

By considering the significance of the object in Woodman’s untitled photographs, its materiality and relationship to contemporary studio glass, I have traced an aesthetic of light inherent to the mediums of glass and photography and evoked Vasseleu’s concept of light as “a texture woven from the visible and invisible qualities of lux and lumen,” a texture of light that passes from objectivity to subjective experiences of feeling such as being penetrated, dazzlement, ecstasy and pain.\textsuperscript{93} By then exploring the volatility of light via the overexposed negative of Woodman’s Self Portrait at Thirteen, I have borrowed Miles’ approach by exposing an “excessive, blinding and volatile light” upon certain theoretical and art historical texts,\textsuperscript{94} an approach that has made possible new beginnings for Woodman’s vast body of work. By shifting from the absolute light of photography to a more entangled painterly light as is found in Caravaggio’s poetics of mirroring I have argued that Woodman’s untitled photographs respond to the proliferation of right-angle dispositif, mirror reversal and the embodiment of the artist.\textsuperscript{95} Here I have suggested potential meanings for Woodman’s glass object as encompassing the angelic, classical iconography, musicality and the latent presence of Caravaggio’s brush, whilst arguing that Woodman’s glass object can be taken equally as the feather of an angel’s wing and the martyr’s palm.

\textsuperscript{90} See: Raymond, Francesca Woodman and the Kantian Sublime.
\textsuperscript{91} My approach towards Woodman’s photography is distinct from Raymond’s in our consideration of both light and affect. Raymond associates light with a “denigrating link between femininity and formlessness” where as Vasseleu makes clear that light is normally associated with the masculine in the Western tradition. Also in regards to my consideration of affect, which Raymond links to the cultic reception of Woodman’s imagery; an argument that Best might find to be a “blindspot” within Raymond’s methodology as one that does not accommodate the role of emotion that Rankin makes clear was important to Woodman’s processes. However, Raymond’s text does bring immense clarity to Woodman’s photographs and this has been significant for my own research. See: Raymond, Francesca Woodman and the Kantian Sublime, 18-20 & 4. Vasseleu, Textures of Light, 6. Best, Visualising Theory, 1. and Rankin, Pooh Mumble, Ideas Cooking, 35.
\textsuperscript{92} Phelan, “Francesca Woodman’s Photography: Death and the Image One More Time” in Signs, 985.
\textsuperscript{93} Vasseleu, Textures of Light, 12.
\textsuperscript{94} Miles, The Burning Mirror, 1.
\textsuperscript{95} Fried, The Moment of Caravaggio, 7-37.
Woodman often photographed fish as well as birds beside the female form and these creatures both inhabit a third or angelic space between the human and the divine.96 In the writing of this chapter, the only example of Woodman's photography that I came into personal contact with was one of the Eel Series (fig.79) which is held in the collection of the Art Gallery of NSW. The image is small, about 15 x 15 cm square and the orientation of the print, which differs from the version reproduced in Townsend’s monograph,97 attests to the slippery nature of Woodman’s imagery. In this photograph, Woodman’s body curves around the rim of a white enamelled bowel that rests upon a terrazzo floor. As Woodman’s body breaches the photographic frame, a sinuous, phallic creature slips over the lip of the bowl, only this phallus is something darkly luminous and circular; a number of eels that, whilst still alive and writhing, were carried by Woodman and Rankin from the market at the piazza Vittoria.98 Like the glass object as feather in the untitled photographs and the bodies of birds in others such as Woodman’s series Swan Song (fig.76), the eels lend their qualities to Woodman’s body as her imagery appropriates their writhing nature and associated meanings.

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97 See: From the Eel Series, Rome, 1977-78 in Townsend, Francesca Woodman, 164. Here, the orientation of the photograph on the left differs from the print held at the NSW Art Gallery in Sydney. It is unclear but possible that the two photographs presented side by side in Townsend's book have been printed together on the same piece of paper.

98 Rankin, Peach Mumble, Ideas Cooking, 35.
fig.80. Francesca Woodman, *Untitled (Woman’s Head, Shells)*, no date.

fig.81. Leopold and Rudolf Blaschka, *Aulosphaera Elegantissima*, biological glass model.
If the object in the untitled photographs still resembles a fishbone, given the material context of glass, Woodman’s imagery seems more at home with the exquisite taxonomy of Leopold and Rudolf Blaschka’s biological models of which a large collection is held at Harvard University thirty minutes drive from RISD, (fig.81) or, within the vitreen upon which a woman sleeps (fig.80), than with notions of madness, abjection and voyeurism that Phelan and Sundell associate with the way in which Woodman photographs her body.  

It is important here to note that the untitled photographs have appeared in a number of publications. That the nature of the glass object remained hidden in plain view for decades raises questions about the way in which works of art can be subsumed into and obscured by text, and the extent to which metaphors of death, like those of light within photographic discourse, have escaped critical analysis. Whilst it is clear that the glass object in the untitled photographs refers to the spine of Woodman’s body, its long held classification as a fish skeleton and nothing more demonstrates how ingrained these metaphors of death, madness and suicide are within the literature. As “a texture of light woven from the visible and invisible qualities of lux and lumen,” the glass object, by refusing and transcending classification, demonstrates the depth of Woodman’s practice and directs the eye towards the tactile mode of perception by evoking sensations of penetration dazzlement, ecstasy and pain. Thus, by moving beyond the metaphoric relationship between death and photography, it is possible to establish new beginnings such as those intended by Catherine de Zegher for the exhibition “Inside the Visible,” beginnings that, like Woodman’s photography, intervene in the exquisite texture of light.

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100 Townsend’s monograph on Woodman’s photography also includes a small reproduction of a third photograph featuring the glass object which was printed on transparent film and attached to a page of Woodman’s artist book Quaderno dei Dettati e dei Temi, 1978. See: Townsend, Francesca Woodman, 51 and 53.
101 Vasseleu, Textures of Light, 12.
102 Ibid
103 de Zegher, introduction, 21.
Part 3
Imagination is always considered to be the faculty of forming images. But it is rather the faculty of deforming images offered by perception, of freeing ourselves from the immediate images; it is especially the faculty of changing images. If there is not a changing of images, an unexpected union of images, there is no imagination, no imaginative action. If a present image does not recall an absent one, if an occasional image does not give rise to a swarm of aberrant images, to an explosion of images, there is no imagination. There is perception or memory of a perception, familiar memory, the habit of colours and forms. The fundamental word corresponding to imagination is not image but imaginary. The value of an image is measured by the extent of its imaginary radiance...¹

Establishing multiple meanings for Francesca Woodman’s untitled photographs, finding relations between imagery across time and traditions, brought certain resonances to my own photographs so that, just as I have written about the significance one work may have had for another, my studio work became the process through which certain meanings and imaginings crystallised. Beginning with *Echo and Narcissus* in 2014,¹ I continued, over the course of my candidature, to place one photograph alongside another, another and another until two would lock together in a poetic refraction, a visual harmony, an *imaginary radiance*; a creative practice that I found articulated in the words of Gaston Bachelard.² Bachelard speaks of this process as an opening and renewal of the human psyche.³ His metaphor is luminous, evoking a light of the mind and the visual capacity of the imagination. From the landscapes I had intended to explore, my methodology began with an actinic, elemental light,⁴ then spiralled tightly inwards, discovering a discursive light and coming to rest in a poetic re-configuration of self portraiture – but not before first passing through Michael Fried’s kaleidoscopic readings of Caravaggio’s paintings⁵ and representations of the body and grace in Ancient Roman and Renaissance art⁶ and feminist theory.⁷

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¹ See pages 63–65.
² See page 139.
⁴ As described in chapter 3, *Light Work*.
⁵ Fried, *The Moment of Caravaggio*.
⁶ Jacobs, *Aretino and Michelangelo*.
⁷ See chapter one, *Light Theories* for a review of feminist and other relevant theories.
Caravaggio's paintings are characterised by a dazzling and excessive quality through which light is painted to reflect upon highly polished surfaces of, for example, armour and blades. These representations of excessive qualities of light in Caravaggio's paintings give the impression in the words of Charles Dempsey as quoted by Fried: "an actual world in a moment of flux ... a split second that will be immediately shattered as the figures continue their actions." This characteristic of Caravaggio's painting that for Dempsey defined the “foundation” of a new realism, was in Caravaggio's time attacked by Carducho who wrote that the painter's reality was merely "a deception without artifice, an effect without substance, resulting in superficial copies in the absolutely literal sense of a mirrored instant in time." Here, what Carducho saw in Caravaggio seems almost to prefigure the event of photography and the fraught relationship it would come to have with painting.

In *The Taking of Christ* (fig.1.), Michael Fried finds the light illuminating Caravaggio's self-portrait to the right of the composition, to be of a “mysterious source.” This light behaves counter to the contemporary expectations of the eye accustomed to the photographic image and through which an aesthetic of light has been established; constrained to a fraction of a second and held to a fixed point of view. By comparison, the temporal and physical freedom of both seeing and painting allows for shifting positions of light, subject and painter over time. The extended minutes, hours, days and months of painting/seeing allows the eye of both the artist and viewer to perceive brilliant light and detail in the dark simultaneously in ways that the camera cannot typically record. Blumenberg describes Caravaggio's light as heralding a shift in the understanding of the world that coincides with Descartes and a light of “examination.” This *Cartesian* light coincided also with the birth of scientific enquiry, the amplification of observation that optics allow and the close observation of the natural world evident both in Italian and Flemish still life painting that would follow. In Blumenberg's words, this was a light that had shifted from the “homogenous, unquestioningly presupposed medium of visibility that ensures the unaccented presence of that which is to be represented” to a light that is localised and subject to adjustment, a “staging of lighting” that finds its apogee in the 19th century with the lime-light of the theatre and an *accentuated* vision that takes “as its point of departure, the dark as the “natural state.” However,

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9 Ibid, 256.
12 Ibid, 53-54.
like the fire light that falls in intensity by the time it has reached the oak leaves in *Saint Francis of Assisi in Ecstasy* (fig.36), the light of Caravaggio’s 17th century is one that is still “limited” and “subject to the law of inverted quadratic proportion.” Here it is necessary to forget the advances of artificial lighting and the fixed photographic image that shape our world view and remember that vision is neither so objective nor instantaneous as the shutter of the camera. Caravaggio’s light behaves more like the eye itself in its capacity to find a face in the darkness and perceive light with little to no actinic value. Hence, the “mysterious source” of Caravaggio’s light and its orientation has a singular point of origin analogue in *The Taking of Christ* (figs.1-2) where the artist himself is depicted with a lantern held aloft in the place of his brush.14

13 Ibid, 53.

"Inverted quadratic proportion", or the Inverse-Square Law: "A law in which the magnitude of a physical quantity is proportional to the reciprocal of the square of the distance from the source of that property. Newton's law of gravitation and Coulomb's law are both examples. The inverse-square law has very special mathematical and physical properties... that other inverse powers of the distance do not have." "Inverse-Square Law" A Dictionary of Physics 7th edition, Oxford Reference, http://www.oxfordreference.com.virtual.anu.edu.au/view/10.1093/acref/9780198714743.001.0001/acref-9780198714743-e-1542?rskey=6fzaur&result=1 (accessed 7 June 2016)

fig.3. Caravaggio, *Rest on the Flight to Egypt*, c. 1597.
An accentuating light of examination evokes the scientific accuracy and meticulous observation of the angel’s wing in Caravaggio’s *Rest on the Flight to Egypt* (fig.3), the feathers of which – small upon the shoulder and the elongated spines of the primary flight feathers – are reflected in the small leaves and fine branches that spring from the space between the angel, the sleeping mother and the oak tree (fig.4). The wing sits at the centre of a series of reflections that can be traced further still, downward through the parallel lines of the wing, the folds of the mother’s robes and the child’s cloth, before coming to rest in the form of the mother’s hands; her fingers answering to the long flight feathers or primary coverts. This mirroring of forms continues at the very centre of the painting, between the floating bow-like robe at the angel’s waist and the feathers at the base of the wing that appear almost to touch it. Such mirroring suggests the behaviour of the reflective surface of water and the pool depicted to the right of the mother – a surface that cannot be represented directly. Like a blade slicing through the reflective surface of such a pool and dividing the painting’s composition perfectly in half, the angel’s left wing emerges sharply foreshortened, throwing its reflection to the right as though it were balanced upon the surface of a mirror. Here, like Dürer’s *Left Wing of a Blue Roller* (fig.5), the anatomy of the bird is laid meticulously before the gaze, whilst its sister wing protrudes sharply to resist the analytic eye (fig.6).

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15 Like the tain of a mirror. See: Vasseleu, *Textures of Light*, 8.
fig. 5. Albrecht Dürer *Left Wing Of A Blue Roller*, 1512.


At the CSIRO, I photographed a wing large enough to have been worn by the angel in Caravaggio’s painting (fig.13). The largest bird after the albatross, the wing span of the Andean condor measures over six feet, evoking a tall figure and causing me to consider my own scale in relation to that of the bird. While I was making photographs in the mountains of Patagonia in 2012, these vultures would circle overhead, their presence visceral and mesmeric, the span of their wings evoking the human form, their feathered tips spreading apart in the air like the fingers of an open hand (figs.11-12). These vultures are less shy than our birds of prey and their enormous size means that, as they fly overhead, they appear close enough to touch – though none of my lenses are long enough to be fooled by this impression. Wings are unimportant to the scientists – it is the whole bird that they need with wings permanently folded closed. The wings that they do have – set with feathers splayed open as though in flight – serve as aesthetic objects only and within the collection there are few of these. I began with smaller wings of parrots and owls (figs.7-10), then the wing of a swan (fig.18).16 Surprisingly large, the swan’s wing triggered the emergence of the even larger wing of the condor which had come from a captive bird at the Taronga Zoo in Sydney. Large and heavy, it had been necessary for the taxidermist to scrape muscle from the bone in such a way that the underside of the wing was meaty and utterly that of the vulture. However, the feathers – the primary and secondary coverts – were like a heavy velvet in the light, a quality better conveyed by the darkly reflective surface of water that fills the photograph placed next to that of the wing in the paired work Mirror, 2015 (fig.14).

16 These wings and the works that they appear in are also discussed in chapter 3, Light Work.

At the centre of *Mirror*, between the condor’s wing and the water, the photographs are fused by a tangle of reeds growing in the creek at my mother’s property. These reeds, shaking in the long exposure, have been placed beside the wing in such a way as to reflect the pattern formed by the black and white feathers; an abstraction that is brought over and across the shared photographic frame and continued in the trees reflected within the pool of water. It is said that the angel’s wings at the centre of *Rest on the Flight to Egypt* depict those of a pigeon, though I would argue that Caravaggio only had the one wing, and that he used a mirror in order to paint the other, which would explain the wing’s exaggerated three dimensionality. In my own work, a mirror, a refraction, again creates a second wing, whilst play of words also occurs; *calamus* meaning the hollow shaft either of a feather or of a reed.

Michelangelo’s Leda and the Swan (fig.15) and the masculine features of her serpentine body are central to a discussion of the body and grace in Renaissance art, an attribute exemplified by the ancient Roman sculpture Sleeping Hermaphroditus (fig.16). Unearthed in the early seventeenth century and placed upon a mattress of marble carved by Bernini, the masculine and the feminine features of the ancient carving are represented within the body of a singular being upon a pillow of stone. At play within Michelangelo’s lost painting of Leda and the Sleeping Hermaphroditus, as Fredrika H. Jacobs writes, was “an aesthetic that may best be categorised as an artful dissolution of differentiated categories aimed at heightening the viewer’s appreciation by myriad of means, such as sensorial stimulation and challenging conflations of gender identity.” A heightening of the viewer’s appreciation, circumspect dissimulation is specifically concerned with the conflation of the sense of touch with the visual, evoked in the mode of painting via a coalescence of opposing features within a single form, and in sculpture, by viewing a three dimensional figure in subdued lighting.

In my Swanskin photographs (figs.17-19), the body of the birds reference the myth of Leda and the Swan and, the third of the series specifically (fig.19), Rubens’ painting of the myth after Michelangelo (fig.15), of which a print had hung for many years in my home after the exhibition Rubens and the Italian Renaissance at the National Gallery of Australia in 1992. Composed against a deep black, the long, white neck of the adolescent bird in my photograph is folded back upon the body, with the wing closed beneath and the shoulder resting upon a dark ground. Each fold is sensuous and bodily – the image may as well be that of a woman’s thigh, the leg bent at the knee and kneeling. In this work however, it is not gender that has been conflated within a single form, but the bird and the woman. Here, Leda is the swan, a corporealisation of something divine, an attribution of a body to something angelic. As Elizabeth Grosz explains of Irigaray’s writings on the divine: “the angel always traverses and displaces distinct identities and categories, being a divine union of contraries.” This was taken further still in my paired works Breast, Trespass and Rest (figs.20-22), that each place the bodies of birds beside an abstracted approach towards self-portraiture. Here, the patternation of wings, breasts and the barbs of feathers are fused with representations of the/my body via photographs of clothing taken at a close distance.

17 Jacobs, Aretino and Michelangelo.
18 Ibid 52.
19 Ibid 57.
20 See Grosz, Irigaray and the Divine.
21 Ibid, 124.
fig.15. Peter Paul Rubens, *Leda and the Swan*, after Michelangelo, 16th Century

fig.16. *Sleeping Hermaphroditus*, Roman Period.


Ecstasy

Fried’s beholder – the embodied relationship between artist, viewer and painting – is exemplified in the body of the angel in Caravaggio’s Rest on the Flight to Egypt (fig. 3), whose position is “congruent with the painter’s – also the viewer’s – bodily orientation before the canvas.” Depicted from behind and central to the composition, the angel stands in for the artist and for us. Seen from behind: a rückenfigur whose winged form carries us into the imagery and into the landscape – a borderland defined by the title of the work and the distant horizon to the right of the composition. The sky of the landscape, which mirrors the volume of the wing (fig. 23), inhabits a smaller portion of the canvas than the painting implies. Bordered by green and golden leaves, its luminous quality refracts between the surface of the water (fig. 24), the vegetation on the earth (fig. 25), the mother’s dark robes and the speculum of the wing (fig. 26): a Tyndall effect or scattering of the blue range of the spectrum that only heightens the golden light of the sun as it sets behind us, the viewers, and behind a horizon opposite to the scene.

figs. 23-26, Caravaggio, Rest on the Flight to Egypt, c 1597. Details.

22 Fried, The Moment of Caravaggio, 142.
fig. 27. Caravaggio, Cardsharps, c. 1594. Detail.

fig. 28. Caravaggio, Penitent Magdalene, c. 1597. Detail.

fig. 29. Caravaggio, Madonna and Child with St. Anne, 1606.

fig. 30. Caravaggio, Crowning with Thorns, 1607. Detail.

fig. 31. Caravaggio, Boy Bitten by a Lizard, c. 1596. Detail.
Disrupting Caravaggio’s tenebrism and more gentle by comparison with the heightened treatment of his light and the mesmeric mirroring of his paintings, the violence and immediacy of his imagery, is a play of natural light that falls upon the background of his scenes. At times this light is soft, as though a cloud were passing over the window of the artist’s studio (fig.27). For the most part however, light is depicted as sharp as the threshold and the lintel; abstractions that cut angular shapes from beyond the pictorial frame, down and into the painting below (fig.28-31). As such, the upper portions and backgrounds of the canvas appear to be reserved by Caravaggio for the representation of light alone.

Like lens flare, such a light implies the invisible passage of lumen. This is achieved via shafts that fall into and across the painting in such a way as to conflate interior and exterior spaces via a confusion of windows and thresholds that speak poetically to the pictorial frame (fig.32). Likewise, the gloaming of distant landscapes in paintings such as *Rest on the Flight to Egypt*, *John the Baptist* and *Sacrifice of Isaac* (figs.33-35) may well have begun with the play of light that fell upon Caravaggio’s studio wall. The effect is to give the perceptibility of lux to the invisible movement of luminous light both within and beyond the two dimensions of the painting. 23 The atmosphere of Caravaggio’s compositions are thus linked with that of the world beyond via a light that falls from behind our shoulder and into the painting; via a light that simultaneously illuminates the scene and warms our back, via a light that links the shadow play of the threshold and lintel with the serpentine line of the horizon beyond (figs.32-35).

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23 On visible and invisible light, Vasseleu writes that the distinction between ”lux and lumen is an ancient one. Lumen refers to the physical movement of invisible rays of light whose perfect linearity is the essence of illumination and requires no organ of sight. The passage of lumen is transparent and imperceivable. On the other hand, lux refers to the phenomenon of light, or as light as it is experienced in sight, composed of colour, shadow and visible qualities. Generally speaking lux is the subjective experience of light. See Vasseleu, *Textures of Light*, 129.
fig. 33. Caravaggio, *Rest on the Flight to Egypt*. Detail.

fig. 34. Caravaggio, *John the Baptist*, 1608.

Close enough to touch and arcing over the radiant skin of the saint and the angel in Caravaggio’s *Saint Francis of Assisi in Ecstasy* (fig. 36), the shoulder of a wing catches a warm fire light that has fallen in intensity by the time it has reached the golden oak leaves in the middle ground. Beyond, what at first appeared to me to be light reflected on the rippling surface of a river is in fact, upon more careful observation, light raking beneath a heavily overcast sky under which a small fire, like the one that illuminates the scene from beyond the edge of the canvas, burns in the distance (fig. 37).

*fig. 36. Caravaggio, Saint Francis of Assisi in Ecstasy, c. 1595.*

I photographed the surface of a river at a place where it swung between steep hillsides and when it was only just cold enough for snow to spin through the air (fig. 38). With the wind, the snow and the light, the surface of the water was constantly changing, as though the rough scales of a fish were moving erratically over silk. Exposed for the highlights, the negative is for the most part completely transparent and the photograph looks to me almost celestial, a constellation of reflections over an expanse of deep black. To keep with this sense of the night sky, I spun the photograph around so that it appears inverted and abstracted, removing all sense of gravity, scale and orientation (fig. 39).


Like Woodman’s inverted angels and those by Caravaggio that appear as though painted from above in *Seven Works of Mercy, Inspiration of Saint Matthew, Nativity of Saint Francis and Saint Laurence, and The Martyrdom of Saint Matthew* (figs. 40-44), the river, first viewed from the bank at my feet, has been placed overhead via its new orientation (fig. 39). Spinning the photograph around in such a way tips the viewer into orbit; the rings of Saturn emerge from the dark water, the surface of a planet catches the light of a sun, an octagonal flair like a satellite is cut by the blades that measure the aperture of my lens.


*fig. 44.* Caravaggio, *Inspiration of Saint Matthew, 1602.*
In *Saint Francis of Assisi in Ecstasy*, three small white daisies grow where Saint Francis lies, establishing a triangular constellation with the orange fire that has been painted to the same size as the flowers so as to appear far off in the distance (fig.45). Another constellation emerges between the light painted in the clouds – via a series of paired and almost parallel lines – and a similarly shaped hole in the saint’s robe that surrounds the sharp wound in his breast (fig.46). The feathers of the angel’s wing establish a similar correlation with the plants along the ground beneath the saint (figs.47-48), whilst the dimly lit oak leaves respond to the same light caught in the angel’s hair (fig.49).

In Baroque iconography, light mixed with hair communicates the quality of the atmosphere as that which transmits the passage of luminous light.24 Thus the painting infers that a second fire burns fiercely beside *us*, entangling the bodies of the artist and viewer as a reflection represented in the brightly illuminated bodies of the angel and the saint.

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24 Cesare Ripa wrote on the personification of air: "Over her head is a sun whose rays mix with her hair, signifying the beneficial aspects of the air, which transmits the sun’s rays to man". Cesare Ripa, *Baroque and Rococo Pictorial Imagery*, (New York: Dover Publications, 1971) 8.

*figs.45-49. Caravaggio, Saint Francis of Assisi in Ecstasy, c. 1595. Details.*
Printed above my inverted photograph of a river, is another that I had made the following winter (fig.50). This second photograph was made by hanging a dress over my window, placing my camera inside the fabric and experimenting with the play of light piercing through the lace of the dress. Like the cut in the robe of St. Francis (fig.51), or the wound in Christ’s side in The Incredulity of St. Thomas (fig.52), in which Fried finds the confirmation of St. Thomas’ sense of touch via the sense of sight, my photograph imagines what the skin could see if it could: light that has resolved into soft circles, sharp light that forces its way through the tight weave of fabric, focussed white ovals that line the negative spaces of the lace where the fabric fell into the shallow depth of field, and just a glimpse through the aperture at the centre, of the architectural frame that borders the panes of glass in an old fashioned window beyond (fig.53). What might be a shaft of light cuts also a sharp angle from the centre at the top down towards the left, interrupting and varying the deep tonality of the image to mirror the silk of the water below. Light bounces, as though within an old uncoated lens, between the two photographs; between the celestial origins of light and the surface of the skin, a relationship implied by the fabric of the dress and the surface of the river. Like the constellations established in Saint Francis of Assisi in Ecstasy, each aspect of the imagery weaves a texture of light, tracing a path from its source, to the eye, from the fire to the skin.


Fried finds within Caravaggio’s paintings two moments, a temporal understanding that begins with “immersion” and the painter’s “ongoing involvement” in the act of painting. Immersion, as Fried writes, allows us to imagine the painter “so caught up, so immersed ... as to be less than fully aware of any sharp distinction between the painting and himself.” 26 This first moment comes to an abrupt end in Fried’s second: that of a violent severing of the artist from the painting via either specular appearances of light flashing upon armour and blades, or by the use of the blade itself to sever. 27 However, Fried’s twin moments become “inextricably intertwined” 28 in, for example, Judith Beheading Holofernes (fig. 54). This occurs between Judith’s blade that, while cutting, carries with it the latent presence of Caravaggio’s brush in the act of painting (immersion), and her apparent awkwardness, her aversion to the blade as it severs the head of Holofernes (specularity). Between the gaze of the older Abra who appears utterly immersed in the decapitation taking place before her, and the specular quality of the blade. The gleaming quality of armour and blades such as is found also in The Taking of Christ, and the “implied thematics” 29 of reflection that carry embodiment via the latent presence of right-angle dispositifs 30 are, writes Fried, “correlated to one another in Caravaggio’s art.” 31

26 Ibid, 39.
27 Ibid, 63.
28 Ibid, 155.
29 Ibid, 216.
30 See page 106-108.
fig 55. Caravaggio, Rest on the Flight to Egypt, c 1597. Detail.
Fried might find this correlation to be embodied within the wings of the angel in *Rest on the Flight to Egypt* (fig.55), the first of which has been laid before our gaze as a “dazzling feat of material description.”32 The second wing, with its the sharp protrusion from the surface of the painting, stands in for the blade and for brilliant light, rendering the beholder’s relation to the painting strictly visual or “optical” in nature.33 It is here, between Fried’s “polar”34 moments, that Caravaggio’s “poetics of mirroring” become, in Fried’s own words “entangled.”35

Such brilliant reflections, if they were encountered in the flesh as opposed to paint, would manifest as a painful presence; a penetration of the eye that would pass sight into perception as a sense of touch.36 However, this dazzlement of the eye and the excessive light that inflicts a blind moment of vision is figured, in the context of western philosophy, not as a severing, but as a contact within which “the distance in vision” and the objectivity achieved via a purely ocular perspective “is lost.” Here, as Hans Blumenberg writes: “one who previously had been only someone who saw has simultaneously become another” and “belongs to the Other.”37 As such, it could be argued that representations of reflected light contribute to, rather than end, Fried’s theory of embodiment defined as a “flouting of boundaries in the interest of continuity both between the painter and the painting”38 within which lies a “primordial relationship” that is “succeeded but never wholly supplanted, by other viewers” or “us.”39

This optical relationship becomes entangled with what Blumenberg describes as a nonvisual sense of belonging via the German word gehören, to belong, also to hear. This transgression of sensory perception occurs at the point of contact between light and the eye of the beholder.40 Here, perception passes from the eye, through the sensation of touch as an experience of pain, to the ear as a harkening within which the beholder belongs to a dazzling, blinding and penetrating source of light. Whist Fried and Blumenberg’s theories may appear to be in opposition to one another, the first severing, the other belonging, both turn upon a violent evocation of the sensation of touch. As such, the perception of excessive representations of light might be considered to operate as a threshold through which the nature of vision is irrevocably altered.

32 Ibid, 128.
33 Ibid, 39.
34 Ibid, 208.
37 Ibid.
39 Ibid, 12.
fig. 56. Caravaggio, Rest on the Flight to Egypt, c 1597. Detail.

The reflective nature of *Rest on the Flight to Egypt* is, for the most part, held internally within the painting, a poetics of mirroring that began with the angel’s wing and continues with the small diamond of negative space between the angel’s wrist and the violin which perfectly mirrors the eye of the donkey to the left (fig.56). Between the angel and the man, who are both utterly absorbed in the musical performance, it is the donkey’s gaze that meets our own and holds it there. From the deep liquidity of the beast’s eye shines one of only two reflections (the other being a shard of light hitting the glass bottle that rests at the man’s feet upon the ground). All the while, just to the left of the angel’s face, a knot in a branch of the oak (fig.56) echoes both of the angels hands, each and every eye, soft golden curls and harkening ears – a spiralling of intensity that turns upon the bow like fold at the centre and in which the form of an ear can be found inverted within the billowing fabric (figs.58-59). A meeting point between the perception of sight and sound, the painting merges with the musical score held up to the angel to perform and asks not so much to be seen but to be listened to.
Fried describes Caravaggio’s processes as requiring no preparatory sketches, that he marked the intended location of his figures first by pressing a palette knife into the soft surface of the canvas to mark the position of the ears. He then painted the eyes in last “as if to forestall, to defer for as long as possible, a dynamic of the gaze”.

I had made my first overt self-portrait for the work _Harken i_ in 2015. The roll of film was not so much intended to be used, and so there are kinks in the negative that were caused by my fingers, by carelessly trying to force something that was not designed to be touched by anything other than light into an old spool in the darkroom (fig.60). These three small and delicate crescents that I have left raw and uncorrected within the image, reflect the subject of the photograph itself: the auricle of the outer ear.

Beneath this photograph, I have placed another image of an ear, that of my mother’s horse (fig.61), composed up close and turned 90° to the left, and whose dark body appears to swallow my own and my gaze between the juxtaposed imagery (fig.62).

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41 Fried, _The Moment of Caravaggio_, 55.
In a second, singular photograph of the horse (fig.57), the nape of her pelt is palpable, the light shining again as a delicate crescent from the surface of her eye. Like the beast in Caravaggio’s painting, this is a listening eye, an eye seen with a discursive light, with a light described by Levinas as “the light of a voice;” an eye that can be heard, and that can be spoken to. Harken i and ii are photographs about eye contact, the act of listening and the sensation of empathy, of the careful operation of the camera in the presence of the horse, at which surprisingly she did not flinch. It says something about the act of photographing another, and of the way the camera captures also the gaze of the photographer, which is directed downwards when operating a camera with a waist level view finder, how at this moment the ears play a crucial role in judging what is going on beyond the ground glass and beyond the lens.

**Transfixed**

The “sheer depth of feeling” conveyed by the “outwardly inexpressive” quality of Caravaggio’s *Penitent Magdalene* (fig.63), her “imagined inner life comparable, if not superior, in intensity to the viewer’s own” elicits from the painting’s beholder an affective response that Fried likens to that of Buddhist sculpture (fig.64). “Mediated in our own time by photography,” Fried writes that “the invention of absorption in painting [calls] for something like a new, more concentrated... form of empathetic projection on the part of the viewer.” Caravaggio’s capacity to trigger from the viewer such a response is exploitative of the complex processes responsible for the viewer’s capacity for empathy and relies upon the painter’s skill for a heightened state of realism linked to the mirror like mode of painting through which light appears to reflect upon the surface of the canvas as though we were a mirror within which we might catch our own reflection. The latent presence of right-angle dispositive and the poetics of mirroring, that for Fried establish an embodied relationship between the painting and the beholder, suggests an alternate reading of the myth of Narcissus is needed (fig.65), that the reflective surface of water and of mirrors enables the transgression of boundaries between, not only “individual elements and forms,” but between individuals themselves.

43 Ibid, 91.
45 Fried refers here to the paintings of Gerhard Richter and the photographs of Jeff Wall. Ibid, 78.
46 Ibid, 106.
48 Ibid, 96.

fig. 64. Dainichi Buddha (Dainichi Nyorai) Kamakura period 1185-1333, Japanese.
This is most powerfully demonstrated in the contemporary Mirrorbox of Megan Daalder (fig. 66) within which, via a shifting reflection of the face that moves over the face of another, two individuals may become entangled to the extent that the effects can be felt to linger physically, measured scientifically and imaged neurologically50.

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fig. 67. Caravaggio, Martyrdom of Saint Ursula, 1610.

fig. 68. Caravaggio, Taking of Christ, 1602.
As already discussed at the opening of this chapter, the origin of Caravaggio's light may be analogised in his painting *The Taking of Christ* (fig.68) in which the painter's self-portrait to the right of the scene is depicted with a lantern held aloft in the place of his brush (fig.69). Fried finds an analogy also “between Judas’ kiss and the caressing nature of the application of paint,” that the kiss (fig.70), like the sword and the paintbrush, are for Caravaggio “nominally aggressive instruments” associated with “acts of murder and decapitation”.

Caravaggio’s self-portrait in *The Taking of Christ*, his participation and position to the right of the composition, is found again in the *Martyrdom of Saint Ursula* (fig.67), painted approximately eight years later. Here, Caravaggio again stands within the press of bodies to the right and so closely behind the saint that her bodily space appears to be entangled with that of the painter’s in much the same way as the figure of Jesus and the fleeing man in *The Taking of Christ* appear to be fused at the head (fig.71).

Whilst Ursula’s preoccupation with the arrow piercing her breast is purely visual, the artist’s face conveys a glazed expression of shock and pain (fig.73), and it is here that my perception of the painting goes further, and then departs from Fried, as for me, it is Caravaggio himself who has been shot by the arrow and is struggling for breath. Thus, painter and subject, Caravaggio and Ursula, share more than pictorial space – they share, by their close proximity, the death blow of the same arrow.

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52 Ibid.
53 See also page 106.
fig. 72. Caravaggio, Denial of Saint Peter, 1610.

fig. 73. Caravaggio, Martyrdom of Saint Ursula, 1610. Detail.

fig. 74. Caravaggio, Martyrdom of Saint Ursula, 1610. Detail.

fig. 75. Caravaggio, Rest on the Flight to Egypt, c 1597. Detail.
Like the hand that holds the lantern in *The Taking of Christ* (fig. 69), which, given the press of bodies, cannot, beyond any doubt be associated with Caravaggio's hand, another in the *Martyrdom of Saint Ursula* grasps the shaft of what might be a spear above the faces of the painter and the saint (fig. 73), the fingers of which mirror the way in which the bow is held in the King's hand (fig. 67).\footnote{Fried writes that this hand belongs to the figure between the Saint and the King, and that it is not a spear but a noose that is tied around woman's neck. However, I do not see a rope around her skin, only the crease formed as she bends her head down, and on the face of the figure in question, an expression, not of violence but of grief.}

Forming a right-angle with the arrow from behind Ursula's body (fig. 74), the spear is grasped in a way that infers that it is not Caravaggio who holds it, but instead, a shadowy figure whose features are all but hidden, with only glimmer of polished metal and a flourish of gold adorning a helmet that echoes that within the *Denial of Saint Peter* painted earlier that same year (figs. 72–73). This figure, which emerges almost impossibly from the compressed space between Caravaggio and Ursula, is all but buried in the darkness of the painting as though, in the raw “tar”\footnote{Fried, *The Moment of Caravaggio*, 223.} like pitch of the ground, a face is both menacing and mirroring Caravaggio's own.

Fried notes that Caravaggio left chiaroscuro far behind in this and his last paintings\footnote{Ibid} and the representation of light has, in this work, something of a similar quality to the almost archetypal darkness in the painting. Ursula, her skin and the weave of her robes, emits an otherworldly, almost lunar radiance that far outstrips that of the resplendent armoured men. Like the skin of the angel in *Rest on the Flight to Egypt* (fig. 75), which Fried describes as possessing a quality of "sheer sensuous beauty" that behaves within the painting as a "severing or specularising effect,"\footnote{Ibid, 143.} Ursula's body (fig. 74), the abbreviation of *light* to *white* in both painting and photography and the limitations of photographic technology in the representation of black skin,\footnote{On the representation of black skin and photography see page 26-28.} raises profound questions of aesthetics and race that only heightens the aestheticised, violent nature of the "severing or specularising effect."
These aesthetics are exemplified in the painting's alternative name *Ursula Transfixed*. Signalling the trauma inflicted not only upon the body of the saint, but also upon the beholder as witness whose vision becomes neither objective nor distant in the presence of such imagery. To be *transfixed* is to be pierced either with a something sharp or with an emotion such as horror. The painting may thus be taken as a metaphor for the violent capacity of light and the painful experience of the visual passing into perception as an "affective perceptibility," a experience of touch, a sensation that calls forth the gesture of another unidentifiable hand from within the press of bodies (fig. 76) that, in a vain attempt to shield the woman from the fatal blow, evokes the raising of a hand to protect the eye from dazzling and excessive light at which point perception passes from the eye to the ear. Almost poetically, the painting was, at its completion, subjected to the damaging rays of the sun and as such, the arrow now appears immaterial (fig. 76), as though it were in fact a ray of light set loose from the sun represented in the golden lion adorning the breast plate of the king; a final and a material link embracing subject, metaphor and a sensuous contact with the exquisite tactility of light.

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59 Susan Best places the "affective dimension of art" alongside materiality and process as a locus of "innovation", and as "a quality of perceptibility that feminist theory should illuminate." See page 26., and Best, *Visualizing Feeling*, 3.


To further explore these aesthetics of excessive light and to evoke the sensations of touch through which the nature of vision is irrevocably altered, I made a second self-portrait that operates similarly to the imagery of Harken i and Ecstasy. This time, in the work Transfixed (fig.77), I am looking upwards, my gaze, hidden or "deferred" like Caravaggio's figures before their eyes had been painted in,62 or like Woodman's own in Self Portrait at Thirteen (fig.78).

Above this image is another frame, a second exposure from the roll of film used in the work Ecstasy.63 Made by hanging a dress in front of my window so as to scatter the light, as though onto my skin, into my lens and onto the film. This image, like the photograph of my mother's horse, has been turned 90º to the right, aligning the brightest aspect of the photograph with the place where my eyes should have been. The resplendent disk at my ear establishes a constellation with the soft circles in the image above and emphasises the importance of sound to the work. Here, the gaze, and the "severing or specularising effect,"64 of the reflective surface of the eye, has been displaced by the ear and photography is presented as something other than purely visual.

fig.77. Genevieve Swifte, Transfixed, 2015.

fig.78. Francesca Woodman, Self-Portrait at Thirteen. 1972.

63 See pages 64-65.
64 Ibid, 143.
Fried finds in the “severing or specularising effect,” in particular of *Judith Beheading Holofernes*, an allegory for the act of painting, that decapitation and violence “stands for the cutting out of the picture itself relative to its surroundings” as the “emergence” of “the self-sufficient and autonomous gallery picture,” and that within *The Martyrdom of Saint Ursula*, “the distinction between moments of immersion and specularity is at once multiplied and dissolved.” By passing through Fried’s kaleidoscopic approach to Caravaggio’s paintings, the poetics of mirroring explored in my photographic works sets up a certain structure that emphasises and trespasses across the even sharper, almost surgical-like edge of the photographic frame, a structure within which poetic refractions and visual harmonies are translated in my final body of work between vision, touch and sound. Translating between these perceptual modes turns the ears to eyes and eyes to ears, disrupting what might otherwise be only purely visual with Vasseleu’s sensations of vision: of “penetration, dazzlement ecstasy and pain.”

Locating the sensations of touch via representations of the body and grace in Ancient Roman and Renaissance art brought added depth via feminist theory to the implications of the angelic in both Woodman’s and Caravaggio’s imagery. As Elizabeth Grosz writes: “the angel always traverses and displaces distinct identities and categories, being a divine union of contraries” In my photographic works, the structure established between paired photographs allows for a “union of contraries” between the body and the bodies of birds for example, as an exploration of the iconography of Woodman’s and Caravaggio’s imagery. This may be articulated via the feminism of Irigaray who’s “corporealisation of the angelic” attributes, as Grosz writes, a “body and a sex to that always moving, shimmering being,” an “embodied...sexed angel”, that may thus represent the “possibility of a sexual ethics:”

Irreducible to philosophy, theology, morality the angels appear as messengers of the ethics evolved of art –sculpture, painting or music –without which something other than the gesture which they represent cannot be said.
Similar concerns have also been traced via an aesthetic of *grace*. Desirable to both the male and the female gaze,77 *circumspect dissimulation* – through which antithetical compositional devices of *contrapasto* and gender identities were merged in Renaissance art78 – sought to translate into the “pure visuality” of painting, the “tactile quality and sensorial completeness of sculpture.” *Circumspect dissimulation*, thus acknowledges “the limitations of sight,” a paradox that, as Jacobs points out, accentuates antithesis: “the viewer is never confused about what it is [they] actually [see].”79 Such aesthetic appreciation requires *lucidity*, this is a “game” whereby the rules of perceiving both admit the “phenomenological satisfaction” of touch within the visual, *and* decipher the distinct identities of vision and touch. In this, the appreciation of the artist’s skill is paramount.80 By subsuming the sensation of touch into *pure visuality*, the precision of photographic technology – chemistry and optics – surpasses *circumspect dissimulation* and thus renders transparent the hand/skill of the photographer. However, like the way in which Woodman holds her glass object, or Miles’ *burning mirror*81 for example, the implications of touch to photographic practice might be traced, not in the perfection of verisimilitude as would be the case with painting, but in the *handling* of light, camera and subject.

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77 See the promotional letter to Guidobaldo della Rovere, duke of Urbino from Pietro Aretino who wrote of Michelangelo’s *Venus Reclining with Cupid*: “Because the goddess infuses her qualities into the desires of the two sexes, the wise man [Michelangelo] made her with the body of the female and the muscles of the male so that with an elegant vivacity of artifice [grace] she is moved by masculine and feminine sentiments” in Jacobs, *Aretino and Michelangelo*. 51-52.
79 Ibid
80 Ibid
Conclusion

Like the material properties of glass and the surface of the camera lens, photography is subject to moments of transparency and opacity. In her text *On Photography*, Susan Sontag traces preferences over time for a “solid point of view” established between Alfred Stieglitz and Edward Weston (fig.1), of “impeccable lighting, skill of composition, clarity of subject, precision of focus, perfection of print quality,” a point of view that eclipses before yielding once more to the halation of Atget’s Paris (fig.2). However, the proficiency of the technician, the “activity of the photographer” is evoked by Sontag via only the most fleeting of physical gestures: that of the index finger triggering the camera shutter, truncating the photographer’s moment of immersion to nothing more than a fraction of a second. There is no darkness, wetness or smell of chemistry, no stirring of the bath, or hands burning in the light, no fleshing out of composition or the buttery turn of the focus ring, the camera may as well be weightless, there is no time spent waiting for a moment to unfold, or the gentle coaxing of a subject, no evaluation of the light or economy of frames and film, no skilful changing of lenses or the polishing of glass.

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2 Ibid, 164.
3 Sontag writes: “One can’t possess reality, one can possess (and be possessed by) images – as according to Proust, most ambitious of voluntary prisoners, one can’t possess the present but one can possess the past. Nothing could be more unlike the self-sacrificial travail of an artist like Proust than the effortlessness of picture-taking, which must be the sole activity resulting in accredited works of art in which a single movement, a touch of the finger, produces a complete work.” Ibid, 163-164.

fig. 2. Eugène Atget, *Cour de Rohan*, 1922.
Beyond the voluntary imprisonment of the writer – through which Sontag might have gained access to the solitude of the darkroom – the author is similarly disembodied. The hands typing, the fingers drawing the pen across the page, are as transparent as the photographer who stands behind the camera lens. However, within the scope of her text, Sontag’s presence is briefly touched upon. Slipping into the first person to recount her experiences of the surgeon’s scalpel, first in person as an “inhibited” witness to a medical procedure, and later in the cinema as the member of an audience who flinches at the first cut of the scalpel depicted upon the screen (figs. 3-4). Sontag, transfixed by the cinematic blade, her vision coerced and all distance, all objectivity lost, experiences the knife/light/vision in a way that is more analogous to sound and to pain than to sight. All the while however, the sharpness of Sontag’s own medium escapes all critical analysis.

One outcome of my research has been an unfolding of the relationship between writing and photography which has been explored in two ways: via the development of my own photographic works in parallel to the exegetical writings found within these pages, and an interrogation of the power exerted posthumously by theorists and art historians over a body of photographic works made by a young woman. This relationship is a troubled one that may be evoked by Sontag who states that:5

“words do speak louder than pictures. Captions do tend to override the evidence of our eyes; but no caption can permanently restrict or secure a picture’s meaning.”6

Drawing upon Margaret Sundell’s reading of Francesca Woodman’s untitled photographs, Peggy Phelan’s reaffirmation of the object held in Woodman’s hand as a fishbone is presented in Phaidon’s influential publication, Art and Feminism, as a caption, concisely overriding “the evidence of our eyes.” However, as Sontag states, the caption cannot permanently restrict or secure the photograph’s meaning and, given the opacities of Woodman’s practice, such meanings can never remain fixed. As a blind spot to both theory and art history, materiality presents a point of entry for practice-led research through which the exquisite nature of Woodman’s glass object becomes suggestive of how she might have handled her camera – an optic, a prism, a burning mirror through which potential meanings and “new beginnings”7 might scatter and refract, and through which traditional and entrenched readings might be set aflame.8

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6 Ibid, 108.
7 de Zegher, introduction, 21.
8 Miles, The Burning Mirror, 1.
figs. 3-4. Michelangelo Antonioni's *Chung Kuo – China*, 1972. Film stills.
In her text, Sontag also referred to infrared to imply that photography could be “independent of light itself.”9 However, actinic light comprises not only visible light but also, in the words of Bunnell and Sobieszek in their encyclopedia on photography, that “vast region of the spectrum lying beyond the red and to which our eyes are not sensitive, but which we are conscious of in the form of heat.”10 As such, actinic light incorporates wavelengths of a polysensuous11 range, a term Sontag uses to imply that the words of Henry Thoreau12 – who’s life span coincided with Talbot and Daguerre – belonged to a “context of nature,” a seeing that was “not cut off from the other senses,” a seeing that “predates photography.”13 Sontag's difficulty with the photographic medium is one that is at odds with the objectification inherent to Cartesian thought; an understanding of the world that, as Blumenberg notes, was heralded by the representation of light in Caravaggio's paintings. As Liz Wells writes on landscape photography: “pictures composed in accordance with the rules of perspective, offer a single, central viewing position; this draws upon and contributes to reaffirming the Cartesian ... emphasis on unique subjectivity.”14 Deriving from the Renaissance, Wells associates the transparency elicited by perspectival representation – the sense of looking “through” the photograph and unmeditated indexicality – with the “authority” of the photographer, rather than as an “inherent” quality of the medium itself.15 Like the angel/violinist in Caravaggio's Rest on the Flight to Egypt, the “bodily orientation” of the photographer in relation to the camera is “congruent”16 with that of the painter's before the canvas. As such, photography cannot be said to belong solely to itself, neither medium occurred in isolation from the other and the relationship between photography and painting and is both far older and more complex than the “misleading analogy” to which Sontag refers.17 Perhaps what Sontag meant when she claimed that photography could be “independent of light itself” was that photography might not always refer to the visual. In Jocelyn Moorhouse's Proof (figs.5-8),18 the blind photographer is depicted composing a photograph by the heat of the sun, and, so as to be reminded of love, the photographer with short term memory

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9 Sontag, On Photography, 93.  
10 Bunnell, and Sobieszek, Encyclopedia of Photography, 302.  
11 Sontag, On Photography, 93.  
12 Sontag writes that “You can't say more than you see” was a phrase brought across from Thoreau's "context of nature" to a photographic one by the photographer Paul Strand; to a "seeing for seeing's sake". No further references can be found to trace these words directly to Thoreau. Ibid.  
13 Ibid  
14 Wells, Land Matters, 5.  
15 Ibid, 7.  
16 Fried, The Moment of Caravaggio, 142.  
17 Sontag writes that “To group photographers into schools or movements seems to be a kind of misunderstanding, based (once again) on the irrepressible but inevitably misleading analogy between photography and painting” Sontag, On Photography, 144.  
loss in Tom Tykwer’s *Winterschläfer* (fig. 9), turns his camera towards his lover who is behind him. Neither acts are purely visual, they are both * polysensuous* in nature; the first being tactile, the second affective; Sontag’s *kalós* drive\(^\text{20}\) having perhaps more to do with how things *feel*, than how they might appear purely to the eye.

As explored throughout my candidature, the fabric of Vasseleu’s light, her texture woven from the visible and invisible qualities of *lux* and *lumen*, is presented as inseparable from things that are seen, from the embodied perception of vision and from the circumstances of light’s cultural and historic meanings. When Blumenberg wrote in 1957 of Caravaggio’s light as a “historical signature”\(^\text{21}\) that heralded a shift in the understanding of the world that coincides Descartes and a light of “examination,” a light that found its apogee in the 19th century with the lime-light of the theatre, he wrote nothing about the significance of photography to our understanding of the world, most likely as the medium was – and still is – in an “aggregate state.”\(^\text{22}\) Artificial *directed lighting* facilitates an “accentuating approach to vision”\(^\text{23}\) that risks overemphasis “of the work of man...as the only thing worth seeing,”\(^\text{24}\) dissociating the “connection between vision and freedom.”\(^\text{25}\)

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19 Tom Tykwer *Winterschläfer*, (Prokino Filmverleih and Bavaria Film International), 1997.
20 See page 46.
22 Ibid, 30.
23 Ibid, 53-54
24 Blumenberg refers here to “outdoor lighting” and the indiscriminate illumination of the night as the result of a long process of manipulation and technological advancement. Ibid, 53.
In Blumenberg’s original German, an “Optik des Präparat” places “emphases on the intimate interrelations between science and mentalité.” Blumenberg’s use of the word Optik here refers to “a view of light and vision that is embedded in a general consciousness” and Präparat, translated to “prefabrication”, may also refer to a laboratory or “pharmaceutical preparation.” Such “fixations of the gaze” facilitated by an “optics of prefabrications” writes Blumenberg “eliminates the freedom to look around within a general medium of visibility.”

However, if photography still occupies an “aggregate state more vivid, more sensitive, to the ineffable, and less dominated by fixed traditional forms,” Miles’ Burning Mirror, as “an instrument of multiplicity and inclusivity” that “opens up a multidimensional means of engagement with photography” invests the medium with the sensual properties of light and embodied vision. Miles writes that:

As it causes blinking, tearing and even pain, this penetrative glare forecloses on a detached, objective and intelligible experience of light, and brings the rationalist debt to matter into play. In a similar way, excessive light of lens flare floods through the camera’s aperture, overwhelms the dark chamber within, bounces off its lens and interior surfaces, and leaves a trace of that disruptive moment on the surface of the photograph.

Rather than allowing photography to persist as a tired analogy of Plato’s myth, Miles’ Burning Mirror instead may be used to “concentrate the rays of the sun to illume the secret depths of the cave” itself.

If photography, like Caravaggio’s light, behaves as an “historical signature,” certain shifts in the understanding of the world might one day be defined via the disruptive moment of chemical photographic processes. This moment is marked also by the emergence of women artists and the democratic nature of the medium, which has exploded with the prevalence of digital and mobile photography is, I would argue, photography’s most defining characteristic. But what precisely is

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26 Joel Anderson, trans., Light as a Metaphor for Truth, 62.
27 Ibid, 54
28 Ibid, 30.
29 Miles, The Burning Mirror, 213.
30 Ibid, 207.
31 Miles notes the “popular deployment of Plato’s simile as a philosophical precursor to the photographic” referring to Sontag’s opening in On Photography and Rosalind Krauss’ writings on Cindy Sherman in particular.. Ibid, 4-5.
32 Ibid, 205
33 Blumenberg, Light as a Metaphor for Truth, 53.
it that photography, as “an instrument of multiplicity and inclusivity,” disrupts? As explored in my previous chapters, the way in which Woodman photographs her own body is for both Sundell and Phelan, “complicit with voyeurism.” Despite Fried’s reading of Caravaggio’s embodied identification with Judith (fig. 10), which I have used as a strategy to overcome this dynamic of “voyeurism” in Woodman’s imagery, his beholder is emphatically male. Julia Margaret Cameron’s early experimentations – her painterly manipulation of her emulsions that manifest as disruptive and luminous opacities, and her refusal to bring her subjects into sharp focus, occasioned relentless critique that was not only directed towards the material and technical aspects of Cameron’s craft, but extended to the manner in which the bodies of her female models were depicted (fig. 11). Despite the democratic nature of photography, the emergence of women artists and writers, the authority and prevalence of the “triumphant gaze” persists. Over time however, multiple possibilities of seeing begin to crystallise, disrupting the gaze like lens flare scattering across the surface of a photograph.

34 Ibid, 213.
35 Sundell, Vanishing Point, 435.
36 See page 167. Also Fried, The Moment of Caravaggio, 155.
37 This is most evident in the audio recordings of Fried’s lectures. See: National Gallery of Art, A.W. Mellon Lectures in Fine Arts, “Michael Fried, The Moment of Caravaggio” http://www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/audio-video/mellon.html (accessed 20 June 2016)
38 "I can’t think you have taken a favourable view of the face of the young lady who posed for Diana... [do not] put young limbs into such positions as call forth muscular development" From a letter to Julia Margaret Cameron from G.F. Watts in, Marta Weiss, Julia Margaret Cameron, Photographs to electrify you with delight and startle the world (London: Victoria and Albert Museum) 2015, 38.
39 Sontag’s On Photography for example almost exclusively surveys the practices of male photographers.
40 de Zegher, introduction to Inside the Visible, 21.
fig. II. Julia Margaret Cameron, *Diana*, c.1864-6.

Cross pollination between traditions and the exploration of unanticipated areas of enquiry have, throughout the course of my research, shifted the nature of my practice from its prior form\(^{41}\) to a distinct and altered way of making. This is most evident in the pairs of photographs, the making of which embodies both material thinking and “close and committed looking”\(^{42}\) to a degree that has no precedence in my earlier work. Like mathematical equations, these works became processes through which certain concerns could be calculated. Transfixed (fig.15), for example, subtracts the gaze and multiplies the light. Harken, Breast and Trespass (figs.12-14) each add one body to another, and Ecstasy (fig.16), like astronomy, measures speed and distance with light, from the celestial to the skin. Despite the persistence of vision that occurs when the eye absorbs more than one frame at a time, working with photographs in this way has a protracted temporal quality that negates the perception of photography as an instantaneous act. Many of the works span a number

\(^{41}\) See chapter three, *Light Work.*

\(^{42}\) Fried, *The Moment of Caravaggio,* 60.
of years, such as *Echo and Narcissus* (fig.17) which took me two years to make. Others span immense distance such as *Mirror* and *Wingspan* (figs.18-19), each of which misplace landscape with bodies of birds that otherwise would be unknown to the other. Most essential to these works is the idea that one sense may be evoked by another, that the embodied experience of perception might inhabit photographic imagery despite its excessively visual and *specular* nature. When I am looking at imagery, when I am making, I am immersed. This fact is central to the works.

Despite the way in which the modes of text and image have informed one another throughout my project, writing directly about my final body of work has presented enormous challenges as the processes of writing and making rarely coincide in my practice. These otherwise parallel and discrete activities – the one focused, the other poetic – do however intersect within the activity of reading, which is frequently broken with intense bursts of either making or of writing, an explanation as to why the theories presented here are for me so crucial. These points of contact are especially the case with the philosophy of Luce Irigaray43 whose poetics of language and the opacities of her text translate directly to an affected state in which I am able to make. This is a process that I would otherwise trigger through the practice of deep listening, by listening to music, looking and by dreaming.

fig.18. Genevieve Swifte, Wingspan, 2014.

As Grosz writes on Irigaray, “texts are material objects and as matter they are available for a very wide range of material uses, potentially infinite readings.”

The “viscosity, materiality and superabundance” of the theories presented here operate poetically alongside my final body of work. However, the implications of these theories do more than inform my practice, they have also changed the way I see the world, illuminating everything with an exquisite light that is both discursive and elemental. To make a photograph in this way is to make eye contact with a world illuminated irrespective of genre, fusing, like *Echo and Narcissus* (fig.17) for example, landscape with self-portraiture. In the work *Ecstasy* (fig.16), elemental light ricochets across the reflective surface of water, in the single frame of *Harken ii* (fig.21), a discursive light gathers upon the glass-like skin of the eye, forming a sharp opacity over the otherwise transparent pool of the horse’s gaze. This reflective surface of living tissue that mediates perception is mirrored by the glass skin of the *Poetic Lens* (fig.20).

Like a poem, the relationship between these theories and my practice could be described as ekphrastic. However, the works have their own syntax; phrases that speak with light instead of words articulate a photography of touch and “multiple, double perspectives,” in a way that words simply cannot. At the centre of this, between exegesis and the photographs made over the last four and a half years, lies a shared border; a threshold or movement between modalities; between disparate imagery, between writing and making, between vision, touch and sound.

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45 Grosz writes “Irigaray plays on the full resonances of the term genre: a term able to summarise men’s domination of personal and familial structures (genre as “genus,” “family” or “humankind”), of knowledge (genre as “kind,” “manner” or “sort,” the imposition of categories), of cultural achievement (genre as “style,” “aesthetic type”), and of social relations (genre as “fashion,” “taste” or “style”).” Ibid.

Bibliography

Books:


Weiss, Marta. *Julia Margaret Cameron, Photographs to electrify you with delight and startle the world*, London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 2015.

Articles:


Film/Audio Recording:


Dean, Tacita. Green Ray. Film.


**Websites:**


Education

Candidate, Doctor of Philosophy, Photography and Media Arts, The Australian National University School of Art.

2007, Bachelor of Visual Arts (Honours), The Australian National University School of Art.

Public Collections

ACT Legislative Assembly, Australia

Upernavik Museum, Greenland

Queensland State Library, Australia

The Australian National University

Bibliotheca Alexandrina, Egypt

Publications

*The Poetic Lens,*
Relative Constructions artist collective, 2014.

Grants, Funding and Awards

2016, *Project Funding, New Work,* ACT Arts Fund.

2015, *Out of Round Funding,* ACT Arts Fund.

2014, *Canberra Art Critics’ Circle Award.*

2013, Indiegogo crowd-funding campaign.


2010, *Project Funding, New Work,* ACT Arts Fund.

2010, Private Donations Australia Cultural Fund.


2010, *Janet Holmes à Court Artists’ Grant,* NAVA.

2010, *Out of Round Funding,* ACT Arts Fund.

2009, Donovan Astronomical Trust.
Select Professional Background and Exhibition History

2016

Featured artist with composer Cheryl E. Leonard, Spark, KQED TV, San Francisco.

Sila, collaborative project of composition and live video projection with musical performance by Cheryl E. Leonard, Polar Soundscapes, David Brower Center, Berkeley, California.


2015

Exhibiting artist, The Poetic Lens, with Relative Constructions, Tamworth Regional Gallery, Sydney.

In collaboration with composer Cheryl E. Leonard, Soundings, School of Art Gallery, ANU, Canberra.

Threshold, collaborative project of composition and live video projection with musical performance by Cheryl E. Leonard, Outsound New Music Summit, San Francisco.

Solo exhibition, Trespass, Barometer Gallery with Head On Photography Festival, Sydney.

2014

Solo exhibition, Trespass, The Front, Lyneham, Canberra.

Exhibiting artist, Quotidean, Elements of the Everyday: Water, CelerySpace, Berkeley, California.

A CaliforNoyers Production co-created with La Porte Peinte, Noyers, France.

Speaker, Photography and Fictions, Conference hosted by the Queensland Center of Photography, Brisbane.

2013

Exhibiting artist, Sur Polar: Arte en Antarctida, Galeria de Arte Contemporaneo de Xalapa, Mexico.

Exhibiting artist, Intensity of Purpose: 21 years of ANCA, Canberra Museum and Gallery.

2012

Exhibiting artist, Assisted Reproduction, School of Art Gallery, ANU School of Art, Canberra.


Speaker, IV Antarctic Art and Culture International Conference and Festival, Buenos Aries.

Exhibiting artist, Sur Polar IV, Museo de Arte Tigre, Buenos Aries.
2011


Speaker and exhibiting artist, *Antarctica, Music, Sounds and Cultural Connections* Festival and Conference, ANU School of Music, Canberra.

Solo exhibition, *Drawing and Photography from Northwest Greenland*, Photospace, ANU School of Art, Canberra.

Graduate in residence, Photomedia Workshop, ANU School of Art, Canberra.

2010

Artist in residence, Upernavik Artist’s Retreat, Greenland.

2009

Finalist, *Phoenix Prize for Spiritual Art*, SoA Gallery, ANU School of Art, Canberra.

2006


2000

Performance, Zhang Huan’s *My Australia*, The National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.