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**Scary Monsters and Super Creeps:
Analogue Photography Materialising the
Australian Gothic**

By
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Abstract:

This research paper positions my creative practice within the theoretical framework of the Gothic mode and analogue photography. In doing so I have been able to explore expressive methods of relating to the natural world in a colonised country. My creative research expands my analogue photographic practice in process and subject matter. I materialise my theoretical concerns through the photographic image, paper negative, chemistry and the hand-made camera. I have created a camera obscura from a 1955 caravan, which is a theatrical space for experiencing the projected image of the outside world. I have also made this caravan a mobile pinhole camera, studio and darkroom. I expanded my photographic chemical practice by incorporating household products such as coffee to create my black and white lens-less photography. This research has also culminated in the creation of four series of photographic works: *Scary Monsters and Super Creeps*, *Other Worlds*, *Weltzmertz* and *Weltzmertz Disrupted*.

Introduction.

My practice-led creative research weaves together two significant interests within my art practice – photography and the poetics of darkness.¹ The questions I have investigated through my research are: how can analogue photography materialise ideas that reflect relationships between culture and nature? More specifically, how can analogue photography with its specific material process evoke a dark poetic to critically investigate the politics of photography and the Australian landscape. To navigate the answers to these questions I have anchored this research within the rich theoretical framework of the Australian Gothic. This thesis is an exploration of my image making, my theoretical interests and a further investigation into the gothic genres lineage and sensibilities.

My art practice has been concerned with nature and culture, and in the past my artworks have explored intersections and friction points in the natural and manmade environment: my Honours thesis, *Ephemeral Graffiti*, explored the world of homing pigeons and homing-pigeon racers. In my Masters research I have been able to delve further into the politics of nature and its cultural representation via photography. By creating a camera obscura from a 1950's caravan I have been able to use the slow and experimental attributes of analogue photography to look long into the landscape. I have used negatives and experimental darkroom practices to destabilise images and

¹ The lineage of the term 'poetics of darkness' comes from a reworking of the title of Anne Williams book: Williams, Anne. *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.

investigate implications of representing nature.

Chapter One – *The Gothic* – begins by setting the parameters of the genre. I explore the usefulness of Gothic manifestations such as monsters and the art of haunting as ways to understand historical and current methods of colonising land and its expressive power to reflect this knowledge back to the world.

I outline culminating themes within the genre by tracing milestones in its history to identify specific symbols and meanings. I explore timeless manifestations of the mode and how these appear throughout diverse forms, and contemplate ways these can be utilised within my creative practice.

In the sub-chapters, *The Goths* and *Architecture*, I begin observing how binaries are used to establish 'the other'. *The Cult of Nature* establishes Gothic links to nature and the sublime as established by Edmund Burke, heralding darkness and fear from the human psyche when in contact with nature that conjures Gothic terror. The Romantic movement exploited these qualities, bringing significantly visible and enduring artists into the canon such as Caspar David Friedrich, Lord Byron and Mary Shelley, as well as establishing some of the rich and powerful aesthetic links between the Gothic, nature and the landscape.

In *Monsters* I look to J.J. Cohen theory of monsters to begin the exploration of

the monster figure in the performances of Justin Shoulder and seeing how his monster costumes manifest reflections on mortality and capitalism by inhabiting decidedly naive yet sophisticated monsters. I align this move away from the abject and grotesque Gothic toward the darkly humorous and playful Gothic in my series of photograms *Scary Monsters and Super Creeps*². Through this series, I dabble in how 'the other' might be revealed, how it might switch, blur and dissolve through monster forms.

I then introduce the formless Gothic in the final part of Chapter One, *The Art of Haunting*. I address aspects of haunting and its cultural uses through Andrea Juranovszky's insights into the Gothic loop as it appears in literature to address trauma. Demonstrating the capacity for the Gothic loop in photography, I examine the haunted institution in my creative work, *Other Worlds*.

The second chapter, *The Australian Gothic*, establishes the Gothic links to Australia through the Romantic movement, which coincides with colonial settlement in Australia. This is detailed in the sub-chapter, *The Horror of the Journey*, and references the British penal system and the beachfront settlements.

² *Scary Monsters and Super Creeps* is the title of the David Bowie album released in 1980. The song *Ashes to Ashes* appears on the album, and the film clip uses an experimental analogue film technique – solarisation. This appears as a high contrast black and white aesthetic with a pink overlay. Bowie appears dressed as Pierrot clown with 'Blitz kids' from the London club scene who were pivotal to the New Romantic Pop Culture movement. The black solarised seas in this film clip by David Mallet and the artistry of Bowie foreground elements in my art practice including my use of solarisation, black seas and skies.

Colonising Nature utilises William Bruan's examination of *Buried Epistemologies* in colonising British Colombia to examine the colonial project in Australia. This sub-chapter considers the systematic progression of settlement and the consequential frontier wars between colonising forces and Indigenous Australians. Donna Haraway's approach to the theoretical construction of nature and culture as a political strategy guides a path to observing political power and perhaps redirecting it. In the chapter *Postcolonial Re-appropriations*, I look at the artwork of James Tylor to demonstrate the potential for photography to redirect power over land. I examine his work *DeCookalisation*, specifically focusing on his relationship to photography and 'retro' aesthetics and its ability to politically activate in a 'retrospective return' to old photographic mediums in the service of ideas. Tylor revisits the past through daguerreotypes to re-appropriate Indigenous land.

The sub-chapter *Visualising Nature* establishes the camera obscura's place in seeing the landscape, looking at an exemplar in the field – Abelardo Morell and his *Central Park* series. Expanding the possibilities of the camera obscura in a contemporary context, Anne Marsh opens up an interesting avenue by diverting the camera obscura from the service of surveillance and the mechanical cataloguing tool of science, by highlighting the potential situated in its irrational qualities as a puzzler of perception, in a theatre of image immersion.

In *Traversing the Landscape*, I explore the theatre of nature contained in the 1955 caravan camera obscura I have created, and imagine the potential it has to create and view the political constructions of nature.

Weltschmerz deals specifically with the Romantic concept of *Weltschmerz* or 'world grief', and examines the role of this idea in a contemporary context within my photographic works *Cape Treachery*, *Weeping Shore* and *Still Wind in a Ghost Town*, 2015. In these works, I highlight the historical context of the British settlement of the land for mining, gold, shale and coal, and explore the process of working and travelling in the landscape with a mobile studio/ darkroom.

The final chapter, *Material Trace/ Monsters in the Medium*, delves into my artistic process in an expanded way by experimenting with the chemicals involved in photography. Firstly, I look at the experimental practice of Sigmar Polke, specifically his use of materials to manifest intentions within his work.

My experiments are documented and explained in the sub-chapter *Chemicals*, where I delve into the chemical structure of developer. In addition, I utilise contemporary research in the niche field of black and white analogue photography to create new processes in my practice. The final sub-chapter, *Destabilising Images*, describes the fracture of the photographic image on many levels such as the material surface, the process, the represented image and the conceptual construction of images. Within the

artwork *Weltzmertz Disrupted*, we see contemporary analogue photographic images that reflect an Australian Gothic sensibility in a new configuration of a contemporary material practice.

Finally, in conclusion, I give an account of how my photographic practice has progressed throughout my research. I describe how via the MFA process I have expanded my material practice by creating a camera obscura to traverse the Australian landscape and redefined my approach to chemical photography in a way that opens up an exploration into a material practice that considers material potency and the poetics of darkness. My practice continues to inspire me and moves me ever forwards, making images with a deeply considered knowledge of the photographic image and its power in and over nature.

Chapter One - The Gothic

Travelling in time, this chapter traces the gathering epistemology of the Gothic mode, beginning with the Goths and architecture and elaborating on Gothic influence over visualisations of nature in the Romantic movement. I set the parameters of the Gothic to build a vocabulary as it relates to my work with monsters and the art of haunting.

The Goths: Uncivilised Chaos.

The Gothic is a mode of expression which can be thought of as a thick sludge slowly seeping its way through crevices, taking the shape of its surrounds yet somehow staining everything as it goes. It is this mutable and ever-changing quality that historian Anne Williams observes when she notes that the Gothic is 'heterogeneous and always changing forms'.³

In attempting to trace its diversity and define aspects of its character, the Gothic starts within the genetics of the Germanic people from northern Europe in the second century CE.⁴ Grouped in the broader category of 'Barbarians', the Goths were 'other' to the Romans; they had fair skin and blond hair and they posed a real and invading threat to the empire, its land and Christian values. From a Roman viewpoint the Goths were uncivilised, violent barbarians and regarded with disdain and repulsion. They were not

³ Anne Williams, 'Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic', in Gilda Williams (ed.), *The Gothic, Documents of Contemporary Art*, MIT Press, Massachusetts, 2007, p. 27.

⁴ <http://www.ancient.eu/Goths/> by Joshua J. Mark published on 12 October 2014.

Catholics but Arians⁵, and it was said they could not think rationally, and were superstitious; that they feared natural forces but did not fear death.

Because they sought death while being violently motivated by evil spirits, they were said to be more animal than human.⁶ They wore fur clothing and had pungent body odour.⁷ The Roman fear and loathing of the Goths established a primary aspect of the Gothic mode, which Anne Williams describes as its ability to 'express many dimensions of otherness'.⁸ The Goths also establish the fear of the uncivilised and the looming threat that the 'other' can have and its ability to disorder established civilised order.

As historians Punter and Byron state in their book *The Gothic* 'What remains constant throughout the developing political use of the term is that the Gothic always remains the symbolic site of a culture's discursive struggle to define and claim possession of the civilised, and to abject, or throw off, what is seen as the other to the civilised self'.⁹

This position, pitched at the brink of chaos, is the fine line whereby the Gothic mode resides in order to expose fear and unrest within society. In this historic instance, the Gothic instilled a fear of the return to the animal, the sweat and blood-soaked violent actions of people. It was a fear wracked with superstition, fear of death from the fierce, wild and uncivilised hand of 'other' people.

⁵ Herwig Wolfram, *History of the Goths* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).Pg 232.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Anne Williams, *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic* (University of Chicago Press,1995),Pg 73.

⁹ D. Punter and G. Byron (2004). *The Gothic*. Malden, MA, Blackwell Pub. Pg 5.

Architecture. Establishing Binaries.

The Gothic shapeshifts from human to architectural form between the 12th and 16th centuries when the term is applied to medieval architecture.¹⁰ Gothic buildings were not made by the Gothic people but were retrospectively named Gothic by Italian historians in the 16th century.¹¹ At this point in time, these buildings represented a counterpoint to the established order of classical architecture and in this sense repeat the position of the Gothic being 'other' to Roman classical culture. Gothic architecture is an expansive subject that spans many revivals, with structural and decorative nuances that are beyond the scope of this thesis. But it can be said that it typically defines itself as distinct from the Roman style.¹² Some important defining features are the distinct combination of an interior arch called a 'rib' and its connection with a 'groin' which is an edge where the curved surfaces of the vault penetrate each other.¹³ The rib and the groin architectural features translate across Italian and Spanish languages to the rib and groin of an animal or a human's internal structure. These animalistic identifiers align with the medieval, natural aspects of the Gothic. Gothic buildings are famed for their pointed arches and flying buttresses.¹⁴ These features have been said to emulate a stretching action towards the heavens¹⁵, while some observe that the dark interiors and weighty stone are more indicative of hell. The

¹⁰ David Punter and Glennis Byron, *The Gothic* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2004).Pg, 32.

¹¹ Ibid.Pg 32.

¹² Robert Mark, *Experiments in Gothic Structure* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1982.)

¹³ Paul Frankl, *Gothic Architecture*, vol. Z19 (Baltimore Penguin Books, 1963.)

¹⁴ Ibid. Pg, 1-9.

¹⁵ Punter and Byron, *The Gothic*.

Gothic cathedral embodies the development of a distinct characteristic, the spiritual binary of 'good and evil'. Its stained glass windows and striking interior features emphasise the 'light and dark' that endow the Gothic quality of chiaroscuro¹⁶, in addition to the 'us and them' binary from its earlier incarnation.

An example of the ability to disturb and invoke fear through 'othering' and binaries is the Gothic cathedral of San Petronio in Bologna, Italy. Giovanni da Modena, an Italian painter from the 15th century, created a fresco depicting Dante's inferno (Figure 1). The ordered depiction of 'paradise' is painted directly on the wall resembling the inside of a cathedral with priests sitting in rows. Below, the monstrous image of Lucifer looms over the Chapel of Bolognini. Here, the figure devours a human through a large mouth in the centre of its face. The human is then digested and is spewed out through a second mouth and face in Lucifer's groin. All around the inferno are demons devouring naked human figures as a sense of panic and chaos escalates throughout the barren rocky scene and evil prevails as the devil in the pit of hell devours them all. At the top right hand corner of the fresco, da Modena paints a depiction of Mohammad, labelled within the painting as 'Machomet', being devoured by demons.¹⁷ The cathedral has consequently been reported as having been under threat of being bombed by five men connected to Al Qaeda who were arrested by Italian police in 2002. The men

¹⁶ Chiaroscuro: The treatment of light and shade in drawing and painting – An effect of contrasted light and shadows falling unevenly or from a particular direction on something. (*Oxford Dictionary*.)

¹⁷ <http://www.poderesantapia.com/art/giovanmodena.htm>

threatened the cathedral again in 2006.¹⁸ The fresco has been deemed incredibly insulting to some Muslims; as such it continues a Gothic binary and 'othering' that evokes a kind of fear and terror from 1401 into the 21st century between Catholicism and Islam, East and West, as society continues to struggle with its divisions.

¹⁸ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/jun/24/arts.artsnew>



Figure 1. Giovanni da Modena, The Inferno, 1410, Fresco, Basilica di San Petronio, Bologna.

Romanticism: The Cult of Nature.

The Gothic is raised up again within the imagination of the Romantic movement in the 18th century. The Romantics emerged as a counter perspective to the rational insights of the Enlightenment movement¹⁹ and the emerging forces of the industrial revolution. Gothic countercultural devices gained more specific characteristics and grew even more transgressive in the fertile ground of the Romantic arts. As noted by historian Maurice Cranston, the Marxist movement sometimes referred to Romanticism as the 'cult of nature'²⁰. The Romantic movement embraces the natural world as paramount;²¹ and as a result, many strong connections developed to the Gothic and its role in representing darkness, melancholy and fear within nature.

A key figure in drawing on the powers of the Gothic to fuel romantic imagination was philosopher Edmund Burke. In his enquiry into the sublime and the beautiful he rejected classical principles and accounted for human passions being aroused through the sublime. In Burkes view the natural world is a primary source for arousing the sublime; he states 'as pain and danger when near enough to ignite self-preservation but distant enough to not be

¹⁹ Maurice Cranston, *The Romantic Movement* (Cambridge, Mass; Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1994). Pg. 48

²⁰ Here Cranston sights that the Marxist left considered the best thing the 'the cult of nature' (the romantic movement) did was revolt against the industrial revolution, sighting William Blake and his poetic verse 'the dark satanic mills' in his poem 'And those feet in ancient times,' of 1804 to be a reference to the industrial revolution. Ibid.

²¹ Simon Gregg, 'New Romantics: Darkness and Light in Australian Art,' *Art Monthly Australia*, no. 246 (2011.)

actual pain. This sparks passion and subsequently sublime pleasure'.²²

Burke also states that 'the ocean stirs the mind because it is the object of no small terror. Indeed terror is in all cases, the ruling principle of the sublime.'²³

These insights as well as darkness, lack of light and consequent obscurity in Burkes view have powers to ignite the sublime. Darkness and terror called the Gothic out from its slumber within the walls of cathedrals and allowed it to again inhabit vast and formless realms of nature. The Gothic architectural elements crumbling into sublime clutches of nature created a long and enduring symbol: The Gothic ruin.

An exemplar of romantic vision within the fine arts is German painter Caspar David Friedrich, a lasting figure because of his ability to paint nature evoking the sublime. *Abbey Among Oak Trees* (Figure 2) shows the Gothic ruin of an abbey situated in a bleak wintery landscape. Here the oak trees are devoid of any sign of new life. Black and gnarled, they stand together leaning towards the abbey, as if whispering witnessed accounts of the rituals held in the abbey before its ruin, perhaps even stories of the land prior to the abbey's construction. The trees loom together in a grand, affirming way, showing nature's whole and interconnected dominance over the man-made building and the minute human figures in the foreground of the landscape. The sky is lit up yet dim; it glows while illuminating the scene from behind, while the crescent moon in the sky creates a glimpse of the celestial,

²² Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (New York Garland Pub, 1971.)

²³ Cranston, *The Romantic Movement*.Pg, 50.

the infinite realm of the natural world beyond earth. This painting has epitomic status in Gothic visual history and it has been criticised as an over-saturated cliché in popular culture, yet it is included here because of this ability to capture so much interest, for its symbolic mark in time when nature victoriously took hold of the man-made. It is not only a symbol of nature's sublime power and ultimate dominance, but a melancholic symbol of the futility of mankind to the powers of death, decay and the vanity of the political world with its inevitable episodic collapse.²⁴



Figure 2. Caspar David Friedrich, *The Abbey Among Oak Trees*, 1809-10. Oil on Canvas, 110 × 171cm. Alte National Galerie, Berlin.

The natural world within the Gothic mode is dark and damp. Arching, tunnelling woodlands creak in the wind, and it's a place where trees have eyes and animals bite. It harbours fugitives; it conjures spirits and then

²⁴ <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/becoming-modern/romanticism/romanticism-in-germany/v/caspar-david-friedrich-abbey-among-oak-trees-1809-or-1810>.

exorcizes them; and it is not a friend of reason or the rational. As such, the Gothic brings forward powerful forces in nature that are uncontrollable and unpredictable. Lightning strikes of electricity from the sky such as the terror of tsunamis in the ocean, deep ravines and sink holes that appear without warning, icy peaks crack and avalanches fall – these all inhabit the wilderness of the romantic sublime. The Gothic sees these and also hallucinates further, making up stories as it seeks to herald warnings against meddling with the forces of nature.

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* gave birth to the ultimate Gothic monster at the beginning of the 19th century. As a prominent figure in the Romantic movement, Shelley lived during the industrial age and the age of reason, and became a critical witness of her time, creating a complex and compelling story. The conditions of the time didn't create a supernatural monster but a science-fiction monster. Victor Frankenstein's animation of the 'lifeless clay' of animal and human corpses, created a poetic and horrific tale of a man's compulsion to defy the natural forces of decay and mortality through science, evoking a monster that was also the victim of its birth. The book's narrative is a complex weave of terror and empathy – for both the monster that is Frankenstein and the unstable, melancholic, self-loathing nature of Victor Frankenstein himself. This further develops the character of the Gothic as being able to manifest chaos between the man himself and nature, exposing the disorderly and chaotic character of human nature that can switch and contradict. Through the creation of the fictionalised monster and the romantic visions within the 'cult of nature', we can examine the binary

duality of culture and nature, the physical and metaphysical.

"It was the secrets of heaven and earth that I desired to learn; and whether it was the outward substance of things or the inner spirit of nature and the mysterious soul of man that occupied me, still my inquiries were directed to the metaphysical, or in its highest sense, the physical secrets of the world." Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*.²⁵

Monsters.

The Gothic mode's inherently boundless journey through time implies an immortality that also belongs to its monsters. The hunch-backed ghoul, witches, un-dead zombies, the machine-like man, ghosts, the banshee and of course the charismatically alluring and destructive vampire – all un-alive yet un-dead and doomed to a cycle of repeat. It could be said that they have been dragging themselves out from a European past to haunt the present. Associate Professor of English and Human Sciences at George Washington University, J.J. Cohen, created a 'theory of monsters' in seven short theses. In the final thesis, he establishes cultural uses for the manifestation of the monster in reconciling a connection that the 'other' has to the 'self.'

²⁵ Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*. Wordsworth Editions limited: Hertfordshire, 1999. Pg 33.

Thesis VII: The monster stands at the threshold of becoming.

'*This thing of darkness! Acknowledge mine.*' William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*.

'Monsters are our children. They can be pushed to the farthest margins of geography and discourse, hidden away at the edges of the world in the hidden recesses of our mind, but they always return. And when they come back, they bring not just a fuller knowledge of our place in history and the history of knowing our place, but they bare self-knowledge, human knowledge – and a discourse all the more sacred as it rises from the outside. These monsters ask us how we perceive the world, and how we have misrepresented what we have attempted to place. They ask us to re-evaluate our cultural assumptions about race, gender, sexuality and our perceptions of difference, our tolerance towards its expression. They ask why we have created them.' J.J Cohen. *Monster Theory*.²⁶

The monster haunts us and the monster in its full form can reflect back to us questions about ourselves. Examples of contemporary Gothic monsters include *Glut Glut* (Figure 3) and *V* (Figure 4) created by artist Justin Shoulder. Through the creation of elaborate costumes, Shoulder weaves an illusionary world that builds characters of particular monsters, each with a taxonomy deliberately constructed to reflect social and personal selves. *Glut Glut* is a strangely alluring beast of gluttony. In Shoulder's words, 'Glut Glut is disgusting, insatiable, filthy, the embodiment of excess... all it can say is "Glut Glut"; it speaks only through its own name and only perpetuates itself'.²⁷ The world of *Glut Glut* is created by Shoulder through live performances, photography, graphic design and video.

²⁶ Clive Bloom, *Gothic Horror: A Guide for Students and Readers*, vol. 2nd (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 216.

²⁷ Justin Shoulder: *Under This Mask, Another Mask* –Amelia Groom. Interview with the artist.

These devices show the viewer a glimpse of greed, consumption, waste and gluttony, mirroring personal and societal dilemmas during capitalism.



Figure 3. Justin Shoulder, *Glut Glut*, 2008, Sydney, photograph by Matt Hornby.

The monster named V is Shoulder's overtly Gothic monster that also exists on stage, in photography and in chilling videos. Shoulder references the macabre painting tradition of the Vanitas²⁸ through the performance of V. A monster made from the everlasting material of plastic, V emerges from an inverted V-shaped doorway made from fluorescent light tubes, enacting the painterly chiaroscuro effect often seen in German expressionist cinema. The monster materialises to recite from the 'ancient' book of 'V', '*Vanitas Vanitatum Omnia Vanitas*'²⁹. These words are then followed by the words V, V, V echoing through an enormous soundscape that trails off into deafening

²⁸ The Vanitas is a tradition in still life painting utilizing symbols of mortality, vanity and decay.

²⁹ The Vanitas stems from 17th century Dutch genre and takes its name and moral basis from a verse of the Latin translation of the bible in that states, *Vanitas vanitatum omnia vanitas*. This translates to... 'Vanity of Vanities, saith the preacher... all is vanity [futility]. I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of the spirit... for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest. (Ecclesiastes 1:2;1:14;9:10) The National Gallery.

http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/glossary/vanitas*/chooseLetter/V

shrieks. The narrative format of the chanting 'V, V, V' mimics the children's television program *Sesame Street* when a new letter of the alphabet is introduced. The reference to children's television is not by chance but a play on the childish act of imagining monsters. The irrationality of the monster contains a mythology and an immaterial, supernatural quality that can be seen as immature. The realm of childish fantasy is ripe with imagination untainted by the constraints of the adult world. Shoulder's monsters exist in worlds, which, as with all monsters, trick, switch and blend binaries. Shoulder's monsters are both adult and childish. Alluring and repulsive, they are playful masks of real dilemmas. V's dilemma for us is mortality and life's purpose. Shoulder juxtaposes the naive with the sophisticated to create sublime confrontations.



Figure 4. Justin Shoulder, *V*, 2010, Film Still. Sydney.

The juxtaposition of the naive and sophisticated was an approach I used to create the series of photographs, *Scary Monsters and Super Creeps*.

(Figure 5).

This series of photographs uses camera-less photographic techniques to experiment with and find the monster form. In a decidedly naive and playful expression, much like the act of holding a séance at a teenage sleepover party, these images are an attempt to contact the 'other' side. In this case the 'other' is the world of nature outside the boundary of my body, which I perceive as a natural form, yet the seaweed is 'other' to what I perceive as me physically. The medium I used to 'contact' the 'other' is otherwise known as direct contact prints.³⁰ The natural material I use is seaweed that I found churned up. Each clump washed ashore was attached to the base and the root of the plant, leaving a trace of where it was imbedded in the ocean floor. The ferocious acts of natural elements – wind, tides, churning swells – and lifting the weed from the sea inspired in me an idea of Edmund Burke's terror of the ocean and the Romantic sublime. With the intention of evoking the sublime from the darkness deep beneath the surface, seaweed also evokes memories of entangled tendrils around my legs when swimming, creating a chilling terror with its slimy mysterious darkness. To surface the figure of the monsters from this material, the seaweed was placed on the photographic paper and swished, piled and slopped on until the seaweed began to take on monster forms, anthropomorphising the seaweed in a narrative play with the monstrous 'other' – the seaweed evoking 'nature'. The resulting photographs are not scary but irrational and playful Gothic

³⁰ Photogram AKA Direct contact print: A camera-less photographic process that produces a negative image by placing objects directly onto a light sensitive surface in the darkroom and then exposing it to light, often using an enlarger.

monsters. Emerging from a dense black sea of silver halides,³¹ they reflect our figuration of nature as we draw out reflections of ourselves and ascribe them onto nature.

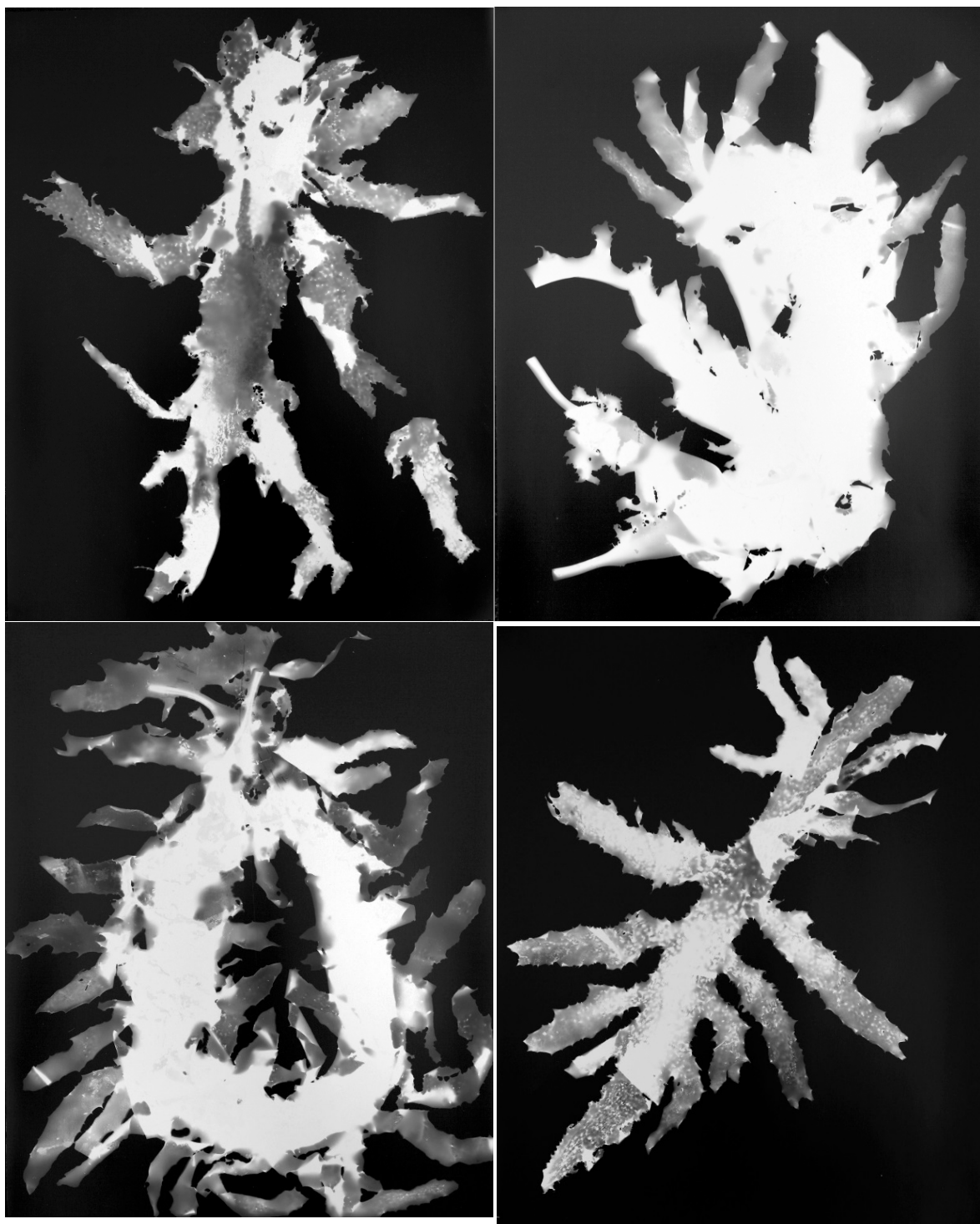


Figure 5. Claire Conroy. *Scary Monsters and Super Creeps*, 2014, silver gelatin photograms 11x14".

³¹ Silver Halides: The primary element for light capture in photography is the silver halide crystal. <http://www.Kodak.com>

The Art of Haunting.

Haunting is a formless type of expression that can further enable reflection of the self and society.

'The art of haunting' is the term favoured by contemporary theorists to describe the Gothic in literature. Andrea Juranovszky describes it in her research paper *Trauma Re-enactment and the Gothic Loop*. Juranovszky focuses not on the Gothic monster individually, but on the Gothic narrative and its retrospective direction. The study explores the notion that repetition throughout the mode is not simply an unimaginative and lazy use of a trope, but can be viewed and utilised as a possible site to reshape cultural and historical identities. In particular ones having been subject to historical traumas. Juranovszky proposes that, 'The reshaping takes place through a series of revisitations'.³² She also states that within the Gothic loop, repressed events return and impose themselves on the present. Furthermore, these events refuse to leave and haunt the mind of the protagonist in literature until they submit to face the challenge that processing the memory has to offer.

Juranovszky suggests the Gothic loop could be described as a discursive element, 'a fictional time and space of various suspensions

³² Andrea Juranovszky, 'Trauma Reenactment in the Gothic Loop: A Study on Structures of Circularity in Gothic Fiction,' *Student Pulse* 6, no. 05 (2014), <http://www.studentpulse.com/a?id=898>.

when/where certain past or present traumas must be continuously re-experienced and finally resolved – with horror and suffering involved.’³³

The return of the monster and the art of haunting is inherent in the Gothic tendency to retrieve, revive, return and to haunt the present, continually drawing from personal, cultural and natural histories to elaborate on the present. This return or ‘re-enactment’ may be a device to reconcile trauma and conflict, as Juranovszky suggests, or it may simply be a site to witness.

Artists like Anne Ferran have achieved considerable ground in the psycho-geography of history. Her retrieval through the photographic image explores the colonial institution through found photographs and empty sites that once were filled with people. She uses imagery of these sites and photographic anomalies such as light leaks and reflections to create a ‘nesting or haunting’ into the present’

In my photographic work *Other Worlds*, I push haunting out to the chilling nightmare of the soulless, inert and dark territory of architecture. Represented through sharp and stark monochromatic prints and the rational nightmare of power and containment within subject matter, and utilising the camera as a cold mechanical indexing device, I explore the role of the ‘haunted house’ or specifically the ‘haunted institution’ to develop the Gothic loop in photography. Delving into colonial histories at the site of Sydney College of the Arts (SCA), I researched the site from its origins as an asylum from 1885,

³³ Ibid.

focusing on the original purpose and specific architectural features that were indicative of the style at the time. The architectural history and its relationship to Foucault's Panopticon³⁴ aligns with ideas about photography and as a vantage point to witness.

The three images produced were *The Line of Authority*, *The Ha Ha Wall*, and *The Witnesses* (Figures 6,7,8). *The Line of Authority* captures an image of the prominent Victorian Italianate clock tower that resides in the centre of the grounds. The Kirkbride building was built with a centralised group of buildings that were described as 'the axis of authority' where the hospital staff resided. This 'axis of authority' inspired the name of this image. I swapped the word 'axis' for 'line', to draw more attention to the line of the clock tower itself. The clock was never installed and the holes at the top of the tower remain empty cavities. These large and looming cavities imply the placement of an eye or at least a peephole with a vantage point. The image has been captured as a large-scale pinhole photographic negative. The negative aesthetic radiates shadows creating an auric effect, and the pinhole technique offers an infinite depth of field and sharpness, creating a rationally sharp viewpoint yet switching to the irrationally unfamiliar image in its negative form.

A ha ha wall is a specific type of wall that from a distance doesn't obscure a

³⁴ This is founded on Foucault's readings of the architect Jeremy Bentham's panoptic tower within institutional spaces used as a method of control. In Foucault's *Discipline and Punishment* this physical model of a the panopticon tower as power mechanism has been Figure transferred to photographic theory as the relationship to the eye and the camera, the surveying device and the photographic or recorded image from the camera can also be seen to be a panoptic device, to observe, to record and witness events and behaviour, also 'The concept of regulating a gaze has much in common with the humanist idea of man at the centre of the universe, and, like the camera as prosthesis, it is predicated on a vertical body (the tower) in possession of an omnipotent gaze.' (Marsh, 2003, pg. 34)

view, but when approached a large trench meets the bottom of the wall and it becomes insurmountable. Sandstone walls surround the Kirkbride building and at many points they become ha ha walls. This was intended to keep patients inside the asylum. The ha ha wall mimics a cruel joke as it implies a kind of freedom – a visual freedom, an ability to look out upon the landscape. But this is merely an illusion. Above the wall moves a palm tree in a soft blur, as if waving from the other side.

This chilling series of works explores the poetic of darkness in the sharp aperture of the camera obscura printed on large monochromatic paper. The series reflects the cold and powerful ruin of a 19th century idea; the mental asylum.



Figure 6, *The Line of Authority*, 1.6 x1 m.



Figure 7. *The Ha Ha Wall*, 1.4 x1 m.

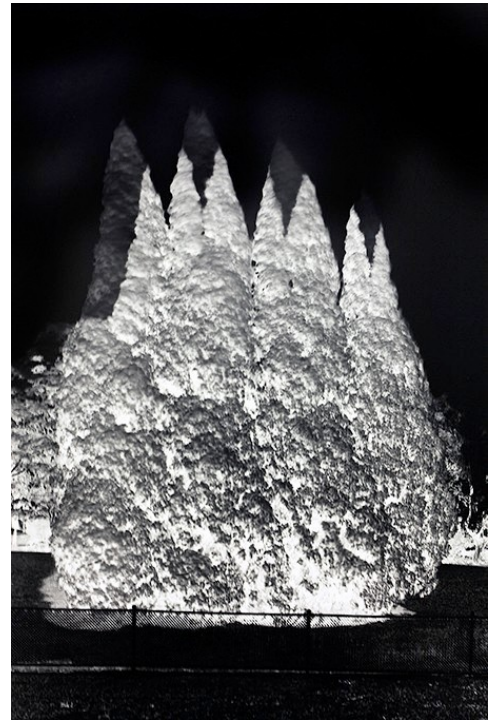


Figure 8 *The Witnesses*, 1.2 x 1m. 2014, *Silver gelatin pinhole photographs* by Claire Conroy.



Figure 9. *Installation view: Claire Conroy, Other Worlds, 2014. Sydney College of the Arts.*

Chapter Two - The Australian Gothic

'Long before the fact of Australia was ever confirmed by explorers and cartographers it had already been imagined as a grotesque space, a land peopled by monsters. The idea of its existence was disputed, was even heretical for a time, and with the advent of the transportation of convicts its darkness seemed confirmed. The Antipodes was a world of reversals, the dark subconscious of Britain. It was for all intents and purposes, Gothic par excellence, the Dungeon of the world.' G. Turcotte.³⁵

While establishing the shift of the Gothic mode to Australian shores, this chapter deepens the discussion regarding representations of 'nature' and how my conceptual practice considers colonial notions. Utilising the theoretical work of Donna Haraway and Willem Braun, I navigate questions about how nature is constructed through cultural strategies to control natural resources. I look at how image-making is implicated in the construction of 'nature' and how artists can witness this and possibly interrupt this construction. I describe the journey in my customised 1950s caravan camera obscura, using it as a tool for seeing the landscape inside as an inverted projection. This perspective helped to create the series *Weltzmertz* from the viewpoint of the colonial gaze.

³⁵ Gerry Turcotte, *Australian Gothic. The Handbook to Gothic Literature*, in Mulvey Roberts, M (ed) 1998.

The Horror of the Journey.

The Gothic mode has been draped over the Australian landscape relatively recently, shrouding the land from the arid interior to the brutal cliffs and violent shores. The colonial expedition from England to the shores of the southern continent began between 1787 and 1868.³⁶ This coincides with the Romantic movement and its additions to Gothic experiences and expressions. The settlement of Australia began to form expressions of the Australian Gothic that are deeply linked to colonisation.

Australia as a penal colony birthed an environment filled with anger and violence. Ideas of escape for both convict and free settler were crushed through realistic fear of the vastness of space, the terror of the unknown interior and the overwhelming tyranny of distance from the 'motherland.' The sea held a vast and sublime effect for the eighteenth and nineteenth century British Australian – the realities of Edmund Burke's sublime terror had been experienced firsthand on the journey across the seas. Yet most of the settlements were 'beachhead'³⁷ frontiers, looking outward to the sea as the terror of looking inland was even more immense. When eventually the colony began to expand inward, to create European settlements the frontier was begun and the horrors expanded.³⁸ Thus begins a cultural lineage of an Australian Gothic.

³⁶ Hughes, R. *The Fatal Shore*, Great Britain, Collins Harville [1987] Pg. 143 – 144.

³⁷ Beachhead frontiers' were settlements, that occupied small areas of land because they were either places of secondary punishment of convicts or outposts to block other colonialists ambitions.' British occupied small areas of land, Aboriginals were able to continue their activities. John Connor, *The Australian Frontier Wars, 1788-1838* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2002.)

³⁸ Ibid. Pg. 34.

Colonising Nature.

Of the Australian Scenery. By Marcus Clarke.³⁹

'WHAT is the dominant note of Australian Scenery? That which is the dominant note of Edgar Allan Poe's poetry – Weird Melancholy. A poem like "L'Allegro" could never be written by an Australian. It is too airy, too sweet, too freshly happy. The Australian mountain forests are funereal, secret, stern. Their solitude is desolation. They seem to stifle in their black gorges a story of sullen despair. No tender sentiment is nourished in their shade. In other lands the dying year is mourned, the falling leaves drop lightly on his bier. In the Australian forests no leaves fall. The savage winds shout among the rock clefts, from the melancholy gums strips of white bark hang and rustle. The very animal life of these frowning hills is either grotesque or ghostly. Great gray kangaroos hop noiselessly over the coarse grass. Flights of white cockatoos stream out shrieking like evil souls. The sun suddenly sinks, and the mopokes burst out into horrible peals of semi-human laughter. The natives aver that when night comes, from out the bottomless depths of some lagoon the Bunyip rises, and in form like a monstrous sea-calf, drags his loathsome length from out the ooze. From a corner of the silent forest rises a dismal chant, and around a fire, dance natives painted like skeletons. All is fear inspiring and gloomy. No bright fancies are linked with the memories of the mountains. Hopeless explorers have named them out of their sufferings—Mount Misery, Mount Dreadful, Mount Despair. Marcus Clarke.

³⁹ MaKinnon, Hamilton, and P. Primrose, *The Marcus Clarke Memorial Volume*. Melbourne: Cameron Liang. Pg 114 – 116.

Marcus Clarke's (1846 – 1881) perception of the Australian scenery reflects a melancholic emptiness and a Eurocentric Australian Gothic sensibility. In a macabre reality the 'funeral forests' point to the death and injury of Australian Indigenous people as well as white people in the bloody frontier wars. The bird 'shrieks', sounding like evil souls, could reflect the compromised morality that came about in the 'open warfare'⁴⁰ of the Australian frontier massacres and battles. Ex-convict and free settler civilians committed war crimes including kidnapping, child labour, torture, rape, sex slavery and murder.⁴¹ The frontier war battles were extreme and officially declared on the contested settlement of the Hawkesbury River. The Darug people of the Deerubbun River resided there and it is now commonly known as the Nepean River and the Hawkesbury River. The battle broke out between corn farmers who were primarily convict settlers and the Darug people. The diary entry from Magistrate Richard Atkins at Parramatta Court comments: 'It would be impossible to describe the scenes of villainy and infamy that passes at the Hawkesbury'.⁴² The war in the Hawkesbury region was backed up by the military with a garrison placed in the area to protect farmers and corn crops from the Darug people. The Darug people led by fighters such as Pemulwuy retaliated. The war was not only fueled by the acquisition of land, food and goods from both sides, but by retribution from one attack to another.⁴³ The battles continued as well as the spread of disease until Aboriginal numbers declined. Overt warfare then gave way to more subtle forms of segregation

⁴⁰ Open warfare was declared between the 'natives and the settlers' on the Hawkesbury river by Captain David Collins. Ibid. Pg.35.

⁴¹ John Connor, *The Australian Frontier Wars, 1788 -1838*. Sydney, University of NSW Press 2002.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

and suppression of the Indigenous people.

The documentation of the frontier wars makes the politically strategic claim of 'terra nullius' or 'nobody's land' a brazen untruth. It was an obvious act of manipulation that justified the legal standing for British/Australian rule in appropriating land and enabling the colonisation of Australia. A conveniently emptied wilderness.

In my Honours thesis I explored the myth of the separation of humans and nature. My art practice observed and created 'friction points' and overlapping territories between animals and humans, specifically homing pigeons and people living in cities. Tim Low's book *The New Nature* provides valuable insight into the relationship between human and nature:

'Humans are probably wired to think in opposites – yes and no, good and bad, winners and losers, nature and culture, natural and artificial. The world isn't divided up like this... 'Wilderness' is the child of this dichotomous thinking, existing only as an opposite of something – us.'⁴⁴

The separation of nature and culture not only separates us from nature but it leaves the 'wilderness' emptied. It is this emptiness or absence that geographer Bruce Willems Braun pays attention to in his PhD *Buried Epistemologies* as he investigates the colonisation of British Columbia. He argues that images of 'wilderness' removed of their human element or

⁴⁴ Tim Low, *The New Nature*. Camberwell, Vic: Penguin.

cultural significances are political. Furthermore, political acts that are colonial can be seen in neo-colonial strategies used by corporations, governments or other parties with vested interests. Braun points out that images used in places such as the brochures of corporate forest management or in photographic books of pristine and untouched wilderness – often utilised in environmental campaigns – can become complicit in a political agenda. That agenda is to appropriate lands or ‘manage’ unkept or unprotected spaces. Braun also argues that ‘What remains completely unmarked in photographs, texts and figures is a subtle manoeuvre whereby the ‘land’ or the ‘Forest’ are simultaneously abstracted and displaced from existing local cultural and political contexts, and resituated in the rhetorical space of the ‘nation’ and its public’.⁴⁵

If we look at the origins of photography and the early landscape photographs of the late eighteenth century, we see the influence of the modern colonial era. When looking at images from early explorers of new-found lands, Graham Clarke says ‘the eye scales and tracks the land as it establishes its own point of reference and the beginning of a map of social and political control over nature’.⁴⁶ The settlers’ and explorers’ approaches to photographing the land in the early colonial experience have a distinct approach to the subject that includes, as Graham Clarke keenly witnesses, ‘the mapping of the land and the imaging of the land as at once a physical

⁴⁵ Bruce Willems Braun, "Buried Epistemologies: The Politics of Nature in (Post)Colonial British Columbia," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 87, no. 1 (1997): 10.

⁴⁶ Graham Clarke, *The Photograph* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 59.

reality, a national symbol, and an order of political and social control'.⁴⁷ In *Desert Sand Hills Near Sink of Carson, Nevada, 1867*, by Timothy O'Sullivan we can see traversing the desert landscape a mobile wagon that is also a darkroom for wet plate collodion photography. Clarke's analysis of photography and its political implications are reinforced here in the footprints of the photographer, with Clarke stating that they 'indicate the settler's relation to the land'.⁴⁸ (Figure 10)



Figure 10. Timothy O'Sullivan. *Desert Sand Hills Near Sink of Carson, Nevada, 1867*.

The perception of an empty wilderness and the abstraction of the land for political gain builds the foundation for 'terra nullius', an abstraction of perception that maintained British power and title over land and forwarded Australian colonisation.

⁴⁷ Ibid. Pg.59.

⁴⁸ Graham Clarke, *The Photograph* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) Pg, 60.

Donna Haraway suggests that nature is a 'deeply contested myth and reality', and that 'written onto the body of Nature are themes of race, sexuality, gender, nation, family and class'.⁴⁹ Haraway further states that in examining this carefully, one can explode the appearance of neutrality⁵⁰ of the social and natural world that masks racism and sexism.⁵¹ It is also Haraway's view that natural science and fact are constructs that are intricately woven narratives. Haraway suggests as such it is possible to witness motivations and histories of investment in these narratives, and that narratives of 'nature' can be rewritten.

Postcolonial re-appropriation.

James Tylor writes into the politic of nature and addresses post-colonial concerns that engage complex relationships with nature, culture and the landscape photograph through his series of work titled *DeCookolisation*. Tylor uses daguerreotype⁵² (Figure 11) and wet-plate photographic processes to create a visual link to historic narratives, as they are the aesthetic and photographic technology that were used in the early days of colonisation.

Through a 'retro' aesthetic the audience is directed to the 19th century to revisit the British exploration of the South Pacific in images such as *Mount*

⁴⁹ Donna Jeanne Haraway, *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (New York: Routledge, 1989.) Pg, 3.

⁵⁰ The 'appearance of neutrality' stems from Marxist theory, that the owners of the means of production will see equality in a system of exchange. Ibid.

⁵¹ Haraway, *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science*, 7.

⁵² Daguerreotype: A photograph taken by an early photographic invented 1839. The process employing iodine sensitized silver plate and mercury vapor. *Oxford Dictionary*.

Cook New Zealand, Cook Islands, Mount Cook National Park, Australia. Tylor's Aboriginal, Maori and European heritage is a motivational and authenticating force behind his challenge to Cook's discoveries. Tylor reiterates in an essay about his artwork 'that these places had already been discovered'.⁵³ The vast and empty wilderness visually described in the hauntingly sombre, melancholic landscape photographs are devoid of people yet the context of the work gives voice to the peopled lands.

Tylor re-appropriates these lands through titles which are the names given to each site by the respective Indigenous people, Te Aoraki, Aotearoa (Mt Cook, New Zealand), Avaiki Nui (Cook Islands), Gan Garr, Guugu Yimithirr (Mt Cook National Park, Australia.) (Figure 12) He further explores the notion of appropriation of land through the appropriation of imagery. Collecting his source photographs online from other people's imagery and intentionally not acknowledging the original photographer, he further calls into question the postmodern art practice of the mash-up, remixing and appropriation, practices which have been challenged by some Indigenous peoples.⁵⁴

Tylor has cleverly used the medium and the aesthetic as a form of reference

⁵³ http://issuu.com/stillsgallery/docs/james_tylor_online_catalogue_/6.

⁵⁴ A landmark in the legal protection of Aboriginal art occurred in 1994. 'The reproduction of paintings, which depict Dreaming stories and designs of cultural significance has been a matter of great concern to the Aboriginal community. Pirating of Aboriginal designs and paintings for commercial use without the consent of the artist or the traditional owners was common for a long time. The recognition of the sacred and religious significance of these paintings, and the restrictions which Aboriginal law and culture imposes on their reproduction, is only now being understood by the white community' observation by the presiding trial judge, Von Doussa J.

<http://ab-ed.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/go/aboriginal-art/protecting-australian-indigenous-art/case-studies-of-copying-and-appropriation/case-study-4-the-carpets-case>.

to the past and untypically appropriated non-iconic images found online, avoiding more common uses of appropriation from the heavily used techniques of the late 1990s. Here Tylor uses pictorial appropriation inventively to freshly consider the impacts of appropriation and the political constructs of the so-called empty wilderness.

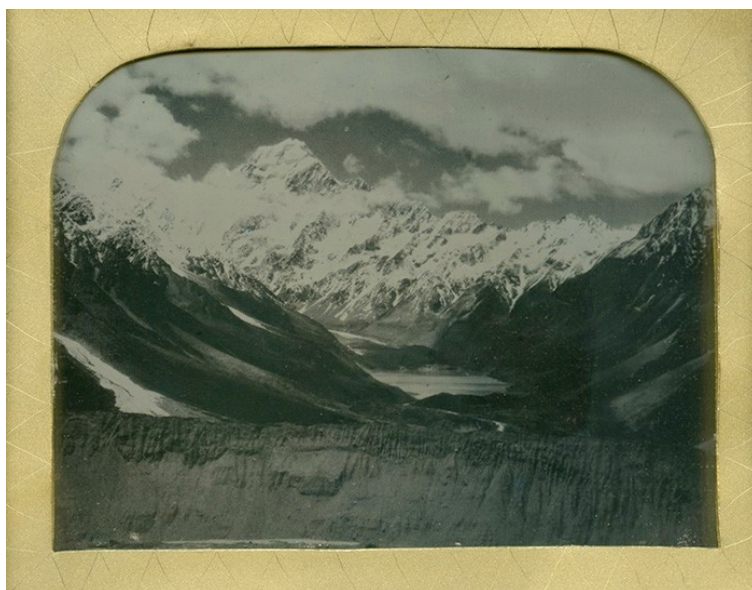


Figure 11 James Tylor, Te Aoraki, Aotearoa (Mount Cook, New Zealand), from DeCookolisation series. Daguerreotype, 10 x 12.7cm 2015.

Figure 12 James Tylor, Gan Gaar, Guugu Yimithirr nation (Mount Cook National Park/ Cooktown, Australia) from DeCookolisation series, Daguerreotype, 10 x 12.7cm 2015. http://www.stillsgallery.com.au/artists/tylor/index.php?obj_id=folio&image=6&nav=1

Visualising Nature.

The camera obscura⁵⁵ is inherently linked to the origins of photography with its ability to form images in a darkened space, this image is sublime as it is nature working in a way that can overwhelm, startle, and delight a person. The daguerreotype was described by its inventor Louis Daguerre as 'the spontaneous reproduction of the images of nature received in the camera obscura'.⁵⁶ The image produced inside the darkened room inspired a curiosity and a reversal of the world that holds an innocence and wonderment that is intrinsically linked to a curiosity of nature, just as photographic historian Graham Clarke writes in his book *The Photograph*: 'the photograph not only signals a different relationship to and over nature. It speaks very much to a sense of power we seek to order and construct the world around us.'⁵⁷

There is an irrational and disorienting quality in seeing the world through the camera obscura; the world is seen upside-down and back to front. It is mesmerising and intriguing, even when we know the physical properties of light when travelling in straight lines, the phenomenon still continues to amaze.

Art historian and optical science expert Barbara Maria Stafford observes in her book *Artful Science: Enlightenment Entertainment and the Eclipse of*

⁵⁵ Camera obscura is a darkened box with a convex lens or aperture for projecting the image of an external object onto a screen inside. It is important historically in the development of photography. Oxford dictionaries.

⁵⁶ Graham Clarke, *The Photograph* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997)Pg, 13.

⁵⁷ Ibid. Pg,11.

Visual Education, 'The camera obscura was a chief instrument allowing the early moderns to catch a fleeting glimpse into normally hidden operations of perception'.⁵⁸ Stafford goes on to say, 'This psychologically disorientating "prank" stimulated viewer pleasure through bafflement and ignited the pleasure of curiosity'.⁵⁹

Artist Abelardo Morell is an exemplar in the field of contemporary camera obscura practice. His large body of work inside hotel rooms around the world captures on film – in both colour and black and white – the interiors with the exterior world projected onto them. His work uses the indexical nature of photography to capture the familiar surroundings of a hotel room with features such as carpets, wall, ceiling trimmings and beds, juxtaposed with the iconic structures of famous places such as the Eiffel Tower, Times Square and Central Park. The exteriors are projected into the darkened space using an aperture. In the darkened space the coloured image is projected and overlaid upon these textured and three-dimensional surfaces. In his series *Central Park, Spring, Summer, Fall and Winter*, (Figure's 13-14) Morell visualises nature and time through change in the seasons. Morell's photographic explorations of the camera obscura extend to the creation of a mobile camera obscura (Figure 15) made from a tent. Here he captures the landscape, juxtaposing a textured micro view of the ground with the macro

⁵⁸ Barbara Maria Stafford, *Artful Science: Enlightenment, Entertainment, and the Eclipse of Visual Education* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1994), 45-47

⁵⁹ The camera obscura recreates an image in a 'truthful' perspective as formulated by Leon Battista Alberti the renaissance mathematician who constructed the grid formula to draw one point perspective. Anne Marsh, *The Darkroom: Photography and the Theatre of Desire* (Macmillan, 2003), Pg, 27.

view of the surrounding landscape. (Figure 16)



Figure 13. Abelardo Morell: Camera Obscura: View of Central Park Looking North-Summer, C Type Photograph, 2008.



Figure 14. Abelardo Morell, *Camera Obscura: View Of Central Park Looking North-Winter*. C Type Photograph 2013.



Figure 15. Abelardo Morell, *Camera Obscura Tent*, C Type Photograph, 2010.

Figure 16. Abelardo Morell, *Tent-Camera Image on Ground: View Looking Southeast Toward The Chisos Mountains*. Big Bend National Park, Texas, C Type Photograph, 2010.

The camera obscura has been involved in divergent historical and philosophical discussions, on the one hand in support of the rational 'truthful,' 'mechanical' and scientific view of the world⁶⁰. Yet on the other hand, another point of view emerges of the camera obscura that expands on the magical illusionary qualities of the device to trick the mind's eye. Leading this discussion is Professor Anne Marsh who writes about the origins of the 'dark room' as a device for destabilising the rational. To do this, Marsh writes, we can begin 'by not regarding it as merely a panoptic tool (surveillance in the service of power) or the perspectival mechanical tool of science to document with accuracy. Rather, view the camera obscura as a performative medium to challenge perception.'⁶¹ Furthermore, in approaching it this way Marsh says that by 'destabilising the camera obscura as a rationalising mechanism it is possible to dismantle the conventional history of photography'.⁶²

With this point of view in mind, I explored the use of the camera obscura and its potential to destabilise cultural constructions of the Australian landscape.

Using the camera obscura as method not only of viewing nature but also

⁶⁰ The camera obscura recreates an image in a 'truthful' perspective as formulated by Leon Battista Alberti the renaissance mathematician who constructed the grid formula to draw one point perspective. Anne Marsh, *The Darkroom: Photography and the Theatre of Desire* (Macmillan, 2003), Pg, 27.

⁶¹ 'The camera obscura is a mechanical tool to create illusion and therefore more of a fantasy machine than a rational tool.' Anne Marsh, *The Darkroom: Photography and the Theatre of Desire* (Macmillan, 2003),Pg, 28.

⁶² Ibid. Pg, 27.

as a 'performative medium, to challenge perception',⁶³ the process of image-making through this device becomes a way of seeing the implications and actions of the colonial landscape on nature in Australia.

My attempts to do this began in 2006 when I created a temporary camera obscura from a three-tonne truck (figure 17) to poetically visualise man-made intersections in the natural landscape around Sydney. In 2007 I looked at the environmental impact of land-clearing and salinity in the West Australian landscape. I created images of remnant salmon gum forests to haunt the present with the memory of past species, using a camera obscura water tank (Figure 18 - 19). The water tank was a reminder of the trees' ability to contain the water that is now evaporating and leaving salt on the soil surface.



Figure 17. Claire Conroy, *Lightspeed* 2006. *Silver Gelatin Pinhole* photograph. 3m x 1.2m.

⁶³. Anne Marsh, *The Darkroom: Photography and the Theatre of Desire* (Macmillan, 2003), Pg, 29.



Figure 18. Claire Conroy, *Water tank pinhole camera*. 2006.

Figure 19. Claire Conroy, *Salmon Gum, Pinhole photograph 1 x 1.2 m*. 2006



Figure 20. Moving pinhole camera, location shot #1 and #2. Kellerberrin WA 2007.

Traversing the landscape.

Through my MFA I have restored and customised a 1950s caravan, transforming it into a portable camera obscura (Figure 24.) It is now a camera, a darkroom and a projection space for an audience to experience. The object enacts a return to the 1950s and the mobile photo studio carries a connection to the earlier days of photography in the 19th century. The camera obscura is a tool to perceive the nature of light and image formation as well as a physical space to interrogate the colonial landscape.

I've created a camera to be a whole body experience; I am immersed in the image whilst creating it. Inside the camera I am separated from the outside world but I see the world inverted and reversed (Figure 22). The process of making images in this way takes hours of preparation and lengthy exposure times from a few minutes to a few hours. The time spent inside the camera setting up and making test exposures amounts to up to six hours at a time for a shoot. Creating each image usually takes two days on location with setting up, testing, watching the light and preparing for a long exposure.



Figure 21 . Claire Conroy, Inside Caravan Camera Obscura. 2014. Photograph by Kelly Sturgiss.



Figure 22. Claire Conroy, The projected image inside the caravan camera obscura. 2014.

A point of difference from my previous works is that the caravan is also an experience for the audience. The seats and tables remain in original positions and the projection of the outside appears on the table top via a lens and appears on the wall via an aperture in the door (Figure 23.) The inside is painted black as required by the camera to stop reflected light affecting the light sensitive photographic paper, and the projection is directed on to the white table top and a screen opposite the door. Inside the caravan is a place of theatre and intrigue for audience members, who are made to be dazzled and mesmerised through their own curiosity. The caravan recalls the experimentalist science performances of the Baroque era when aural and visual education styles blended educational demonstration with the art of visual illusion and the theatrical.⁶⁴ The portable camera obscura challenges the low art/ high art divide by embracing art and science in its entertainment and spectacle form, and through a DIY culture's tendency to generate wonderment through the travelling curio (figures 25 -29).

⁶⁴ Stafford, *Artful Science: Enlightenment, Entertainment, and the Eclipse of Visual Education*, Pg. 45.



Figure 23. Claire Conroy, Caravan Camera Obscura. 2015.



Figure 24. Camera Obscura, Burnie Street – Spectrum Now Festival. 2015



Figure 25. Camera Obscura, Other Worlds Exhibition Sydney College of the Arts. 2014



Figure 26. *Camera Obscura interior*, Sydney College of the Arts - 2014.

The immersive travelling experience is in good company with artists such as Kathy Cavaliere with her portable camera obscura/pinhole camera (figure 30). Titled *Upside down and in Reverse* it was used in NSW Australia in 2009 as a camera and as an educational tool. Another example is Jo Babcock's VW converted into a pinhole camera in the USA from 1989 (figure 31).



Figure 27. Kathy Cavaliere, *Upside Down and in Reverse* 2008-2009. Bathurst Regional Gallery and Billboard Hazelhurst Gallery.



Figure 28. Jo Babcock, VW Van Camera, San Francisco USA. 1989.

My caravan camera obscura (figure 32) has been made by converting a caravan built in St Peters, Sydney in 1955⁶⁵ (Figure 33) into a darkened space through custom carpentry of wooden window shields, as well as lightproof seals on the roof and door. The fully functioning darkroom includes solar panels to power exhaust and darkroom red lights. It has been built throughout my MFA degree to be a self-contained analogue photographic studio to continue to traverse the Australian landscape.

⁶⁵ My caravan was built in 1955 in St Peters on the Princes Highway in Sydney, and, as the advertisement states, was made by a local company that focused on 'material workmanship and service guaranteed'. (Figure 33) As the past invades the present through the history of the object, the 1950s enter 2015.



Figure 29. Claire Conroy, *Caravan Camera Obscura*, 2015.

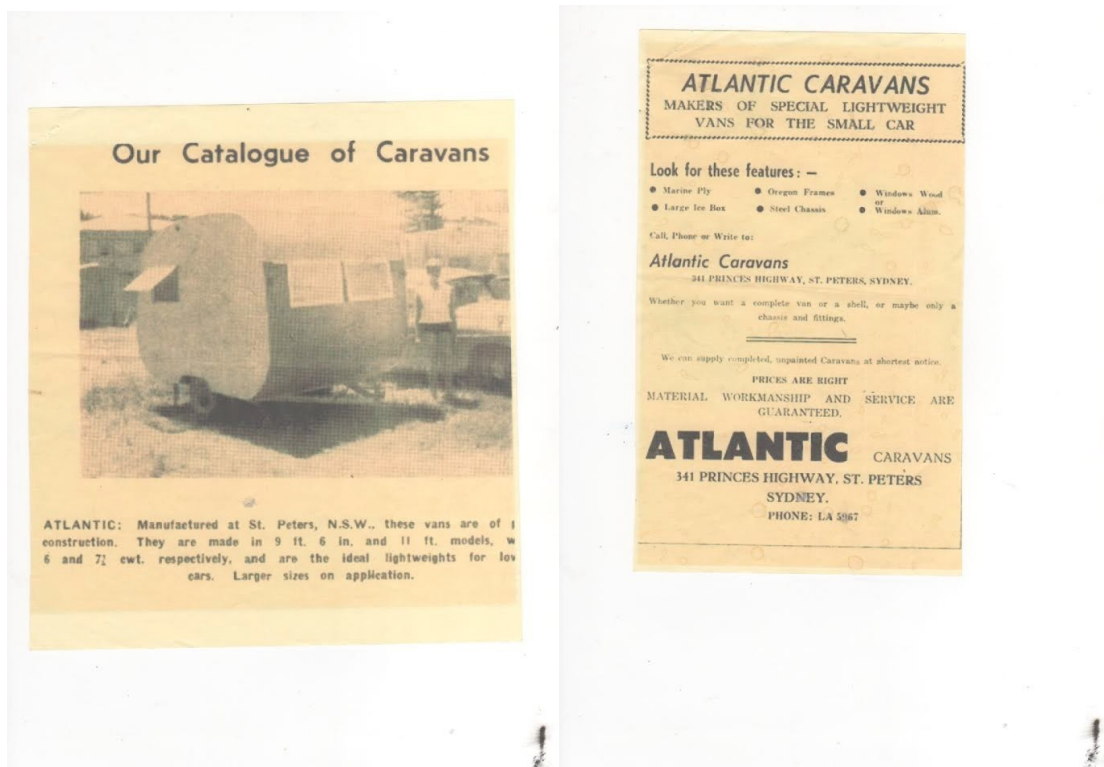


Figure 30. Atlantic Caravans, St Peters, undated newspaper advertisement.

Weltzmertz

I made the first long journey using the camera obscura caravan over many weeks in the summer of 2015. Living out of the caravan and the car, I camped with friends and lived in the mobile studio. Amid the intensity of the rigor and work required to shoot images this way, it all worked! The fun of being able to sleep in the caravan, capture images and process them along the way made it possible to make important aesthetic and location decisions, ones that I would have otherwise had to leave until I got the images back to the studio for developing. The van also served as a travelling curio, intriguing campers in various campsites.

I began exploring the south-eastern coast of NSW with the aim of heading towards Eden. I wanted to travel via Mystery Bay, which is a rich allusion calling to mind the Romantics, and later on I moved inland to the ghost town of Glen Davis (figure 37). Living in a caravan on the road and immersing yourself in nature also reflects the ideal 'Australiana' coastal holiday dream of the 1950s to the 1970s.

At this time I wasn't really on a holiday but working in a disguised mobile studio while looking at the landscape. Thinking about nature, natural resources and the continuing colonial project, I began shooting the images that have become the series *Weltzmertz*. The images gaze across the land.

Through their aesthetically retrospective patina they engage in a dialogue with the Australian landscape in a way that begins with the colonial viewpoint. They harness the haunting power of the retrospective, retro or nostalgic space. Art critic and philosopher Arthur Danto explores the idea that artworks can 'create a historical patination where the reality shown could have taken place in the era depicted... allowing the viewer to project new meaning and historical connotation onto images that previously had no such connotations'⁶⁶. Through the retrieval of that era I also gaze upon the land knowing the historical connotations of that time. I have chosen locations that were settled because of their proximity to the bounty of their natural resources – gold, coal and shale.

The images in *Weltzmertz* create an illusion of the 'unpeopled', empty wilderness, reviving the illusion and authority of the image as truthful and the perception of nature unquestioned. Yet I change the context via the titles – *Weeping Shore (Coal)*, *Cape Treachery (Gold)* and *Still Wind in a Ghost Town (Shale)* – provoking a fear and distrust in the emptying of the landscape, and a complex acknowledgement of the myth of Terra Nullius.

The images herald a danger in the Romantic representations of nature and examine the construction of the photograph and its relationship to and over nature. The titles of the images indicate the resources that were taken from these places and the absence of people indicates how they were taken

⁶⁶ Arthur C. Danto, 'Mark Tansey: The Picture Within the Picture', in *Mark Tansey: Visions and Revisions*, ed., Christopher Sweeting (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1992), 16

through the myth of an emptied landscape.



Figure 31. Claire Conroy, Cape Treachery, Gold. Pinhole photograph. 1 x 0.6 m. 2015.

Cape Treachery, Gold (Figure 34) was shot in the Narooma region of the NSW coast, an area that was initially settled by boat to access the surrounding hills of Tilba that were utilised for gold mining.



Figure 32. Claire Conroy, Weeping Shore, Coal. Pinhole photograph. 1x 0.6m 2015.

Weeping Shore, Coal (figure 35) was taken after a series of days camping south of Sydney near Wombarra. This area is on a small track of land between the hills and the sea. The surrounding mountains are mined for coal.



Figure 33. Claire Conroy, *Still Wind in a Ghost Town, Shale*. Pinhole photograph. 1.2 x 0.6 m. 2015.

Still Wind in a Ghost Town, Shale (figure 40) captures the Glen Davis ghost town area within the Capertee range in NSW. Glen Davis was settled as a shale mine to produce oil.



Figure 34. Claire Conroy, Shooting the Shale Cliffs at Glen Davis Ghost Town. 2015.

Chapter Three - Material Trace / Monsters in the Medium

As explored throughout this thesis, the Gothic mode can be useful to revive the past through haunting, and reflecting upon the 'other' and the self through observing binaries within the presence of societies monsters. This chapter focuses on analogue photographic practice and its material processes as a tool to manifest monsters and activate haunting and challenge history by disrupting images.

I begin by examining the artworks of Sigmar Polke. Polke's experimental approach to painting and photography reflects the alchemical processes of change as well as the indexical and iconic powers of photographic imagery to recall and challenge history.

I then examine my process of image-making, outlining experimental approaches to photographic chemistry, utilising household domestic chemicals instead of commercial developer. I show how my work has evolved through devolving the photographic surface, shattering the transparency of the photographic medium. Exposing the process in the images *Weltzmertz Disrupted*, I construct a new view of the natural landscape in an Australian Gothic chemical induced mise en scène.

The Spirits that Lend Strength are Invisible.



Figure 35. Sigmar Polke, *The Spirits That Lend Strength Are Invisible III (Nickel/Neusilber)*, 1988; nickel and artificial resin on canvas, 157 1/2 in. x 118 1/8 in. (400 cm x 300 cm); Collection SFMOMA.

Sigmar Polke: Alchemy.

Polke is renowned for his use of irregular materials in painting such as uranium, nickel and gold. Polke's material experiments are process-orientated approaches to art-making and are described as alchemical (figure 38). As defined in Polke's co-authored book *Sigmar Polke: The Three Lies of Painting*, by Hentschel, his series of alchemical paintings are 'characterized by the use of toxic, fugitive dyes and pigments also by the application of natural and synthetic resins, which lend a shimmering and

ephemeral quality to their surfaces.⁶⁷

Polke's materials have a temporal quality, as they are unstable surfaces existing in non-static states. Marcelle Polednik, notes that Polke's choice of materials are both symbolic and historical.⁶⁸ His art practice is prolific and enmeshed with processes that are heavily influenced by darkroom chemical processes and photographic images, melding abstraction and materials with narrative and figurative representation.

In looking at Polke's work I have selected two documents as guides. One is an essay by C.W. Haxthausen, *The Artwork in the Age of its (AI)Chemical Transmutability: Rethinking Painting and Photography after Polke*. The other is *History in the Making: Sigmar Polke and Photography* by M. Polendnik. Both of these texts reflect on Polke's photographic practice from a detailed material and process-based perspective.

When looking at Polke's work, Polendnik borrows a hypothesis from J. Wiess that 'process divulges itself to be the primary source for a poetics of the work'.⁶⁹ I relate to this statement in that my lengthy physical and material process of image-making builds into the artwork a unique aesthetic and constructs layers of meaning. A major source of poetics in my work comes from building cameras, spending relatively long periods of time on location,

⁶⁷ Polke, Hentschel, Hamburger Bahnhof, & Kunst und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik, *The Three Lies of Painting*, Ostfildern – Ruit, Germany. 1997.

⁶⁸ Polednik, Marcelle. *History in the Making: Sigmar Polke and Photography*. Pg. 115.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

creating long exposure paper negatives and experimenting with chemistry to disrupt images.

Sigmar Polke's photographic series *The Bowery* and *Sao Paulo* interrupt and degrade the photographic image, creating aesthetic qualities that reveal the magical qualities of the darkroom and its material transformations. It has been argued that Polke recreates the 'auratic' within the photograph,⁷⁰ the aura that Walter Benjamin described as being removed by the process of mechanical reproduction.⁷¹ Polke is said to have achieved the return of the aura through the process of handling each print in a singular fashion so that they are all unique. His images are also known to break down the transparency of the photographic image between the referent (subject depicted) and the material object (photographic paper). Roland Barthes says the photographic object is often perceived as a transparent window similar to 'two laminated leaves that cannot be separated without destroying them both.'⁷² Polke arguably shatters this transparency with his disruptive handling of the image object.

His series *Sao Paulo* and *The Bowery* utilise the image in ways that have been described as irreverent towards the technical developing and printing process.

As can be seen in *Bowery* (1973) and *Head of Steer* (1977) (figures 39-40) his

⁷⁰ Polke, Hentschel, Hamburger Bahnhof, & Kunst und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik, *The Three Lies of Painting*, Ostfildern – Ruit, Germany. 1997.

⁷¹ *Art in the age of Mechanical Reproduction* by Walter Benjamin describes the Aura of an artwork as the artworks unique existence in space. This can be diminished through the mechanical reproduction

⁷² Polke, Hentschel, Hamburger Bahnhof, & Kunst und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik, *The Three Lies of Painting*, Ostfildern – Ruit, Germany. 1997.Pg. 189.

irreverent approach to the seamless and slick mechanical photograph interrupts the image in a way that not only questions the decline of the aura but also interrogates and, perhaps as Hentshel claims, destroys the 'authority of the reproduced image'.⁷³



Figure 36. Sigmar Polke, *The Bowery – New York*, Silver gelatin Photograph 1973.

Figure 37. *Head of Steer*, Silver gelatin Photograph, 1977.

Arts writer Susan Sontag notes that the photography has an inseparable relationship to history with 'its index of moments in time always referring to the past from the second they are taken'.⁷⁴ As Poledinik observes, Polke exploits this relationship to history by manipulating and interrogating historical meanings through 'subtle and complex manipulations of photochemical processes and photographic technologies'.⁷⁵

⁷³ Ibid. Pg, 190.

⁷⁴ Sontag, Susan. *On Photography*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979.

⁷⁵ Poledinik, Marcelle. *History in the Making: Sigmar Polke and Photography*.Pg,1.

Polke's image *Developing Phenomena* (Figure 41) questions the nature of the truth in a photograph by evoking a visible phenomenon that appears to be in the room with Polke. This transparent ghost-like presence or sooty smoke could have been there at the time the image was created, but we tend to assume that it was not present in the room when the picture was taken. This image typifies Polke's reveal of the temporal quality of image-making beyond the instant moment, reflecting layers of time from the taking of a picture to the involved processes of developing film and paper. Translating that to digital, the process of capturing of an image begins with taking the photograph then continues with the manipulation of the image in software and the final output either in print or on screen. These processes, when revealed, destabilise the concept of truth in an image as much as Polke's darkroom procedures destabilise the longevity of the image/object in time with improper use of developing and fixing processes in the darkroom.

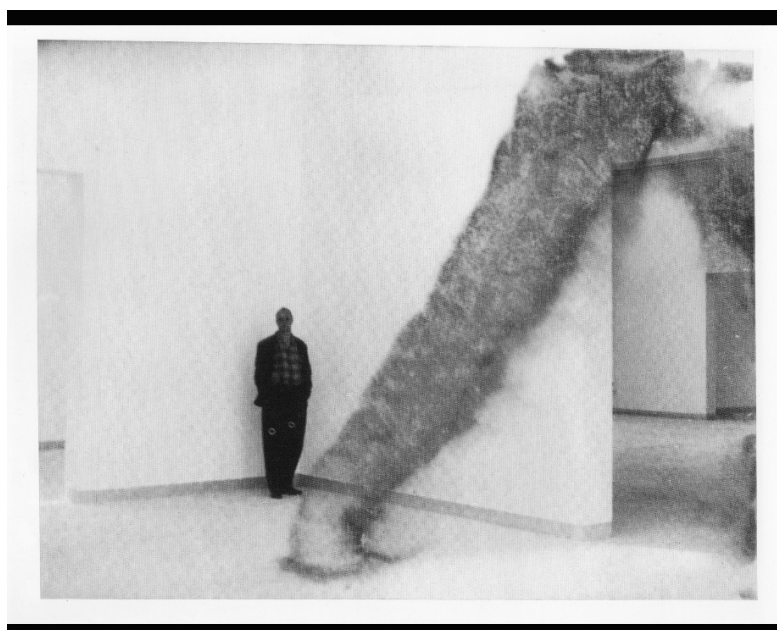


Figure 38. Sigmar Polke: Phenomena of Developing Venice Biennale. Silver Gelatin Photograph, 1986. Private Collection.

The application of instability can reflect the transmutability of materials and mutability of history. This can be seen in the painting *Watchtower II* (Figure 42). The painting uses silver oxide on the surface of the canvas to create the image of a watchtower, both in reference to a hunting watchtower and a watchtower from the Nazi German concentration camps. The powerful image is created from a perspective of looking up at the tower; it is dominating and terrifying in its historical context. The image beckons the viewer to move around it, looking at it from different perspectives, and the image becomes faint or clear depending on the angle of the viewer and the light reflecting off the surface of the silver oxide. The use of silver is the key ingredient in photographic emulsion; it changes with time and light, making it possible to render an image. With the necessary process of washing and fixing, the image can be fixed in time. Polke's use of silver in his artworks is radical in that painters usually avoided silver because of its instability and unpredictability. Polke's use of silver oxide in *Watchtower II* evokes a powerful presence that is both symbolic and historic. It refers to our relationship to history and how this is always melding and transforming, and implicates photography's relationship in these transformations.

Art historian Katriana Klaasmeyer writes about Polke's *Watchtower* series:

'Polke does not diminish or attempt to hide the horrific realities of these symbols, yet he enshrouds them in dark uncertainties. The ghost-like haziness and mysterious mist are unpredictable and unbounded, forcing a shifting of perspective. Polke does not wish to erase the past, but perhaps something so

complex can only be approached through the magic of alchemy, with its transformative powers and limitless potential.⁷⁶



Figure 39. Sigmar Polke, Watchtower II. Silver, silver oxide and synthetic resin on canvas. 303.85 x 225.43 x 4.13 cm. 1984 -85. Sigmar Polke. Carnegie Museum of Art.

⁷⁶ , Katrina Klaasmeyer <http://www.cmoa.org> Khan Academy.

Chemistry.

Art processes, materials and techniques work together to render ideas. Borrowing again from the hypothesis of J. Wiess, that 'process divulges itself to be the primary source of poetics in the work'⁷⁷, I explore further the process of making my analogue images.

The camera obscura is one of the original image formers. In 1800 photographic image-capture began when Thomas Wedgwood recorded his experiments with rendering an image by impregnating leather with silver salts.⁷⁸ Joseph Nicéphore Niépce rendered a positive reversed image called a heliograph following an eight-hour exposure inside a camera obscura in 1820;⁷⁹ a collaboration with Niépce led Louis Daguerre to invent the daguerreotype process, which heralded the birthdate of photography on the 30th of July 1839. The same year Henry Fox Talbot invented the calotype negative and salt-based printing process, thereby becoming the inventor of the negative/positive process and allowing reproduction of an image.⁸⁰ The early materials used in the daguerreotype negative were silver foil on a polished copper plate. Iodine fumes were then impressed on the plate, bitumen and essential oil of lavender formed a resin which was then painted onto the plate and hardened.

⁷⁷ Polednik, Marcelle. *History in the Making: Sigmar Polke and Photography*.Pg. 115.

⁷⁸ Serge Guyon et al. *Magic of the Image: Photography Revealed = Magie De L'image : La Photographie Révélée* (Paris: CNRS Audiovisuel, 2009), Vidéo/DVD

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

Initially this was developed in a mercury solution, which was then abandoned as water, sea salt and sodium hydra sulphate washed the iodine off the plate revealing a silver mirror positive. The process of photographic invention incorporated a rigour that was both experimental and empirical and involved numerous chemical recipes. But a key and enduring ingredient remains – silver, with its light-sensitive quality.

Light-sensitive materials

Silver halides are silver chloride and/or silver bromide, and they blacken in various degrees when in contact with light. Billions of silver bromide ions are stacked up in a gelatin emulsion and when absorbed by a bromide ion the photon (light) ejects an electron from the bromide, which is then transformed into a silver atom. The silver atoms are the latent image. Developer gives another electron to the silver electrons that were illuminated by the photons activating the electron aggregates making the latent image visible.⁸¹

Polednik explains the negative/positive process: 'This change results in the production of a negative image, a process that can be repeated by passing light through a negative and thereby producing a positive print'.⁸²

The photographic process is mutable; the process of applying techniques and technologies to materials changes the reception including the 'look and feel' of an image. This can be seen in the history of images and their timely or

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Polednik, Marcelle. *History in the Making: Sigmar Polke and Photography*. Pg, 119.

untimely associations to an era through tone, colour, grain, pixels etc. The difference in process is not only associated with time and the history of photographic technology but it can also be associated with an artist's practice.

My photographic practice uses analogue photography from a camera obscura and in my photographic process I use resin-coated photographic paper or silver gelatin photographs that remain as negative and positive images. To make the latent image appear, I expose photographic paper through a camera obscura or – as it is called when creating photographic images – a pinhole camera. The exposures are long and range from a few minutes to an hour. I then put my silver gelatin paper negatives through the process of development, stop bath, fix and then finally wash. The image is then stable and archival. I manipulate and reinterpret this process within my practice to create aesthetics that reflect ideas.

Developer

Traditionally, developer is made from organic compounds known as developing agent this is combined with other ingredients key to make analogue photographs. Ingredients vary depending on the brand. I use Ilford multigrade developer diluted at a ratio of 1+9. It is made up of hydroquinone, which is a developing agent. It converts exposed silver to black metallic silver. It contains charged atoms, which are both acid and

alkaline.⁸³ The developer molecule is built around a ring of carbon atoms called benzene rings. There are usually one or two electron-rich atoms, attached to the rings that provide the electron used to initiate development.⁸⁴

Developer also contains a preservative – sodium hydroxide – and acid salts, which decrease oxidation by balancing the pH toward the acid. Oxidation exhausts the developer, creating waste and potentially staining the images. The preservative's sulphite ions also act as a solvent for silver halides assisting development and creating a finer grain developer.⁸⁵

Although not present in Ilford multigrade developer, an accelerator is often used in developers to activate the developing agent and balance the PH toward the alkaline. An activator is an alkali, usually sodium carbonate or potassium carbonate, which are alkaline salts.⁸⁶

A chemical restrainer is sometimes used to minimise the fog formation on film by decreasing the rate of development of unexposed grains. Potassium Bromide is usually used for this.⁸⁷

More recently in my practice, I have been replacing commercial developers

⁸³ R. E. Jacobson, *The Manual of Photography*, vol. 7th (London [etc]: Focal Press, 1978), 273

⁸⁴ Scott. Williams, *A Use for That Last Cup of Coffee: Film and Paper Development*, Rochester Institute of Technology RIT Scholar Works (1995).

⁸⁵ Jacobson, *The Manual of Photography*, 7th, Pg. 276.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* 277.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* 273.

with domestic, less environmentally impacting chemistry. As stated by Ilford photographic suppliers: 'Hydroquinone is the main active ingredient in most black and white developer solutions. In high concentrations it is dangerous for the environment, and most developers are therefore described as very toxic to aquatic organisms.'⁸⁸ There are also health risks to the human body: as also stated on the Ilford website, with regards hydroquinone in a concentrated state (before dilution at a 1:9 ratio), 'The current EU harmonised classification for hydroquinone as a pure substance is:

Carcinogen 2: H351 – Suspected of causing cancer

Mutagen 2: H341 – Suspected of causing genetic defects

Acute Toxicity 4: H302 – Harmful if swallowed

Eye Damage 1: H318 – Causes serious eye damage

Skin Sensitiser 1: H317 – May cause an allergic skin reaction

Aquatic Acute 1: H400 – Very toxic to aquatic life.⁸⁹

For many years I have considered the harmful impact of a chemical-based practice and have been interested in finding alternatives.

During a conversation about photographic chemistry, my supervisor David Haines mentioned coffee as an alternative developer. I began inquiring further and discovered the research of Dr Scott Williams from the Rochester Institute of Technology. Now I have a greater understanding regarding alternative developers.

⁸⁸ <http://www.ilfordphoto.com/healthandsafety/page.asp?n=163#Hydroquinone>

⁸⁹ <http://www.ilfordphoto.com/healthandsafety/page.asp?n=163#Special%20Hazards%20-%20>

Williams posed a challenge to his students of the 1995 class of imaging and photographic technology, to identify non-traditional developers using household products. Students attempted to understand the developer molecule. Williams states: 'they didn't succeed', but by experimenting with various chemicals they eventually leaned towards phenolic acids (tannins) found in tea and coffee. Coffee showed clearer results and it was discovered that the group of phenols in coffee contains caffeic acid, which is similar to catechol and hydroquinone found in commercial photographic developers. When combined with a pH balancer like baking soda, sodium bicarbonate or drain clearer/potassium hydroxide can activate the developer and swell the gelatin. When sodium bicarbonate or drain clearer/potassium hydroxide is combined with a pH balancer like baking soda, it can activate the developer and swell the gelatin.

These experiments inspired the continued building of this knowledge, and since 1995 other contributors added to online forums, a Flickr group *and* a recipe book. In addition, there are many websites dedicated to 'Caffenol' – the name for coffee-based developer made with vitamin C and washing powder. Vitamin C is ascorbic acid, which reduces fog and developing time and balances the pH towards the acid. Washing soda or sodium carbonate Na_2CO_3 activates the developing agent and balances the pH towards the alkaline. An optional inclusion is potassium bromide or iodised kitchen salt, as an antifogging agent is good for film development.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ J.Caradies Reinhold. G. M. Overs. E.R. Roberts. J.Nanian, G.Figal, M.Woll, D.Essl, B.Sibbern-Larsen, *The Caffenol Cookbook and Bible*,(2012).

The following is my test research based on the recipes on Flickr made from the caffanol cookbook using caffanol-c-m.⁹¹ (Figure 44-45)

Ingredients

- Washing powder – Aldi Tri-mat top loader 2 x concentrate phosphorous free.
- Vitamin C – Ascorbic acid 100%

Coffee – International Roast instant coffee 200g/pk (my mum's favourite from the 1980s. Strong black – hot water 2min 20sec in the microwave)

Method:

Dilute washing powder in warm water, add vitamin C and then add coffee directly to the mixture.

Keep liquid at 20 degrees Celsius and 1000ml. After mixing, let stand for 10 minutes while I prepared photograms.

Test photograms. Enlarger f16 – 10 seconds.

Place coffee in the tray at 3:02pm; begin to see leaf take shape at 3:04. Blacks tones in the image are not black yet, some uneven development. leave the photogram in the solution for another 10 min, not the 15 min recommended for film at 20 degrees. 10 min is almost too much as the image is very coffee toned yet blacks are fairly black.

⁹¹ Ibid.

First successful caffenol development of photographic paper was at 25 degrees for 10 min in developer.



Figure 40. Coffee developer being prepared in caravan.

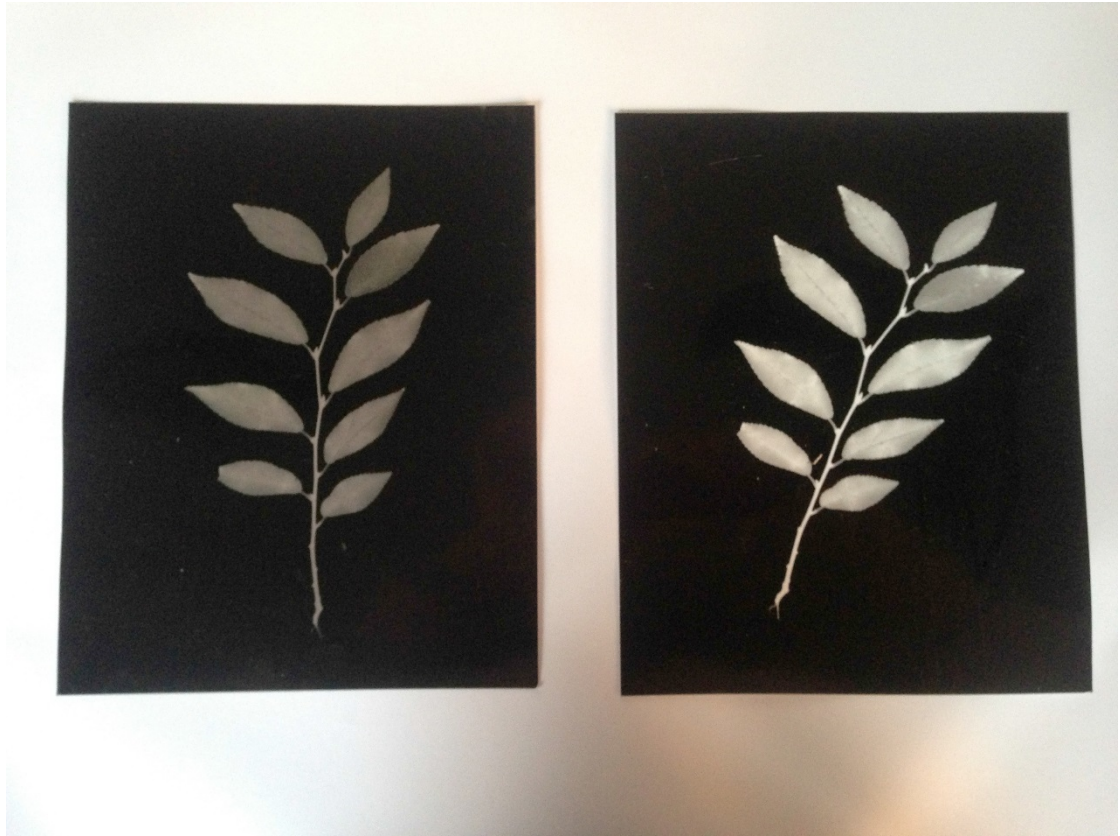


Figure 41. Coffee developer on left regular developer on right.

Stop Bath:

Tap water, around one minute, to wash developer off the paper or film.

1. Fixer:

Fixer is used to remove silver halides from the emulsion. It is a solvent that must form a complex with the silver so the silver can be washed out of the emulsion. It must not damage the gelatin and must not attack the silver image. The most widely used are thiosulphates, ammonium and sodium thiosulphate.⁹²

⁹² Jacobson, *The Manual of Photography*, 7th, 294

Thiosulphate is a salt containing an ion $S_2O_3^{2-}$ sulphate with one oxygen atom replaced by sulphur.⁹³ Thiosulphate acts to bind the silver and as such it holds most of the silver in a non-water soluble form.

This prevents most of the toxic free silver ions from mixing with water and greatly reduces the impact on water sources. However, the solution is highly saturated with silver, the silver needs to be processed correctly in a chemical wastewater treatment plant. The Ilford website states that when processed correctly 'silver thiosulphate is rapidly transformed in waste water treatment plants into non-toxic silver sulphide. Silver sulphide is very stable and insoluble, so it will not change further and precipitates as sludge.'⁹⁴ This sludge can be placed in landfill where it biodegrades. As stated on the Kodak website 'because of the very low water solubility of the silver contained in the sludge, it does not leave (leach from) the sludge to any significant extent in landfills or soil when used as a fertilizer'.⁹⁵ Correct disposal is important for the environment and impact exposure to the body must be considered. Ilford medical safety data sheets⁹⁶ and the United States environmental protection agency⁹⁷ state that there are no significant concerns for human health when using ammonium thiosulfate (the variety I use.) However, impact has been shown in rats and rabbits by studies by the US environmental protection agency.⁹⁸

I also researched and tested alternative fixers. Online forums suggested sea

⁹³ Oxford Dictionary.

⁹⁴ <http://www.ilfordphoto.com/healthandsafety/page.asp?n=163#Special%20Hazards%20-%20>

⁹⁵ http://www.kodak.com/eknec/documents/a4/0900688a8012f2a4/J-216_ENG.pdf

⁹⁶ <http://www.ilfordphoto.com/Webfiles/2012430120381541.pdf>

⁹⁷ <https://archive.epa.gov/pesticides/reregistration/web/pdf/ammonium-thiosulfate-red.pdf>

⁹⁸ Ibid.

water as a possible fixer. I gathered seawater from Clovelly Beach in Sydney and soaked a photogram in the seawater for five days with no success. The print discoloured and is identical to a test with no fixing solution at all. Surprisingly the image from the coffee solution in both cases is still visible without fixer, indicating the coffee solution may have some fixing properties.

The seawater tests were failures as I wasn't satisfied that there was any fixing happening at all. I began finding reports of successful results online that were using condensed salt solutions.⁹⁹

2. Salt fix solution:

1litre of solution should weigh 1.2kg. Place in a two-litre container, ½ kg of table salt (sea), add 700 ml of warm water to dilute, add water to make 1litre then filter the water using a fine strainer. This will leave 600 ml of solution. Dilute the remaining solution in a hot pan, pour through filter again until all the solution/salt is added in diluted form. Heat while fixing at 30–40 degrees – it should take three hours.

This process seems to work, but the timeframe for fixing is dissuasive because the stirring, heating and diluting process takes so long. It is also suggested that the film is then fixed for up to four hours. It is only three minutes with ammonium thiosulphate.

My next test is looking at the ingredients of the fixer. I propose another option:

⁹⁹ <http://caffenol---carioca.blogspot.com.au/2012/04/sea---salt---fixer---project.html>

salt, i.e. sodium chloride (works in tests) and vinegar (acetic acid.) Yet vinegar contains only 2% of the acid used in commercial fixing solutions.

Due to the time constraints of the fixing, this alternative is not viable. I have been continuing to use the commercial thiosulphate at this stage.

3. Wash:

Tap Water – 15 minutes.

Using a mobile darkroom and camera (i.e. a caravan) has led me to look at less chemically toxic materials as the space is small and the ventilation is limited. Storage and disposal of the chemistry while I'm on the road travelling is also a concern. This process in turn informs the character of the images depicting the natural environment (figure 46-48).



Figure 42. Claire Conroy, Washing prints with local water on location Dalmeny South Coast NSW 2015. Photograph by Loni Cooper

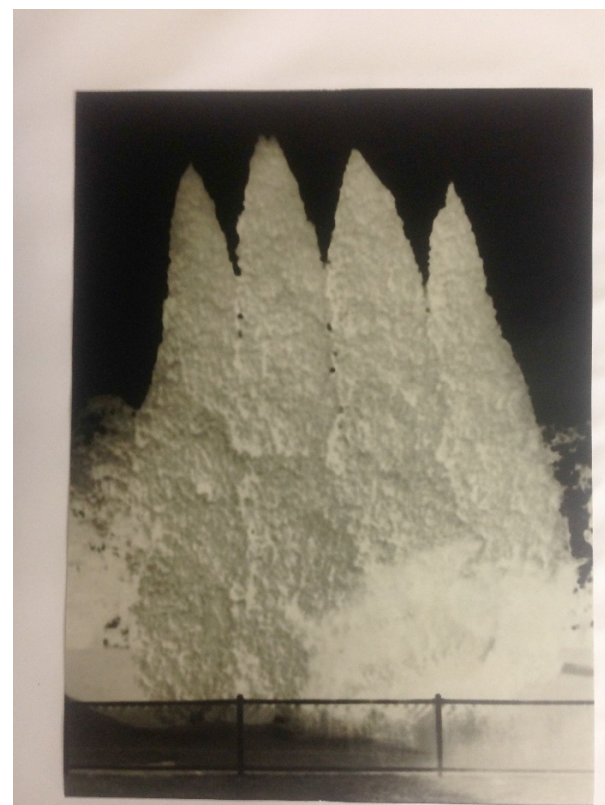


Figure 43. Claire Conroy, *Caravan* photographing the trees on location at SCA. 2014.

Figure 44. Claire Conroy, *First print made with coffee from the van*, silver gelatin pinhole photograph. 2014.

Destabilising Images.

My series *Weltzmertz Disrupted* contains three altered versions of the original *Weltzmertz* series and one additional image *Australia Rock* (Figure 49-52.) A rock resembling the shape of Australia, it is a tourist attraction in Narooma. Narooma means 'clear blue waters' in the Indigenous Yuin language.

Weltzmertz Disrupted acknowledges, as historian Simon Morley suggests, that 'one cannot find the sublime where it was found two hundred years ago'.¹⁰⁰ The *Weltzmertz* series revives and reveals the haunting colonial gaze. The artworks use the contextualising power of the title to fracture and disrupt inscribed narratives of the Romantic sublime. This reveals the subject of the gaze to be natural resources.

The next series continues to fracture the narrative of the photograph, but in an expanded exploration of material qualities. It will experiment with analogue photography, the land and landscape, broadening my art-making process and deepening the poetics of my work.

Using the tension between the latent and visible image, I manipulate the application of the developing process. By limiting the application of the

¹⁰⁰ Simon Morley, *The Sublime* (London: Whitechapel Gallery; Cambridge, Mass, 2010), 160.

developer to the exposed silver halides I change the range of visible areas in the image and add traces of the application of the chemical.

Working within a totally different timeframe from exposing the image (10 min to 40 min) I work furiously (1– 5 min) applying developer to parts of the image. Moving intuitively and using methods like splashing, throwing, swishing, brushing with my gloved hands and spraying with a pesticide pressure sprayer, I activate the developing process.

Using this method is not an attempt to express emotions in the sense of the romantics or abstract expressionist painter. Rather I want to contact the 'other', the monsters in the materials. I want to witness them somehow tear each other apart.

The process of material transmutability involves wet and chaotically moving liquid coffee solution, bubbling soapy washing powder froth, and fizzing vitamin C, all collectively and pungently stinking. The latent image emerges magically from the development the silver halides within the analogue photograph. The silver particles that have had lengthy exposure to sunlight reflect off the landscape; the material monsters are pulling at opposing arms of the narrative construction, pulling apart the representational image from the inside out.

Buried within latent image the subject matter waits to be transformed into a dark and haunting image. The photo chemistry seeps across the surface of

the emulsion in like a thick sludge staining everything as it goes. In doing so, the dark poetic of the Australian gothic shapeshifts again to emerge in a contemporary photographic practice.

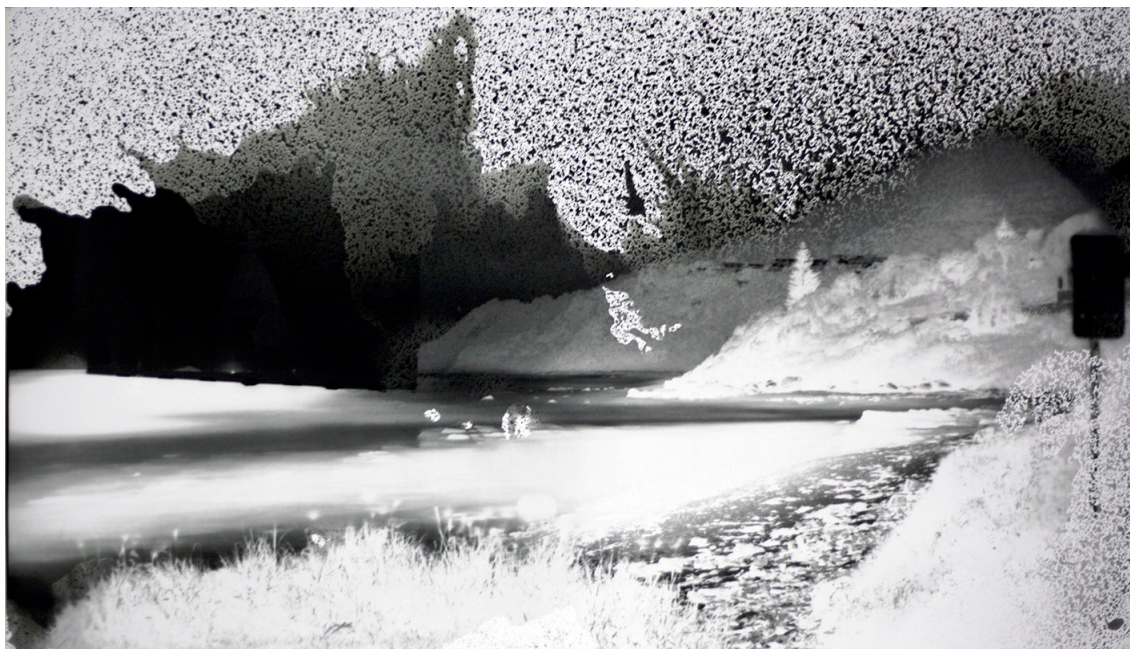


Figure 45. Claire Conroy, *Weltzmerz Disrupted #1*. Silver gelatin pinhole photograph. 90 x 60 cm 2015.



Figure 46. Claire Conroy, *Weltzmerz Disrupted #2*. Silver gelatin pinhole photograph. 100 x 60 cm 2015.



Figure 47. Claire Conroy, *Weltzmerz Disrupted #3*. Silver gelatin pinhole photograph. 80 x 60 cm 2015.



Figure 48. Claire Conroy, *Weltzmerz Disrupted #4 – Australian Rock*. 2015. Silver Gelatin pinhole photograph 30 x 42cm.

Conclusion.

In undertaking this practice-led research, my aim has been to explore two concurrent interests in my art practice – analogue photography and the Australian Gothic genre. My question was how can analogue photography materialise ideas that reflect relationships between culture and nature? More specifically: how can analogue photography with its specific material process evoke a dark poetic to critically investigate the politics of photography and the Australian landscape? I situated these questions within the Australian Gothic genre as guide for collecting answers.

This thesis contains three chapters – *The Gothic*, *The Australian Gothic* and *Material Trace/ Monsters in the Medium*. *The Gothic* defined the parameters of my approach to the Gothic mode, extracting characteristics that appear throughout the shape-shifting and enduring genre. The characteristics extracted defined themes used in my creative work such as ‘othering’ and binaries. I contextualised this study within the performance practice of Justin Shoulder, especially in his creation of the monstrous ‘other’ in the Gothic monster form. I examined how monsters have an ability to reflect our society and ourselves. The theoretical work of Andrea Juranovszky opened up an exploration the formless Gothic in the art of haunting through trauma re-enactment and the Gothic loop. These contexts have sought to support a case for and define my use of the monster and the art of haunting. Playing with process and representation, my artworks contact the monstrous other within nature in the photographic series *Scary Monsters and Super Creeps*.

Other Worlds enacts the art of haunting when I approach the Kirkbride building at Sydney College of the Arts. I explore this subject to re-enact the architectural strategies of control in the mental asylum. Using the irrational and obscure quality of the photographic negative and pinhole photography, the works bare witness and evoke questions about the past.

The chapter *The Australian Gothic* aligns the Gothic with the colonial experience and reveals political strategies in relation to the appropriation of land. Expanding the implications for visualising the landscape, in particular in landscape photography, I looked at Bruce William Braun's research into the politics of nature in post-colonial British Columbia. I examined the explosive theories of Donna Haraway, where her redefinition of reality deepened my research into cultural constructs of nature. James Tylor's use of landscape photography and the daguerreotype contextualised my interest in the retro or retrospective return when he re-appropriates land in his series *DeCookolisation*.

Illustrating my approach to traversing the landscape, I travelled in the mobile darkroom/studio/camera obscura that I created from a 1950s caravan. I viewed the space within the camera obscura in line with Anne Marsh's approach to the camera obscura as an irrational object, recalling the travelling curio and the puzzling theatre. I showed how being immersed inside an inverted projection of the landscape alters my view of the world, helping to create the photographic series, *Weltzmertz*. These images were

taken on a journey across NSW reflecting mining sites for gold, coal and shale. The images hold a romantic and melancholic patina recalling the colonial gaze.

The final chapter, *Material Trace/ Monsters in the Medium*, details my research into the material qualities of analogue photography. Highlighting my experimental and process-based practice.

I retrace the work of Sigmar Polke's alchemical paintings and black and white photography. Through experimental research and practice I reassess my use of chemistry and replace commercial developer with household products. This process has led me to my aim of knowing how analogue photography can materialise the Australian Gothic. The final series of my MFA, *Weltzmerz Disrupted*, uses process to pull at itself, melding abstraction and materials with narrative and figurative representation. This approach reflects the Gothic's shapeshifting character as an overarching genre to begin a case for a contemporary material practice.

Throughout this Masters research I have furthered my understanding of analogue photography, creating artworks that investigate how process and materials can materialise theories that reflect my line of questioning.

I have now created a caravan camera obscura that I can continue to use as a mobile studio/camera and travelling curio projection space. I have also

produce four series of photographic images. My theoretical investigations into political constructs of nature have deepened my knowledge of the photographic image in society. The material explorations I have undertaken into chemistry, disrupting images, using monsters as subject matter and evoking haunting have provided avenues to transform theory into artworks. In future, I can see my art practice utilising these strategies to further interrogate the politics of nature and photography while evoking a poetic of darkness.

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List of Illustrations Presented for Examination.

1. *Caravan Camera Obscura*.

Customised and registered 1950's caravan. 2.5m x 2.3m x 2.3m

2. *Scary Monsters and Super Creeps*.

Series of 6 silver gelatin photograms. 60cm x 2m x 3cm.

3. *Australia Rock*.

Hand coloured silver gelatin pinhole photograph. 60 cm x 2m x 3cm.

4. *Other Worlds*.

Series of 3 pin hole photographs. Including:

The Line of Authority. Silver gelatin photograph. 1.4 x 1m x 3 cm.

The Ha Ha Wall. Silver gelatin photograph. 1.4 x 1m x 3 cm.

The Witnesses. Silver gelatin photograph. 1.2 x 1m x 3 cm.

5. *Still wind in a Ghost Town (Shale.)*

Silver gelatin pinhole photograph. 80cm x 60cm x 5cm.

6. *Weltzmertz Disrupted*.

Selection from series: image 1 and 3. Silver gelatin pinhole photographs, 90cm x 60cm x 5cm and 80cm x 60cm x 5cm.

Catalogue of Work Presented for Examination.



Camera Obscura Caravan. Examination Installation. Sydney College of The Arts Gallery. 2.5m x 2.3m x 2.3m.



Camera Obscura Caravan. Examination Installation. Sydney College of The Arts Gallery. 2.5m x 2.3m x 2.3m.



Camera Obscura Caravan. Detail of vinyl sticker on back window. 30cm x 1m x 1mm.



Scary Monsters and Super Creeps and Australia Rock. Silver gelatin pinhole photographs. Series of 6 plus 1. 60 cm x 2m x 3cm.



Weltmertz Disrupted #3 and Scary Monsters and Super Creeps Examination Installation. Silver gelatin pinhole photographs.



Other Worlds Installation View. Silver gelatin photographs. 1.6m x 3.5m x 3cm.



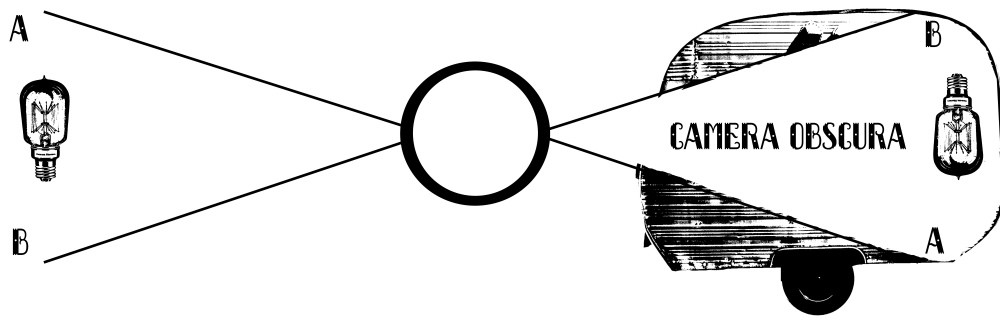
Welmertz Disrupted and Still Wind in a Ghost Town' Installation View. 2 x 90cm x 2.5 m x 5cm.



Camera Obscura Image from examination installation. 80cm x 50cm x 0.



Interior of Camera Obscura. Examination installation.



Camera Obscura Caravan. Schematic Diagram.