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Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK

Journal of Australian Studies

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rjau20>

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Available online: 08 Dec 2011

To cite this article: Helen Ennis (2011): A singular photograph: Olive Cotton's Sea's awakening , Journal of Australian Studies, 35:4, 449-459

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14443058.2011.617382>

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A singular photograph: Olive Cotton's *Sea's awakening*¹

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In 1937 Australian photographer Olive Cotton photographed the sea from the headland at Newport Beach, producing *Sea's awakening*, one of the most sublime images of her career. This essay considers the photograph in depth as part of an ongoing search for developing alternative means of analysing and interpreting photographs. It is premised on the conviction that photographic history is limited as a means of illumination and uses an interdisciplinary approach, drawing from other fields including social history and biography. In addition, concerns with gender, materiality and narrative are explored. The aim of the essay is not to fix the meaning of *Sea's awakening*, rendering it static but to mobilise it.

Keywords: Olive Cotton; materiality; photographic history; modernism; light

Introduction

Some time in 1937, photographer Olive Cotton stood on the southern headland at Newport Beach, north of Sydney, watching the sea with her camera at the ready. It was, she has written, “early morning, before the sun rose and soft daylight accented every ripple of the water”.² She made one exposure (possibly more) and later developed the film and made the print that she titled *Sea's awakening*, with which this essay is concerned. However, I want to begin with an altogether different image by another photographer from another time. It is Sydney photographer Petrina Hicks' *Ghost in the shell*, a single channel colour video made in 2008.³ Hicks' subject, a young woman in a patterned shirt, turns slowly in a two-minute time span, smoke curling from her mouth as she moves. She does not acknowledge the camera or address the viewer but appears to be in her own world. There is something in the camera's slow circular movement around its subject that strikes me as an apt metaphor for the process this essay will follow. It represents an attempt to see Cotton's photograph in the round, from the sides, front and back. A further element to the metaphoric association is the elusiveness of the meaning of Hicks' image. While I will use a number of different means to illuminate *Sea's awakening*, my aim is not to fix meaning and render it static but rather, to mobilise it.

This investigation is part of my ongoing efforts, as a curator and writer on photography, to find different ways of looking, thinking and writing about photographs. It is premised on my experience of the shortcomings of photographic history as such, and the conviction that interdisciplinary approaches offer an expanded range of possibilities for the interpretation of photographic images. That said, in my view, an interdisciplinary emphasis should not be predetermined. The photograph in question should shape the approach taken. In this article, Cotton's

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Figure 1. *Sea's awakening*, 1937, Olive Cotton (1911–2003), gelatin silver print (29 × 25 cm). Collection of McInerney family, Courtesy Josef Lebovic Gallery, Sydney.

Sea's awakening will be considered in terms of photographic history, social history and biography; in addition, concerns with gender, materiality and narrative will be explored.

There are important precedents for my decision to focus on a single image. The most recent of these is the 2005 book, *Singular Images: Essays on Remarkable Photographs*, edited by Sophie Howarth, which deals with individual photographs from the 1840s up to the present. Howarth begins her introduction with a telling quote from the autobiography of Beaumont Newhall, eminent photographic historian and foundational curator of photography at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Newhall recalled that his friend and fellow photographic historian, Van Deren Coke:

... bet me I couldn't talk for one hour about one photograph. I chose one of [Alfred] Stieglitz's most celebrated pictures, *The Steerage* ... very easily spent one hour lecturing on a single photograph and won the bet.⁴

Howarth and her fellow writers convincingly argue for the “value of sustained engagement with single images”, focusing on “the uniqueness of a particular image, seen from the point of view of production, intention, encounter and interpretation”.⁵ Earlier examples of this approach include Geoffrey Batchen’s 1991 essay on Max Dupain’s modernist icon, *Sunbaker*, and Mark Haworth-Booth’s book on nineteenth-century photographer Camille Silvy’s *River scene*, which was published in 1992.⁶ Haworth-Booth’s book is reputedly still the first to be devoted to the discussion of a single photograph.

There are further reasons for adopting this approach. One relates to the hierarchy accorded to different media within the discourses of art history and museology, in which the traditional arts of painting and sculpture receive a disproportionate amount of scholarly attention (and wall space in art museums and galleries). Photography, despite its pervasive influence, does not usually attract the same degree of deep scholarship or exposure, either within art museums and public institutions or within the discipline of art history. Another reason is more emphatically contemporary, directly connected to the advent of digital photography and cyberspace. As Howarth notes, in the current climate where images are proliferating in greater numbers than ever before and are also being discarded more readily, “the enduring single image is in many ways more elusive”.⁷

My project can be seen as recuperative to some extent, a slowing down of looking that I believe Olive Cotton herself would have endorsed. But the approach I have adopted is recuperative in another way too, as a response to the flattening of time and space and the inter-related dematerialisation of the image that has been theorised by Paul Virilio and others.⁸ A particularly fruitful paradigmatic shift in photographic history in recent years has been to consider the photograph, not only as a two-dimensional image, but also as a three-dimensional object with specific physical properties; in other words, to take into account its materiality. This encompasses the materials from which the photograph is made (whether, for example, it is on glass, tin or paper), its surface (whether it is shiny, textured or smooth) and its scale and mode of presentation. Is it presented in a case, an album, or inside a frame? How do you view the photograph? Where do you position yourself to see it? This materialist investigation is linked to the desire to accord greater power both to the tactile qualities of a photographic object and its sensory appeal. In addition, it engages with contemporary concerns with phenomenology and the experiential, and with ideas about the impact and affect of images.⁹

The focus on *Sea’s awakening* may be recuperative but I do not consider it to be nostalgic, for I am not advocating either a return to, or longing for, a pre-cyber reality. The dematerialisation of objects in the cyberworld is coterminous with the reinvigoration of objecthood in other areas of art practice and contemporary life. Such phenomena may be contradictory but, in my view, are productively so.

Sea’s awakening is a straightforward image with three main components: sky, sea and light. The composition observes a traditional pictorial convention, the rule of thirds with two-thirds being devoted to the sea and one-third to the sky. No sign of human presence or activity is included and the vantage point is high above the shoreline. As far as I know, only one print of *Sea’s awakening* exists—a vintage print (that is, one made by the photographer around the same time as the negative).¹⁰ It was part of Cotton’s own collection that she kept at her home, Spring Forest, on the farm in western New South Wales where she lived from 1951 until a few months

before her death in 2003 at the age of ninety-two. “Collection” seems too grand a word because there was nothing formal about the compilation of Cotton’s personal archive or her approach to it; photographs from her long career were stored casually but safely in a spare room. *Sea’s awakening*—which Olive Cotton first showed me in 1995 when we were working on the book *Olive Cotton Photographer*—is a fully resolved print, her signature and handwritten inscriptions of title and date indicating its state of completion. It is exhibition scale, measuring 29 by 25 centimetres, and is on its original backing. Printed on matt paper it rewards a close viewing due to its print quality, especially its detail and rich, sonorous tones.

The location for *Sea’s awakening* is highly significant, for Cotton’s photography invariably grew out of a familiar and extended relationship with her subject matter. Cotton grew up at Hornsby in Sydney’s north but her family spent their summer holidays at Newport Beach where her great aunt had a house; her father, Leo Cotton, a professor of geology at the University of Sydney, eventually moved to Newport in the 1950s. As a young girl Cotton explored the area around Newport, the beach, headland and groves of trees, taking with her the Kodak no.0 Box Brownie camera her aunt had given her at the age of eleven. While *Sea’s awakening* is borne out of Cotton’s familiarity with the scene it is also indicative of her observational powers that had been fostered by her father and his scientific pursuits. Cotton’s daughter Sally McInerney remembered walking around the Newport cliffs with her grandfather who “would pick up slatey stones and split them apart to show the stems of fossil plants, pressed flat . . . he would put them into our hands, telling us how many millions of years ago the plants had lived”.¹¹

Cotton was the beneficiary of her father’s informal tutelage not only in geology but in photography as well. Leo Cotton was an amateur photographer and encouraged his daughter’s interests, teaching her film processing and printing in a darkroom that he set up in the laundry of their Hornsby home.¹² Olive Cotton described first using a camera as “a great awakening” and, from the outset, found photography to be an ideal means of self-expression.

As far as I know, *Sea’s awakening* is the only seascape in Cotton’s oeuvre; she made many more photographs of the bush and inland areas. But there is another image taken at Newport that she regarded as important, in part because it marks the beginning of her artistic career. Entitled *She-oaks*, it dates from 1928 when Cotton was seventeen years old and already very keen on photography. The photograph’s location was Bungan Head at the south end of Newport Beach where Cotton often walked among the she-oaks growing there. In the right-hand side of the composition is the small, barely visible figure of Max Dupain, her friend and later husband, whom she met at Newport in Christmas 1924. Dupain’s family also took their annual Christmas holidays at Newport, and Cotton’s uncle, Max Cotton, was friends with George Dupain, Max’s father. Cotton later recalled that as teenagers she and Dupain “were both interested in photography (though he had a more sophisticated camera, with a bellows) and we could roam all around Newport together taking pictures”.¹³ However, *She-oaks* is entirely different in style to *Sea’s awakening*, which was taken nine years later. The soft focus, dark tones and generalised affects of the former are redolent of the international style of art photography known as Pictorialism, which prevailed in Australia during the 1920s.¹⁴ While *She-oaks* is the work of a talented student rather than an accomplished practitioner, it signals the self-consciousness

and seriousness of artistic intent that Cotton built on so assiduously during the thirties.

1937 was an excellent year for Olive Cotton. Three years earlier, having completed an arts degree at the University of Sydney, she had made the adventurous decision to join the Max Dupain Studio rather than pursue a career in teaching as her father had hoped (that did eventuate later when she briefly taught mathematics at Frensham School in Mittagong). Dupain, who had opened his photography studio at 24 Bond Street in Sydney in 1934, had already achieved a prominent position in the photography sector due to his innovative personal and professional work. Opportunities for photographers were burgeoning in the post-Depression years and photography became one of the primary tools for the promotion of modern living and consumerism. The young Dupain received support from Sydney Ure Smith, an influential publisher and fervent champion of modern art. Ure Smith published *Home* magazine and *Art in Australia* which, in 1935, featured a portfolio of striking photographs by Dupain that confidently declared his arrival on the scene.

Cotton's role at the Max Dupain Studio was gendered. She was not a photographer or "camera operator" (a role restricted to the men), but an assistant, or what she later referred to as "the dog's body assistant".¹⁵ She was responsible for making appointments, attending to models and assisting with the processing of Dupain's negatives and prints. While she had no illusions about her minor role, her association with the studio was invaluable (in this period there were no professional courses for the study of photography, so training was embedded within the studio system). It gave her access to excellent equipment and facilities and immersion in a youthful, highly energised environment. Her friends and colleagues, including the photographers Damien Parer and Geoffrey Powell whom Dupain employed, were all aged in their twenties. The group enjoyed an informal studio life where, as Dupain later recalled, interruptions were not an issue and models and associates dropped in for coffee and conversation. They also accompanied each other on assignments out of doors—to beaches around Sydney, including Newport, where Dupain took fashion shots in the sandhills. Although Cotton worked at the margins of the professional sphere, she made the most of her situation. After hours she used the studio to set up still lifes of commonplace objects. *Teacup ballet*, c. 1935, is the best known, though atypical, outcome of these experiments. The controlled studio conditions enabled her to develop her command of the photographic language, especially of lighting and composition. And it was there, at the Max Dupain Studio, that she began to master the printing technique employed in *Sea's awakening*.

While some of the photographs taken in the early years of her career (between 1934 and 1937) are important, Cotton's work took a quantum leap in 1937. As a sure sign of her commitment to her photographic practice she purchased a new camera, her first Rolleiflex. In autumn that year she embarked on a ten-day camping trip with her father, uncle and cousin. In a 1918 Buick they travelled up the coast to Coffs Harbour and across to the New England tableland, before returning to Sydney by the inland route. Towards the end of her life Cotton recalled this 1937 trip, saying that: "My patient father kindly stopped whenever I wanted to take a photograph. This sometimes took quite a long time—waiting for the sun and clouds to be right, selecting a viewpoint and so on".¹⁶

Her efforts were amply rewarded as she secured what proved to be some of the finest landscapes of her career, including *Winter willows*, *Orchestration in light*, and

perhaps also the remarkably reductive *Light and shade*. *Winter willows* was shown at the London Salon of Photography exhibition in 1937 and reproduced in the British publication, *The Penrose Annual*, the following year. It attracted praise from reviewer Jan Gordon who wrote that “the possibilities of so very complex a tangle of movements, rhythms and spacing shown in *Winter willows*” revealed keen perception that was, “recorded aptly with no hint of ‘artiness’”.¹⁷ *Sea’s awakening* was another of the successful images Cotton made with her new Rolleiflex camera some time during this extremely productive year.

Not only was 1937 a good year for Cotton, it was an exceptional one for Australian photography more generally, as modernism began to yield real dividends. Two icons of Australian modernist photography date from 1937: Harold Cazneau’s *Spirit of Endurance* (as it later became known), taken in the Flinders Ranges in South Australia, and Max Dupain’s *Sunbaker*. Both images demonstrate the clarity of vision, bold compositions and stripped down vocabulary that were the hallmarks of modernist photography and that Cotton embraced in her work of the same time. As Jan Gordon had noted, Cotton’s photography was free of “artiness”, which can be understood to mean that the work was free of the sentimentality and over-elaboration typically associated with Pictorialism. Modernists abandoned the “arty” soft-focus affects and handworked printing techniques favoured by Pictorialists, choosing instead to use sharp focus and print on modern photographic papers.

Australian photographers’ responses to modernism were complex and varied. Nonetheless, their practice can be organised into five main areas that dealt with the city, contemporary life, nature, portraiture and the body.¹⁸ The city has often been seen as the prime site of modernity, with its high-rise office buildings, forms of modern transport, and other associated experiences of urban living and consumerism. In contrast, Cotton’s modernist oeuvre—of which *Sea’s awakening* is a part—is dominated by photographs of nature, encompassing the natural environment and flower studies. Portraiture became the next phase in Cotton’s work, in terms of numbers, quality and importance. Cotton only took the occasional shot of the city, as in *Sesquicentenary procession*, 1938 (more city views came later in the early years of the war when she was managing Dupain’s studio while he was serving in the camouflage unit in Papua New Guinea). She rarely depicted scenes of contemporary life due to her highly deliberate way of working and her lack of interest in the momentary and spontaneous.

What does a photograph like *Sea’s awakening* mean within the context of modernism? For Australian modernist photographers such as Cazneau, Dupain and Axel Poignant, the relationship between urban and natural environments, between the city and the bush, was crucial.¹⁹ While different aspects of contemporary life were celebrated, an underlying sense of anxiety was also not uncommon. I agree with Isobel Crombie’s observation that Australian modernist photography was characterised at this time by a concern that modern urban life was too fast-paced, superficial and decadent, leading to the separation of the modern citizen from nature, and contact with its vital forces.²⁰ This response was also deeply and acutely felt by Cotton, whose childhood was imbued with a deep love of the bush. She saw nature as offering a refuge from the pressures of contemporary life, and as offering solace. But there was more to it than that; only the natural world could, she believed, provide the urban dweller with experiences of solidity, stability and timelessness. This helps explain the significance of Cotton’s title. *Sea’s awakening* suggests that the sea

and sunrise are united in a wondrous relationship that is part of nature's cyclical rhythms; it is enacted daily without any possibility of interruption or human intervention.

This brings me back to a more detailed examination of the photograph in question, and introduces a brief excursion into photographic formalism as another means of addressing the "problem" of finding different ways of interpreting photographs. Not surprisingly, in this post-postmodern era, I have little interest in the modernist project as it relates to photography, that is, in defining the medium's essential characteristics or uniqueness. That was a key concern for numerous photography curators and writers during the 1960s and 1970s, as exemplified in the schema developed by the very influential John Szarkowski, who was Director of Photography at the Museum of Modern Art, New York from 1962–91. In 1964 he curated an exhibition, *The Photographer's Eye*, which argued that "the creative photographer's visual language" is distinguished by five elements. He defined these as being: The Thing Itself, The Detail, The Frame, Time, and finally, The Vantage Point.²¹

I am not interested in Szarkowski's schema as such—I find its authoritarianism and its certitude breathtaking. Of far greater interest is an approach that is constantly open to negotiation, and which remains unfixed and fluid. However, there are elements in the "visual language" identified by Szarkowski that are potentially useful for amplifying our understanding of *Sea's awakening*. The most pertinent are the vantage point and frame. Where is Olive Cotton standing to take her photograph? And where are we positioned in the viewing of it? Cotton adopts a vantage point that hovers well above the scene. Because it is unfixed it appears somehow indeterminate. Indeed, *Sea's awakening* is predicated on an all-seeing vantage point—what can be described as a "God's-eye view". Nothing specific is included to attract the eye. Because the image is in focus from the foreground to the distant horizon the viewer is led through the overall scene without being expected to pause and focus on its individual components. And yet, within this vastness there is detail. That detail is crucially important to Cotton, as revealed in the commentary I quoted earlier, where she said that: "soft daylight accented every ripple of the water" [my emphasis]. The reference to every ripple underscores another fundamental aspect of this photograph; its evocation both of a rapt way of seeing and a state of rapture.

The all-seeing vantage point assumed in *Sea's awakening* is impersonal. No human narrative is enacted within the scene or even suggested by it. There is in fact no literal point of identification, no way for the viewer to enter into it. This is not to say that nothing is happening in the image, indeed, there can be no mistaking the central event with sunlight energising the upper half of the composition and declaring the beginning of another day. Although the effect of monumentality achieved in *Sea's awakening* has its corollary in other 1937 landscapes, especially *Orchestration in light* and *Light and shade*, it is at odds with the best known attribute of Cotton's work; its intimacy. This intimacy is epitomised in *The sleeper* where the sleeping woman at the centre of the composition is encircled by the bush, and is entirely at home in it. (Significantly, Cotton's subject was not a stranger but a close friend, Olga Sharp, whom she photographed from a physically close vantage point.)

In *Sea's awakening* Cotton's use of what Szarkowski calls "the frame", works against particularity, specificity or intimacy. In his essay in *The Photographer's Eye* exhibition catalogue, Szarkowski described the frame in the following terms: "The

central act of photography, the act of choosing and eliminating, forces a concentration on the picture edge—the line that separates in from out—and on the shapes that are created by it”.²² The picture edges in *Sea's awakening* have no hard limits, they are fluid and open-ended. Cotton chose to frame the view from the headland at Newport Beach without making any references to land, either in the foreground or on the sides. Her intention was to demonstrate that the scene she photographed cannot be contained. It extends way beyond the edges of the frame, is beyond the human, and accordingly, has no end. *Sea's awakening* thus sees Cotton at her most lyrical and most sublime. The image also underlines Cotton's interest in interiority, in inner states of being. The sea is represented not as a site for action and activity (as in the work of Cazneaux and Dupain) but as a field of contemplation.

The lyrical, evocative affect of *Sea's awakening* is reinforced by the literary associations of the title, which appears to have been drawn from a poem by Englishman Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. The final verse to *Becalmed*, published in Longfellow's collected poems in the 1890s, reads:

Blow, breath of song! Until I feel
The straining sail, the lifting keel
The life of the awakening sea
Its motion and its mystery!

The sourcing of titles from literature was unusual for Cotton, but was also briefly adopted by Dupain in this period. The difference in their experimentation with non-descriptive titles was that Cotton referred to nineteenth-century literature whereas Dupain's references were contemporary (including allusions to Huxley's *Brave New World* and the poetry of D. H. Lawrence). In the mid to late thirties Cotton sometimes used poetic titles that recalled Pictorialist conventions, as in *The patterned road* and *The way through the trees*, and she chose a musical reference for her light-filled landscape *Orchestration in music*, 1937. However, more often her titles were descriptive rather than literary or poetic. *Papyrus*, *Plum blossom* and *Shasta daisies* are cases in point. In 1939 she made another literary reference when she gave the title *Only to taste the warmth, the light, the wind* to an exquisite portrait of a young woman.²³ This line comes from an English poem from the 1890s, *Primavera*, by Laurence Binyon.

Sea's awakening occupies a curious position in Australian modernist photography of the thirties because of its subject matter—it depicts the sea, not the land. Other photographs in which the sea is represented, by Cazneaux and Dupain, for example, are invariably peopled and deal with the leisure pursuits of modern urban citizens. Despite its subject matter, *Sea's awakening* can be closely linked to Cotton's landscapes of the period. Together this small group of photographs offers an alternative to the nationalist position advocated by Cazneaux, Dupain and others concerned with Australian identity in the interwar years. Their preoccupation was not simply with a distinctive national landscape, but with the specific qualities of Australian light as well.

Harold Cazneaux was a key player in what became known as an “Australian Sunshine School”, which was the photographic heir to the late-nineteenth-century Heidelberg School. Cotton was very familiar with Cazneaux's photography through her membership of the Photographic Society of New South Wales (Cazneaux

exhibited there and also commented on the work of early career exhibitors such as Cotton). As Geoffrey Batchen has written, Cazneau “consistently sought to represent the specificities of Australian light and landscape” in his work.²⁴ In contrast, Cotton’s photography of the landscape was more about nature than nation, and her investigation of light was more scientific than nationalistic. In other words, her landscapes arose not from the desire to express an essential and essentialist Australian-ness, but rather from her sustained observation of the natural world. Although Cotton’s interest in light, and the physics of light, was paramount, it was inseparable from her interest in shadow. In *Sea’s awakening* the interplay between light and dark is highly strategic and the dark tones are given a very active and mobile role.

While gender was a factor that contributed to shape Cotton’s role in the Max Dupain Studio (leading to the very limited range of professional opportunities that were available to her around the time of the production of *Sea’s awakening*), her position was further complicated by her personal relationship with Dupain. When Cotton joined Dupain’s business they had been friends for ten years. By 1937 they had become romantically involved, and were to marry two years later (their marriage was short-lived, as they separated in 1941 and divorced in 1943). Their respective roles in the studio and in the photography sector more broadly were unequal. Dupain was involved in both commercial photography (mainly illustrative for the advertising industry and for magazines) and exhibition photography (what is now generally termed “art photography”), the two principal spheres of activity open to photographers at the time. Cotton, on the other hand, operated only as an exhibition photographer during the 1930s. Her situation was typical of the period. Very few women photographers ran their own studios between the wars, when they were far more likely to work as assistants to male photographers who may have been members of their families.²⁵

In her recollection, made some years later, of the events behind her now well-known photograph, *Fashion shot, Cronulla sandhills, c. 1937*, Cotton elaborated on her position in the Dupain studio. The image shows Max Dupain at work with his Rolleiflex, photographing model Noreen Hallard for his client David Jones. According to Cotton:

In the late 1930s it was becoming common practice to take fashion photographs out of doors. We would all go in Max’s small car to a favourite location where he would take the required shots, my role being to help the models with their make-up and changes of costumes. However, I always took my camera and would often take pictures for my own enjoyment.²⁶

Sea’s awakening, however, did not result from this kind of group and social activity. Its origins were in solitude. Further, it exemplified the development of Cotton’s independent position and original point of view. As I have noted elsewhere, evidence of Cotton’s artistic independence is provided by her account of the creation of *Shasta daisies*, another of her successes from 1937.²⁷ In 1981 she explained that Dupain thought she was “wasting” her time “using the studio camera to take *Shasta daisies*”, but in her view the image “turned out quite well”.²⁸ She declared that she did not like anyone giving her advice “because you feel that you’ve considered everything before

you present the final print, it's your idea. [If] anybody else wants to impose their ideas, I don't like it".²⁹

At the time Cotton made *Sea's awakening*, she was an active member of the New South Wales Photographic Society (she had joined in her late teens), and a regular participant in the society's exhibitions in Sydney. While 1937 represented a watershed in terms of Cotton's creative development, it also marked a peak in terms of her public exposure. Her work was included in an international exhibition at the London Salon of Photography and she attracted coverage in the Sydney press, although significantly only in the women's pages. In an article in the *Daily Telegraph* published in July 1937, Grace Johnstone wrote that Olive Cotton "competes with Sydney's best known male photographers on their own ground".³⁰ Johnstone argued that Cotton's recently exhibited work at David Jones' was "on the right track" as it displayed "vision and skill".³¹

It has not yet been established whether *Sea's awakening* was exhibited around the time it was made. What is certain is that it then slipped from view, along with the rest of Cotton's oeuvre, until the 1970s when feminist researchers Barbara Hall and Jenni Mather began to retrieve from obscurity work by unknown or neglected women photographers. Cotton was one of those included in their groundbreaking Australian Women Research Photographers Project (1981) that culminated in an exhibition and publication.³² These events triggered a new interest in Cotton's photographs and an unprecedented level of exposure through their inclusion in collections and exhibitions in art museums and galleries. Kathryn Millard's documentary film, *Light years*, which poetically explored Cotton's life and work, was released in 1991, and in 2000 I curated a retrospective exhibition for the Art Gallery of New South Wales which subsequently toured to the National Library of Australia.

This essay has been concerned with the process of looking at a single photograph—Olive Cotton's *Sea's awakening*—from different perspectives and with a slowness that is germane to Cotton's own approach. The photograph dates from one of the most productive phases of her photographic practice, from 1935–9, when she took command of her photographic language. While, as a seascape, the image is unique in Cotton's oeuvre, it is typical in numerous other respects. It is, in the final instance, the outcome of a method based on observation, on watching and waiting, and is an expression of Cotton's deep love of and respect for the natural world.

Notes

1. My thanks to Kylie Message and Ursula Frederick for the opportunity to develop my analysis of Cotton's work.
2. Olive Cotton quoted in Helen Ennis and Sally McInerney, *Olive Cotton: Photographer* (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 1995), 26.
3. See Michael Desmond, *Present Tense: An Imagined Grammar of Portraiture in the Digital Age* (Canberra: National Portrait Gallery of Australia, 2010).
4. Sophie Howarth, "Introduction," *Singular Images: Essays on Remarkable Photographs* (New York: Aperture, 2006), 7.
5. Howarth, *Singular Images*, 7.
6. See Geoffrey Batchen, "Max Dupain: Sunbakers," *History of Photography*, 19, no. 4 (1995): 349–57; Mark Haworth-Booth, *Camille Silvy, 'River Scene, France'* (California: Getty Trust Publications, 1992).
7. Howarth, *Singular Images*, 7.

8. See for example, Paul Virilio, *The Aesthetics of Disappearance*, trans. Philip Beitchman (New York: Semiotext(e), 1991); Jean Baudrillard, *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, translated and with an introduction by Paul Patton (Sydney: Power Publications, 1995).
9. Sue Best, "What is Affect? Considering the Affective Dimension of Contemporary Installation Art," *AAANZ Journal of Art*, 2 and 3 (2001): 207–25.
10. The photograph is part of the Cotton estate and is currently for sale through a commercial gallery dealer, Josef Lebovic, in Sydney.
11. Sally McInerney, "Life in the Country," in Ennis and McInerney, *Olive Cotton: Photographer*, 18–19.
12. After finishing his science degree at the University of Sydney, Leo Cotton went to Antarctica on the 1907 Shackleton expedition but did not winter there. He did however take photographs while he was in Antarctica.
13. Cotton quoted in Ennis and McInerney, *Olive Cotton: Photographer*, 55.
14. Its exponents included John Kauffmann in Adelaide and Harold Cazneaux in Sydney. Cotton met Cazneaux at the New South Wales Photographic Society and greatly valued his commentary on her early photographs.
15. Cotton quoted in "Coming Events/Special Interest," *Graphic Monthly*, August 1986.
16. Cotton quoted in Ennis and McInerney, *Olive Cotton: Photographer*, 3.
17. Jan Gordon, "Art in Photography," *The Penrose Annual: Review of the Graphic Arts* 40 (1938): 27.
18. Isobel Crombie has dealt with the body in her in-depth study *Bodyculture: Max Dupain, Photography and Australian Culture* (Musgrave, Vic.: Images Publishing, 2004).
19. I have discussed Australian modernist photography in more depth in *Photography and Australia* (London: Reaktion Books, 2007), 73–90.
20. Crombie, *Bodyculture*.
21. John Szarkowski, *The Photographer's Eye* (England: Martin Secker & Warburg, 1966) n.p.
22. Szarkowski, *The Photographer's Eye*, n.p.
23. See the cover image for the catalogue Helen Ennis, *Olive Cotton: Photographer* (Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2000).
24. Geoffrey Batchen, "Endurance," in *Harold Cazneaux: Artist in Photography*, ed. Natasha Bullock (Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2008), 129.
25. Helen Ennis, "Patterns in Time," in Ennis and McInerney, *Olive Cotton: Photographer*, 5.
26. Cotton quoted in Ennis and McInerney, *Olive Cotton: Photographer*, 28.
27. Ennis, *Olive Cotton: Photographer*, 5.
28. Barbara Hall and Jenni Mather, *Australian Women Photographers 1840–1960* (Melbourne: Greenhouse, 1986), 84. Quoted in Ennis, *Olive Cotton: Photographer*, 16.
29. Hall and Mather, *Australian Women Photographers*, 84. Quoted in Ennis, *Olive Cotton: Photographer*, 84. Male/female, husband/wife partnerships are often assumed to be one-sided with the male exerting the greater power and influence. Dupain, for example, has been described as Cotton's "mentor"; see Michael Richardson, "A Therapeutic Calm," *Australian Photography*, 42, no. 9 (September 1991), 4. However, I have argued that the Cotton-Dupain partnership was far more active than originally assumed, see Ennis, "Partnerships," *Photofile* 53 (April 1997): 24–28. During the late 1930s they continued with the kind of collaboration they had established as teenagers; each posed for the other and from time to time they photographed the same subjects.
30. Grace Johnstone, "The Lady behind the Lens," *Daily Telegraph*, July 15, 1937.
31. Johnstone, "The Lady behind the Lens," *Daily Telegraph*.
32. The book is Hall and Mather, *Australian Women Photographers*.