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WILDING PHOTOGRAPHS:

**Exploring the Turbulent and Affective
Qualities of the Material Phenomenon of
Photography**

**A HUGHES
PhD**

2019

WILDING PHOTOGRAPHS:

Exploring the Turbulent and Affective

Qualities of the Material Phenomenon of

Photography

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ABSTRACT

WILDING PHOTOGRAPHS: Exploring the Turbulent and Affective Qualities of the Material Phenomenon of Photography

Suspended above the ground, fragments of photographic imagery and material are seen in a dense arrangement of matter.... She points at a detail and states she feels there is a purposeful 'wilding' creating rifts and schisms between material, that disrupts expectation, throwing into question the encounter.¹

This doctoral project operates through an exhibition-based practice that brings the photographic image together with sculptural material and performative gesture to explore an embodied encounter with photographic objects. The research challenges both the identity of photographic images as ubiquitous, immaterial representations made manifest by digital technologies, as well as the predilection of photographic theory to evolve critical discourse away from the turbulent and affective qualities of the material phenomenon of photography.

The term 'Wilding', calls into question ontologies and cultural assumptions, through interrogative processes that return the photograph to a physical condition and mutable image in turbulent and shifting relationships with matter, preceding and open to meanings.

¹ Excerpt from written record of PGR Critique, Northumbria University, discussing exhibited work *Filmy*, 2016. (Hughes 2016)

The research evolves through methodologies that privilege co-actions with the photographic object and other material within sensory encounters of environments. Through this approach, the research explores the construction of installations as situations for embodied encounters, accounting for the artist-researcher, a cross-disciplinary network and audience engagement, all of which serve to destabilise and re-create worlds, facilitating the examination of the boundaries of representation, material and imagination. The main question the research seeks to address is:

What are the potential effects on material, body and meaning, when simultaneously engaging with photography's haptic, spatial and temporal dimensions?

In seeing to answer this question, the research widens critical reflection on the material encounter of photography in the social and cultural sensorium. The visceral and psychological enquiry of this project draws on key texts relating to photography's expanded field (Baker 2005) as well as the 'experiential turn' (von Hantelmann 2014) and the contemporary and feminine sublime (Morley 2010; Freeman 1995). It also considers theory on 'New Materialism' in cultural geography, anthropology and contemporary feminism (Bachelard 1942; Anderson & Wylie 2006; Neimanis 2012; Ishii 2012) and the embodied encounter through the critical sphere of phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty 1945; Dufrenne 1973) and 'situated cognition' (Brown, Collins & Duguid 1989).

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DECLARATION

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work. I also confirm that this work fully acknowledges opinions, ideas and contributions from the work of others.

I declare that the Word Count of this Thesis is: 45,723

Name: Alexandra Hughes

Signature:

Date: 15th March 2019

INTRODUCTION

WILDING: IT'S COMPLICATED

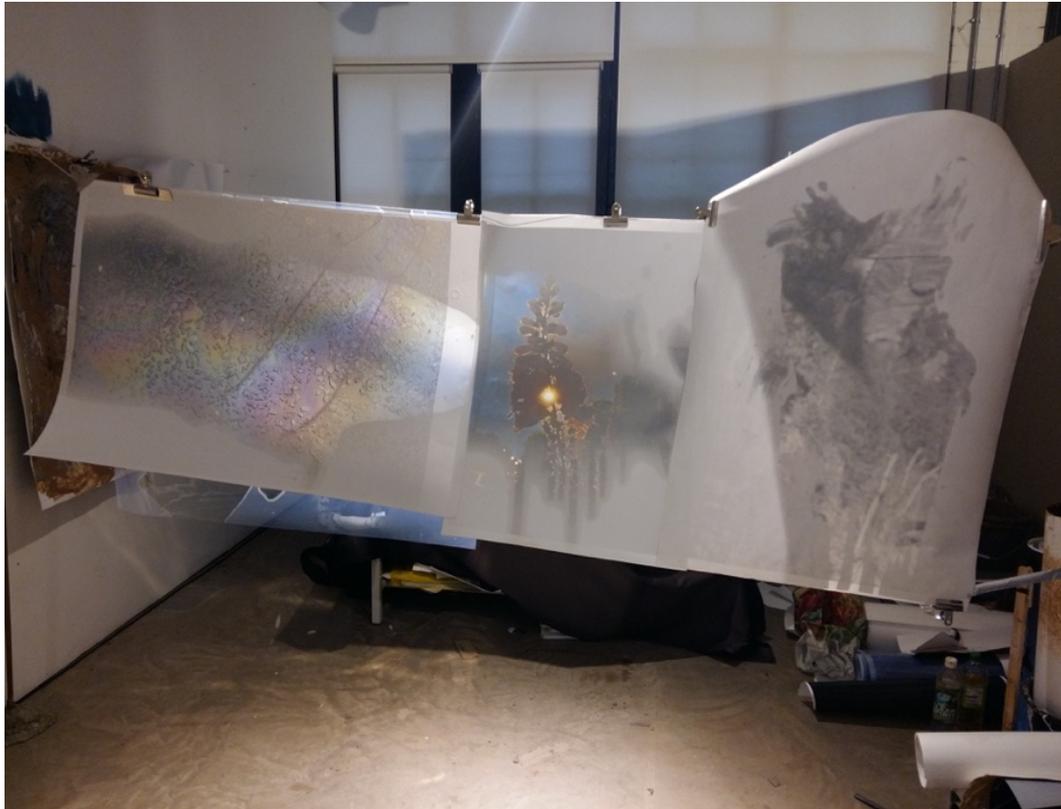


Figure 1: Studio work in progress (oil stained photos) 2017 Author's Own

At my desk; knife in hand, I hold the blade above a photographic print. I hesitate momentarily before my body exerts pressure downwards and the blade pushes through the thin layers of emulsion and out the other side. I have cut through the photograph revealing the fragility and the fibres of the paper, frayed in the imprecision and dulling sharpness of the knife. I have broken through the apparently seamless image, no longer stable, with a cracked surface. Maintaining pressure, I move my hand and the cutline grows, tracking my unsteady motion, the knife eventually finds itself back at the initial entry point. A piece of the photograph falls, freed from the boundaries of the image, leaving a hole that becomes a window to an external animated environment.

British Columbia, Canada; in a car, we wind through long roads enclosed in the valleys of The Rockies, at dusk. The car windows become a frame to a rolling vista. I photograph the full moon, which appears very near, and I think about the shifting frameworks around our perception of proximity and distance.

In the studio; I crunch and crease a photograph through a rough, un-forgiving handling, not with disregard but with acute awareness of its sensitivity. I am deliberately and subversively letting the photo be exposed as temporal and evolving, through environmental and human jostles.

North Sea, UK; I stand on the beach and I look out at the sea, it exudes something beyond my knowing - powerful and unforgiving yet alluring - which engenders a feeling of fear and energy. I run at it, breaking through the barrier line of land and water, of the 'here' and the 'there'. As the waves approach, I am acutely aware of my heartbeat, my breath, my blood, my cautionary and exhilarated state of mind. I look down at my body disappearing and blending into the elemental dark water which lifts me up and down; no longer a landscape or scenery I look upon, instead I am enmeshed within this place.

In my mind; I am distorted with frustration and I reach for a pile of photocopies of my hands. The image of the hand, like a simulacrum, engenders a tactility, bringing to the encounter an oscillation of sight and touch. I cut around the fingers and using a piece of wire, I pierce each hand. This destructive action brings a transformation both as a release of emotions and a physical change, whereby further actions and desires are set into motion as the process develops into a new artwork.

Skopelos, Greece; the sun is beating down on me, radiating my skin through the filter of oily sun lotion and penetrating intensely into my irises. I squint. My feet and ankles hit the surface of water as I go further in, the depth expanding above my waist as the sea bed drops away. I am now swimming. I see small pools of oil, a fluid film, sitting and undulating on the surface of the heavy density of water underneath. I drop my body and head below the surface and then return for air. My camera, in a protective waterproof plastic wallet, has filmed me and itself submerge into the sea. I think about screens, osmosis, permeability and reflective forces, the phenomenon of unstable and malleable surfaces and boundaries of material, bodies and technologies.

On the studio floor; here lies a print. I pour vegetable oil onto, no, into the print as it immediately soaks into the fabric of the matt paper. Crudely but effectively, I suspend a rope between two

points on adjacent walls in the studio, hanging from it the oil stained print. A spotlight behind permeates through paper and as gravity pulls the rolling excess of oil downwards, a patchy transparent image showing the shape the oil has formed, revealed.

London, UK; I glance through a large glass window front into a lobby space. I see a shaft of sunlight hit a marble wall layered with the reflection of myself, the passing traffic and the buildings behind me. I think about the spatial compression perceived through the overlay of images, light and matter.

In the digital suite; the printer churns out a large-scale photograph. After a time, it is carefully lifted out of the cradle. I watch a technician gently roll the print, placing it inside a poster tube, cushioning the ends with tissue paper. I carry it back to the studio. I too, carefully unroll it and turn it face up. The curvature of the print reveals a layered sheen of emulsion. Around the studio, there are various materials in solid, liquid and sticky forms. I pour a pool of cloudy white varnish onto the photograph, it expands, taking on a blueish tone under the light. I push my fingers into the viscous liquid and it rolls across the print. I use a tissue to mop at the residue of varnish which has already started to react by corroding the image. With each swipe of the tissue, ink lifts up and photographic details turn painterly. In certain areas, the distortion is such that it almost returns to an imageless piece of paper.

Skye, Scotland; I notice how iridescent the purple heather flower is, changing in accordance to the erratic weather conditions. I feel compelled to take photographs of it. I already know the photographic image as it will first be, will not be enough, not adequate for what I am seeking. I ask myself, if I photograph the heather flower, how then do I use that flower? How can I make the image move beyond a fixed static representation? How can I disturb the seamless veneer of the image to something livelier and more sensory?

From my desk; I pick up a nail and hammer, driving it into a print on the studio wall. I step back, aligning it straight by eye only, I put a second nail into the opposite corner. The nail will eventually come out, the holes will remain as evidence of a past. The work pierced shows the photograph to be fallible, imperfect, unstable and incomplete.

(Hughes 2013-2018)

My relationship with photography is deliberately complicated. In opening this thesis with passages written from the perspective of my embodied voice (the artist-researcher), situated within the studio and other environments, I introduce both my methodologies and the overarching impetus of the research. This is defined by the term 'wilding', which I use as both an academic term (proposed in this doctoral research) and a verb at different places in the writing.

Wilding photographs is a methodology of action. It is situated in physical, material-led processes that are embodied and bodily-led, tactile and disruptive. 'Wilding' is also a term that defines a conceptual strategy to disrupt the conventions of the photographic medium. This strategy consists of exposing audiences to the results of the wilding methodology, through installations (a term I will discuss) and public exhibitions.² This opens a situation for new subjectivities that surpass the notion of photographs as singular representations, and a common approach to photography underpinned by binary oppositional thinking - such as, art and technology, index and icon (as outlined by Charles Sanders Peirce) and more specifically in this research, image and material. In bringing these together to examine the photographic object, the research calls into question ontologies and cultural assumptions, through interrogative processes that return the photograph to a physical condition and mutable

² Taking the definition of Installation Art as: "large-scale, mixed-media constructions, often designed for a specific place or for a temporary period of time" (Tate 2018).

image in a turbulent and shifting relationship with matter. The photographic practice provides situations for embodied encounters, which destabilise and re-create worlds, re-examining the boundaries of representation, material and imagination, asking:

What are the potential effects on material, body and meaning, when simultaneously engaging with photography's haptic, spatial and temporal dimensions?



Figure 2: *You Left Me Wild*, 2015 Authors own

In these interrogative and transgressive processes and methodologies, the wilding approach explores the turbulent and affective qualities of the material phenomenon of photography. Here, 'affect' is applied to mean the influence, impact and difference caused, as defined by Ben Anderson (Professor of Geography, Durham University):

Affect is a body's capacity to affect and be affected, where a body can in principle be anything... Affect is two-sided... It consists of bodily capacities to affect and be affected that emerge and develop in concert...affects are transformed in relation to processes of mediation...a term used in cultural and media studies to refer to something that stands in-between and reconciles two separate things (Anderson 2014, p.13).

In exploring the turbulent qualities of the material phenomenon of photography, I characterise the word 'turbulent' as indicating confusion and instability. I co-opt a proposed turbulent approach to a medium, as outlined by geographers Anderson and Wylie (2006), who consider the problematics that surround matter and materiality, exploring how a medium can sit between these two states, as:

A mix of order and disorder – tensed between a gathering and a distribution... Imagining matter from the state of turbulence offers the exhilarating sense that the assembling of materialities can only be a continual process of gathering and distribution (Anderson & Wylie 2006, p.321).

Collectively, the research methodologies and strategies are wilding photographs in situations of practice that challenge the contemporary identity of photographic images as overwhelmingly ubiquitous, immaterial representations made manifest through digital technologies. In addition, this practice-based project seeks to counter the tendency in photographic critical discourse to overlook the transformative, nuanced affective qualities of the material phenomenon of photography.

The term, conceptual framework and methodologies of wilding came into focus and began to be explicitly utilised in the second year of this doctoral study, building upon a significant body of practice. Before settling on the term 'wilding', the relevance of the words 'wild' and 'wilderness' were considered; however, the latter proved too specific to

a certain type of environment, despite having productive connotations in relation to definitions of situation, and representations of place (this is explored further in Chapter 2). More applicable as both an action and an expansive, conceptual approach was the meaning of the word 'wild' - defined in the Merriam-Webster dictionary as "deviating from the intended or expected course, marked by turbulent agitation, going beyond normal or conventional bounds" (Merriam-Webster 2018), and by academic Jack (Judith) Halberstam as "going beyond the structures we inhabit and that inhabit us" (Halberstam 2013, p.7). Halberstam's research on queer philosophy, undertakes 'wildness' as a strategy and method as the "unmaking of the world and in the dismantling of ideological scaffolding...opening a revolutionary terrain for the invention of new desires which have yet to be defined: new subjectivities that cannot be represented" (Halberstam 2019).

The term 'wilding' emerged while discussing this exploration of terminology in a doctoral group critique during the exhibition of my work *Filmy* (2016). I include here an excerpt describing a colleague's response to my research at that stage:

Suspended above the ground, fragments of photographic imagery and material are seen in a dense arrangement of matter.... She points at a detail, it is the back of a print with cut-out shapes, a tree branch stuck with glue, smears of plaster, clay and string bindings. She feels there is a purposeful 'wilding' creating rifts and schisms between material, that disrupts expectation, throwing into question the encounter (Hughes 2016).

CONVENTIONS OF A MEDIUM

For wilding to be understood fully, we first must consider the conventions of the medium. As previously stated, my relationship with photography is intentionally complicated. Using both analogue and digital cameras, I take a lot of photographs of my everyday surroundings and specific locations to which I have travelled. However, since my earliest introduction to cameras, I have rarely been satisfied with the photographic *image* alone. Feeling both a desire to capture a moment and a simultaneous frustration that undermines this action, I frequently ask myself: why I am photographing this? What will this image do? These questions arise as a direct response to the convention in contemporary culture to identify the medium as narrowly communicated through immaterial representations.

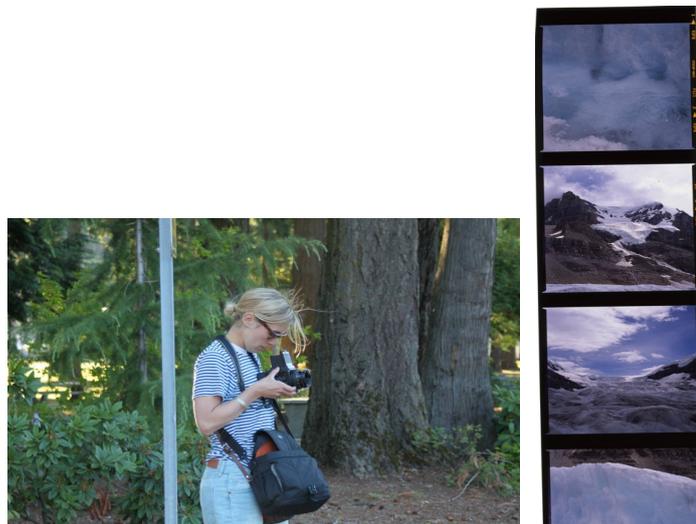


Figure 3: Taking photographs in British Columbia, Canada, 2013 Author's Own

As theorist Andre Bazin noted, this convention began with the discovery of the camera obscura which enabled artists to create the illusion of three-dimensional space, closer to way things appear to exist through our eyes, without the mark of the artist hand.³ As Bazin says:

Photography freed the plastic arts from their obsession with likeness... the camera/photography gave the illusion by a mechanical reproduction in the making of which man plays no part... the essentially objective character of photography... The photographic image is the object itself, the object freed from the conditions of time and space that govern it (Bazin & Gray 1960, p.7-8).

The seemingly absent hand and the objective mechanical reproduction of 'likeness' became part of the conventional understanding and application for the medium. This approach still dominates today, and is reflected in my own education in photography, beginning with studying a BA Hons in Photography at Falmouth University, Cornwall, UK (2004). This course operated through a syllabus informed by the historical and contemporary conventions and aesthetics associated with photography. Training in the darkroom included learning how to remove dust from the glossy surface of negatives and to 'spot' prints with ink to hide every perceivable blemish on

³ Camera Obscura: "(from Latin, meaning 'darkened room') ...a small hole is made in the window blind of a darkened room, an inverted image of the scene outside the window is produced on the opposite wall of the room... this eventually lead to the development of the photographic camera" (Science and Media Museum 2019).

the image. In the digital suite, we were taught the tools of image manipulation and to save 'pre-set levels' on computer software, in order to repeat this process and achieve the exact same, 'perfect' result each time, ad infinitum.

Throughout my academic career, the theoretical influence of Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida* (1980) has also embedded a cultural and critical approach to the photographic medium, seen as indexical images of representations and memories. In stating that "the noeme of Photography is simple, banal; no depth: 'that has been'" (Barthes 1980, p.115), Barthes frames the photographic image as a testament to the existence of a specific thing in a specific place at a specific time, simultaneously immortalised and gone forever.

Barthes shows photography's indexical nature as in accord with its relation to its user, its beholder, placing his own response to photography at the centre of his critique: "As a '*Spectator*' ... I wanted to explore it not as a question (a theme) but as a wound: I see, I feel, hence I notice, I observe, and I think" (Barthes 1980, p.21).

Barthes developed a conceptual framework to analyse the qualities of the photographic image, applying his terms 'studium' and 'punctum'. The studium: "marked as a kind of general interest that requires the rational intermediary of an ethical or political culture ... or to enjoy them as historical scenes" (Barthes 1980, p.26).

In contrast, the punctum: “will break the studium... it is this element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me... which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)” (Barthes 1980, p.27). Barthes applies his approach by dissecting photographs; pinpointing elements in an image as the punctum, such as a belt or shoe.



Figure 4: Francesca Woodman. Untitled, Rhode Island, 1976

Source: www.mutualart.com

Figure 5: Francesca Woodman. Untitled, Rome, 1976 Source: www.mutualart.com

I can certainly say photographic images have also ‘struck’ or ‘pricked’ me. For example, the photographs by Francesca Woodman, a 20th century artist, never waver in their poignant exploration of the human body in space. Most often it is her naked self, either staged or seemingly spontaneously appearing within derelict buildings, which engender my own memories and imagination of experiences of what my body has or could endure - causing sensory memories and emotions to arise. But where do I locate the punctum? Is it the corner of the glass digging into her breast? Is it where her bare back meets the rough, dirty surface of the

wall? What about the photograph where her body is caught in a blur, where then does the punctum stop and start? (figure 4-6) What would it be to crop away all other aspects of the photograph to just these dissected details? I am unconvinced the image would still ‘prick’ me in this case. The photograph in its entirety is what holds poignancy. The whole composition as considered by Woodman. For example, the photographic frame edge seems important. As writer Isabella Pedicini notes: “This was the real space in which she set her figures, bounded by a square, the limits of the photographic negative” (Pedicini 2012, pp.11-12).



Figure 6: Francesca Woodman, *Space², Providence*, Rhode Island, 1976 Source: www.tate.org.uk

What about the physical frame I look upon and act within? The photograph framed on the surface of paper? The thickness of the paper in relation to the material elements within the prints image? What about how the photograph framed in glass causes light reflections to bounce off the print, which move as I move, activating my imagination to animate the figure within the photograph? There is also the photograph situated in the frame of the gallery or book, the photographed looked upon by me – a

bodily frame between it and me, under and within specific ambient conditions. These all play an integral role in the 'reading' of the photograph. However, Barthes fails to look between image, material and space. In fact, he bluntly disregards this aspect of the medium, suggesting: "Whatever it grants to vision and whatever its manner, a photograph is always invisible; it is not it that we see" (Barthes 1980, p.6). Instead, the object Barthes speaks of is not the photographic object but the object in the image.

Barthes' approach to the image as a *representation* is clear: "no representation could assure me of the past of a thing except by intermediaries; but with the Photograph, my certainty is immediate: no one in the world can undecieve me" (Barthes 1980, p.115). This has had a continual influence on the critical approach to the medium. For instance, academic Mary Ann Doane notes: "the certainty of referentiality we have come to associate with photography...has been perceived as a direct emanation from the real, an assurance of a ground in an era of massive mediation" (Doane 2006, p.1).

Through this critical and wider cultural approach, the photograph is seen as something that points, frames, categorises and separates entities. For example, space and time, subject and viewer. The image can therefore be considered as indexical, in that it "represents its object through resemblance" (Olin 2012, p.10). This convention assimilates the theory of philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce, whose writing on semiotics (often

referred to as 'Peirce's sign theory') developed in the later nineteenth century, offer an account of signification, representation, reference and meaning. Peirce's theory on semiotics, especially his triadic division of signs, was widely used by art historians and art critics in the latter half of the twentieth century and have been referred to since the 1960s in writings on photography.⁴

Peirce's concept asserts that all signs can be thought of as exhibiting three modes of meaning. The first mode, that of the 'icon', produces meaning through its resemblance to other signs. A sign's status as icon is dependent on the subjective ability of the interpreter to see the sign as resembling something else. Iconicity speaks to the subjective possibility of an interpreter freely associating a sign with past experience. The second mode, 'indexicality', is not subjective and instead arises when a sign has a physical connection to another object. This occurs when a physical process leaves a mark upon the sign: "The index asserts nothing; it only says "There!" (Peirce cited in Doane, 2007 p.1). This indirectly reveals the presence of another object influencing the sign, without that object directly appearing.

⁴ For a general overview of Peirce's Sign Theory, or Semiotic see website: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/peirce-semiotics/>

Thirdly, the 'symbol' mode addresses a sign's accepted meaning for a community. This is not wholly subjective, but it is still contingent. Peirce states that all signs display aspects of all three modes.

Peirce addresses photographs through the different modes. Regarding the iconic, he states that "most icons, if not all, are likenesses of their objects. A photograph is an icon" (Peirce cited in Short 2007, p.215).

Peirce notes that photographs "are very instructive, because we know that they are in certain respects exactly like the objects they represent" (Peirce cited in Edwards & Hart 2004, p.40). He then changes course, noting that a photograph is actually indexical: "A photograph is an effect of a physical process and thus it is an index of the subject photographed" (Peirce cited in Short 2007, p.215). Thus, Peirce, by choosing a photograph as his example, reveals a special slippage between iconicity and indexicality particular to photography.

However, art historians' writings on photography have predominantly focused on the term 'indexicality' to describe the photograph.⁵ The slippage outlined by Peirce seems to be largely neglected in the general critical analysis of photographs. James Elkins, in his reassessment of the central debates over photographic representation since the late 1970's, notes:

⁵ A notable example is essay: *Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America*, Rosalind Krauss *October* Vol. 3 (Spring, 1977), pp. 68-81

It could be argued that the use of the index in isolation from the symbol and icon is a misuse of Peirce's theory.... Hence calling a photograph indexical, or saying its most important property is indexicality, is misreading Peirce...every object in the world relates existentially to an indeterminate number of other objects, either directly or indirectly... indexicality must be seen as the foundation of one of many possible ways of using photographs (Elkins cited in Lefebvre 2007, p.1).

Art historian Margaret Olin adds to the debate, extending an aspect of Barthes' theoretical approach by stating that the most significant indexical power of the photograph is between the photograph and its beholder, performing a relation that may not depend on resemblance. This she calls the *performative index* (Olin 2012, p.69).

The image is not to be discredited in its potential potency to engender emotive reactions in its encounter. However, I think this convention stems from a complacency in the viewer, that assumes the image is giving what is already known and what has been seen before, and which subtly feeds the notion that symbolic and indexical representations precede and form our sense of the world.

As my example of encountering Woodman's photographs shows, I too see the slippage of indexicality and iconicity. Thus, as a practitioner, I approach photographs both 'felt' as objects and 'read' as images. Through this, my research explores how direct meaning shifts and multiplies, interrogating and expanding on how photographs function as culturally coded signs.

In wilding the photograph, I bring image and object together. I sit in my studio, I cut, pierce, contort, smear, touch, move, tear the photograph. I am deliberately complicating the image. I am seeking to break the image as representation by moving my approach from the 2-dimensional photographic image to a 3-dimensional photographic object open to experiential engagement. I think about the physical presence of photographs as both images and material in direct relation to me in this specific time and space. I place and shift the photographic object with other material matter that takes a leap from the point of capture to expand outwards, exploring a situation of encounter that is new, unpredictable, not felt before, and which opens up a space for differently structured possibilities on the medium. This approach thus heightens the experience of encountering a multiplicity of the index, icon and symbol through a simultaneous encounter of the medium's temporal, spatial and tactile dimensions.

DIGITALISATION

The photographic conventions observed have been exacerbated through digital technologies, informing the contemporary identity of photographic images as overwhelmingly ubiquitous immaterial representations.

In my act of taking photographs, I am part of a populace that contributes to the annual production of over a trillion photographs (Haworth 2016, p.17). As bleakly predicted by philosopher Vilém Flusser, the increasingly

vast distribution of photographs within the everyday digital environment might offer no more than, “repetitive images with outcomes that carry no new information... these images are redundant” (Flusser 1986, p.26).

When I graduated from Falmouth, I signed (perhaps naively) a contract with a picture library to digitalise a series of photographs from my portfolio. These photographs were then made available for any commercial client to purchase through an online database. I found books and magazine advertisements showing my images shifting across contexts, formats and scale, acting as representations to ideas beyond my control. It is a condition of the medium noted by academic Andrew Fisher, who recognises that:

A tension in photography, is its openness as a form to being de-ranked and transformed technically and historically...immaterial digital images can choose in a way that earlier photography couldn't, sitting across networks, through platforms, spaces and moments of experience and the scale and what it might mean to the image are transformed, distributed and change forms (Fisher 2013).

Fisher's observations are part of wider theoretical speculations on the conventions of the photographic medium, which are largely in response to the domination of digital technology. This includes many writers, journalists and theorists who have co-opted relatively new terms, including 'Post Photography'.⁶ This term, first defined by academic WJ Mitchell in

⁶ An example is journal article: *Post-Photography: The Unknown Image*, Robert Shore, 2013, *Elephant Journal* 13. (Winter)

The Reconfigured Eye: Visual Truth in the Post Photographic Era (1994), describes photographic images as objective, 'truthful' representations challenged by new digital manipulation technologies.

Furthermore, the photographic theoretician and historian Geoffrey Batchen stated, the age of 'post photography' now reigned. Batchen goes on to observe a 'technological crisis' of photography as a result of a wider cultural shift and 'epistemological crisis':

The first 'technological' crisis involves the apparent displacement of photography by digital imaging... The second 'epistemological' crisis involves, 'broader changes in ethics, knowledge and culture... Specifically, digitalisation ... virtual reality – each of these expanding fields of activity calls into question the presumed separation of nature and culture, human and non-human, real and representation, truth and falsehood... all concepts undergirding photography's extant epistemology (Batchen 1994, p. 48).

This technological crisis has brought into question the conventional approach towards the photograph as immaterial representation in both photographic practice and critical theory. Contemporary theorists, have challenged Barthes' *Camera Lucida* to "find another sense of photography" (Elkins 2011, p.9), and to reveal that "photography is not only a 'visual' practice" (Olin 2012, p.11). Nonetheless, there seems to be an increasingly visual and disembodied interaction with the world whereby only visual signs are perceived as meaningful, and the sensuous, physical world is neglected.

Therefore, I find a gap, and potential area for expanded research within the detailed dialogue concerning the embodied, physical approach towards the photographic object in which a reflection on the materiality of photography would be seen to encapsulate all its dimensions at once.

MATERIALITY

My practice, from my BA Hons in Photography and MFA at the Slade School of Fine Art (2008), up until the commencement of this doctoral research, has remained faithful to working with photography through tactile, experimental, subversive and affectionate explorations on the materiality of the medium – as demonstrated in work such as *Cut Light* (2006-2009), *Developing Stills* (2008), *Collage on Film* (2011-2013), and *Magnetic* (2014) (figure 7).⁷

⁷ To see further examples of my work, see: <http://www.alexandrahughes.co.uk>



Figure 7: *Developing Still* (2008), *Cut Light* (2006-2009), *Collage on Film* (2011-2013), *Magnetic* (2014) Authors Own

Photography researcher and academic Sandra Plummer's critique on the materiality of photography particularly resonates with me. Plummer suggests that "it would be good to get beyond the 'either or' and embrace the notion of the photograph as 'either-and'" (Riches, Plummer and Wooldridge 2011, p.35), and elsewhere notes that "We currently lack a history that aligns the technical advances of photography to specific material properties of the image; understood as decisions and not technologically determined limitations" (Riches, Plummer and Wooldridge 2012).



Figure 8: Prints on the studio floor, 2017 Author's Own

This, 'either-and' approach suggested by Plummer is further seen as a proposition by art historian George Baker, who in his essay *Photography's Expanded Field* (2005), suggests looking at the medium as simultaneously in a "non-stasis / non-narrative condition" (Baker 2005, p.126).⁸ Baker, through considering how the historical critical approach to photography has been shaped through oppositional thinking, focuses on the line between stasis and narrative:

The frozen fullness of the photographic image, its devotion to petrification or stasis, has seemed for so many to characterize the medium as a whole. And yet...its aesthetic organisation into sequences and series - thrusts the photographic signifier into motion, engaging it with the communicative function of narrative diegesis (ibid).

⁸ A text that in turn appropriates Rosalind Krauss' seminal essay, *Sculpture in the Expanded Field* (1979). Krauss writes to challenge the perceived cultural definitions of sculpture, landscape and architecture, proposing the intersections that placed supposed categories of medium in the "neither nor" condition.

Baker proposes a new approach to the photograph: “to depict it as suspended between the conditions of being neither narrative nor fully static... both a function of not-narrative and not-stasis at the same time” (ibid p.127). Baker asserts: “to locate a project not as the photographic suspension between the not-narrative and the not-stasis, but as some new combination of both terms” (ibid p.130).

Through this proposal and in response to wider cultural speculation of the medium, Baker states:

Resisting the notion of a technological demise of the medium, we can open up the imagination to how the photographic object can be ‘reconstructed’ in contemporary art practice (Baker 2005, p.123).

In beginning to mark out this ‘expanded field’, Baker defines the practice of artists including Jeff Wall, who reconciles photography with history painting, and Andreas Gursky, who embraces the new scale and technology of photography’s digital re-coding. Baker also draws upon artist Philip-Lorca di Corcia’s reference to theatre and cinema, and explorations of the ‘narrative caption’ in the photographic projects of Andrea Robbins & Max Becher (Baker 2005, p.122).

However, Baker does not provide an example of an artist’s practice that explores the material phenomenon of photography, perhaps because its meaning lies in the physical experience with the medium. Here, I see a

space for practice-based, tactile engagement to open up knowledge of the materiality of the photographic object, and all its dimensions.

There are contemporary art practices that investigate this field of enquiry on materiality and photography - with two subtle yet distinct explorations. The first exploration is on the conceptual relationship between materiality and the photographic image. Here we might place Hiroshi Sugimoto's conceptual investigations of the relationship of object-forming to the act of image-making in his *Pre-Photography Time-Recording Device / PPTRD* (2008). In regard to a set of photographs of fossils, Sugimoto states: "fossils work almost the same way as photography, as a record of history" (ed. Elkins 2007, p. 431).

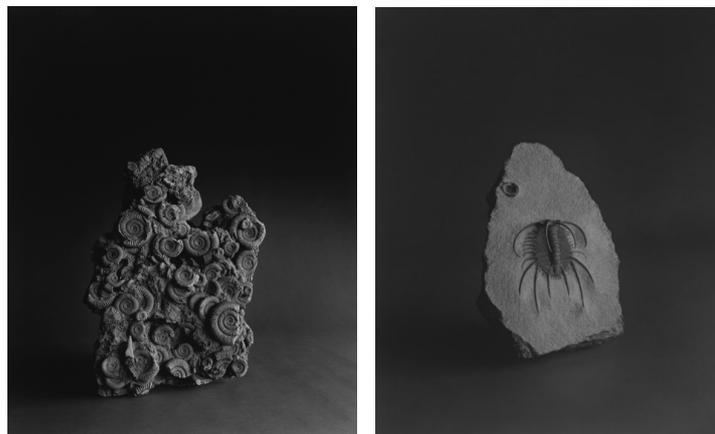


Figure 9: Hiroshi Sugimoto, PPTRD 028 & 037, 2008

Source: www.sugimotohiroshi.com

Such explorations between materiality and image are considered in Plummer's essay, *Photography as Expanding Form: Virtual and Actual Expansion in the Work of Saron Hughes and Martina Corry* (2015),

through investigating the works of two artists who employ a folding methodology. These works are wall-based prints, showing images that result from either action carried out on the photographic paper in the darkroom or staged compositions in which a folded piece of paper is inserted into a seemingly disparate environment (figure 10 & 11). In encountering the work, an illusory quality in a flux of dimensions occurs, “encompassing a transition from the optic to the haptic, from the iconographic to the indexical” (Plummer 2015, p. 23).



Figure 10: Martina Corry, *Untitled 3.2*, 2008 Source: www.martinacorry.com



Figure 11: Saron Hughes, *A1 Still Lives* series, 2005 Source: www.saronhughes.com

The second exploration is a physical investigation between materiality and the photographic object. It is this field in which my research resides and contributes distinct knowledge. This field includes artist Sara VanDerBeek

- in particular, her recent work *Electric Prisms, Concrete Forms* (2015). Comparable but distinct to Corry and Hughes, VanDerBeek shows physical folds in the work in which, “the viewer is presented with several variations of a shallow three-dimensional construction... Sitting somewhere between framed photograph and sculptural relief, they push against the viewer’s initial understanding of them as pure image” (The Approach 2015).

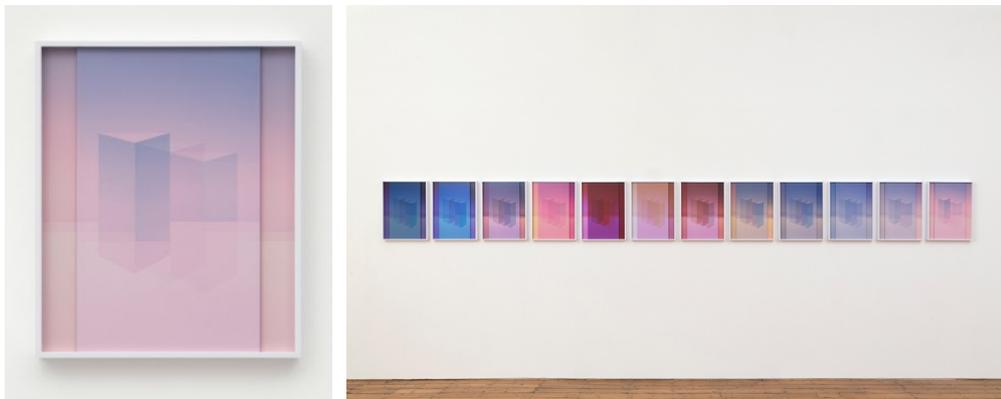


Figure 12: Sara VanDerBeek, *Electric Prisms, Concrete Forms*, 2015

Source: www.theapproach.co.uk

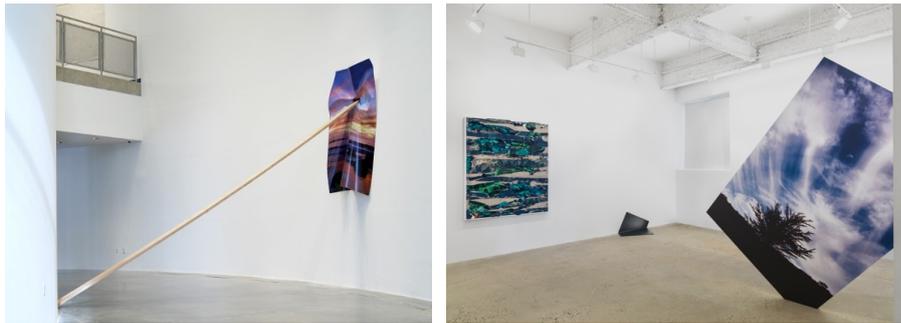


Figure 13: Letha Wilson, *California Sunset Lean*, 2014 Source: www.ideelart.com

Figure 14: Letha Wilson, *Higher Pictures* (installation view), 2014

Source: www.lethaprojects.com

More apparent still is the exploration of the materiality of the three-dimensional photographic object in the works of Letha Wilson. Wilson's approach uses sculptural materials as well as the architecture of the gallery itself, employing photographs of the American West to highlight the relationship between landscape and gallery (figure 13 & 14).



Figure 15: MOMA, *Photography into Sculpture*, 1970
Source: <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/2694>

These explorations of the 'Photographic Object', can be seen to have precursors in an earlier group exhibition from 1970, *Photography into Sculpture*, first installed at MOMA, New York, by curator Peter Bunnell. The exhibition was described in the original wall text as: "the first comprehensive survey of photographically formed images used in a sculptural or fully dimensional manner" (Cherry & Martin Gallery, 2011), and has been re-installed in various contemporary galleries, re-titled to: *The Evolving Photographic Object, 1970* (Hauser and Wirth, 2014).

To distinguish my practice-based research in this context, my research does not strive to make a comparison between the conventional

discourses and histories of sculpture and those of photography. Rather, the research employs both the use of sculptural materials as well as performative gesture, to move the photograph from the 2-dimensional to 3-dimensional, inhabiting and constructing temporal spaces as installations. My intention is not to show an explicit exchange between two sites with a direct reference to somewhere else. Instead, the research strives to explore the potential for the medium to testify both through physical presence and pictorial representation, widening the overlooked nuances for the medium, rethinking not only our acts of seeing but our bodily, sensuous acts of engagement with the photography.

PHENOMENOLOGY AND INSTALLATION ART

In looking at the 'affective' qualities of the photograph, the research intersects with the field of installation art, and the related critical sphere of phenomenology; and thus, opens up a neglected area of study in these fields' relationship to photography.

Phenomenology is "the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person" (Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy 2013). My research largely relates to the studies of phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty, who explores the role of perception, body, sensations, space and temporality, that "forces us to reject the preconceived notion of the world and rediscover the primordial experience from which it springs" (Merleau-Ponty 1945, p.298). Merleau-Ponty addressed what he saw as a

fundamental division in Western philosophy's understanding of the human subject, arguing that: "subject and object are not separate entities but are reciprocally intertwined" (Merleau-Ponty cited in Bishop 2005, p.50).

Installation art is characterised by art historian Clare Bishop as a field in which: "the ensemble of elements within it, are regarded in their entirety as a singular entity...a situation into which the viewer physically enters" (Bishop 2005, p.6). Here, instead of *representing* texture, space and light, installation art *presents* these elements as immediate sensory experiences. This quality is defined as an "activation" (Bishop 2005, p11), a term which I co-opt within this research. The second quality that installation potentially activates – and which further relates to this research on multiplicities of meaning and space. – is the "decentred subject: in which optics and perspectives connected to the viewer's sight is disrupted, showing our condition as human subjects as fragmented, multiple and *decentred* ... by an interdependent and differential relationship to the world" (Bishop 2005, p.13).

In direct reference to the ideas of Merleau-Ponty, the connection between phenomenology and installation art was explored in the 1960's through Minimalist sculpture, as noted in Rosalind Krauss' review of artists Donald Judd and Robert Irwin, *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (1977). Krauss uses these artists' works to demonstrate how perceptual experience precedes cognition and highlights the interdependence of art and viewer

through: “objects of perception, objects that are to be grasped in the experience of looking at them” (Krauss cited in Bishop 2005, p.53).

Merleau-Ponty himself wrote about art on several occasions, for example, *Cezanne Doubt* (1945) and *Eye and Mind* (1960) both explore painting as a manifestation of the way in which we relate to the world. However, Merleau-Ponty neglected to discuss the medium of *photography* in relation to phenomenology.

Barthes' *Camera Lucida* (1980), marks out a contested relationship between photography and the field of phenomenology. His approach is challenged by Fisher, who suggest that Barthes' writing acts to “fictionalise the key concern of phenomenology” (Fisher 2008, p.22). Fisher suggests a theoretical study on the relationship between phenomenology and photography should “not hold at a distance materiality, reproducibility, historical, technical and cultural questions on photography” (ibid p.27).

Echoing Barthes, philosopher Hubert Damisch, in *Five Notes for a Phenomenology of The Photographic Image* (1975), also puts aside materiality to consider the “constitutive deception of the photographic image ... (an) ontological deceit” (Damisch 1978, p.71).

By observing this general disregard to materiality, my research looks to develop the exploration between phenomenology and photography through practice and embodied installation. This approach serves to widen the overlooked nuances of the medium, which I think can be only

discovered and reflected upon in the 'doing'. The research investigates the multiplicity and production of altogether new situations that re-centre and decentre the body and perception, through experiential explorations - activating and evidencing the simultaneous engagement with photography's haptic, spatial and temporal dimensions, and destabilising and re-creating worlds.

METHODOLOGIES AND FIELDS OF STUDY

Through the strategies of wilding photographs, the research evolves through practice-based, experiential methodologies that privilege co-actions with material.

As outlined at the start of this introduction, this research begins with my physical encounters with both environments and the photographic object, which are then integrated and interrogated in the studio as temporal assemblages, using the medium alongside found matter and materials. I then apply these studio processes by reconfiguring and formalising constructed situations as installations in exhibitions to be encountered by wider audiences.

The thesis reflects the different 'voices' and 'gestures' manifest in the research. There is account of the embodied voice within the exhibition, the diarist reflective notes of 'me' (the artist-researcher) as well as the voice of critical discourse and that of the 'audience', as physical and discursive

responses that evidence the research's effects on material, body and meaning.

Starting with fine art practice and theory, the research relates to photography's expanded field (Baker 2005). In this respect, it explicitly deviates from the conventions of the medium and relates to notions of alterity explored in the genre of the contemporary sublime, which disrupt "the stable co-ordinates of time and space and the understanding of representations as producing our life-world" (Morley 2010, p.2). The research finds particular resonance with the sub-genre of the feminine sublime, which sustains "a condition of radical uncertainty as the very condition of possibility" (Freeman 1995, p.11).

Furthermore, the practice-based methodologies that explore meaning-making through the situated subject, relate to the notions outlined as the 'experiential turn' as "a methodological shift in how we look at any artwork and in the way in which it produces meaning" (von Hantelmann 2014, p.2). By emphasising the practice-based methodologies as a major contribution to knowledge, this research emphasises the 'performativity of research', which looks at where "originary knowledge or the new is revealed through handling" (Bolt 2006, p.129). Through this, the research evidences "new epistemologies of practice distilled from the insider's understandings of action in context" (Haseman 2006, p.99).

As contemporary enquiries in the wider cultural sphere challenge the conventional epistemological systems used to define our material world,

the relevance of this research extends from the field of fine art to other cultural fields of study. In particular, the research relates to theory regarding 'New Materialism' in cultural geography, anthropology and contemporary feminism (Bachelard 1942; Anderson & Wylie 2006; Neimanis 2012; Ishii 2012, Edwards 2010), which has particular relevance to the exploration of 'turbulence'.

In addition to studies from phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty 1945; Dufrenne 1973), my research intersects with psychological studies of 'situated cognition', where "situations might be said to co-produce knowledge through activity" (Brown, Collins & Duguid 1989, p.33) and in which, "gesture plays a role in changing thought" (Goldin-Meadow and Beilock 2010, p.664).

Through the approach of wilding photographs, the research aims to reveal the turbulent and affective qualities of the material phenomenon of photography, widening critical reflection on the material encounter of photography in the social, academic and cultural sensorium.

CHAPTER STRUCTURE

This thesis is to be read as an exegesis rather than as an act of wilding in itself. Each chapter in the thesis expands outwards like a ripple, moving forward not in a chronological linearity of methodologies, but rather as

expansive implications, reflecting on a set of formalised installations made throughout the duration of the project.

Each chapter takes a particular focus on the wilding approach accounting for the trajectory of visceral bodily engagement and encounters with material, to the analytical, conceptual reflection. This is seen in the chapters as interconnecting layers of process, theory, encounters and subsequent affects, including written accounts alongside photographic documentation, sound and video (seen in the figure captions marked in green: play **video** and **sound** by following the web link to Vimeo website).

Each chapter takes a particular focus on the wilding approach:

Wilding Surfaces (Chapter 1): This chapter reflects upon my installation *Letting Things Be Uncertain* (2017) and associated experiences and artworks, beginning at the intimate and interrogative point of touch with the surface of the photographic object. This exploration disrupts the division of the matter and image to reveal an inherent materiality of the photograph.

As the title suggests, *Letting Things Be Uncertain* opens an exploration on the experiential engagement of the photographic object, moving away from the notion of fixed representations. The resulting work in Chapter 1, is a mixed media installation, which is reflected upon through describing my (as artist-researcher) engaged practice in constructing the installation. This description includes my experimental material processes, tested in-

situ with additional site-specific materials, but also incorporating reconfigured works from previous exhibitions - in particular my series, *Claytypes* (2017), made within a process of smearing clay across the surface of photographs. The chapter goes on to describe my haptic and phenomenological experience of the final installation.

In this chapter, I also extend the propositions of contemporary theorists who argue against Barthes' *Camera Lucida* (1980), as an attempt to reveal ideas of materiality, hybridity and the phenomenological experience of the 'surface' of the photographic object: James Elkins' *What Photography Is* (2011), Andrew Fisher's *Beyond Barthes: Rethinking the Phenomenology of Photography* (2008), and Riches, Plummer and Wooldridge's, *Photography's New Materiality* (2011). The methods of wilding photographs described in this chapter interrogate the physical locus points of dimension through the photographic object, but also reveal hidden depths that are in relation, both ontologically and aesthetically, to other seemingly disparate material forms. These relations are defined perceptually through situated, embodied encounters.

Wilding Frames (Chapter 2): This chapter expands from the surface, moving from a 2-dimensional to 3-dimensional plane, in which the research methodologies are seen to move outward to explore how the approach to wilding photographs can potentially reframe notions and experiences of environments. The research seeks to challenge the

conventional approach to the frame as seemingly fixed, countering the notions of “the segment which the frame frames as an example of nature-as – representation” (Krauss 1981, p.31). The research in this chapter questions where the edges of the frame truly reside and looks at the significance of what happens ‘in-between’ these edges.

In testing the notion of the ‘frame’, the research acknowledges the etymology of the term ‘wilding’ - associated with the words ‘wild’ and ‘wilderness’ - as well as extending this association to ‘the sublime’. The chapter reflects upon the trajectory of these terms, which were first used to name physical, natural environments, but have subsequently evolved to be applied to ambiguous and ambient situations in new contemporary cultural conditions. Furthermore, the chapter reveals a contradiction of the terms, seen through a ubiquity of photographic representations of the wilderness and the sublime as immaterial visual tropes within mass culture, and creating a sense of visual distance.

Through describing my creative processes and audience response to a set of artworks, *figuring it* (2016), *Phole* (2015-2018) and *Filmy* (2016), the research looks to collapse a sense of distance, moving to a sensory, lively experiential encounter in which human scale and the photographic object are brought together with notions of fluidity. Thus, highlighting the slippery and provocative notions of nature, material, technology and human.

The artworks in this chapter are described in detail. This includes the materials and images they are comprised of, which in turn are derived from an amalgamation of places, reflected in my descriptions of the personal sensory experiences of specific locations that inform my material processes.

Through these exhibitions and artworks, the research seeks to reveal potential affective qualities of the frame that shape situated perceptions and meanings, through a methodology of inviting audiences to respond to the work. This includes documentation of two key discussions in the presence of the work *Filmy*: the first with Ben Anderson, Professor of Geography at Durham University (who I invited to the installation in acknowledgment of his association with the influential term and approach of 'turbulence'); the second, conducted as a PGR doctoral group critique (Northumbria University) in which colleagues were recorded to discuss the terms 'wilding' and 'wilderness'. Finally, chapter two shows how the research explores the turbulent and affective qualities of the photographic object as an emergent multiple phenomenon, through the expression of immersive experiences, multiple perspectives and as a self-reflective journey which is visceral and ambiguous.

Wilding Bodies (Chapter 3): From the explorations of the frame, the research presented in this chapter extends to encompass performative gesture and bodily movement through the active participation of an

audience. This is undertaken through the artwork *Wild Affections* (2017) which consisted of two performances and a mixed media installation. Here, the research explores the process of wilding photographs through improvised, intuitive, tactile, situated bodily acts, performative gesture, sculptural material and a witnessing audience.

This chapter includes a theoretical challenge to Barthes' metaphors of touch by Margaret Olin, who suggests that "photographic gestures indicate that photographic practices do more than merely represent the world" (Olin 2012, p.11). It also draws upon reflections by visual anthropologist Elizabeth Edwards, who argues for attention to the performative engagements with the photographic object (Edwards 2010).

The research outlined in this chapter seeks to expand beyond Olin and Edwards, by looking at what potential transformations happen in human thought, narrative and our sense of place when the photographic object is in physical communion with the human body. The methodologies include both my solitary processes, and subsequent collaborative experiments with a group of performers in-situ - as a starting point for a collective choreography which considers how, "physical gestures and hand motions are a way of expressing and even working out our thoughts" (Goldin-Meadow & Beilock 2010, p. 664).

In this context, the wilding process is expanded through my co-participation with other performers. This in turn, folds back into the work itself, extending the exploration of the turbulent and affective qualities of the medium. These embodied acts of improvisation (Crickmay & Tufnell 1990) with the photographic object are seen as part of the wilding process to 'unfix the image'.

Wilding Response (Chapter 4): This chapter extends the idea of embodied performative action, attending to the 'space beyond' - considering the affective, potential collaborative and ongoing performativity of the research into the wider social and cultural sensorium. This methodology directly relates to the notion of 'performative research' that "sees the material outcomes of practice- as all-important representations of research findings in their own right" (Haseman 2006 p.103), as well as to 'the performative paradigm' defined by artist and lecturer Barbara Bolt (Bolt 2006).

The chapter describes the methodologies undertaken in the project, *Assembly* (2018), in which an invited, cross-disciplinary network of practitioners and researchers physically assembled an artwork. Through this haptic process, responses manifest in each individual's own respective practices were brought together as a live installation of objects, video and live performances. This was presented as both a public evening event and a performative symposium for a research-student audience.

Assembly (2018) was awarded funding by the Cohort Development Fund from Northumbria-Sunderland AHRC Centre for Doctoral Training in Art and Design. The research shows the scope of impact that creative methodologies in practice-based research can achieve, and re-evaluates ideas of materialism from the context of fine art to cross-disciplinary networks.

The methodology carried out in *Assembly* aims to counteract the undervaluation of the nuanced affective qualities of the material phenomenon of photography in critical photography discourse. This is addressed through the embodied act of 'doing' resulting in unexpected thoughts and bodily gestures. Through both the event and performative symposium, what is evidenced is a widening of audience response, as both diverse and overlapping situated perspectives on the research in the affective and discursive domains.

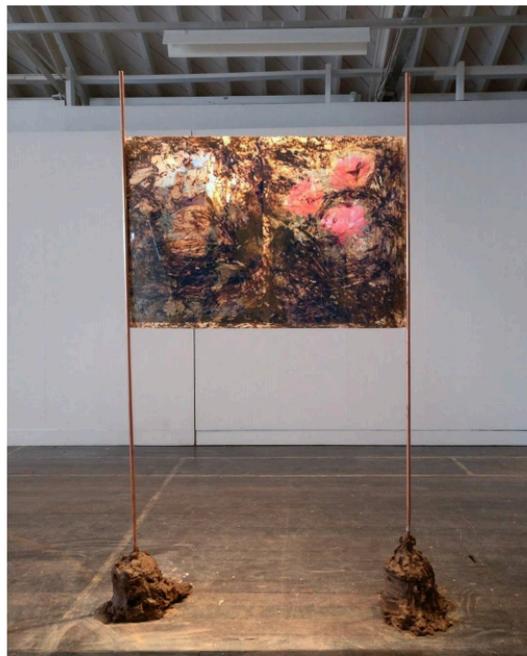
Conclusion: by looking at the chapters collectively, the conclusion reflects upon the results of this practice-based research carried out through the approach of wilding photographs which brought the photographic image together with sculptural material and performative gesture. The conclusion also explains how this practice-based research has challenged the narrow conception of photographic images as ubiquitous, immaterial representations and countered the dominant paradigm in photographic theory that overlooks the nuances of

photography's materiality. This includes reflection on how the research approached photography as a term "on the periphery of a field in which there are other, differently structured possibilities" (Baker 2005, p.136). Finally, the conclusion states how this exhibition-based practice, in its distinct, simultaneous engagement with the haptic, spatial and temporal dimension of the medium, contributes new knowledge regarding the turbulent and affective qualities of the material phenomenon of photography to the field of contemporary fine art.

Chapter 1: WILDING SURFACES

Artwork: *Letting Things Be Uncertain* (2017)

Mirror Gallery, South Hill Park, Bracknell



Alexandra Hughes

Letting things be uncertain

Saturday 6 May – Sun 19 June 2017

Mirror Gallery, South Hill Park

Preview: Saturday 6th May, 10:30 – 11:30

Figure 16: Exhibition Invitation, 2017 Designed by Cat Cooke

SURFACE POINT



Figure 17: *Letting Things Be Uncertain* - artist in installation, 2017 Author's Own

Drama bleeds onto different surfaces,
No separation
Of sunrise and sunset,
A red flower from Arizona,
Streetlight hitting the River Seine,
Parquet floor.

Jagged rips,
A fragile energy.
From the stem and the flower to the arms and the hand,
That's what I am trying to grapple with.

The purple rock bleeding into the wall's indigo hue,
A sense of vertigo,
That sense of movement,
It brings back precariousness,
A kind of blend.

Conscious of my own, your own, body and steps as a fluid action.
Walking through,
Undulate.
A haphazard manner,
Shimmers,
Passing images that disappear
Drip,
Thread,
Hold,
Hang,
Frame,
Penetrate,
Glow,
Change.

Petrified finger marks,
Dried,
Marking an encounter,
For a cracked moment.

Figure 18: Text piece describing– *Letting Things Be Uncertain*, 2017

Author's Own

The above text piece was written like a roving body and voice, describing the encounter of some of the components and qualities that constituted my solo exhibition, *Letting Things Be Uncertain*, South Hill Park,

Bracknell, UK (2017). The exhibition was an immersive installation made up of mixed-media constructions alongside video and 35mm projections. Placed inside a semi-dark gallery, the works were a combination of photographs on paper and transparency – perforated, cut, ripped and stuck with crude layers of other matter: clay, wire, tape, glue, metal, plastic and wood – as floor-based material composites and structures. The configuration of these structures shaped boundaries and pathways for an audience to enter, walk on and circulate within. Spotlights highlighted and permeated surfaces and images, including prints of flowers, human arms, hands and profiles, disparate landscapes, water, rock, hues of vivid pink and blue.



Figure 19: **VIDEO** - Excerpt of *Letting Things Be Uncertain*, 2017 Author's Own

Link: <https://vimeo.com/299271556>

As the text piece describes there is a sense of precariousness, haphazardness and vertigo of surfaces experienced through the body moving through the installation. These qualities are reflective of this research term and approach to wilding photographs, as “marked by turbulent agitation, going beyond normal or conventional bounds” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary 2018). This chapter begins the research at ‘the surface’, collapsing the division between image and material to reveal the turbulent and affective qualities of the material phenomenon of photography; thus, calling into question cultural conventions on the medium as immaterial representations.

This research undertakes an exploration on where the surface and image truly lie to see if unexpected depths and meanings can open up below and beyond. It considers the definition of surface as: “a two-dimensional locus point (such as the boundary of a three-dimensional region)” (Merriam Webster 2018), by simultaneously engaging with the photographic image and its haptic, spatial and temporal dimensions. Through the proceeding descriptions of my (the artist researcher) processes and subsequent encounter of the resulting work, the exploration not only interrogates the physical locus points of dimensions but explores the photographic object in relation – both ontologically and aesthetically – to other seemingly disparate material forms, as well as perceptually, through situated, embodied encounters.

Drawing attention to the photographic surface reveals an inherent

materiality of the medium which has often been overlooked in photographic theory. Contemporary theorist James Elkins reflects on the theoretical tendency to neglect to see the surface of the photograph as largely down to the persistent influence of Barthes' *Camera Lucida* (1980). As outlined in the thesis introduction, *Camera Lucida* has embedded a cultural approach to the photographic medium: as indexical images. In Elkins' open argument to Barthes, he states that Barthes ignores the actual photographic material and goes on to say that "once surfaces are forgotten, photographs are also forgotten" (Elkins, 2011, p.38). With this, Elkins proposes to "find another sense of photography" to bring attention to our "own acts of seeing" (Elkins 2011, p.9), by starting with describing the encounter of the surface in relation to the photographic image and uses the metaphor of black ice as an analogy:

Like black ice, the material surface of a photograph is often transparent to vision: my eye moves right through the thin shiny surface of the photographic paper, except where I see scratches or dust, or where the coating reflects my face... The black lake ice stills the water beneath it, and floats weightlessly on the surface of the water... Indeed, there is no distinction between the coldest, most frigid water just below the ice, and the softest boundary of the ice itself: the pane, and the world beyond the pane, fused (Elkins 2011, p.19).

Extending Elkins' use of the metaphor of ice and his perspective of spectator, this practice-based research, seen through my installation *Letting Things Be Uncertain* (2017) – developed through the process of wilding – makes the photographic surface apparent through immediate bodily and material engagement that is both reflective and self-reflexive.

Photography's New Materiality, written by academics Harriet Riches, Sandra Plummer and photographer and curator, Duncan Wooldridge, published in *Photoworks* (2011) is accompanied by an introduction to this essay, published on the website, *either/and*. In this introduction, Wooldridge poses the question: “why we are unable to perceive image and object simultaneously?” (Riches, Plummer, Wooldridge 2011, p.2). Plummer considers this by first reflecting on the problem as not just specific to the photographic medium, referring to art historian Gombrich who “asserts that it is impossible to see both the surface and the image of a picture” (Gombrich cited by Riches, Plummer, Wooldridge 2011). In bringing this back to the conventional approach to the photographic medium, Plummer remarks:

Photography has often been mistakenly constituted as merely image, as a purely visual medium...it would be good to get beyond this ‘either or’ and embrace the notion of the photograph as ‘either-and’; image and object (Riches, Plummer, Wooldridge 2011, p.35).



Figure 20: Gerhard Richter, *MV.9*, 2011 Source: www.gagosian.com

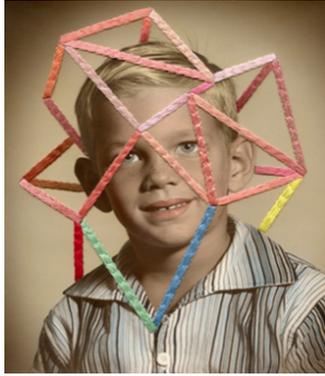


Figure 21: Julie Cockburn, *The Astronaut*, 2011 Source: www.yossimilo.com

Photography's New Materiality (2011) also challenges Barthes' position by stating that "focusing on the details of the photographic image requires a disregard for the medium... in the act of depiction the photograph as object is lost" (ibid p.30). It goes on to consider the photographic object in relation to other media by defining the notion of 'hybrid photographic works' that "posit photographic object-hood via the explicit merging of mediums demonstrate photography's potential to be metamorphosed with or into another medium" (ibid p.30). The essay includes examples of contemporary artists' practices, including Gerhard Richter, whose work of "over-painted photographs also obscure the representational content of the photograph through the application of another medium" (ibid p.30), and Julie Cockburn's series of works that show hand embroidery through the surfaces of found photographs (Riches, Plummer, Wooldridge 2011, p.30) (figure 20 & 21). I think these artists bring important attention to the surface of the photograph, presenting a hybridity that ruptures the cultural tendency to see mediums as seemingly disparate entities. However, the resulting works, presented on the plane of the wall, could be argued to

only require an optical contemplation from the audience. My research extends the exploration of a simultaneous encounter of the image and object and the notion of hybridity – as stated by Plummer, Riches and Duncan – through bodily, sensorial experiences within the 3-dimensional situation of an installation. In examining both processes and encounters of the photograph in relation to other material, the research looks particularly at elemental, primitive matter to explore a possible ‘shared encounter’.

Phenomenology and Surface

As mentioned in the thesis introduction, philosopher Hubert Damisch puts aside the use of a camera and materiality, adopting the conventional approach to the photograph to consider ontologies and phenomenology associated with the image. Damisch characterises the image as presenting the result of an objective process, seemingly without direct human intervention, stating:

Here is the source of the supposition of ‘reality’, which defines the photographic situation. A photograph is this paradoxical image, without thickness or substance (and, in a way, entirely unreal), that we read without disclaiming the notion that it retains something of the reality from which it was somehow released through its physiochemical make-up. This is the constitutive deception of the photographic image ... (an) ontological deceit (Damisch 1978, p.71).

Damisch says that in this ontological deceit, the photographic image is not seen as belonging to the natural world: “It is a product of human labour, a cultural object whose being – in phenomenological sense of the term –

cannot be dissociated precisely from its historical meaning” (Damisch 1978, p.70).

Through an exploration of surface and materiality, the wilding methodologies explicated in this chapter complicate the image, engaging with the photographic object to call into question established cultural approaches to the medium to re-examine accepted ontologies. In doing so, there is a reconsideration and exploration on the medium’s relationship to both the physical world and phenomenology.

This approach reflects the insights of Merleau-Ponty’s seminal 20th century work, *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), which explores the role of perception in how we engage and understand the world through the body, sensations, space and temporality. Merleau-Ponty re-orders perception to precede representation stating:

Objective thought is unaware of the subject of perception. It presents the world ready-made as a setting for every possible event and treats perception as one of these events. But it is in fact perception that comes first (Merleau-Ponty 1945, p.477).

As I outlined in the thesis introduction, Merleau-Ponty neglected to discuss the medium of photography in relation to phenomenology. This left Barthes to draw out a contested relationship between photography and the philosophical field of phenomenology, as identified by Andrew Fisher in his essay *Beyond Barthes: Rethinking the Phenomenology of*

Photography (2008). Fisher states that not only is *Camera Lucida* (1980) the only evidence of phenomenology in photographic theory, but it creates a misguided, basic and narrow relationship between these two fields. He highlights how Barthes holds at distance, materiality, reproducibility, historical, technical and cultural questions on photography. With this, Fisher states: "Barthes fictionalises the key concern of phenomenology, namely immediate experience...and no detailed consideration is given to the materiality of photography" (Fisher 2008, pp. 22-26). He argues that there needs to be an alternative consideration for phenomenology in photography, and highlights the distinctions between 'eidetic' and 'existential' phenomenology. 'Deriving from phenomenologist Edmund Husserl's concept of 'pure essence', "the desire of eidetic phenomenology is to bring universal essence to cognition...The eidetic reduction is supposed to strip away the contingent factors of experience" (ibid p.25). In contrast to this, 'existential phenomenology', emphasises embodied and situated experiences, defined by phenomenologist, Merleau-Ponty as: "putting essences back into existence" (ibid p.25). Fisher moves to correct this by re-describing general encounters of photography related to the field. However, Fisher does not identify any specific example of a practice in his text and only refers to one image he took of a piece of text.

My research contributes to knowledge in the underdeveloped enquiry between photograph and phenomenology by exploring the material phenomenon of photography through the physical embodied situated

body. It interrogates the photographic surface as a boundary of dimensions, image and matter. In doing so, it explores the photographic object in relation to ideas of activation, intimacy and how the physical experience of a structure, “is not to receive it into oneself passively: it is to live it, to take it up, assume it and discover its immanent significance” (Merleau-Ponty 1945, pg. 301).

The chapter starts by describing how the installation came to fruition, and then explores the potential relationship between elemental matter and the photograph, and subsequently the experiential destabilisation of surfaces.



Figure 22: *Letting Things Be Uncertain*, 2017 Author's Own

ESTABLISHING LETTING THINGS BE UNCERTAIN

Letting Things Be Uncertain came about through an invitation from exhibition coordinator and curator Cat Cooke, to hold a solo exhibition in the Mirror Gallery, at South Hill Park in May 2017. South Hill Park is an eighteenth-century stately home, converted to an arts centre in 1972 and set on large grounds. The gallery, with two opposing entry points, is a white space retaining romantic flourishes of classical design, including parquet flooring, a large mirror trimmed with relief work embedded into the wall and long windows with shutters, looking out to a garden maze.



Figure 23: Mirror Gallery, South Hill Park, Bracknell, 2017 Author's Own

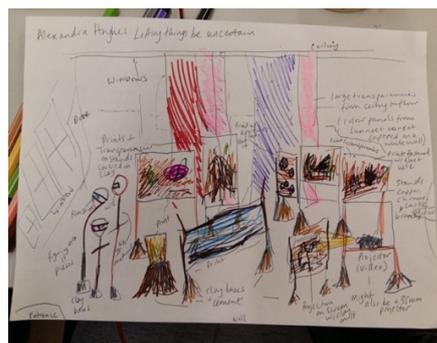


Figure 24: Hand drawn plans for *Letting Things Be Uncertain*, 2017 Author's Own

This gallery setting, with its own additional layers of history and narrative, gave a new and formal context to develop this research. This exhibition came midway in this doctoral study – a critical point to consolidate evolving studio processes, ‘test’ new work in a project space, and to reconfigure existing work, which had been seen within group exhibitions

as 'stand-alone' pieces. It also provoked a specific recurring memory that proved to be a formative experience in my approach to the installation.

From a preliminary visit to the gallery, the construction of *Letting Things Be Uncertain* was created by transporting the contents of my studio to inhabit the gallery space for a week whilst creating the installation. The installation was not fully preconceived but resulted from a combination of my ongoing intuitive, experimental material processes, tested in-situ with additional site-specific materials and in response to the ambient conditions of the gallery. Alongside this approach, I loosely mapped out potential reconfigured works from previous exhibitions, in particular my series, *Claytypes* (2017) which will be discussed in detail in this chapter.

During my experimental surface interrogations in the studio, I created a test work, developed in a project space at Baltic 39, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK, titled, *What Passes Between* (2016).⁹ This 'test', consisted of a video projection, clay, prints, tree branches, sand, rocks, sound and studio spotlights (figure 25).¹⁰ The following excerpt from my notes made during the process serves as a brief explanation of this work:

⁹ Baltic 39: "is a unique collaborative venture between Newcastle City Council, Arts Council England, BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art and Northumbria University, in which the Fine Art postgraduate student cohort reside" (Baltic 39 2019).

¹⁰ *What Passes Between* (2016) see: <http://www.alexandrahughes.co.uk/2016/what-passes-between/>

From a door just ajar, the loud penetrating sound of rushing water can be heard. To enter the space was first to cross a threshold of studio spotlights that set the boundary line of the site and sent pools of illumination into the space, that encompassed and penetrated the elements present...cut out apertures from the surface of photographs echoed and framed other elements in the installation. As the audience walk through the assemblages, they experience multiple viewpoints and the integration of the visitor's movement is seen through the body cutting lines of light and casting shadows as a live component (Hughes 2016).

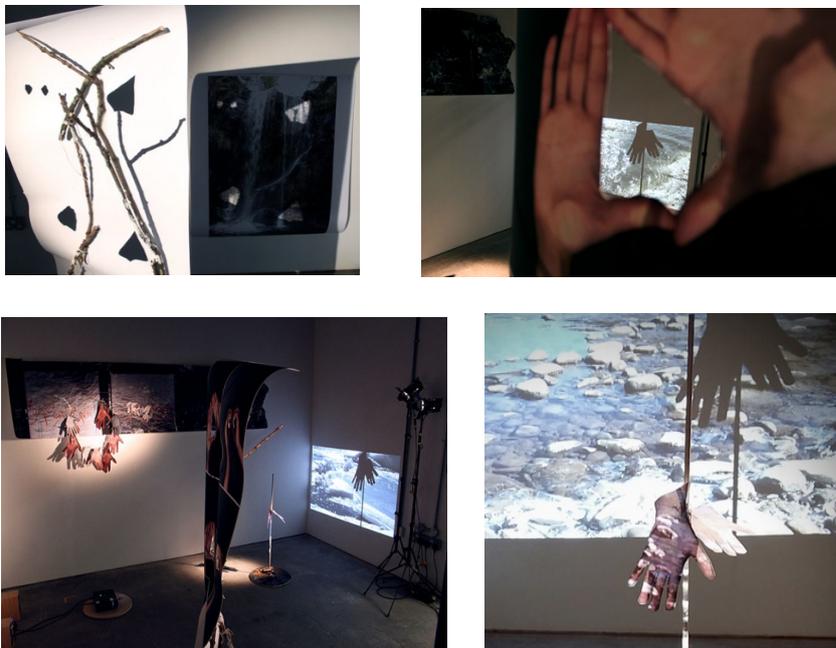


Figure 25: *What Passes Between*, 2016 Author's Own

Through this test, the work drew out a direct relationship to both the image, material and human body as in a co-affective, intimate correspondence. This related to a phenomenological observation made by Merleau-Ponty who stated: “There is an osmotic relation between the self

and the world, they interpenetrate and mutually define each other”
(Merleau-Ponty cited in Pallasmaa 2006, p.20).

My approach to the installation was also influenced by a memory of visiting the exhibition *Ansel Adams: Photography from the Mountains to the Sea*, a retrospective of works by 20th century photographer, Ansel Adams held at the National Maritime Museum, Royal Greenwich Museums London, UK (2012-2013). I describe this memory in the following excerpt:

On exiting the exhibition, I passed a wallpapered mountain scene, just as a shaft of light coming through the museum window fell onto the image, as if it were the light reflecting off of the glacier lake’s silvery surface. Suddenly there was a flux between the static representation and a live animation, placing me in an intimate and encompassed new space that was both and neither, the mountains or the museum, oscillating between states that disrupted my expectations and collapsed my sense of time, distance, location and dimension (Hughes 2013).



Figure 26: National Maritime Museum at Royal Greenwich Museums, *Ansel Adams: Photography from the Mountains to the Sea*, Exhibition Sign, 2012 Author's Own

From these experiences and processes, and with the contents of my studio brought to the Mirror Gallery, I started the installation. I began by

re-installing my works *Claytypes*, created for a previous group exhibition *Materiality* (2017). These are free-standing pieces, consisting of photographic prints, smeared in clay and cohered to poles in bases made from plaster, cement and clay.¹¹

Claytypes originate from processes that include smearing clay onto Duraclear and giclée prints,¹² in the studio and within the outside environment (figure 27). I include here two excerpts describing my processes working out on the Northumberland coastline and in my studio in Newcastle upon Tyne:

Standing in beachside rock pools, I sifted clay (sourced from the cliff side) and water across the print. The process reminded me of wet printing in the darkroom, tilting a print in a tray to wash the chemicals over its surface, to see an image develop. As I pulled out the print from the water, lumps of clay smear the surface, dirty water drips off the side and my hand holds it up to the sunlight, to reveal the image of the Canadian mountains, layered with clay and the Northumberland landscape behind.

My whole body is set into action, pushing lumps of clay along long rolls of prints occupying the expanse of my studio floor. The tacky emulsion of the photograph is resistance to the clay and with water and force, I move across its surface, scarring the photograph with sharp scratches of grit. From this process, I leave it to dry, retaining and evidencing on its surface the co-exchange between me, the photo and clay (Hughes 2017).

¹¹ [Claytypes](http://www.alexandrahughes.co.uk/2017/materiality-exhibition) first seen within group exhibition *Materiality*, Berwick Gymnasium Gallery, Berwick-upon-Tweed, (March 2017). Curated by Graham Patterson, the exhibition; “raised questions on the value of processes in our digital age and look at relationships between technology and the handmade” (Berwick Gymnasium Gallery, 2017). For documentation of *Claytypes* in *Materiality*, follow link: <http://www.alexandrahughes.co.uk/2017/materiality-exhibition>

¹² Duraclear print: “translucent-base film consisting of a translucent-base material, which allows light to diffuse through the image” (Metro Imaging 2018).

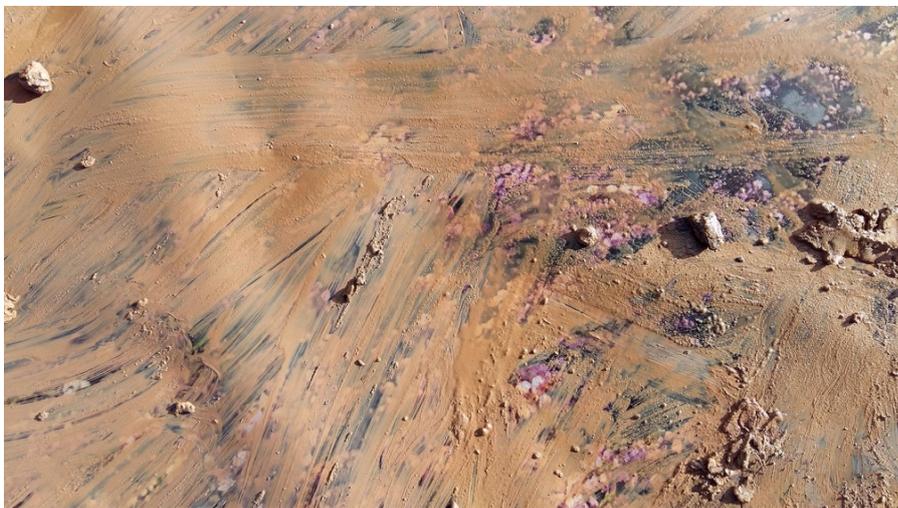


Figure 27: *Claytypes* - processes on the Northumberland coastline, 2017

Photo Credit: Graham Patterson

CONSTRUCTING THE INSTALLATION

Constructing the installation *Letting Things Be Uncertain*, started by placing lumps of clay and quick dry cement onto the gallery floor, on which to insert and set poles of various different materials (figure 28). The poles were predominantly copper pipes as well as wood dowelling, plastic and chrome poles, and tree branches. I then picked up the clay-covered prints, pulling them taught as I suspended and secured between two poles, using a combination of a hot glue gun, electrical tape and wire. This crude and swift process resulted in the completed works having a precarious quality; retaining a visceral energy and immediacy of my touch in the making. These visceral and intuitive processes will be further elaborated on in Chapter 3.

Though the works were made quickly and impulsively, there was a haptic and perceptual decision-making actively unfolding in this process. The materials seen in the works did not arrive from a random selection put together but through a process of shifting and placing materials, to see which combinations created an animated correspondence and intimate exchange. For example, the work includes a photograph of cacti within the desert; a terrain filled with earthly cracks and fissures. This image of the desert in turn corresponds to the dried traces of my fingers, seen as long streaks in clay that begin to mimic the cactus itself as well as suggest the motion and movement of sand and wind. The structure includes copper

poles that gleam with a warmth and colour that furthers the association with the region seen in the image (figure 29).



Figure 28: *Letting Things Be Uncertain*: installation in progress, Mirror Gallery, South Hill Park, 2017 Author's Own



Figure 29: *Claytypes* installed within *Letting Things Be Uncertain*, 2017 Author's Own

Through my research processes, I found contemporary artist Tavi Meraud's exploration on ideas of intimacy and the phenomena of iridescence resonated. In it Meraud says:

Intimacy organises our experience of space and especially surfaces... Iridescence begins as it were, at the surface. Iridescence is a visual phenomenon...it seems to exist only insofar as it is seen...To witness iridescence is to encounter a phenomenon where the axis of reality is perhaps no longer the mundanely given but rather one that is shifted towards a heterotopic convergence of images with different degrees of reality (Meraud 2015).

Meraud also considers the contested term, 'Denkigur' (derived from German): "Iridescence, as Denkigur, allows us to constellate a conception of the surface precisely not as boundary but as a scintillating site of intractable multiplicities" (Meraud 2015).

This phenomenon of iridescence could be applied to describe the encounter of combined material qualities in the installation. For example, the construction of *Letting Things Be Uncertain* utilised aforementioned studio processes, such as threading copper wire through the surface of a print of the sea. This method engendered a relationship between the ambient light and colour reflections from the wire, and corresponding visual elements in within the printed image. Furthermore, the physical matter of both wire and paper print shared an ability to oscillate and form a wave-like shape (figure 30). I further explored reflective surfaces, images and matter in an animated and intimate relationship to the body, through the placement of a 35mm projected image onto a copper plate. This work was a development from previous work *Passage* (2014).¹³

¹³ For further details on work *Passage* (2014) see link: <http://www.alexandrahughes.co.uk/work/passage/>



Figure 30: *Letting Things Be Uncertain*- detail of wire and photograph, 2017
Author's Own

During the installation, I tested hanging long transparencies from the ceiling to the floor of the gallery (taken from my previous series, *White Wall*, 2009-2012), in vivid pink and blue, denoting the colours sunrise and sunset on a white wall.¹⁴ However, it became apparent this did not correspond to the floor-based structures nor to the situated human, anticipated as an active component within the installation. Instead, the transparencies became part of a layered floor-based work, made from the same materials as the freestanding work, which were placed on top -

¹⁴ The large transparencies are enlarged slides from my series, [White Wall \(2009-2012\)](http://www.alexandrahughes.co.uk/photography/white-wall/); a 35mm slide projection series. *White Wall* is an archive of sets of slides as documentation of changing light and colour conditions across white walls in various locations across the period of a day. See link: <http://www.alexandrahughes.co.uk/photography/white-wall/>

resulting in a continuity and union of surfaces to be walked on by the embodied audience.

Approached as an experiment, I installed two further transparencies in the grounds of South Hill Park; suspending the work from a long tree branch, that echoed the shape and length of the tree (figure 31). This outdoor work, in its proximity and relationship to the indoor gallery installation, presented a possible 'expanded frame' and raised further ideas on the construction and perception of environments, which are elaborated upon in Chapter 2.

Through describing the details of my embodied processes and experiences that interrogate the surface, the convergence and emergent multiple phenomena of pictorial representation, *and* the physicality inherent to the photograph begin to reveal themselves. This exploration will continue to unfold throughout this chapter, by describing my embodied encounter with the completed installation. This exploration shows the photographic object in a relationship with the human encounter and other matter, in order to think more deeply about ontology, hybridity, intimacy and activation in relation to the 'surface'.



Figure 31: *Letting Things Be Uncertain* - outdoor work, 2017 Author's Own

EARTHBOUND



Figure 32: *Letting Things Be Uncertain*, 2017 Author's Own

In the encounter with the resulting artwork, *Letting Things Be Uncertain*, I experience a correspondence of surfaces within the structures and configuration of the work. The encounter with the *Claytactypes* in the installation, includes (near the gallery windows) hanging from a thin wooden frame, a long transparency with a printed image of a bush of heather partly revealed under clay that covers its surface (figure 36). From one side of this structure, the eye's attention is on the surface of the print where the thick clay has been applied. From the other side, where no clay is added, a glossy surface is seen, flattened, as an illuminated image.



Figure 33: *Letting Things Be Uncertain*, dual aspect within installation, 2017

Author's Own

Other works show the images of mountains and petrified wood, each with textures and formations that relate to the clay itself, smeared across its surface. Through these undulating surfaces of matter there is evidence of my human touch, leaving rough and rocky textures that appear to simulate the physicality of the landscape seen in the photographs.



Figure 34: *Letting Things Be Uncertain* - detail, 2017 Author's Own

A cut-out section in a print becomes a window, expanding the surface layers spatially by corresponding to the space beyond (figure 34). A silhouette, just distinguishable under a thick application of clay, is illuminated through the penetrative video projection hitting the other side of its surface. The rippling light from the projection, gives the sense of a form, both photographic and human, emerging or dissolving, in and out of the elemental matter of water and clay (figure 35).



Figure 35: **VIDEO** - *Letting Things Be Uncertain* – detail, 2017 Author's Own

Link: <https://vimeo.com/299271016>



Figure 36: *Letting Things Be Uncertain* - detail, 2017 Author's Own

In the encounter with the various components that constitute the works, there is a disruption in the division of matter and image, bringing attention to appearance and depth of material and the traces of human touch. The

combination of clay and photograph share a certain correspondence and commonality of appearance, melding into one textural sensory object, in which the photograph appears to have been born from earthly geological processes. This relates to the notion of hybridity: “to be metamorphosed with or into another medium” (Riches, Plummer, Wooldridge 2011, p.30).

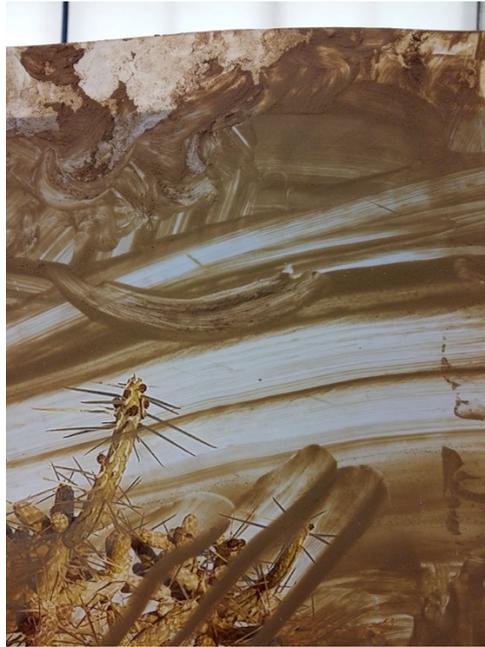


Figure 37: *Claytactype* – detail, 2017 Author's Own

This notion of ‘metamorphosis’ is further reinforced and reflected through my ‘hybrid’ title, *Claytactypes*, which derives from the name of a previous artwork, *Clayotos* (2014-2015) - a collection of 3-D forms made from clay and positive photographic film frames.¹⁵ The titles stem from an interest in the naming of geological specimens through the fusion of matter and appearance. For example: “Mudstone; a dark sedimentary rock formed from consolidated mud” and “Lace Agate; that exhibits a lace-like pattern,

¹⁵ *Clayoto* series (2014-2015) made from clay and 120 film frames. For further details on work see link: <http://www.alexandrahughes.co.uk/2015/clayoto/>

“typically banded in appearance” (Oxford English Dictionary 2004). Giving the titles a hybrid name not only makes direct reference to the combined matter but also raises questions regarding the representations of meaning through naming material things.

THE CONTEXT LYING BENEATH

Through encountering the installation *Letting Things Be Uncertain*, questions are raised regarding origins, ontology and hybridity, in particular the relationship between the photograph and elemental matter. We may consider the elemental as the fundamental, inherent and often primitive quality of matter in seeming contrast to a photograph as produced through refined technological and chemical processes.

Artist Jeff Wall, in describing his work *Milk* (1984) (figure 38), reflects on the process of photography in relation to elemental matter by thinking of the medium to have two parts: wet and dry. Water, being an essential and controlled part of photography, represents an archaism in photography.

Wall explains how water and liquid chemicals:

Embodies a memory-trace of very ancient production-processes...in this sense, the echo of water in photography evokes its prehistory...a speculative image in which the apparatus itself can be thought of as not yet having emerged from the mineral and vegetable worlds (Wall 1989, p.109).

Wall goes on to describe the 'dry' part of photography – the optics and mechanics of the camera and lens – describing these as the

“technological intelligence” of image making (ibid). He reflects on recent digital technology further displacing water from photography, and that the symbolic meaning of natural forms made visible shows ‘dry intelligence’ in historical self-reflection - “a memory of the path it has traversed to its present and future separation from the fragile phenomena it reproduces so generously” (Wall 1989, p.110).



Figure 38: Jeff Wall, *Milk*, 1984 Source: www.moma.org

Wall’s response can be related to the reflections of art historian Gretchen Garner who states: “anchored as it is in the material world and mechanical process, every photograph it would seem to have metaphoric feet of clay” (Garner 1988, p.220).

Wall’s explorations also relate to my own observations on how the increasing ubiquity of digital images leads the medium to be perceived as seemingly further untethered to material, matter and human interaction. However, Wall makes his point as a purely conceptual response to the relationship with photography and elemental matter. My research provides an alternative tangible approach that moves past Wall’s conceptual

approach, and differs from the metaphorical feet of clay (Garner), through a practice that is physical and tactile - finding meanings and relationships at the point of touch of surface.



Figure 39: Processes with print, clay and water on the Northumberland coastline, 2017
Author's Own

Contemporary artist Lisa Oppenheim adopts a more physical process of exploration to the surface boundaries between elemental matter and the photographic object. An example of this is Oppenheim's artwork, *Landscape Portraits* (2015-2016); a series of photograms made by placing paper-thin veneers of wood directly on the photographic paper:

Sassafras, Purple Heart, and River Red are but a few of the species of trees Oppenheim employs: the light of the enlarger penetrates the veneers, transferring their natural patterns onto silver gelatin paper, drawing parallel between her darkroom process and photosynthesis. This surface appropriation turns material into image as well as reflects on how photography was a way to study and subjugate the depicted subject (The Approach Galley 2016).

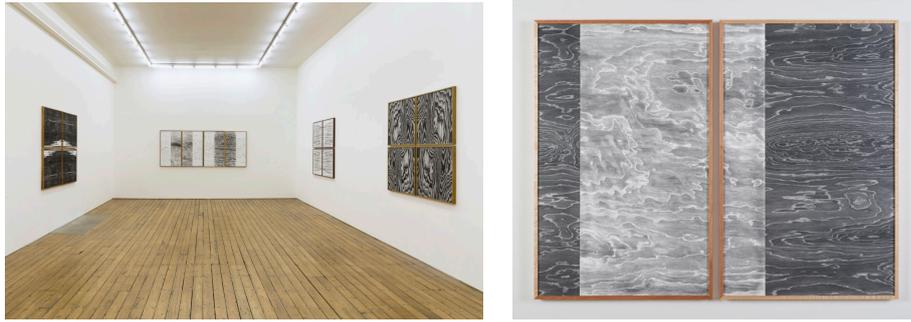


Figure 40: Lisa Oppenheim, *Analytic Engine*, 2016 Source: www.theapproach.co.uk

Similarly, camera-less investigations are employed by recent, practice-based PhD graduate, Agnieszka Kozłowska (Northumbria University 2014) whose doctoral project, *Paper as a Material Signifier in Photographic Indexicality*, deconstructed the photograph to find a way of “representing place as elemental” (Kozłowska 2014, p.2) and “proposes a way of thinking about photographs as traces of physical contact” (Kozłowska 2014, p.14). Kozłowska dispenses with ready-made photographic material and technologies. Instead producing handmade photographs from an old paper making process using grass, as well as creating a camera from rocks taken directly from the landscapes she is working in.



Figure 41: Agnieszka Kozłowska, *Beyond the Visual*, 2011-2014

Source: www.agnieszkakozlowska.com

Kozłowska and Oppenheim provide examples of practices that blur the line between the image and its substrate, raising pertinent questions on the distinction of materials and mediums. However, both of their approaches to obliterate the image making stage in the camera - in favour of an image making that occurs through the direct material surface of the photograph - differs to my own practice. In wilding photographs, my research shows a distinct approach by simultaneously engaging with photography's haptic, spatial and temporal dimensions, revealing a turbulence in discrepancy of surface and image, from which emerges a flux between representation and material that sits 'in-between' states. Here, attention is brought to the photograph as matter and image produced and bound through the physical world.



Figure 42: *Letting Things Be Uncertain* - detail, 2017 Author's Own

In *Water and Dreams an Essay on the Imagination of Matter* (1942), philosopher Gaston Bachelard looks between image and matter to identify a 'Material Imagination', as cultivated through the direct tactile encounter of "images of matter that stems from matter itself" (Bachelard 1942, p.2). He writes in response to "a neglect of material cause in aesthetic philosophy" (Bachelard 1942, p.1), and also reflects on how the union of water and earth produces an 'admixture' (la pate, or as I translate, clay) as one of the fundamental schemes of materialism that would suggest a union of seemingly disparate material ontologies:

The admixture is the basis of a truly intimate materialism in which shape is supplanted, effaced, dissolved. It presents the problem of materialism in its elementary form...the union of water and earth provides an elemental experience with matter...in order to create some kind of clay is always needed, some plastic matter, some ambiguous matter in which earth and water can come together and unite (Bachelard 1942, p.108).

My research aims to extend Bachelard's proposition by seeking a sensuous world underlying the image. This is explored in both tactile processes and encounters with the photograph to look at its relationship to other material, in particular elemental, primitive matter, reopening a space for the imagination and for new meanings. Bachelard goes on to describe his exploration as:

Searching behind the obvious images for the hidden ones, seeking the very roots of image-making power. In the depths of matter there grows an obscure vegetation; black flowers bloom in matters darkness (Bachelard 1942, p.2).

Bachelard's 'Material Imagination' is seeing a recent revival in the contemporary field of New Materialism, including in the essay *On Geography and Materiality* (Anderson & Wylie 2006), from which I partly co-opt the research approach to 'turbulence': "as unfixed and taking meaning in relation to the properties and capacities of any element or state" (Anderson & Wylie 2006, p.325)

Anderson and Wylie's studies sit within wider explorations, challenging conventional epistemological systems used to define our material world. These include explorations by academic Jen Schroter, who explores the terms 'intermedium' and 'intermedial' as "a fusion of different media" (Schroter 2011, p. 2). These terms extend and interrogate the concept of 'gesamtkunstwerk', as "based on formal structures not specific to one medium but found in different media" (ibid).¹⁶ Through this, Schroter asks: "does a sort of primeval intermediality exist that functions conversely as a pre-requisite for the possibilities of such unities?" (ibid). In considering an encounter with an artwork by Fluxus artist Dick Higgins', Schroter co-opts the former's definition of intermedial art as: "the function of the breaking up of habitualised forms of perception" (Schroter 2011, p.6).

¹⁶ A concept first used by philosopher Trahndroff (1827) and applied by composer Wagner (1849) to describe his ideals in his compositions (Wikipedia 2019).



Figure 43: *Letting Things Be Uncertain*, 2017 Author's Own

Through the wilding approach encapsulated in the surface interrogation inherent in *Letting Things Be Uncertain*, my research shows the encounter with the photographic image, material and matter as merged into one textural sensory object. This work therefore suggests an inherent shared ontology between the photographic object and other matter, calling into question the cultural the cultural tendency to separate the photographic medium into the purely representational realm. As such, the research relates back to Plummer's suggested approach of the photograph of "either/and" (Riches, Plummer, Wooldridge 2011, p.35).

INTIMATE CONTACT

As I walk through the installation, I look upon a large print of water, with its surface perforated with copper wire thread through it. The print, both visibly contorted and showing the material's quality to bend, undulates across copper pipes (figure 44). The light in the installation bounces off the metallic surfaces and, in correspondence with my movement, the reflective light assimilates the movement of light on water.



Figure 44: *Letting Things Be Uncertain*, 2017 Author's Own

In amongst the installation, a print shows fingers lightly touching the surface of a white wall, casting a shadow that seems to grow out of the clay. In return, the dried clay, in a dribbling motion, appears to leak from the prints' emulsion on its surface. In another print, the image of outstretched limbs becomes dynamic in the overlay of dried sweeping motions of clay. In this encounter, the sight of the hand engenders a sense of touch, causing a perceptual throw between senses.



Figure 45: *Letting Things Be Uncertain* - details, 2017 Author's Own

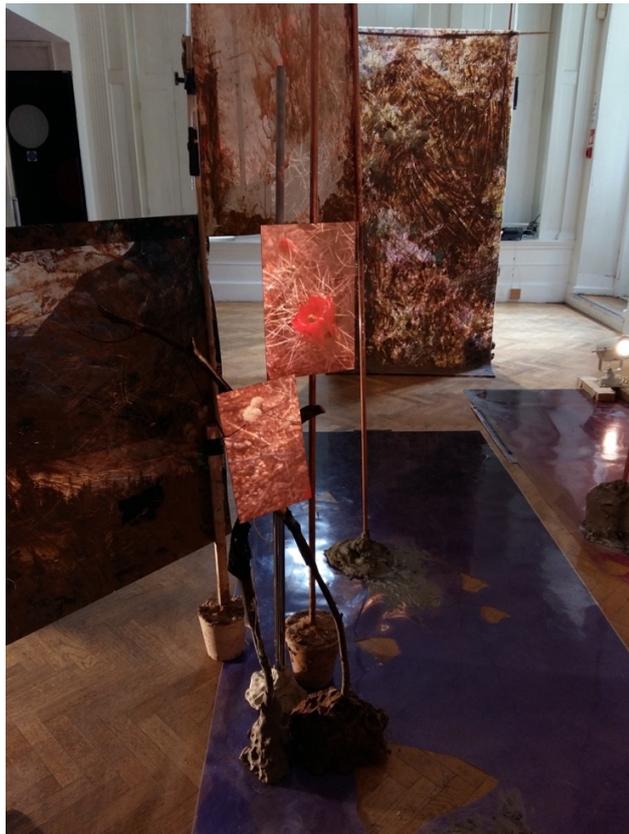


Figure 46: *Letting Things Be Uncertain* - 35mm slide projection on copper plate, 2017
Author's Own

Turning around, I look upon a 35mm slide projector that sits on the floor on top of a lump of clay. My gaze moves towards the projected image of a vibrant red cactus flower on a copper plate held on poles. As I move towards this detail there is a response in the reflected image; appearing and disappearing in accordance with where my body stands - experiencing again an activation and conflation of surface and image, reality and representation. I then move, catching both my own reflection and the other side of the floor-based pieces, through the surface of the large wall-based gallery mirror. This reflection reveals myself as a temporal, perceptual and intimate component and image within the multiplicities of the installation. This experience and encounter repositions the body in Merleau-Ponty's terms: "as the centre of the experiential world" (Merleau-Ponty cited in Pallasmaa 1996, p.43).

As I move further through the installation, bodily attention is drawn to the surfaces underfoot by walking on photograph prints installed on the floor. From the sheen and sensation of hard parquet flooring, there is a transition of surfaces to the long transparencies in vivid pink and blue, denoting sunrise and sunset (a print scaled to the height of the gallery), running down the length of the floor. The transparencies are layered with other prints, blended with cement, clay and held down with tape. Walking across the floor, there is the sensation of an uneven, rocky ground, where the cement and clay cracks and crumbles underfoot, distributing dust

across the photographic surfaces and gallery floor. Here, vision and tactility are brought together simultaneously.

Further multiplicities of surfaces are encountered outside at South Hill Park, where the two large-scale transparencies were installed in the grounds. Here, the light and colour embedded within the transparency film is seen to change in accordance to the ambient light and the movement of leaves, by the weather.

THE SURROUNDING CONTEXT

The bodily encounters of *Letting Things Be Uncertain* described above relate to definitions of Minimalist installation art that began in the 1960s (as referred to in this thesis introduction). Here Rosalind Krauss' describes: "a displacement (that) returned to its body, re-grounded in a kind of richer, denser subsoil of experience than the paper-thin layer of autonomous visuality" (Krauss cited in von Hantelmann 2014, p.4). These developments instigated a consider of how art produces experience and meaning in relation to space and body, which went on to be identified as an 'experiential turn' by art historian Dorothea von Hantelmann, stating the experiential potential of installations relates to the "here-and-now" (von Hantelmann 2014, p.1).

von Hantelmann's proposal reflects my approach of wilding photographs - as a methodology of action, situated in physical, material-led processes

that are live, active and disruptive, producing altogether new situations to examine the material phenomenon of photography.

The orientation of photographic images on the floor alongside matter, including lumpy cement forms, visually and physically binds that matter with the image of veiny rocks and water. This blend destabilises perception and surface, almost inducing a sense of vertigo, through a perceptual confusion of dimension, scale, the 'here' and 'there', matter and senses.

Here, the wilding of surfaces experienced in the installation shows the boundary of dimensions, image and matter in a perceptual and intimate co-affecting exchange with a situated body. The phenomenological sensation experienced in the installation *Letting Things Be Uncertain*, reflects von Hantelmann's notion of 'tactile-kinaesthetic', as the involvement of the viewer in an artwork acts to challenge, "a reflexive spectator-object relationship...in favour of a felt and lived experience of corporeality, a haptic or tactile phenomenology of the body as it encounters the physical world" (von Hantelmann 2014, p.6).

This exchange disrupts perceived surfaces, engendering a collapse in the line between representation and experience which results in an ambiguous state. The confused experiences of surfaces described in *Letting Things Be Uncertain*, intersect with aspects of the contemporary sublime, which disrupt the "stable co-ordinates of time and space and the

understanding of representations as producing our life-world” (Morley 2010, p.2).

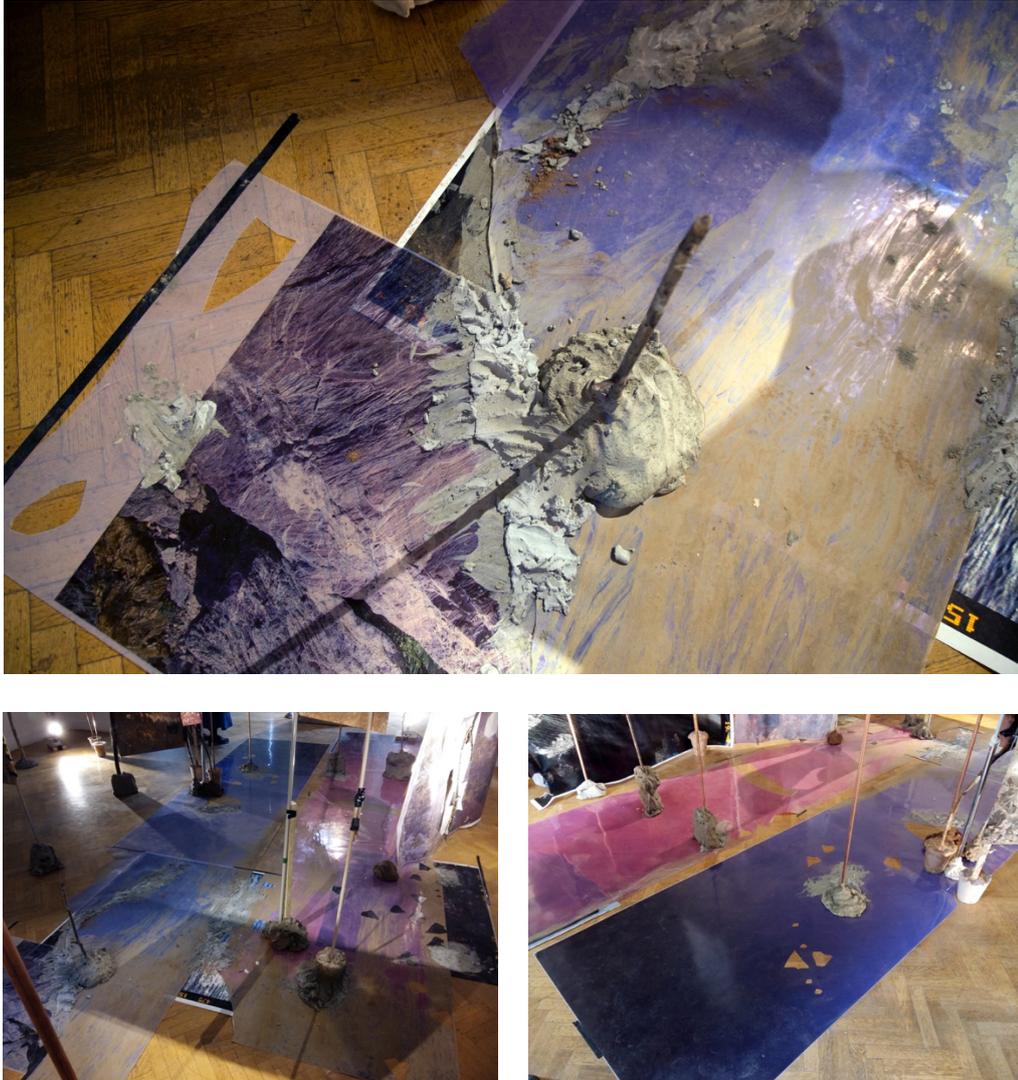


Figure 47: *Letting Things Be Uncertain* - floor details, 2017 Author's Own

In my simultaneous engagement with the temporal, haptic and spatial dimensions to the medium, I also reflect upon philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard's exploration of the sublime and his definition of the 'event', which (in reference to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological studies), "it involves the body as a spatio-temporal presence in the world. The visibility of

things is only possible because we ourselves are visible. The world is of the same flesh as my body” (Lyotard cited in Thompson 1999 p 26-27). Through this ‘sublime’ metaphorical connection between the world and body, Lyotard explores “the highly erotised relationship between the object of sight and the subject who sees” (ibid). This shift, Lyotard describes as the ‘event’: “an absolute singularity; something without equivalence” (ibid).

Ambiguity is also suggested in the title, *Letting Things Be Uncertain*, suggesting the importance of attention to the faculties of cognition and imagination, which in turn challenges the photographic medium as immaterial representation.



Figure 48: *Letting Things Be Uncertain* – detail of outdoor work, 2017 Author's Own

TO END CHAPTER 1

This first chapter opened the research with an interrogation of surface, revealing an inherent materiality that stands in relation to other matter and the perceiving body. The distinct practice-based approach to wilding photographs attempts to go “beyond the structures we inhabit and that inhabit us” (Halberstam 2013, p.7) by simultaneously engaging with photography’s haptic, spatial and temporal dimensions.



Figure 49: *Letting Things Be Uncertain*, 2017 Author's Own

The research aims to relate to, and extend contemporary theoretical attempts to challenge a cultural tendency to think of the photograph simply as representational image, by bringing attention to the surface (Elkins 2012), and to rethink the relationship between photography and phenomenology (Fisher 2008). My research evidences this by making the photographic surface apparent through a bodily and material engagement that is both reflective and self-reflexive - opening up notions of activation and intimacy both ontologically and perceptually.

By bringing image and object together, the research extends the exploration of a simultaneous encounter with the image and object, in relation to Plummer's proposed approach to the medium as: "either and" (Riches, Plummer, Wooldridge 2011, p.35). It also explores the notion of hybridity: "to be metamorphosed with or into another medium" (Riches, Plummer, Wooldridge 2011, p.30).

Through processes of, and encounters with the photograph in a relationship to other material - in particular elemental, primitive matter - the work reveals the photographic object to be instable and lively, with a shifting, turbulent and affective relationship to matter and body. This has the effect of both confusing and raising questions on a potential shared ontology of material matter and the continual mutability of the medium. As Baker proposes in *The Expanded Field of Photography*:

Photography is no longer the privileged middle term between two things it isn't. Rather one term on the periphery of a field in which there are other, differently structured possibilities (Baker 2005, p.136).

Through the construction of an immersive installation for embodied encounters, my research reveals different depths to the apparent photographic surface, disrupting the division of matter and image, collapsing time, location, dimension and experience. This opens up possibilities of the artwork as an event of temporal and physical negotiations between reality and appearance, perception and the senses. With this, the research reveals an important ambiguous condition that

expands the transformative, nuanced affective qualities of the material phenomenon of photography. The medium is consequently open to multiplicities of meanings, ultimately undermining the identity of the photograph as simply immaterial representation. By testifying both to the medium's physical presence and action as pictorial representation, the research moves the photographic object towards a sensuous world full of ontological connections, earthly origins and new subjectivities.

Chapter 2: WILDING THE FRAME

Artworks:

figuring it (2016)

Roaming Room, London

Phole (2015-2018)

Liquid Land, Ruskin Gallery, Cambridge

Filmy (2016)

Polyspace, New Bridge Projects, Newcastle upon Tyne

FRAMING THE FRAME

From the intimate, haptic reflection of the 'surface' in Chapter 1, the thesis moves to a consideration of the 'frame' in relation to the photographic object.

To define how I am approaching the idea of frame, I open with a description of an artwork made prior to the PhD, but which has provided part of the foundation to this doctoral research and in particular, the focus of this chapter.



Figure 50: *Assemble*, 2014 Author's Own

To begin to think about the 'frame' in photography, we must acknowledge its format as either a square or rectangle. Seen first through the viewfinder, which encloses a subject in front of the lens, the format is then reflected in the exposure as either a film frame or on the camera's digital screen. Photographs are subsequently re-viewed through a larger computer monitor or as a printed, scaled up object. The photograph is then encountered and the significance of what sits between the edges of the framed is considered.

Assemble (2014) is a floor-based work consisting of a Duraclear print squeezed upright by a large mound of clay. Looking at *Assemble*, the film frame demarcates one space from another, holding an image, referring to a location elsewhere. The image in question can be described as a generic photographic representation of The Canadian Wilderness, ubiquitously recycled and understood through Western culture.

The frame's capacity to form representations and meanings is described by Rosalind Krauss:

The frame announces that between the part of reality that was cut away and this part there is a difference; and that this segment which the frame frames is an example of nature-as-representation, nature-as-sign. As it signals that experience of reality that camera frame also controls it, configures it (Krauss 1981, p.31).

This idea of the frame as boundary relates to the previous observations regarding the photographs of Francesca Woodman. One might add the reflections of Isabella Pedicini:

This was the real space in which she set her figures, bounded by a square, the limits of the photographic negative...The frame's edge matters so much more to a photographer than a painter because it represents the bounds of the world you have captured...in which you hold everything captive within view and within that boundary...locking up a little nugget of time and space (Pedicini 2012, pp.11-12).

In contrast to Pedicini's locked up "nugget of time and space" (ibid), *Assemble* shows the frame as less secure. The frame's boundary line not only shows the 'there', but in its immediate physical presence, which plays with light and sculptural material, the work opens up a space for an embodied encounter. The theatre light that shines behind the print, both referencing the sun within the image as well as projecting the image across the floor, reawakens the photograph into the present. The undulating surface of clay evidences my touch and simulates the physicality of the mountains seen in the printed image, echoing the extraordinary translation of scale that sits at the heart of photography's ontology. In this way, the enlarged film frame acts as both a boundary and an opening. This encounter activates the viewer's imagination, collapsing the boundaries of place and time, and creating an oscillation between objective representation and subjective reality. The visual and tactile experiences serve to simultaneously construct and destabilise worlds.



Figure 51: *Assemble*, installation and detail, 2014 Author's Own

In *Assemble*, the frame appears as a three-dimensional structure that points towards the phenomenological quality of architectural frameworks, as described by the philosopher Martin Heidegger in his reflections upon Greek temples:

Standing there, the building holds its place against the storm raging above it and so first makes the storm visible in its violence. The gleam and luster of the stone, though apparently there only by the grace of the Sun, in fact first brings forth the light of day, the breadth of the sky, the darkness of night. The temple's firm towering makes visible the invisible space of the air... the temple first gives to things their look, and to men their outlook on themselves (Hyland & Manoussakis 2006, p.104).

Through the process of wilding photographs, which returns the photograph to a physical condition and mutable image with a shifting relationship with matter, the work challenges the frame as a seemingly fixed structure and boundary. By placing the photographic object in a turbulent state that “mixes or associates the one and the multiple”, (Serres cited in Anderson & Wylie, 2006, p.321) the research seeks to show that

the frame can be fluid and open - presenting itself not as an explicit exchange between two sites with a direct reference to 'somewhere else' but as an investigation into the multiplicity and production of altogether new situations, and finding its meaning and borders through an embodied subject. By considering the correspondence between body, space, material and the photographic object, the research looks to collapse a sense of distance, moving to a sensory, lively experiential encounter. The research thus seeks to reveal potential affective qualities of the frame that shape situated perceptions and meanings of environments.

More specifically, my research acknowledges the etymology of the term 'wilding' as associated with the words 'wild' and 'wilderness'. In this chapter, I include historical reflection on how the photograph has framed and formed representations, as well as embedded Western cultural notions of types of environments. In particular, 'landscape' and 'wilderness' and associated ideas of 'nature'. Through this reflection, the research considers the term 'wilderness', as first used to name physical environments, to have evolved from being associated with a wild and natural landscape to define ambiguous, spatial, emotional and ambient situations. The research also looks at the term 'fluidity', seen within the wider cultural research of New Materialism. In relation to this, it looks at contemporary notions of the sublime (partly influenced by the rise of digital technology), which re-think, and challenge conventional epistemological systems used to define and frame our material world.

These terms, 'situation', 'experience' and 'wilderness', shift the trajectory from 'encounter' to 'affect', leaving the research to focus on the mediation between these points through photography. To explore this, I proceed through artworks I created throughout this doctoral project that are the result of moving between the phenomenological encounter of place to the material encounter of the photograph - through constructing mixed media installations as situations, open to an audience response. Here, the human scale and the photographic object are brought together with notions of fluidity, highlighting the slippery and provocative notions of nature, material, technology and human in our digital age.

SETTING THE SITUATION

'Landscape', is identified as "one of the principal types or genres of subject in Western art" (Tate 2018) and as "a picture representing an area of countryside" (Oxford English Dictionary 2004). This definition suggests landscape as determined from a single viewpoint as elaborated on by historian of photography, Robin Kelsey:

This singular of *landscape* suggests a special desire to treat the terrestrial environment as if it were a picture, something apart from us that we own and view...It has been a means of suppressing, among other things, our animality (Kelsey 2007, p.205).

During the nineteenth century, aesthetic discourse developed through the space of the exhibition in which "the transformation of landscape after 1860 into a flattened and compressed experience of space spreading laterally across the surface was extremely rapid" (Krauss 1982 p. 312). Krauss reflects more specifically on a tension in the reception of landscape photography in the context of fine art during the nineteenth century:

Central to this account is that type of photography, most of it topographical in character, originally undertaken for the purposes of exploration, expedition, and survey. Matted, framed, labelled, these images now enter the space of historical reconstruction through the museum... that insists on their representational character within the discursive space of art, in an attempt to 'legitimate' them (Krauss 1982, p.313).

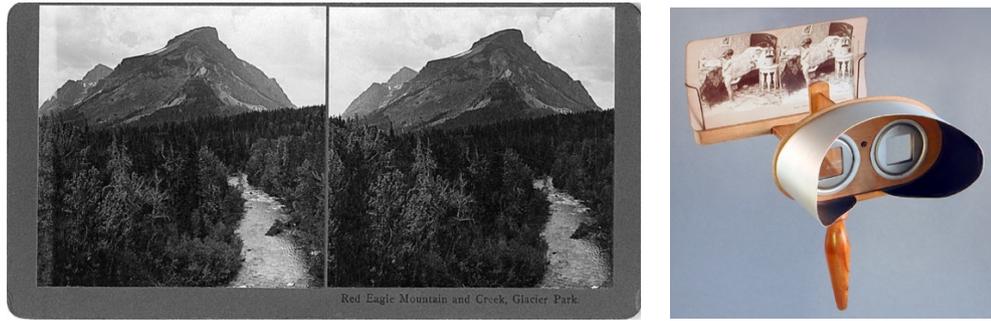


Figure 52: Thomas B.Magee, *Red Eagle Mountain and Creek, Glacier Park. N.A. Forsyth (Butte, Mont.)*, 1900-1908 Source: <http://peel.library.ualberta.ca>.

Figure 53: *Holmes Stereoscope*, 1861 Source: www.commonswiki.org

At this time, the usual title that photographers gave to their works was ‘view’, which was partly influenced by terminology associated with the popular nineteenth century stereoscope.¹⁷ Reflective of the phenomenological aspect of the stereoscope, Krauss observes how:

Structuring the image around a vertical marker in fore-or middle ground that works to centre the space, forming a representation within the visual field of the eye’s convergence at a vanishing point... Indeed, it is a ‘point of interest’, a natural wonder, a singular phenomenon that comes to occupy this centring of attention (Krauss 1982, p.314).

Though a description of the stereoscopic image, this use of the frame to form a centre point and divisions of ‘fore and middle grounds’, determining scale and distance, became a wider, more common approach to composing formal landscape photographs.

¹⁷ Stereoscope: “device by which two photographs of the same object taken at slightly different angles are viewed together, creating an impression of depth and solidity” (Oxford English Dictionary 2004).

During this time of expedition, photography came to be relied on by an “elite British society” to represent North America’s ‘Wilderness’ (Schwartz 2007, p.974). From this growing dissemination of photographs, other sorts of images of ‘wilderness’ started to be constructed in Victorian photographic studios (figure 54), where male sitters would dress up, to be photographed becoming, “part of a larger performance of identity through which virile attributes of the British imperial male were expressed and moral worth was acquired through ‘contact with nature’” (Schwartz 2007, p.977).



Figure 54: William Notman. *Caribou Hunting, The Chance Shot*. Montreal, 1866

Source: www.aci-iac.ca

In the 20th century, the American photographer and environmentalist Ansel Adams became iconic and influential both with regard to his landscape photography as well as his wider cultural approach to wilderness values.¹⁸

¹⁸ Adams, petitioned the American government to pass ‘The Wilderness Act’ that was eventually signed into law in 1964, defined as: “A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognised as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain” (The Wilderness Society 2016).



Figure 55: Ansel Adams, *Yosemite Park Winter*, 1938

Source: www.anseladams.com

Adams explained that he photographed in the way he did to: “inquire of my own soul just what the primeval scene really signifies” (Schama 1995, p.251). Adams described his returns to earlier nineteenth century writers’ and artists’ self-discoveries in relation to wilderness as ‘soul seeking’.¹⁹ These notions became associated with the ‘sublime’, defined by Kant in his work *Critique of Judgement* (1790) as:

An encounter with the vastness and power of nature that is counter purposive, that is to say, it is unable to be managed, exceeding the imagination’s ability to fully understand it as rational knowledge, leading to a sense of mystery by succumbing to a loss of control to a greater and mysterious force than one’s own. This is a discomfoting and disruptive experience, but which leads to a transformative and informative introspection on our human condition and faculties of cognition, perception and imagination (Kant cited in Burham 2000, p.91).

¹⁹ This includes poet Henry David Thoreau who remarked, “Generally speaking, a howling wilderness does not howl: it is the imagination of the traveller that does the howling” (Thoreau 1873, p.225).

The art historian Gretchen Garner observes how in landscape photography, the image becomes split in meaning, between description and metaphor:

The descriptive has told us exactly where we are, what we have seen, what we have claimed, and what we have done to the land. The metaphoric suggested what powers we stand in relation to, what is beyond the visible, the deeper meanings in natural phenomena (Garner 1988, p.220).

In either case, what is revealed is that both the photograph and the wilderness are constructed by the human encounter; with a focus on images of remoteness and distance.

In the 1970's, the Conceptual Art movement attempted to move "beyond the worn-out criteria for photography as sheer picture making" (Wall 1995, p.32). Within this movement, the genre of Land Art involved large scale, often minimalist interventions in the landscape which were: "Usually documented using photographs and maps ...Land artists also made land art in the gallery by bringing in material from the landscape and using it to create installations" (Tate 2018).



Figure 56: Robert Smithson, *Spiral Jetty*, 1970

Source: https://www.robertsmithson.com/earthworks/spiral_jetty.htm

Land Art began to make apparent the human influence within the idea of 'landscape' and opened up a relationship between material matter and the human body, and the space in which these inhabited, both within and outside the frame of the photograph. This genre included explorations of the notion of displacement and slippages in representations, defined by artist Robert Smithson as the 'non-site'; and explored through his sculptural series *The Non-Site (and indoor earthwork)* (1968). Smithson's works shows a spatial expansion of the notion of a framed site (or non-site), through the relationship that opens up between the works on the two-dimensional plane of the wall and three-dimensional objects on the floor. Smithson stated: "It is by this dimensional metaphor that one site can represent another site which does not resemble it – this The Non-Site" (Smithson 2018).



Figure 57: Robert Smithson. *A Nonsite (Franklin, New Jersey)*, 1968

Source: <https://mcacheicago.org/Collection/Items/1968/Robert-Smithson-A-Nonsite-Franklin-New-Jersey-1968>

Richard Long has a varied practice that includes photographs of the consequences of performances he has conducted in locations. For example, *England, 1968* (1968) (figure 58); depicts his actions of treading down an area of grass. By leaving his trace, Long disrupts the formal pictorial portrayal of remote landscapes. This is reflected upon by artist Jeff Wall:

Conventional artistic landscape photography might feature a foreground motif, such as a curious heap of stones ... as a counterpoint to the rest of the scene... Long's walk line in the grass substitutes itself for the foreground motif (Wall 1995, p.253).



Figure 58: Richard Long. *England* 1968, 1968 Source: www.richardlong.org

Smithson and Long are examples of male Land Artists who made work with a performativity of gesture that could be compared to the “virile male pursuits of the 19th century” (Schwartz 2007, p.977). However, there were also female artists associated with this genre, including Ana Mendieta who specifically called her works *Earth/Body Art* (1972-85), reflective of the body art movement as well as a rise in feminism in this era. Mendieta inserted herself, as a situated subject, into both the frame of the camera as well as the landscape, becoming the foreground of the work. She took photographs which depicted moments from her ephemeral actions that included covering herself with mud, feathers, blood and water, as well as a set of bodily gestures that denoted her own symbolic meanings.



Figure 59: Ana Mendieta, *Untitled* (*Silueta Series*, Mexico), 1973–77

Source: www.artic.edu



Figure 60: Ana Mendieta, *Metamorphosis*, Installation view, 2017

Source: www.dailyartfair.com

Both Long and Mendieta show a consciousness for the physical camera frame in relation to their situated body and landscape. These elements are brought together resulting in a disruption to the conventional representation of a singular phenomenon of wilderness and landscape. However, in depicting specific locations (often seen in the artwork titles) and as a document of performative action, the resulting photographs still point to images as being of 'elsewhere'.

At a similar time to Land Art, there was another group of artists forming the 'Light and Space movement': a collective emerging from the movement of Minimalism, in the 1960s, and exploring, "transcendentalist levity, boundary-dissolving luminescence" (Wallace, 2014).



Figure 61: James Turrell, *See! Colour!*, 2011

Source: <http://www.aestheticamagazine.com/new-interpretations-of-colour/>

Figure 62: James Turrell, *Skyspace*, (YSP Deer Shelter), 2007 Author's Own

The Light and Space movement included artist James Turrell – who continues to create installations both in the gallery and in external environments. *Roden Crater* (2018) is a recent artwork "created out in the American Wilderness ... within a volcanic cinder cone by light and space...[which] links the physical and the ephemeral, the objective with the subjective, in a transformative sensory experience" (The Skystone Foundation 2017).

Roden Crater, relates to Turrell's previous work, *Skyspaces* (1986-2008) which are sites entered from the landscape into an empty room, with an aperture cut from the roof becoming a frame to the sky. In the encounter, a

sense of distance collapses through an optical confusion called, “celestial vaulting” (Jones 2000).



Figure 63: James Turrell, *Roden Crater*, 2017 Source: <http://rodencrater.com/about/>

Turrell and the other artists in The Light and Space movement generally didn't utilise the medium of photography in their work. However, the artworks created through temporal and experiential frameworks expanded our sense of an environment, moving beyond representations, and the narrative of a situated artist in the landscape. This is an important approach to consider in relation to my research into the potential of the 'frame'.

As previously stated, Minimalism contributed to the terminology associated with installation art. There was much debate on the terms 'installation' and 'environment'. Its critics were adamant that Minimalists had forged a heightened awareness of space that was undeniably environmental, though many artists disputed the association with these words. Robert Irwin made installations that he described as “site-

determined” (Irwin cited in Bishop 2005, p.57). Influenced by Merleau-Ponty, Irwin aimed to heighten the viewer’s consciousness, stating: “by your individual participation in these situations, you may structure for yourself a ‘new state of real’” (ibid).



Figure 64: Robert Irwin. Light and Space (2007)

Source: <https://www.apollo-magazine.com>

Within this debate, art historian Michael Fried came to define the term ‘situation’:

The entire situation means exactly that: all of it – including, it seems, the beholder’s body. There is nothing within his field of vision – nothing that he takes note of in any way – that, as it were, declares its irrelevance to the situation, and therefore to the experience, in question. On the contrary, for something to be perceived at all is for it to be perceived as part of that situation (Fried 1967, p.155).

This debate regarding the terms wilderness, landscape, environment and situation has continued. From the 1980’s onwards, there has been a steep rise in the use of digital technology within Western culture. We might

reiterate Geoffrey Batchen's 1994 proposal of a "'technological' crisis in photography":

The second 'epistemological' crisis involves, broader changes in ethics, knowledge and culture... each of these expanding fields of activity calls into question the presumed separation of nature and culture, human and non-human, real and representation, truth and falsehood, all concepts undergirding photography's extant epistemology (Batchen 1994, p. 48).

What was laid out by Batchen is still of concern today, as reflected in enquiries linked to *The Anthropocene* (2016) as well as in *New Materialism*, in which there is a revival of consideration for materialist ontologies.²⁰ In his essay *Art in the Age of the Anthropocene* (2012), Jeffrey Kastner proposes: "Nature continues to loom as the elusive, originary Other – a system we are fundamentally native to but unavoidably separate from; one that produces us, even as we (physically, conceptually, discursively) produce it; a complex of spaces, structures and organisms" (Kastner 2012, p.14).

The contemporary considerations of ecology, conservation and environmental psychology, have seen practitioners such as architects and environmental designers "avoid the word landscape and prefer land or terrain or environment or even space" (Jackson 1984, p.3). Yet in

²⁰ Definition of Anthropocene: "Earth's most recent geologic time period (Anthropocene) as being human-influenced, or anthropogenic, based on overwhelming global evidence that atmospheric, geologic, hydrologic, biospheric and other earth system processes are now altered by humans" (The Encyclopaedia of Earth 2013).

opposition to this precision of terminology within certain critical spheres, there is still a ubiquity of photographic representations of landscape and the wilderness as an immaterial, visual trope within mass culture: in advertising, as screen-savers, across social media platforms and within tourism.

Challenges to these immaterial representations can be seen in the practice of contemporary artists, working with the photographic object. This includes contemporary artist Letha Wilson, who works with photographs alongside sculptural material and the gallery space itself, using “architecture and three-dimensionality as both frame and armature” (Grimm Gallery 2018). Wilson returns to address the representation of the American Western Wilderness, using the spatial aspect of the photographic object to test notions of ‘site’ and “the medium’s inability to encompass the site it represents” (ibid).



Figure 65: Letha Wilson, *Bryce Canyon Lava Push*, 2018 Source: www.grimmgallery.com

Benedict Drew explores the notion of the 'technological sublime' through his installations that show an exploration into materiality, where the physical and digital meet. Drew's *Sequencer* (2015) (figure 66) is an installation of photographs of landscapes and projections of videos of earthly matter, overlaid with conch shells stuck to screens, accompanied by sound. Drew stated that his practice: "is about this oversaturated digital realm and the psychedelic nature of this techno sublime. If the sublime can be defined as something too awe-inspiring to understand and overwhelming, the internet sort of fits that" (Drew cited in Needham 2014).

My own experience of Drew's work is as a visceral, chaotic, thrilling and unsettling multi-sensory encounter of colour, image, sound and objects. His practice is an example of how the genre of the sublime has evolved into various sub-genres, reflective of contemporary societal and cultural conditions. Moving from Kant's outline of a sublime 'wilderness' (1790), the notion of the sublime in relation to our contemporary culture has evolved to be applied metaphorically - as imagined sites and to describe ambient and emotional situations. For example, a confusing multitude or mass, a bewildering vastness, in which there is a sense of vulnerability in the confrontation of something powerful and unknown, such as a wilderness of unknown streets or a wilderness of voices.



Figure 66: Benedict Drew, *Sequencer*, 2015, *British Art Show 8*, 2015-17

Source: www.britishartshow8.com

In relation to, and expansion of the practices of Wilson and Drew, my research resides between my direct, sensory, phenomenological encounter of place and the material encounter of the photograph, exploring the turbulent and affective qualities of the photographic object, moving beyond binaries of a 'site and non-site' and divisions of matter, technology, representations, body and architecture. In doing so, the research opens up and proposes new experiential situations and meanings, that instead of a technological sublime, finds relevance in the sub-genre of the feminine sublime, defined by Barbara Claire Freeman:

As not a search for an autonomous female voice...but a critique of tradition that has historically reasserted masculine privilege... the feminine sublime most enduring commitment would be instead to sustain a condition of radical uncertainty as the very condition of possibility (Freeman 1995, p.11).

Again, in interrogating the 'frame' by simultaneously engaging with the haptic, spatial and temporal dimensions of the photograph, the research

also intersects with George Baker's 'expanded field of photography': "As an act of critical imagination made necessary by the forms of contemporary art and one that will answer neither to technological exegesis nor traditional formalist criteria" (Baker 2005, p.123).

In reflecting on my research processes, I include excerpts from travel notes, along with texts relating to the encounter and response of the artworks, including important dialogues from the audience's discursive response, alongside critical theory. The first work described looks between the situated body, the camera frame and scale. This is then followed by an analysis of works that develop notions of fluidity and the frame, exploring ideas of boundaries and knowledge in relation to the affective qualities of the material phenomenon of the photographic object.

FOR SCALE

figuring it (2016)

Roaming Room, London



Figure 67: *figuring it* - detail, 2016 Author's Own

My installation *figuring it* (July 2016) was made whilst artist in residence at Roaming Room, London, in which I found common ground with the gallery's focus on explorations of itinerate spaces.²¹ During the residency I occupied three rooms, constructing an installation that was then opened to the public. I titled the project *figuring it*, to denote this particular output as a 'testing ground' but also to refer to the word 'figure's' multiple meaning of number, body and symbol.

²¹ Roaming Room is an art space the moves locations: www.roamingroom.com/

The installation developed from a three-week research trip carried-out within the desert wilderness in Arizona and California, USA.²² During this time my bodily, phenomenological experiences were gathered through still and moving images as well as through writing, including this excerpt from my diary:

Monument Valley, Arizona USA (April 15th, 2016):

Looking up at the rocks, scale and depth collapse onto one visual plane, a person moves into sight and dimension and depth of field is restored, the mountains enlarging and protruding to an awe-inspiring scale. As I hold the camera up, I include in the frame my extended hand, limited by my arm length and position of the camera. I think about the scale shifts between the camera frame, the landscape and my body (Hughes 2016).



Figure 68: Photographs taken in Monument Valley, Arizona, USA, 2016 Author's Own

Before travelling, I had been looking at photographs of geological digs where scale is denoted through the insertion of a tool or ruler placed

²² Awarded travel support funding from the Post Graduate Resources Fund, Art, Design and Social Sciences, Northumbria University (2016)

against the studied specimen (figure 69). The tool, understood to be used by the human hand, becomes a reference point. By looking at the image, the viewers situate themselves in the photograph, imagining their own hand holding the tool, creating both a sense of scale and tactility.



Figure 69: *Ventifact in Dyngjufjalladalur, Northern Ireland, 1980*

Photo credit: Robert Greenley

As the journey in the USA continued, I created white paper hands from an outline of my own hand, which I stuck onto broken off tree branches. This became my rudimentary and personal scaling apparatus which I used whilst walking, captured as both video and photographs (figure 70).



Figure 70: Work in progress - paper hands on sticks, Arizona, USA, 2016 Authors Own



Figure 71: Work in progress in the studio - scaling prints, 2016 Authors Own

On returning to the UK, the photographs were printed with the paper hand at a 1:1 scale to my actual hand. The relative sizes of the resulting series of prints varied depending on how distant or close-up the hand had been to the lens, masking or revealing more or less of the background environment (figure 71).

Introduced at the start of thesis, the vagaries of scale and perception within the photographic image have been explored by contemporary theorist Andrew Fisher:

The tension in photography is that scale functions to bring things to measure by bringing things within range whilst at the same time, photography's openness as a form to being de-ranged and transformed technically and historically (Fisher 2013).

My methodology within *figuring it*, partly contradicts the possibility of 'openness' that Fisher raises by scaling the photographs to an object that has an absolute specificity of size: my own human hand.

'The hand as a measure' also refers back to the fifteenth century architect Vitruvius, who's ideal of the body as a measure of the world was implemented in his architectural design and was later illustrated by Leonardo da Vinci in his work *Vitruvian Man*, c.1490. Although working centuries before the advent of photographic reproduction, da Vinci nevertheless looked for mirrored patterns at different scales, searching for connections between the structure of the human body and other patterns in nature, believing the workings of the human body to be an analogy for the workings of the universe.

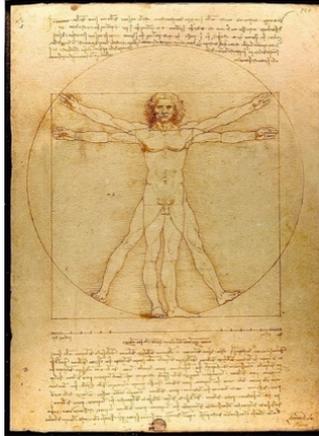


Figure 72: Leonardo da Vinci, *Vitruvian Man*, c.1490 Source: www.wikipedia.org

The work developed from experimental material processes tested in-situ, and was responsive to the ambient conditions of the gallery, deliberately confusing the environmental 'source' of the artwork. I placed and shifted materials; I cut out hands from graph paper that corresponded to the hands in the prints, I measured the circumference of my head making wire rings, I layered images with material in relation to the window light and spotlights found in the space.

Encounter

Employing the same methodology as in Chapter 1 here, I will recount how I first objectively placed myself in the resultant installation *figuring it*, to consider the viewer's perspective, and then moved on to include other audience responses to the works.

Entering the first room, what is encountered is a large black and white print nailed to the wall (figure 73). The photograph is taken of a forest, in

Sedona, Arizona. In the photo, above the trees in the distance, there is the moon, and, in the foreground, the white paper hands are seen inserted into the camera frame, suspended on branches. Further prints in the series are on the wall in the next room. Perceptual shifts are seen within the printed image, where the white border of paper left on the print is seen in flux, mirroring the material quality of the white paper hands within the image.



Figure 73: *figuring it* - installation of prints - room 1 & 3, 2016 Author's Own

A further object is seen in the first room placed in front of the window. The object comprises of a large transparent image of petrified wood, suspended by wire and electrical tape. Behind this is a sheet of graph paper with cut out hands held up by sticks. When the sun shines through the window, it projects through the apertures of the hands and through the transparency, reflecting both the image and hands onto the gallery floor. This opens up a correspondence to the hands within the prints, creating a

turbulence, by confusing a sense of the defined boundaries, of frames, materials and images, creating perceptual shifts of scale and distance.



Figure 74: *figuring it* – room 1, 2016 Author's Own

In the adjacent darkened room, a video is projected onto a large sheet of tracing paper. Here, the silent disembodied arm of a desert guide moves and points to describe the environment that it is in (I will return to describe this video in detail within Chapter 3).



Figure 75: *figuring it* – room 2, 2016 Author's Own



Figure 76: *figuring it* - room 3, 2016 Author's Own



Figure 77 : *figuring it* - room 3, 2016 Author's Own

The final room contains a set of floor-based, figurative objects. Wire circles that measure the circumference of my head are seen to have filmstrips placed across the middle. These 'heads' are held aloft by poles made from a variety of materials found from various sources (figure 76-78).

The height of the sculptures encourages the viewer to bend in towards the objects, looking upon the captured landscapes which either include the shadow of my figure projected into the frame or else my extended hand. Through this encounter a correspondence of bodies opens up. There is an unintentional nod back to the nineteenth century stereoscopes, as well as

the audience body, appearing to occupy the wire frame, almost 'filling in the space' as the physical human body. This conflates my situated body at the moment of capturing the landscape through the camera, with the situated, perceiving, audience body.



Figure 78: *figuring it* - detail, 2016 Author's Own

The audience response to the work, included readings of perceived symbolic narratives, particularly the Christian allegory of the Annunciation,²³ (Simon Raven 2016, pers.comm., 28 July 2016) and the ideas of the 'soul' (Julie Bemment 2016, pers.comm., 28 July 2016).

To gather further audience response, I re-installed some of these works within the exhibition and conference, *Hard Focus: The Physicality of*

²³ Often depicted in paintings with the raised hand of the Angel Gabriel announcing to the Virgin Mary that she would conceive and become the mother of Jesus.

Photography (November 2016). A speaker at the conference, curator Anna Douglas, commented that the print with paper hands seemed to be a refusal to be 'sublime' (the Kantian sense). Douglas thought that the work challenged ubiquitous modes of representing landscape and wilderness by causing a frustration in the viewer by means of the hand stopping the eye from falling into the image of a vast landscape (Anna Douglas pers.comm., 5 November 2016). Thus, this work both disrupts and expands upon how the photograph functions as a frame and as a culturally coded sign in relation to notions of landscape and the wilderness.

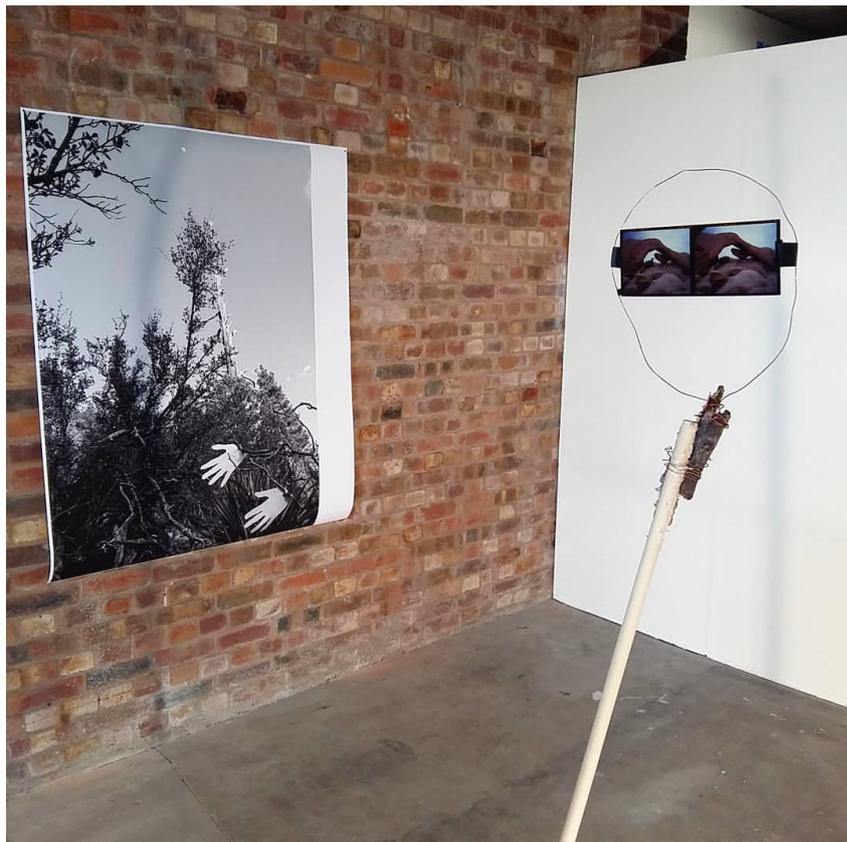


Figure 79: Installation at *Hard Focus: The Physicality of Photography*, 2017 Author's Own

LIVELY STRUCTURES

Phole (2018)

Liquid Land, Ruskin Gallery, Cambridge



Figure 80: *Liquid Land* Invitation 2018 Source: Ruskin Gallery, Cambridge

My work, *Phole* (2015-2018), developed through this doctoral research, in that it was installed in various contexts and scales, to explore shifts in context and encounter. It was most recently reconfigured for group exhibition, *Liquid Land* at the Ruskin Gallery, Cambridge (April 2018) which had an appropriate focus on “the complexities of landscape and the environment” (Ruskin Gallery 2018).

Phole is an installation of pillar-like shapes made of enlarged contact sheets and photographs (the title related to the hybrid titles discussed in Chapter 1). My approach to *Phole*, partly drew upon my encounter of and interest in indigenous totem poles in the Canadian landscape as well as

ancient stone circles across the UK. Both contexts frame a space and draw out an attention to bodily relationships that inspire the creation of metaphor and symbol.



Figure 81: *Phole* - Ruskin Gallery, 2018 Photo credit: Wilf Speller

In the installation of the works, I created pillars by rolling large photographs and securing them shut with tape, wire and string before embedding them into clay bases. Wanting to disrupt and explore senses of distances and proximities the selected images, taken by me, were from various encounters of places and details of material matter, including

water and ice, hair, an oil-spill, urban flowers at night and internet found-images of the surface of mars.²⁴



Figure 82: *Phole* - Ruskin Gallery, 2018 Photo credit: Wilf Speller

Encounter

Similar to the bodily scales in *figuring it*, some of the prints in this installation reflected my height, but here, the rolled photographic object loses a definitive edge; instead, the frame is marked between each free-standing print on the floor.

²⁴ Partly influence by my recent artist in residence in project *Beyond* (2018) at Allenheads Contemporary Arts, Northumberland, UK, working with the The North Pennines Observatory. - <https://www.acart.org.uk/beyond>

The framework created in *Phole* further relates back to the phenomenological aspect of Heidegger's architectural temple; the configuration of the works can be walked through and around; the structures frame both the moving audience body and the space between. This framework extends to incorporate or overlap with the framework of other artworks in the exhibition, collectively forming another sense environment (figure 81-86).



Figure 83: *Phole* - work-in-progress in the studio, 2016 Author's Own



Figure 84: *Phole* - detail, 2017 Photo credit: Wilf Speller

During this research phase, I undertook fieldtrips to the stone circles of Duddo Stones and Roughtling in Northumberland, UK. Here I include an excerpt from my experience at Duddo Stone, with two friends:

They gravitate to the centre of the stones. I circumnavigate the site on the outside, as I walk and as they move, I see their bodies framed and obscured by the stones. My eye draws out invisible, imagined lines between the stones and us, marking out a site with fluid and shifting scales and compositions.

The wind buffets at our ears and blows over the old stones eroded surfaces... I think about what is active, what is fixed and what is past (Hughes 2016).

In relation to my experiences, art historian Nicholas Chare reflects on the agency of the stone circle as well as the simultaneous encounter of fixity and a live material:

A series of stones setup in a particular shape to enclose a patch of ground...All the exposed faces of the rocks have a patina, a coating of plant life ...a living skin...The regular beholder who gives the stone circle sustained attention comes to appreciate how fleeting and fluid it is. It cannot be grasped if it is conceived of as enduring and unchanging (Chare 2011, p.248).



Figure 85: *Phole* alongside Cornford & Cross, *Black Narcissus* (2014) & Wilf Speller, *Future Territories* (2018), Ruskin Gallery, 2018 Photo Credit: Wilf Speller

In looking further at anthropological studies and drawing in relation to photography, Elizabeth Edwards looks at the limited use of the medium in museums. Edwards brings attention to the lack of fixity in the photograph as a document of the past, stating:

Photographs continue to be seen as unproblematic documents, direct fragments of past time, records of what was. Yet, they are both representational and material... They are multi-sensory objects which in turn must elicit multi-sensory responses that shape and enhance, the emotional engagement with the visual trace of the past (Edwards 2010, p.21).

These notions relate to my approach seen through *Phole*, in which the works are purposely printed with a gloss finish which, through the subtle combination of the light reflecting off the prints' surfaces and the shifting movement of the audience, creates a sense of animation and fluidity between fixity and movement.

Phole shows the photographic object in the ephemeral, ambient, physical, present realm, disrupting the perceptive field of a single viewpoint and revealing a fluidity of meaning. Again, we return to George Baker's 'expanded field of photography', in which the medium is, "caught between two negations, between the conditions of being neither truly narrative nor static in its meaning effect" (Baker 2005, p.127).



Figure 86: *Phole* alongside Reece Jones, *Drone* series (2018), Ruskin Gallery, 2018
Photo Credit: Wilf Speller

PERMEABLE FRAMES

Filmy (2016)

Polyspace, NewBridge Projects, Newcastle upon Tyne

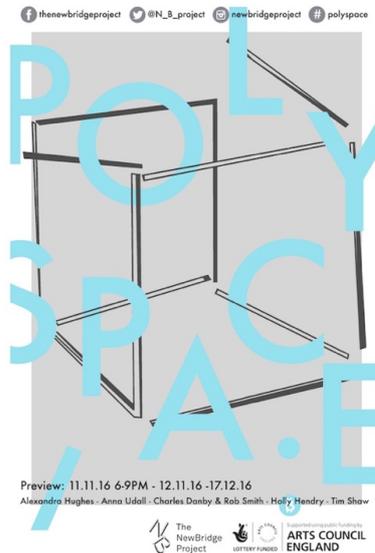


Figure 87: *Polyspace* exhibition poster, 2016 Designed by Oliver Perry

To expand notions of fluidity in relation to the frame and to further demonstrate the audience's discursive response to my research, I describe my artwork *Filmy* (2016).

Filmy was an installation, constructed in a group exhibition *Polyspace* at NewBridge Projects, Newcastle upon Tyne.²⁵ Resonating with the context of this research, and considering the cultural technological' crisis and

²⁵ NewBridge Projects were established in 2010 to provide exchange and support through an engaged and discursive community of artists.
<https://theneewbridgeproject.com/>

notions of environment, the invitation from the curators, Oliver Perry and Peter-Ashley Jackson, included the following statement:

The terms landscape / land art seems antiquated today... *Polyspace* was conceived as a neologism, which best epitomises the modern approach of working with varied spaces as a subject matter; from modern urban environments to the new digital platforms and other technologies via the permanent presence of the natural world (Newbridge Projects 2016).²⁶



Figure 88: *Filmy*, 2016 Author's Own

Filmy was constructed in-situ, employing the wilding methodology that combined the re-use of material from previous work alongside incorporating new photographs from a research trip I took to the Isle of Skye, Scotland in September 2016. In Skye, I participated in Atlas Arts' project, *LAND / LINE*, which consisted of a series of walks led by experts

²⁶ Polyspace weblink: <https://thenewbridgeproject.com/events/polyspace/>

in different research fields, collectively offering a cross-disciplinary approach to the island.²⁷ One of the walks was specifically pertinent to *Filmy* and I include here an excerpt from my notes of the experience of being within a bog:

We walk in the bog; a terrain that is both liquid and solid. Coated in moss as a partial membrane. I jump and the moss ripples around me, the ground gives way easily, with a strong sucking force pulling me down, opening up a deep cavity of water and micro-plant life beneath, increasing my sense of being engulfed in an ongoing multi-layered, reactive landscape. I record, both on video and camera, time spent here. I wonder how I can work with the resulting photographs as both fixed and fluid (Hughes 2016).

Leading one of the walks was anthropologist Tim Ingold who raised questions on the logics of measuring and surveying land, asking for example: “why do we use the sea level as measure, when, it is a baseboard in constant motion?” (Tim Ingold 2016, pers. comm., September 16th 2016). Ingold, challenged fixed and static viewpoints by bringing attention to our contrasting, bodily movement in response to the varying terrain as we walked.

Reflecting further on perceived interfaces and boundaries, Ingold referred to his previously published writing, saying: “knowledge is grown along myriad paths we take as we make our ways through the world ... rather

²⁷ Atlas Arts is a visual arts organisation dedicated to commissioning contemporary arts, culture, heritage, and education based in the Isle of Skye, Scotland. Further information on *Land / Line* here: <https://atlasarts.org.uk/projects/land-line-five-walks-in-skye/>

than assembled from information obtained from numerous fixed locations” (Ingold 2010, p.121).

My experience in the bog land echoes my reflections at the very start of this thesis, in which (also on my trip to Skye): “I notice how iridescent the purple heather flower is, changing in accordance to the erratic weather conditions... asking: how can I make the image move beyond a fixed static representation? How can I disturb the seamless veneer of the image to something livelier and more sensory?” (Hughes 2016). With these questions and sensory memories, my methodology of action; situated in physical, material-led processes was first employed by creating large transparent prints of photographs of the heather flower, to layer with other material and photographs, to create varying degrees of density. This exploration was further reflected in the subsequent artwork titled, *Filmy*, to refer to the medium used and denoting the material quality as: “thin and translucent...gauze-like” (Oxford English Dictionary 2004).

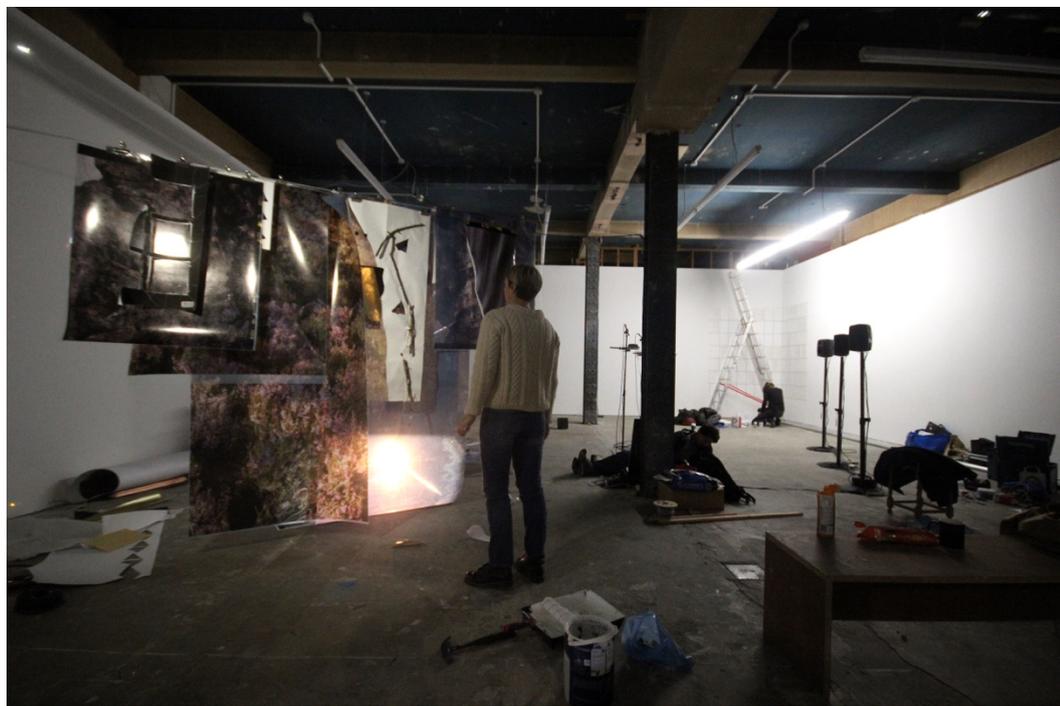


Figure 89: *Filmy* - during installation, 2016 Author's Own

Encounter

What is seen in *Filmy* is a dense fragmented arrangement of imagery and material: large photographic prints (C-type prints, Duraclear prints, Giclee prints) of ice, mountains, hands, plants, rocks, alongside, tree branches, ripped and cut out sections of paper, clay, string, wire and electrical tape. The material is clipped to a long cable tensioned from a wall to a pillar in the middle of the space; cross-lit on two sides by analogue slide projectors, as well as from its placement in front by the plate glass window to the street, lending the work the durational aspect of changing daylight. Throughout the course of the exhibition I physically changed the installation. The artwork evolved and changed, spilling onto the floor, with the inner part of the hanging opening-up to be walked through and on, encountering simultaneously the temporal, spatial and haptic qualities of the photograph.



Figure 90: *Filmy* – at night, 2016 Author's Own

To look at the work up close, peering into the dense layers, what is seen is a shift of paper qualities of varying transparency and opaqueness, determining the amount of light and image that filters through. In a detail, a curl in the film opens up just enough space for its image to project onto the surface of another print layered behind. Holes cut in certain areas provide a space in which an image emerges to meet the eye.

In conversation with Professor Ben Anderson

I invited Ben Anderson, Professor of Geography at Durham University, to experience the installation. This invitation an acknowledgement of his ideas regarding ‘turbulence’ in *Geography and Materiality*, (co-written by Anderson and Wylie) (2006), which underpin my research.

I explained to Ben my exploration into the affective qualities of the material phenomenon of photography. He responded by defining material as “anything that has the capacity to make a difference” (Ben Anderson 2016, pers. comms., December 8th, 2016). He went on to say that this notion stems out of the ‘Actor-Network Theory’, developed by theorists including Bruno Latour, defining it as a ‘material-semiotic’ method. This means that it maps relations that are simultaneously material (between things) and semiotic (between concepts) (ibid).

In reference to *Geography and Materiality*, I asked Ben to elaborate on a section that describes “the flesh as a process not a substance” (Anderson & Wylie 2006, p.9). He replied that, “flesh could be said to be the

occasion of exchange or as a threshold or interval, in which as a gap or a middle part that holds the space of possibility” (ibid). From this he suggested ‘experience’ is the middle part and went on to explain that the word ‘experience’ derives from word experiment, which means to have an ‘openness’ to the world.



Figure 91: *Filmy* - set of details, 2016 Author's Own



Figure 92: **VIDEO** - *Filmy* – excerpt of evolving installation, 2017 Author's Own
Link: <https://vimeo.com/281159042>

This notion of an 'openness to the world' returns to the other approaches laid out in the essay *Geography and Materiality*. Firstly, the 'Excessive', looks between the immaterial and material and includes the 'not yet' theory developed by Bloch (1986), which incorporates multiple modes of possibility and is always incomplete, with a presence and sense of an unknowable 'more to come'.

Secondly, the 'Interrogative' approach, is in search of a renewed account of bodily perception, sense and sensibility, to think about a material imagination that works through livelier, non-linear, powers of interrogation. Described as a 'productive indeterminacy', in which "sensing and senses,

point of view and landscape pass into and through each other, substituting and exchange, coil and recoil” (Anderson & Wylie 2006, p.325).

These notions enrich my exploration of the experiential, situated encounter, simultaneously engaging with the spatial, haptic, symbolic and temporal dimensions of the photographic object, to challenge the frame as seemingly rigid, fixed, structure and boundary.



Figure 93: *Filmy* - detail of inner part of installation, 2016 Author's own

PGR Group Critique

During the exhibition of *Filmy*, I convened a doctoral group critique within the gallery space, to further examine the concepts of wilding, wilderness, fluidity and the sublime.

Within this discourse a colleague pointed at a particular amalgamation of matter within the work *Filmy* and asked: “could the wilderness be found in

these details where the combination of the materials is ambiguous?” She felt there was a sense of, “purposeful ‘wilding’, creating rifts and schisms between material, that disrupts expectation and throws into question the encounter” (Gayle Meikle 2016, pers.comm., 14th December 2016).

My continual re-purposing of material within the installation was pointed out by another colleague. He observed that some of the material was dented, baring traces, histories and processes. He thought that this is also part of the ‘wilding’ process and draws a correlation to the material processes and interchanges that occur within a landscape, as opposed to a pristine vista (image) one looks upon from a removed standpoint (Nick Evans 2016, pers.comm., 14th December 2016).



Figure 94: *Filmy* - detail, 2016 Author's Own

This discussion solidified the description of my research approach as ‘wilding’ photographs. Subsequent research led me to define and outline the term ‘wilding’, in part through co-opting the words of Jack (Judith) Halberstam, an academic in English and Comparative Literature and

Gender Studies. Halberstam looks toward new ways to understand cultural constructions of time and place, through thinking of 'wildness':

the call for disorder or wildness shows up in many places; in jazz, in improvisation ...Listening to cacophony and noise tells us that this is a wild beyond to the structures we inhabit and that inhabit us...Like all world-making and all world shattering encounters...you will feel fear, trepidation...disorientation... this is necessary because you will no longer be in one location moving forward to another, instead you will be part of the movement of things (Halberstam 2013, p.7).

In thinking further on the implications of wilding as an interrogation of the frame with the potential to disrupt and reform cultural and embodied constructions of time and place, I found an interesting relationship to the notions of fluidity as proposed by feminist theorist Astrida Neimanis.

Neimanis, who spoke at the conference *Entanglements of New Materialism* (2012). Her proposition raises question of embodiment by proposing 'thinking with water' to open up a different sort of imaginative space and radical alterity, interrupting some of the foundational concepts in dominant Western systems of thought.

Through this, Neimanis defines her concept of 'hydro logics': "It seeps through every aspect of our material existence" (Neimanis 2012, p.4). In Neimanis' essay; *Hydrofeminism: Or, On Becoming a Body of Water* (2012), attention is brought to the mechanics of watery embodiment, revealing that in order to connect bodies, water must travel across only partially permeable membranes and with this acknowledgement,

distinctions between human and nonhuman start to blur. With this concept, she proposes:

The future is always an open question, and our bodies must be understood as flowing beyond the bounds of what is knowable...we find ourselves tangled in intricate choreographies of bodies and flows of all kinds – not only human bodies but also other animal, vegetable, geophysical, meteorological, and technological ones (Neimanis 2012, p.111).



Figure 95: *Filmy* - detail, 2016 Author's Own

These explorations of knowability and shifting experiential boundaries and frameworks by Ingold, Anderson, Halberstam and Neimanis propose environments that are always unknown and ambiguous, determined by a situated subject, open and forever changing meaning. I see this relating to narratives of the feminine sublime as continually 'otherly' and as outlined by Barbara Claire Freeman as:

Both a general concept of the un-representable as that which exceeds that symbolic order of language and culture... Unlike the masculine sublime that seeks to master, appropriate or colonize the other, I propose that the politics of the feminine sublime involves taking up a position of respect in response to an incalculable otherness... that would ally receptivity and constant attention to that which makes meaning infinitely open and ungovernable (Freeman 1995, p.11).

These theoretical and metaphorical propositions are extended through my research: seen in a physical exploration of the turbulent and affective qualities of the photographic object that reveals a blurred division of matter, technology, representations, body and space.



Figure 96: *Filmy*, 2016. Author's Own

TO END CHAPTER 2

In an online review, the Newcastle-based writer Liam McCabe suggested that in *Filmy*:

“Hughes has created an ecosystem within an ecosystem through vast layers of landscape photography hangings...her acetate prints adapt to the gallery space, transforming it into a meta-landscape of physical photography” (McCabe 2016).

In this chapter, I approached the wilding of photographs by interrogating the frame. I set to complicate the cultural problem of ‘frame’ by challenging the notion of “nature-as-representation, nature-as-sign” (Krauss 1981, p.31) as well as by expanding beyond the “singular of landscape” (Kesley 2007, p.205).

Through the artworks discussed, the research presents the image and material as not in one single state, neither static nor inert. In this way, the work moves beyond the binaries of ‘site and non-site’ by revealing a frame in a fluid flux to the live physical world, mutating and expanding in multiple directions showing the production of altogether new situations through experiential boundaries.

In the situations created in the artworks, the encounters demonstrate a turbulence of matter, technology, representations, body and architecture. This leads to a subsequent ambiguity, which challenges our perception and understanding of environment, in which, “sensing and senses, point

of view and landscape pass into and through each other, substituting and exchange, coil and recoil” (Anderson & Wylie 2006, p.321).

Through this exploration, the turbulent and affective qualities of the photographic object show the qualities and properties of matter as emergent, multiple phenomena. These phenomena draw out and define situations of wilderness as a process understood through the expression of immersive experiences, multiple perspectives and as a self-reflective journey that is visceral, haptic, ambiguous and open to change.

Chapter 3: WILDING BODIES

Artwork: *Wild Affections* (2017)

Materiality, The Holy Island of Lindisfarne

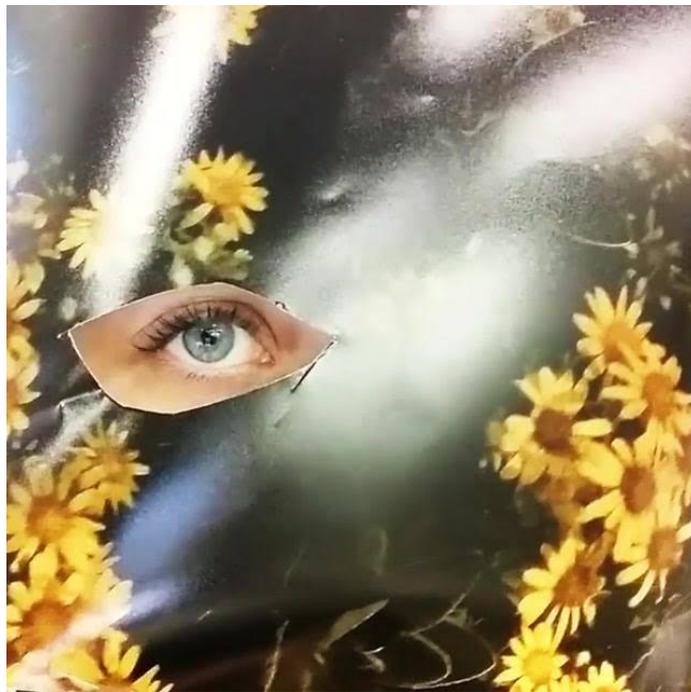


Figure 97: *Wild Affections* – work in progress shot, 2017 Author's Own

BEGINNING AT THE BODY

Following on the trajectory from the 'surface' to the 'frame, the research recounted in Chapter 3 encompasses 'the body', in which the wilding approach expands through performative gesture and movement.



Figure 98: **VIDEO** - *Desert Guide*, 2016 Author's own / Link: <https://vimeo.com/204877164>

To introduce the experiential and theoretical touchstones described in this chapter, I begin with a video recording (figure 98) and written description of an observation I made during a research trip to Arizona, USA (2016):

We follow the guide around the outdoor desert museum in Arizona, I am captivated by how animated her body is, how her arms and hands move as she talks. She is describing both the biological processes and cultural value of these plants, creating invisible figurative shapes with the space between her fingers in relation to what she is saying. Through looking at her hand gestures, it is clear at times that what she is expressing is something very factual or instructional. Other times the arms seem theatrical, as if they are part of a dance, ritualistic and celebratory...

You can see that she is imagining what is happening, pulling from sensory memories her experiences and knowledge and then drawing that out, re-animating it for us, through her live and embodied use of actions and words. Watching her makes me think about the relationship between encounter and affect - between body, imagination and language. It raises questions of how we move, speak, think, feel and create meaning, deriving first from sensory encounters, informing and manifesting in our body language and then symbolic language (Hughes 2016).²⁸

Body language encompasses the conscious and unconscious non-verbal movements and postures by which attitudes and feelings are communicated. One way to describe the guide's action in the desert is to say, she is 'speaking with her hands', meaning to gesticulate, which comes from the Latin meaning: "action" and: "to mimic" (Oxford English Dictionary 2004).



Figure 99: *Desert Guide* - Video still, 2016 Author's Own

²⁸ This research trip was awarded travel support funding from the Post Graduate Resources Fund, Art, Design and Social Sciences, Northumbria University (2016)

This gesticulation can be described as a study in 'situated cognition', in which physical gestures and hand motions are a way of expressing and even working out our thoughts and newest, most advanced ideas, as explained by Professors of Psychology, Susan Goldin-Meadow and Sian L. Beilock:

Gestures convey substantive information. Moreover, the information conveyed in gesture is often not conveyed anywhere in the speech that accompanies it. In this way, gesture reflects thoughts that speakers may not explicitly know they have... gesture does more than reflect thought – gesture plays a role in changing thought (Goldin-Meadow and Beilock 2010, p.664).

The essay, *Situated Cognition and the Culture of Learning* (1989), elaborates on the concept of situated cognition that suggests:

Activity and perception are importantly and epistemologically prior...which are first and foremost embedded in the world, may simply bypass the classical problem of reference (Seely Brown, Collins, Duguid 1989, p.24).

The transition from perception to communication (through gesture) might then side-step the pathway of action and perception to language as described by sociologist John Given as:

Sensory inputs to the brain are subject to parallel, multi-tracked processes of interpretation, elaboration and narration... By 'symbolic language' we mean language that is capable of conveying multiple and sometimes contradictory meanings through the use of metaphor and imagery and words which carry the power of naming, the power to transform the natural world into a world full of human meaning (O'Neill, Roberts, Sparkes 2014, p.55).



Figure 100: *Desert Guide* - Video still, 2016 Author's Own

These studies show the order and complexity of cognitive understanding as beginning and expressed through the situated physical body. This complexity is probed in my methodology of wilding, as an embodied practice that sets to widen the overlooked nuances for the medium by reflecting upon the 'doing'. Thus, wilding prompts a rethinking not only our acts of seeing but our bodily, sensuous acts of engagement with the photography.

Margaret Olin considers photography as a gestural practice. In challenge to Barthes' notion of the punctum, Olin proposes: "Metaphors of touch do not encompass everything that makes photography a gestural practice" (Olin 2012, p.11).

She goes on to say:

Photographic gestures indicate that photographic practices do more than merely represent the world. Gestures turn photographs into presences that populate the world like people and act within it to connect people (Olin 2012, p.14).

Olin's research focuses on how photographs participate in communities and effect behaviour in people. In her research, she observes how the apparatus of the camera and lens shape particular body language and cultural habits in the act of taking photographs, for example, a 'selfie' (a self-portrait type image) is taken at arm's length to be sent as a text message.

Elizabeth Edwards asks: "to what extent can we understand the photograph as being 'beyond the visual'?" (Edwards, 2010, p.22). She brings attention to the performative engagements with the photographic object, stating:

In specific cultural environments ...photographic objects are handled, caressed, stroked, kissed, torn, wept over...in ways that blur the distinction between person, index and thing. Furthermore, the performative material culture of photographs stresses their physical presence in the social world...Materiality is central to this ... it is the fusion and performative interaction of image and materiality... that gives a sensory and embodied access to photographs (Edwards 2010, p.22).

Like Olin and Edwards, my research also moves away from the conventional identity of photographic images as immaterial representations to consider a bodily relationship to the medium. However, my research expands beyond the theoretical proposals and observations of Olin and Edwards to explore gestural practice through a physical, simultaneous engagement with the haptic, temporal and spatial dimensions of the photographic object. Through this, the wilding

methodology conducts an exploration between the translation of sensation to motion and meaning, further revealing the material phenomenon of photography.

I approach the idea of 'performance' as the action, process and presentation of bodily gestural expression, that is often for an audience. Alongside these theoretical propositions, I observe a wider undeveloped area in artistic practices and gallery exhibitions regarding the relationship between performance and the photographic object.

In 2014, the Tate Modern hosted the event *Performing Photographs: Photography, Performance and Affect*, which looked at "how the performative is located within the photograph itself, and in the relationship of the image to the viewer, as well as photography's relationship to the written and spoken word" (Tate 2014). The Tate event proposed interesting questions around the temporal dimension of the photograph, through a panel of speakers, including 'artist-historian' Carol Mavor, whose approach bridges and confuses the gap between the subjective and objective (which will be revisited in Chapter 4). However, this Tate event is an example of the conventional approach to the relationship between photography and performance, returning the photograph to an indexical, two-dimensional image of a past action.

Through describing artwork, *Wild Affections* and associated experiences, this chapter explores the process of wilding photographs as material-led, improvised, intuitive, visceral, situated bodily actions, with the potential to

form extraordinary situations of performance and installation that destabilise and re-create worlds.

Through the methods discussed in this chapter, I present an exploration into the affective qualities of photographs as “bodily capacities to affect and be affected that emerge and develop in concert” (Anderson 2014, p.13). As well as the turbulent qualities as, “tensed between a gathering and a distribution” (Anderson & Wyle 2006, p.321).

This research further relates back to the notions referred to in Chapter 1 by Doretha von Hantelmann (2014), that challenge the idea of a spectator-object relationship and consider the lived experience as preceding meaning. The research finds further resonance with anthropological studies in material culture and the embodied encounter through the critical sphere of phenomenology, and continues its association to the feminine sublime. The methodologies described in this chapter emphasise the importance and utilisation of intuition and improvisation techniques, with reference to my experience of participation in dance workshops. This experience has informed some of my processes; as has reference to other artists’ practices.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first, describes my processes in developing the final installations, with further reflection on my solitary methods as outlined in the making of *Letting Things Be Uncertain*, in Chapter 1, and my embodied studio processes as described at the start of the thesis. In the second section, the chapter proceeds to a discussion

of the collaborative process of working with performers, leading to *Wild Affections* as two public performances: Crossman Hall and Beach performance. The resulting performances are then described in my embodied perspective of a performer. Finally, in the third section, the encountering audience perspective is reflected upon. The chapter includes supporting video footage and photographic documentation.

SITUATING WILD AFFECTIONS

The artwork, *Wild Affections*, was made within the group exhibition *Materiality* and held on The Holy Island of Lindisfarne, Northumberland UK (23rd September – 1st October 2017).²⁹ The exhibition was named after its previous iteration at Berwick Gymnasium Gallery (March 2017), mentioned in the previous discussion of my *Claytactypes* in Chapter 1.³⁰



Figure 101: *Materiality* - fold out press release & map, 2017 Designed by Graham Patterson, Alexandra Hughes and Foundation Press

²⁹ The Holy Island of Lindisfarne, also known simply as Holy Island, is a tidal island off the northeast coast of England.

³⁰ The exhibition was curated by artist Graham Patterson and funded by Arts Council England, Peregrini Lindisfarne Landscape Partnership Trust & Natural England and the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Holy Island is an environment situated on the Northumberland coastline in a marked 'area of outstanding natural beauty' (AONB).³¹ This demarcation returns us to the landscape as culturally 'framed', and Holy Island is seen ubiquitously represented and utilised as artist impressions and within the tourist industry. To work in such a context, meant an opportunity to further my approach in disrupting notions of site, scenery and environment, by incorporating matter and bodies from various locations and points in time. By doing so, this research in turn further investigates the multiplicity and production of altogether new situations in performances and installations.

As the press release suggests:

The works in *Materiality* reflect the artists' embodied response to this remote island off the northeast coast of Northumberland...To explore each piece, you have to walk the island...Alexandra Hughes presents a live performance, *Wild Affections*, in the Crossman Hall on the opening day of the exhibition and again on the evening of the 30th September on the shoreline; close to St Cuthbert's Island (Materiality 2017).

The processes leading to the two events included preliminary visits to the island, studio tests, processes in-situ and collaborative experimentation with a group of performers. This led to the first part of *Wild Affections*, situated in the village hall, Crossman Hall, within a mixed media installation and the second part, on a southerly beach overlooking St

³¹ Established by the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. For more information on AONB see: <http://www.landscapesforlife.org.uk/>

Cuthbert's Island, in which a performance takes place in the ambient weather conditions along with materials and lights.³²

The performers were not trained professionals but were selected as my friends, reflecting my methodology of working with material that precedes from prior encounter or experience in an iterative process.³³

I, IN PROCESS

The installation and performance in Crossman Hall, resulted from two days working on location. The first day was typical of my usual solitary working processes in my studio and exhibition practice. My methods involved a large quantity of material brought from my studio, including unrolled prints from the series, *Phole*, and transparencies and material from previous configurations in *Filmy* and *What Passes Between*. New large prints were also created and scaled-up to utilise the expanse of the village hall and beach. Added to this, I had a collection of other prints and material including wood dowelling, tripods, tape, portable lights, projectors and speakers.

³² The Crossman Village Hall performers were, Zainab Djavanroodi, Alexandra Hughes, Rachael Macarthur and Gayle Meikle. The beach performers were, Kathryn Brame, Ruth Green, Alexandra Hughes and Simon Raven.

³³ This approach was also partly informed by an element in previous work, *What Passes Between* (2016), mentioned in Chapter 1, as a 'test' developed in the project space at Baltic 39, that included a changing series of video recordings of water from different locations from around the world, captured and sent to me by friends.

The first day in the space was spent responding to the ambient and tactile conditions of light, sound and architecture alongside the material. I created free-standing objects which started to compose and frame the installation and a sense of space or place, ready to be activated and adapted further by live encounters. Within this process, I was cognisant of the phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty's observation that: "space is not the setting (real or logical) in which things are arranged, but the means whereby the position of things becomes possible" (Merleau-Ponty 1945, p.284).

This methodology is reflective of my wider practice in which I avoid the use of premediated ideas (symbols) prior to constructing the installation. It is an approach which I largely describe as intuitive inasmuch as it is an instinctive or unconscious drive that unfolds in the present.³⁴ This approach draws back to the processes described in the Introduction and in Chapter 1, in which: "destructive action brings a transformation both as a release of emotions and a physical change, whereby further actions and desires are set into motion as the process develops into a new artwork" (Hughes 2017).

This association with 'feeling', as a possible primary register of meaning in photographs through the embodied encounter with the photographic object is raised by Elizabeth Edwards:

³⁴ Present'ness' as defined by psychoanalyst Lacan is: "the real, or what is perceived as such, it is what resists symbolisation absolutely...it forms the prehistory of the subject prior to their entry into language" (Chare 2011, p.249).

Subjective, embodied, sensory experience related to a state of mind...Feeling, as used here, also carries an intentional quality expressed through the act of making and indeed looking at photographs... Photographs become active sensory interfaces between referent and viewer...The touch enables seeing, in this way, bringing about a blurring of the iconic, indexical and material aspects of the photograph (Edwards 2010, p. 25).

The Japanese Mono-ha movement (the school of things) of the early 1970's, (figure 102) also identified a relation between feeling and material, in associating the tactile substance of matter with what they called the human spirit:

The Mono-ha artists relied on affective sensations arising from matter... Attempts were made to draw out a kind of artistic expression from matter by directly engaging in a dynamic and shifting entanglement of its being (ari-yō), perception and relations, which was further expressed through colloquial words such as dokitto (jump of heart), zokutto (chill in the spine), shibireru (thrill) (Sekine 2018).

In the Mono-ha's rejection of traditional ideas of representation, and Edwards' theoretical studies between feelings, meaning and the photographic object are related to my methodologies within *Wild Affections*. The movement and touch in my installation constructions I describe not as generated through intellect and knowledge but rather as arising through a visceral energy relating to inwards feelings, desires and uncertainties revealed through the process of making. In my processes, I am deliberately creating unrefined, constructed works which make apparent my immediate handmade processes and retain a sense of

energy as temporal and unresolved.³⁵ This creation from the imaginative faculty could be deemed as a fantasy and as philosopher Slavoj Žižek explains: “It is in fantasy that we stage our relation to desire, it is how we develop some way of knowing what we desire” (Zizek cited in Flisfeder 2012, p. 7).



Figure 102: Lee Ufan, *Sitting on Relatum – Expansion Place*, 2008

Photo by Curtis Hamilton for Art Asia Pacific

My described processes and the creation of situations as potentially both self-reflexive and reality forming, is examined by anthropologist Miho Ishii, who explores how divine worlds are created, vitalised and lived by people through focusing on how the body acts with things. Ishii says:

The mode and characteristics of the self and its bodily actions are specified through their coaction with things ...when a person is going to make an artefact, she usually has a certain vision to be realised through her acts. Yet a person may continue to act even in the absence of a vision of what she is going to make. Entering an unknown and unforeseen phase of the process, the human maker must simply proceed to act with materials. She can pursue these acts only in a process of forming an artefact that is also a shaping of herself (Ishii 2012, p.380).

³⁵ This quality of the work relates to artist Thomas Hirschhorn, description of his own work: “I am interested in energy not quality. This is why my work looks the way it looks! Energy yes! Quality no!” (Lange-Berndt 2015, p.60).

My actions of wilding, as described in the construction of *Wild Affections*, show a simultaneous cognitive operation of perceiving and recognising the world as a given environment in conjunction to unique bodily action through which a reality emerges. Through this embodied approach, the research begins to reveal the scope of the photographic object to manifest agency not merely as symbolic but as real and with practical effects.



Figure 103: *Wild Affections* - installation at Crossman Hall, 2017 Author's Own

WE, IN ACTION

On the second day, the performers arrived. Along with the materials already constructed as objects in the space, I had a surplus of materials ready for a series of activities used to open up experimental, spontaneous and impulsive actions and responses to the material and installation.

In thinking about how the performers and I communicated our intuitive, bodily and material-led actions, it brought to mind a past collaboration and workshops I participated within, as well as techniques I have used as an artist educator to engender communication and expression in others through material engagement.

Montage Table, The Northern Charter (December 2016), Newcastle upon Tyne, was a collaboration I took part in as an event where six artists looked at how relationships multiply between materials and people.³⁶

When faced with the challenge to work both collectively and intuitively, we oscillated between quick individual responses to collective decision-making. This was done through playful activities, partly initiated by myself, where I utilised my experience as a freelance artist educator, conducting a workshop inspired by contemporary artist Erwin Wurm's series, *1 Minute*

³⁶ Northern Charter is artist-led organisation in Newcastle upon Tyne. As part of the Northern Charter 'Studio Artists Present' series, artist Sophie Buxton, invited five artists, Tess Denman-Cleaver, Nadia Hebson, Catrin Huber, Alexandra Hughes and Fiona Larkin, to have a conversation exploring their practice in relation to the temporal and active process of montage. For more information see: <http://sophiebuxton.co.uk/montagetable.php> and <http://thenortherncharter.org/?description>)

Sculptures (1996-2017) (figure 104); “using everyday domestic objects ... Erwin creates situations and instructions that allow you to become an artwork for sixty seconds” (Tate 2018).



Figure 104: Erwin Wurm, *1 Minute Sculptures*, 2016 Source: <https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/6842/erwin-wurm-one-minute-sculptures/>

These activities, which explore unexpected relationships with objects and materials at an impulsive speed, relate to ideas of situated cognition where, “learning and acting are interestingly indistinct...resulting from acting in situations” (Seely Brown, Collins, Duguid 1989, p.35).

I employed these processes of situated cognition with the performers in *Wild Affections* as well as adopting an activity from a workshop I had participated in as part of CIRCA Projects - *Summerlab* in July 2017.³⁷ Led

³⁷ CIRCA Projects' Lead by Dawn Bothwell, Adam Phillips and Sam Watson (2009-) and based in the Northeast of England. CIRCA Projects, “spans exhibition making to independent publishing, commissioning new works and the production of events and performances” The project: *World is Sudden: Summer Lab*, 5 – 11 July 2017: “Invited artists have created a series of day-long projects which fuse interdisciplinary experiences... Participants of the Summer Lab are invited to discover other forms of being, hearing, touching, tasting and seeing the world” (CIRCA Projects, 2017).

by G.O.D.S (Glasgow Open Dance School). The aim of this workshop was to, “gather some of the North East of England’s daily movement rituals and use these gestures as a starting point for a collective choreography” (CIRCA Projects 2017).³⁸ The activity comprised of simply moving around the space and performing certain actions at varying speeds.

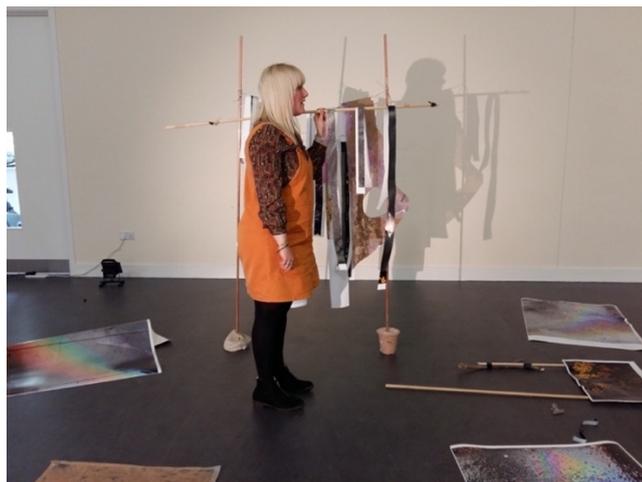


Figure 105: *Wild Affections* - improvisation activities, 2017 Author's Own

These activities, as part of the disruptive wilding strategies to re-examine the boundaries of representation, material and imagination, were further informed by book, *Body, Space, Image: Notes Towards Improvisation and Performance* (1990) by dance artists Miranda Tufnell and Chris Crickmay. The book, described as: “a manual intended to stimulate rather than instruct” (Crickmay and Tufnell 1990, p.1), outlines the following definition of improvisation:

³⁸ Glasgow Open Dance School (G.O.D.S) is a not for profit, community organisation, which facilitates free dance and movement:
<http://glasgowinternational.org/artists/glasgow-open-dance-school-g-o-d-s/>

Improvisation is a way of shifting the boundaries within which we experience the world... A dialogue is needed between wildness and order – between setting the mind loose and measuring objectively. (ibid)

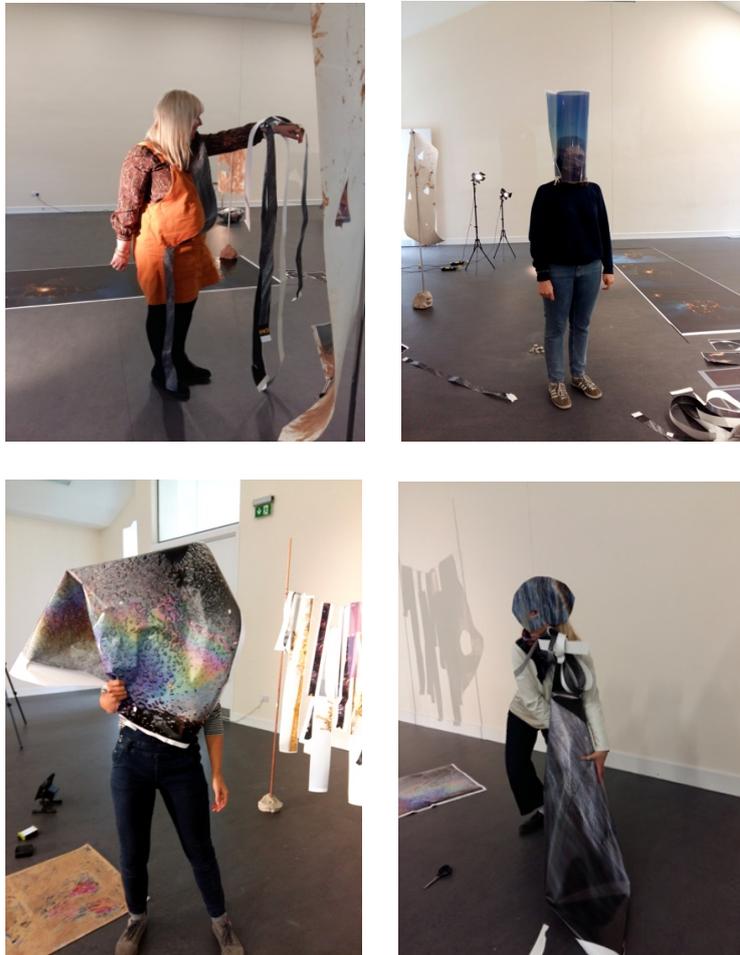


Figure 106: *Wild Affections* - improvisation activities, 2017 Author's Own



Figure 107: *Wild Affections*- improvisation activities, 2017 Author's Own

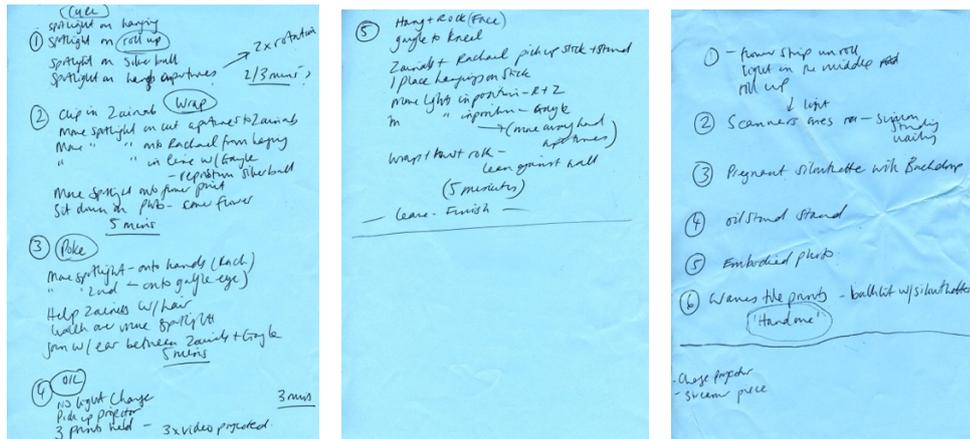


Figure 108: *Wild Affections*- Notations for performances, 2017 Author's Own

By drawing on my previous experiences, we were able to open up a sensory engagement with the space, gaining bodily knowledge of the surfaces and materials, allowing each of us to see the others developing formations and narratives. As we proceeded, I took photographs as well as made notations (figure 108). As actions were decided upon collectively, they would become timed and rehearsed, including the naming of each choreographed formation. The material used in the formations would be laid down, resting as an object in the installation until the time of action in the performance (figure 109).

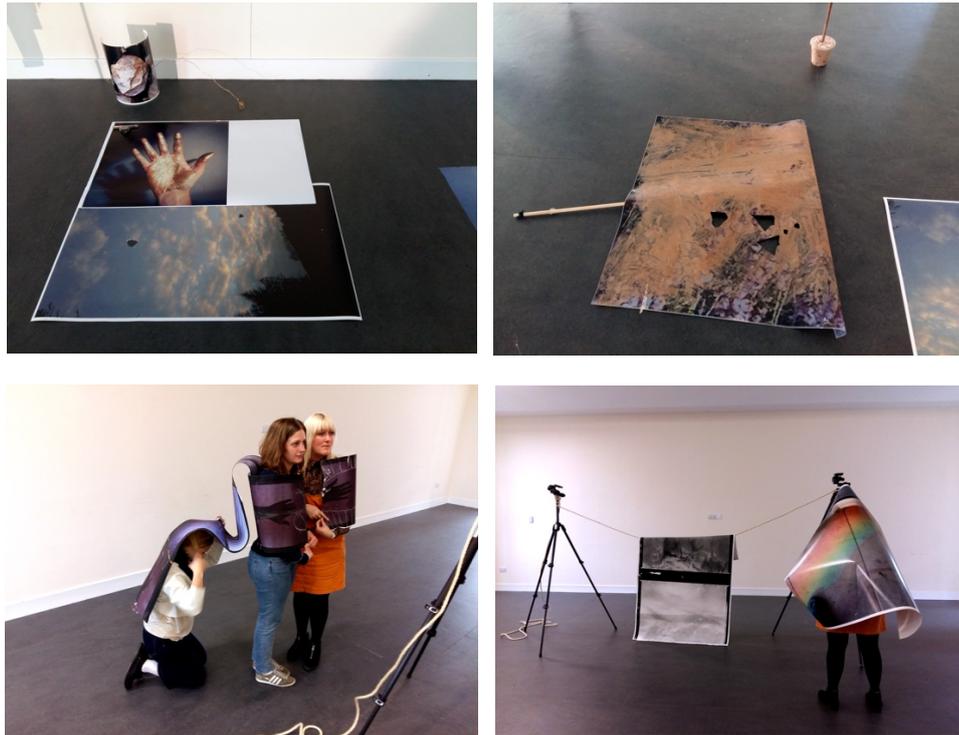


Figure 109: *Wild Affections*- objects for the performance and improvisation activities, 2017 Author's Own

During this process, I witnessed my materials and gestures taking form through correspondence to the other performer's engagement (figure 105 - 109). I watched Rachael drape photographic test strips and long ribbons of cut transparencies over her arm and a wooden pole; the prints, residual from my construction of a freestanding work in the installation, titled *Streamers*, 2018 (figure 110) and I saw an interesting correspondence open up. At another time, I watch a collective formation take shape between as Zainab, Rachael and Gayle exploring different ways to fold their bodies into a print.



Figure 110: *Streamers* in *Wild Affections*, 2017 Author's Own

One week later, the second performance on the beach manifested through similar processes, starting with impulsive actions between performers and materials in the studio. These processes were further adapted and mapped-out into a choreography on the beach. With the same materials but with a new set of performers alongside the ambient landscape as another element, the research extended the potential for unexpected co-actions, performative gesture and transformative meanings to emerge.

In this context, the wilding process expands in my co-participation with my performers, as individuals producing unexpected responses to the

material I have provided which, in turn, then folds back into the work itself, extending the exploration of the turbulent qualities of the medium which, “mixes or associates the one and the multiple, systematic gathering together and distribution” (Anderson & Wylie 2006, p.321) and the affective qualities, “as two-sided” (Anderson 2014, p.13).

By doing so, these collective performative gestures open up multiplicities of meaning in situations, surpassing the assumed fixed meaning in the photograph. This process and actions are reminiscent of academic Joanne Zylinska’s description of the feminine sublime:

It seems to me that the feminine sublime, in turn, not only redefines space and time but also delineates the boundaries of the meeting parties, which, nevertheless, may soon blur. The point is that the encounter itself defines those facing each other, giving them a chance to know themselves, and see their own difference, before they actually approach the other... Thus, in the feminine sublime we have two subjects not only exposed to each other but also needing each other for the assertion of their own (temporary) subjectivity (Zylinska 1998, p.102).

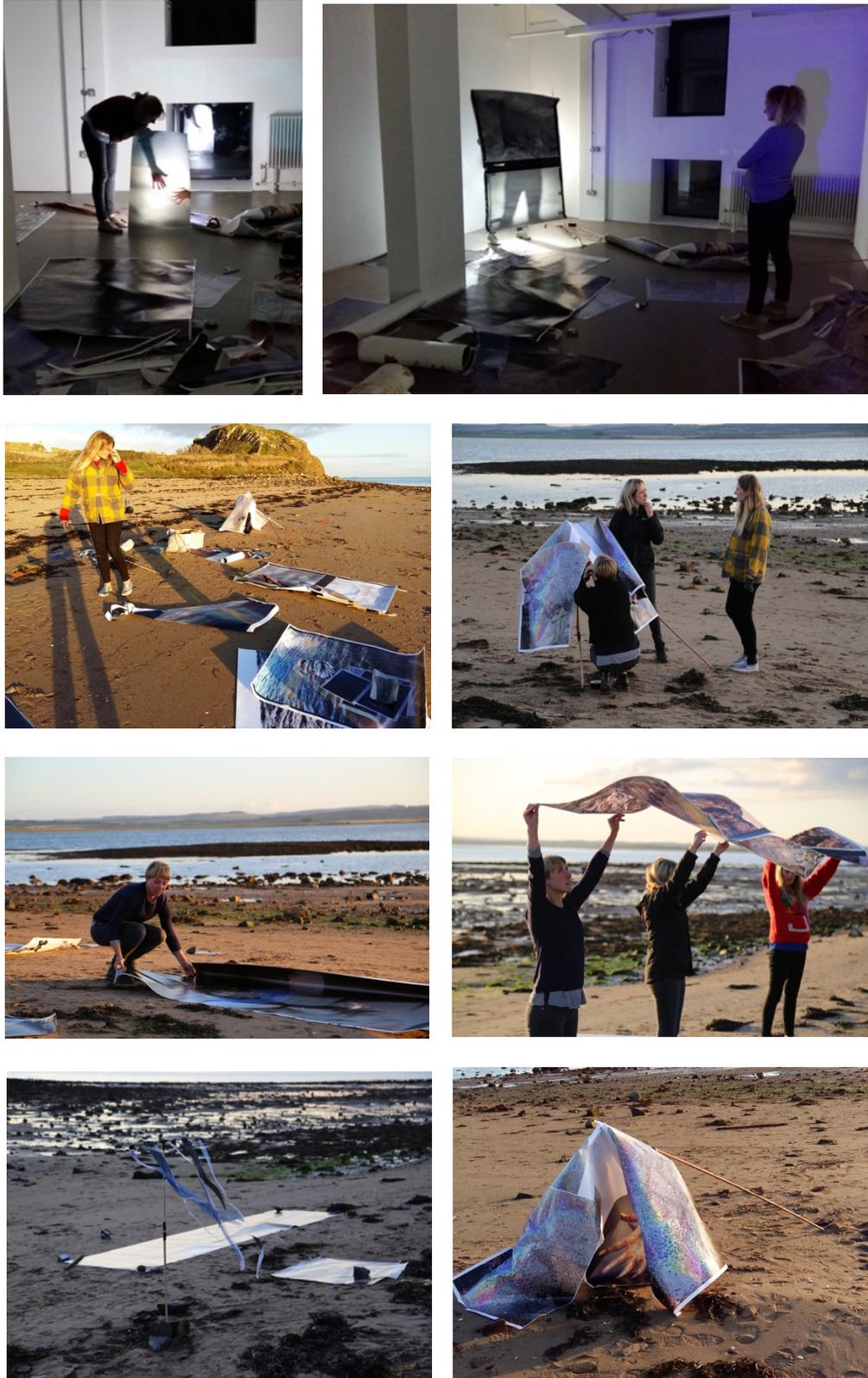


Figure 111: Improvisation activities and objects for beach performance, 2017 Author's Own

This continual or extended use of material in new places and configurations with people, relates to some of the processes undertaken by artist Joan Jonas. Jonas creates aural and visual installations and performance that begins with improvisation, and in the case of the performances, often ends with a written script to be re-performed formally. She describes one of her methods as: “circular revisions or in the shadow a shadow”, (Jonas cited in Simon 2015, p.14) where she mines her own material catalogue, migrating elements of her work and reanimating them as she responds to new situations. She says: “this process has allowed her to create a personal, if puzzling, cosmology as well as a psychologically imbued field” (ibid). Jonas takes a passage from art historian Aby Warburg to describe her work as an “allegory of the world and bodies moving in it... A matter of simultaneously seeing objects juxtaposed in a situation of exchange” (ibid).



Figure 112: Joan Jonas, *Reading Dante*, 2008 Photo credit: Greg Weight

I am a long-time admirer of Jonas’ practice, in particular her evolving performative discoveries of narrative and meaning through her interaction

with a variety of materials. Jonas creates an important ambiguity that allows symbolism and worlds to re-invented by the beholder.



Figure 113: Joan Jonas, *Reanimation*, 2012 Photo credit: Maria Ruhling

Through attending a public talk at the Tate Modern between Jonas and writer Marina Warner, I heard Jonas explain that she starts her work by asking, “how do I change the image, how do I make a space to step over a boundary, pushing the limits of illusion and perception?” In the conversation Warner comments that Jonas’ work, “modifies belief” (Warner and Jonas 2018).

In considering notions of symbolism and belief in relation to action and performance in ritual practices, anthropologist Miho Ishii states:

The contingency in the ritual performance makes the ritual not merely the realisation or representation of one predictable/possible alternative reality, but the momentary actualisation of the virtual state of the world. Through the emergence of divine worlds in ritual practices, such as spirit possession, the making of idols, hook hangings...peoples ordinary settled relations with things are disrupted and in turn, the actuality of their virtual and vital relations are evoked. The emergence of divine worlds thus alienates one’s

everyday perception of reality and in doing so enables a person to catch a glimpse of the fundamental instability and vulnerability hidden in the everyday world (Ishii 2012, p.386).

Through my own activities, and informed by these related approaches, *Wild Affections* returns to the wilding of the photograph as a process of, “going beyond the structures we inhabit and that inhabit us” (Halberstam 2013, p.7) - to destabilise and re-create worlds, and reorder experience, bodily expression and symbolic meaning. This is seen in the resulting formalised gestures within the *Wild Affections*, which turned the described, improvised processes into synchronised, repetitive practiced acts as unique and ambiguous intentions that blurred the boundaries of representation, imagination, material and reality.

THE PERFORMANCES



Figure 114: **VIDEO** - *Wild Affections* – documentation of both performances, 2017 Video
credit: VileGame Productions / Link: <https://vimeo.com/241953948>

To continue the focus on the body to describe the resulting performances, I write from my embodied perspective and sensory experience as a performer in both performances. I also include video stills, photographs and a video recording of both performances (figure 114).

(1) Crossman Hall:

I watch the audience first enter the installation, absent of us (the performers). The audience move through the space, gaining multiple perspectives of the space and objects.

In the space, prints jut out from the wall, located in the middle of the floor and within mixed media constructions. The room is lit by free-standing spotlights as well as video and slide projectors and the ambient afternoon light filters through silted windows. A video projector beams across the room, penetrating through holes and overlaying shadows of objects onto the walls of the hall in varying undulating densities. The video recording being projected shows a camera and myself submerged into the sea. The sound played through the speakers oscillates between mechanical, muffled vibrations and the ambient clear sound of both my breath and water.

We, (the performers), enter through a door into the installation, moving to our first position:

Formation: CURL (3 minutes)

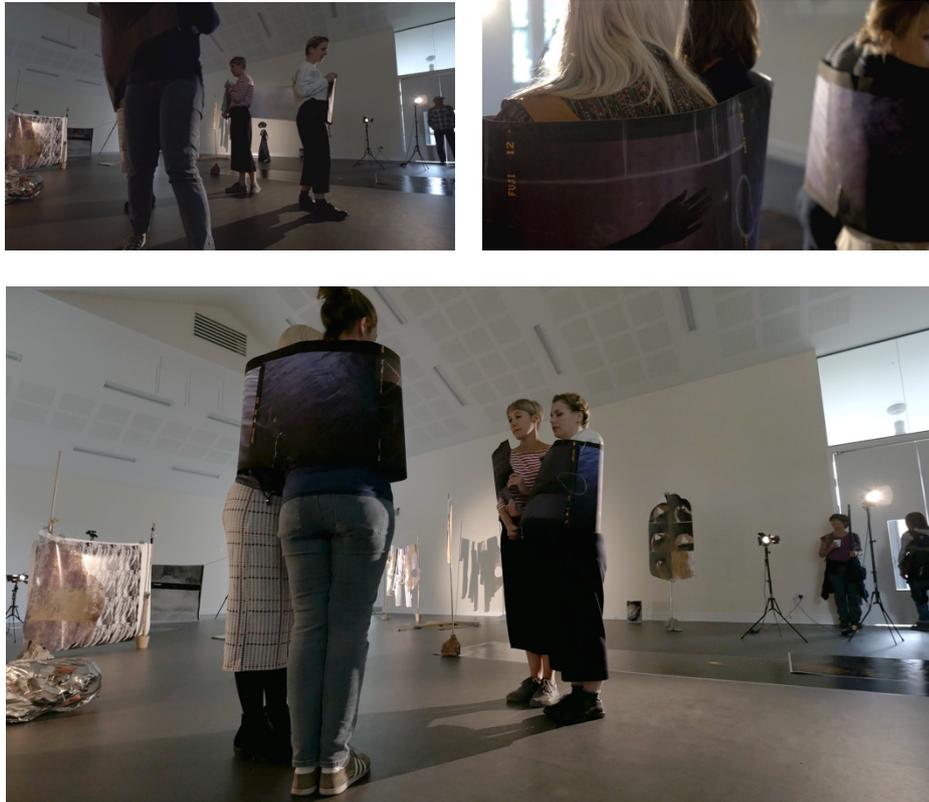


Figure 115: *Wild Affections* - video stills of performance - Crossman Hall, 2017

In pairs, we pick up two long enlarged printed filmstrips that are laid on the floor. We roll ourselves into the soft bend of the paper, which corresponds to the tubular shapes of our figures. We stand. Our hands are seen holding onto the edge of a slightly frayed print and correspond to the hand seen within the printed image. We just about fit. There is little give in the paper, it won't stretch but it might rip. The matt surface, dusty and marked, is responsive to our touch. After a time, we unwind ourselves, returning the print to a flattened sheet on the floor. As we do this, the sound of rippling paper can be heard. We disperse across the installation.

Formation: WRAP (5 minutes)



Figure 116: *Wild Affections* - video stills of performance - Crossman Hall, 2017

Gayle lies on the floor, I unroll a print over the contours of her body and through a cut hole, she threads her arm. Gayle becomes disembodied or re-embodied into the image of the sea on the print. The curve of Gayle's hand mimicking the shape of the waves seen in the image. I re-position a silver papier-mâché rock and lamp clamped to a stick of wood in cement. Rachael has wrapped a large photo around her shoulders; a spectrum of colour seen in the image that runs across her shoulder blades. Rachael stands in front of a large photo that hangs over a rope tied to large tripods. I move a light to illuminate her. Zainab rolls her shoulders inwards, making space for the print's corners to overlap, secured with a bulldog clip at the nape of her neck. Zainab shifts her body so the print catches the video projection, which then ripples over the gold hand seen in the printed

image. I move into my position. I sit on a print on the floor. I reach behind me and pick up another large print, wrapping it around my body and head. I can feel my breath ever so slightly send the photo up and down.

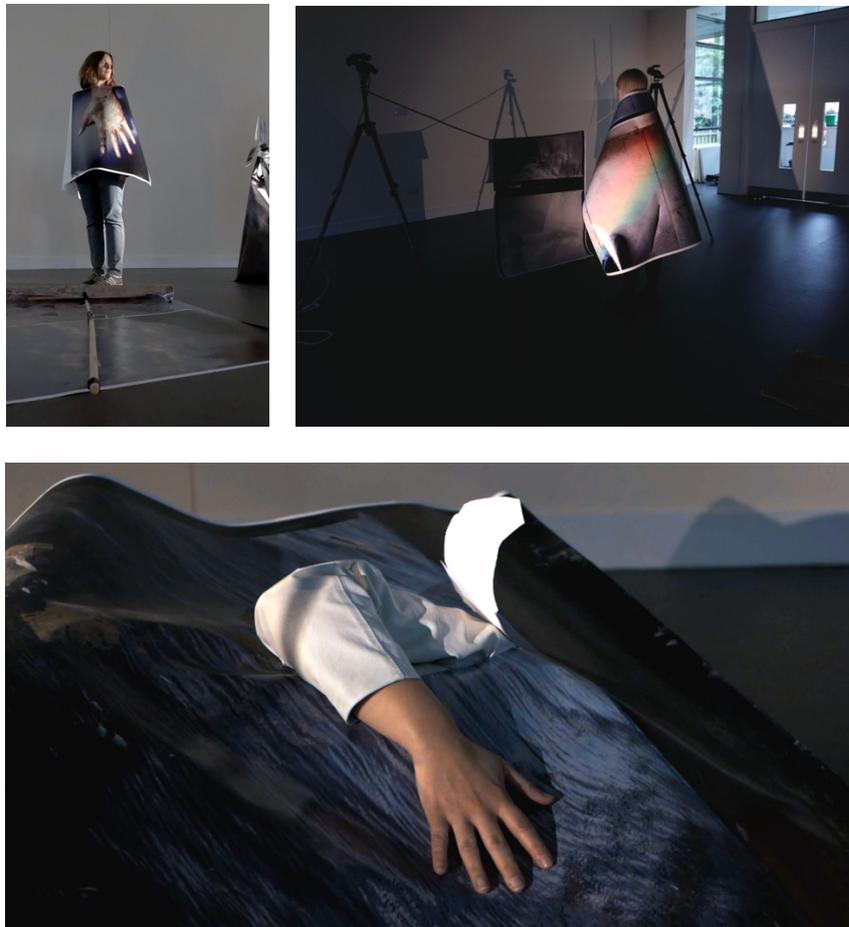


Figure 117 : ibid



Figure 118: ibid

Formation: POKE (5 minutes)

Moving towards our next formation, a series of cut holes in photographs awaits in various configurations. I thread Zainab's hair through the plastic edge of a cut hole in a transparency. The transparency is covered in a thin coating of clay and stuck to a pole that Zainab holds. Gayle bends into a figure like shape, animating it with her moving eye. Rachael slides her hands through the cut space between a series of flatbed scans of hands, made into a freestanding banner. Her fingers twitch. I push my ear through a hole in a print. It hangs there as I push my finger through another hole. There is a shift between the real and represented; an ear and finger float in the image of a sky of white clouds. Our shadows are cast on the wall and we stand still, falling into an ambiguous tableau.



Figure 119: *Wild Affections* - video stills of performance - Crossman Hall, 2017

Video Credit: VileGame Productions



Figure 120: ibid

Formation: OIL (3 minutes)

We meet at a pile of photographs and from the top, I pick up a portable video projector, walk to a distance and then turn back towards the other performers. They bend their bodies in unison, folding weight onto each large photograph they hold. The photograph of a pool of iridescent oil becomes dented with the contours of the body's clasp, the uplift and crush creating an image in relief.

Steadying the projector slightly on my stomach, the video hits the surface of the crushed photographs that are now held outward by the other performers. The video is a replication of the same recording of my descent into the sea. My hand and fingers, suspended in fluid, are seen going in and out of the frame with sweeping motions. The video is held in

the bounds of the prints they hold. The faces of Gayle, Rachael and Zainab are occasionally illuminated by the projection. A strand of hair loosens falling forward onto a face. A weight shifts in the legs. A swallow in the throat. An inhalation of breath causes the photo to quiver. The motion of the video over the photographs creates a further vibration of colour and matter. There is a sense of suspension as bodies hover and shift together, within a temporal boundary.



Figure 121: ibid

Formation: HANG AND ROCK FACE (5 minutes)

Zainab and Rachael balance a stick between their shoulders. I carefully place film and test strips over the stick, hanging in a manner that echoes the freestanding object next to us (*Streamers*). Gayle kneels and sticks a photograph of a hand to her chest. I pick up a print with wire perforated through two opposing ends, tying it across my face, in which the image of the rock printed at a scale, appears to both echo and replace my face.



Figure 122: ibid



Figure 123: ibid

After a time, we come out of this final formation, exiting through the door we had entered through.



Figure 124: *Wild Affections* – video stills of performance – Crossman Hall, 2017
Photo Credit: VileGame Productions

(2) **The beach, near St. Cuthbert's Island:**

The performance begins in the early evening. I watch the audience arrive on the beach overlooking St Cuthbert's Island. The weather is dry. There is a low golden light seen in bands of colour in the sky and the moon is bright. There is a breeze off the water. The sounds of birds and of seals calling to each other on a rock can be heard. Materials rest on the sand, weighed down by rocks, ready to be activated by us, the performers.

The audience sit on the beach facing the laid-out materials in anticipation for the performance. The performance, made from 6 formations at 4 minutes each, starts in the dimming, dusk light and ends in the darkness of the night.



Figure 125: *Wild Affections* – beach performance, 2017

Photo Credit: VileGame Productions

The performance begins with us standing in a row. We lift up a set of photos to catch in the wind, which suspends and wavers in the air. We move to our next position, holding out a set of transparencies. Simon moves along the row we have created, going one by one, he uses a long rectangle LED light to mimic the action of a scanner, moving up and down to illuminate and reveal the images in the held-out prints.



Figure 126: *Wild Affections* – beach performance, 2017

Photo Credit: VileGame Productions

From this, we move to our third formation, picking up a long strip of paper, sand falling as it is lifted. The paper is an enlarged strip of photographs. Fragments of the imagery are revealed through the flowing action of Simon and Kathryn moving spotlights across the back of the print, penetrating through the paper. The print is a film strip of a flower at night, illuminated by a streetlight and there is an occasional alignment of the held torch lights with the light in the image.



Figure 127: ibid



Figure 128: *Wild Affections* - beach performance, 2017

Moving into the fourth formation, Ruth picks up and stands behind a screen made from poles and an enlarged film frame of a detail of a glacier. Simon, standing behind Ruth, shines a light that casts a silhouette of her pregnant figure into the frame.

From here, Kathryn and I move towards one of the freestanding objects jutting out of the sand, changing colour through a video projection on its surface. We lift it up and move in a circle. The photographs of an oil spill seen in the construction rotates away from view, revealing the print of the gold hand on the other side. The colours continue to ripple across its surface.



Figure 129: *Wild Affections* - beach performance, 2017

Photo Credit: VileGame Productions

The final configuration sees a further silhouette made between myself and Simon's outstretched hands behind a print of water, overlaid with a projection of moving water and a spotlight behind it, each held by Ruth and Kathryn. The end of the performance is marked by the spot light being turned off.

PERIPHERAL PARTICIPATION



Figure 130: *Wild Affections* - beach performance, 2017

Photo Credit: VileGame Productions

Alongside my own reflections as artist researcher, here I interweave reflections upon the audience's encounter with the performances.

Returning to the notion of situated cognition in relation to the audience perspective, psychological studies have shown that:

The role of narratives and conversations is perhaps more complex than might first appear... 'legitimate peripheral participation'; where people who are not taking part directly in a particular activity learn a great deal from their legitimate position on the periphery (Lave & Wenger, cited in Seely Brown, Collins & Duguid 1989, p.20).

In both performances in Crossman Hall and on the beach, the audience simultaneously witness both material processes and refined, formal

configurations. These configurations enact a wilding of distinctions between body, material, technology, image and space in which the perception of depth, stasis and movement as well as image and object are called into question.

This flux of dimensions, throws into question perception and draws back to Merleau-Ponty's observations on the phenomenological aspect of depth:

More directly than the other dimensions of space, depth forces us to reject the preconceived notion of the world and rediscover the primordial experience from which it springs: it is, so to speak, the most 'existential' of all dimensions. Because it is not impressed upon the object itself, it quite clearly belongs to the perspective and not to things...It announces a certain dissoluble link between things and myself by which I am placed in front of them (Merleau-Ponty 1945, p.298).

This dissoluble link between space, object and perspective expands those explorations of surface seen in Chapter 1. This dissolution can be seen in similar terms to artist Tavi Meraud's phenomenon of camouflage:

A particular interior – exterior negotiation that ultimately results in suspension of the appearance – reality distinction. Appearance and reality are collapsed...this virtuality shifts the locus of reality away from the thing itself but not entirely back to the perceiving subject. Rather to suspend the issue altogether and suggest another locus of reality – neither here nor there, which shimmers between revealing itself as thing in itself and purely experiential (Meraud 2015, p.9).

This suspension could further be described in relation to Baker's proposition of the expanded field of photography as: "holding at odds such

effects of movement and petrification as well as the temporal and spatial dimensions themselves in one contradictory field” (Baker 2005, p.126).

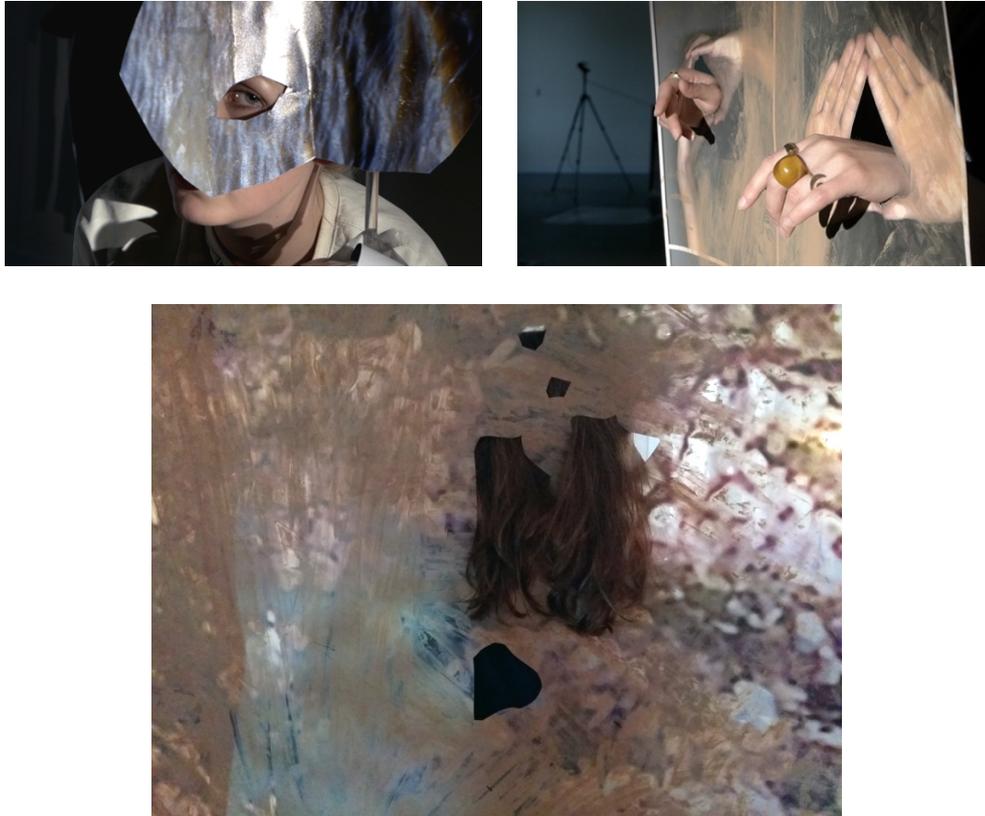


Figure 131: *Wild Affections*, video stills of performance - Crossman Hall, 2017
Photo Credit: VileGame Productions

The audience watch the performers move into positions collectively, coming and in and out of postures, picking up and putting down objects; they watch me switch the direction of lights and cover other performers in material, confusing a sense of process, performance, reality and imaginative narratives.

Graham Patterson, curator of this group exhibition, *Materiality*, later reflected upon the encounter of the beach performance:

Encountering the performance close to St Cuthbert's Island was a very evocative experience... The flickering projected imagery onto the printed work - scrunched up into a type of shelter had a particular alien-like effect resonating eerily with the echoing sound of seals on the shoreline of Guile Point (Patterson 2017, pers.comm., 20 November 2017).

Paterson's description of the performance suggests that as well as 'learning', there is 'sensing' and 'interpretation' unfolding in the situated perspective of the audience, in which a further collapse of 'place' and preconceived meanings may be facilitated. This highlights the exchange between artwork and audience in a turbulent and affective states, described in the field of phenomenology as:

Our body and our perception always summon us to take as the centre of the world that environment with which they present us. But this environment is not necessarily that of our own life. I can be 'somewhere else', while staying here (Merleau-Ponty 1945, p.333).

Subsequent reflection on the performance has prompted associations with number of interrelated ideas. I see this moment of evocative experience evidenced between audience and artwork as an 'atmosphere', as defined by French philosopher and phenomenologist, Mikel Dufrenne who observes that:

Rather than representing an existing world, a perceived work of art expresses a certain bundle of spatial-temporal relations... (Atmosphere is) the expressed world overflows the representational content of the aesthetic object as a certain quality which words cannot translate but which communicates itself in arousing a feeling (Dufrenne cited in Anderson 2014, p.141).

Returning to the medium of dance, Dufrenne, uses a specific example:

This atmosphere is perceptible even in the pure dance... In this sense, the dance triumphs as beyond all representation, as an absolute language that bespeaks only itself (ibid).

Reflecting upon the potential experiential and performative quality of art, von Hantelmann explores not a turning away from meaning, discourse and content, but rather points to a connection of meaning to experience (a concept I elaborate in Chapter 4):

The production of meaning that basically exists in every artwork, although it is not always consciously shaped or dealt with, namely, its reality-producing dimension. In this sense, a specific methodological orientation goes along with the performative, creating a different perspective on what produces meaning in an artwork. What the notion of the performative brings into perspective is the contingent and elusive realm of impact and effect that art brings about both situationally – that is, in a given spatial and discursive context, and relationality, that is, in relation to a viewer or public (von Hantelmann 2014, p.2).



Figure 132: **VIDEO** - *Wild Affections* - object with video projection - beach performance, 2017 Author's own / Link: <https://vimeo.com/317144322>

The actions described in *Wild Affections* result in rethinking not only our acts of seeing, but our bodily acts of engagement with the photography. In doing so, the research opens up and proposes new experiential situations and meanings. This returns to notions of the sublime, as the encounter of something 'Other' which undermines the notion of preconceived symbols as preceding our sense of the world, and the sublime 'event' (outlined in Chapter 1) as defined by philosopher Lyotard:

Between world and body... between artist and world, between the viewer and the work of art...As not only the array of small impressions that shift or relocate themselves but the whole unity of space and time...Events are not shaped by referentiality (Lyotard cited in Thompson 1999, p.27).

The research also relates to Patricia Yaeger's essay, *Toward a Female Sublime* (1989); a critique of French feminist writing, which led her to define a female sublime as: "not through the old-fashioned sublime of domination (a vertical sublime) ...but instead through a horizontal sublime...that expands towards others, spreads itself into multiplicity" (Yaeger 1989, p.191) Yaeger's research has gone on to be described posthumously as, "a sublime not of mastery but of 'undoing'" (University of Michigan 2014).

TO END CHAPTER 3

a suspension as bodies hover and shift together, within a temporal boundary (Hughes 2017).

Through describing the processes and final output of my artwork, *Wild Affections*, we can see the development and implications of a wilding approach that "goes beyond the structures we inhabit and that inhabit us" (Harney & Moten 2013, p.7).

The research processes undertaken in *Wild Affections* returned the photograph to a physical and mutable condition through my embodied sensory engagement and my co-participation with performers, producing unexpected responses to the material. These described processes utilised intuitive, visceral and improvised actions, which were partly informed by dance artists Tufnell and Crickmay's approach to improvisation:

Being receptive to the immediate moment...tuning in to our own sensations, feelings, dreams, we begin our own narrative of discovery that differs from the received narratives of our culture (Tufnell & Crickmay 1990, p.98).

Further resonance to my research approach was found shortly after completing *Wild Affections*, when I took part in the workshop *Doing Day: BODY/BRAIN/ARCHIVE*, at Siobhan Davies Dance Studio, London (2017). The workshop aimed to, “explore how impulses to move arise and how embodied feeling is affected by perceiving the movement of other bodies” (Siobhan Davies Dance, 2018). During this day, choreographer and dancer Siobhan Davies spoke about attending to the body, tapping into a pre-consciousness to ‘undo the image’. Davies wanted to bring awareness to representations coexistence to gesture, in the production of knowledge (Davies 2017, per comm., 19th November).

Through *Wild Affections*, what is seen is an ‘unfixing’ of the photograph as image, showing it to be a material with agency that moves beyond the metaphors of touch and of representations. In this expanded understanding, I found relevance to Olin’s theoretical challenge to Barthes, contained in her observations on the “gestural practice” of the medium (Olin 2012, p.14) and to Edwards’ reflections on the emotional, physical engagement with the photographic object. With *Wild Affections*, I show how the research extends Olin and Edward’s theoretical positions, providing new approaches to the relationship between bodily gesture and the photographic object through simultaneous, physical engagement with

the haptic, temporal and spatial dimensions of the photographic medium. Through this approach, what is shown is the translation of sensation to motion and meaning, through which the research contributes to an undeveloped area in the relationship between performance and the photographic object.

In describing the resulting formalised performances and installations of *Wild Affections*, account was taken for the peripheral participation of a public audience. In reflecting on the embodied perspective of the audience what was seen was a temporal unfolding of interpretations and sensing, within which further multiplicities of meaning arose.

Through the wilding of photographs undertaken in *Wild Affections*, the affective and turbulent qualities of the medium are revealed through a disruption of the division between representation, live gesture and encounter, with the continual potential to destabilise and re-create worlds.

Chapter 4: WILDING RESPONSE

LIVE EVENT & PERFORMATIVE SYMPOSIUM: ASSEMBLY (2018)

BALTIC 39, Newcastle upon Tyne UK



Figure 133: *Assembly* - poster for live event & performative symposium, 2018

Author's Own

THE SPACE BEYOND

With this project, I am privileging practice and co-actions with material with the hope to open a space for critical reflection on the material encounter of the photographic object in the wider social and cultural sensorium (Hughes 2017).

The above text is an excerpt taken from an invitation I composed as part of the final phase of this doctoral project's evolving practice-research methodologies. Chapter 4, *Wilding Response* attends to the 'space beyond', considering the affective, potential collaborative and ongoing performativity of the research process in the wider social and cultural sensorium.

To extend the idea of performance already explored in the thesis, this chapter consider notions of 'performative research', a term taking its name from J.L. Austin's 'speech act theory' (Austin 1962) and defined by academic Brad Haseman in *A Manifesto for Performative Research* (2006):

It represents a move which holds that practice is the principal research activity – rather than only the practice of performance – and sees the material outcomes of practice- as all-important representations of research findings in their own right (Haseman 2006, p.103).

Barbara Bolt, an artist and lecturer in Visual Media at the University of Melbourne, supports Haseman's view, in her essay, *Artistic Research: A Performative Paradigm* (2006). She suggests that in artistic research:

A performative research paradigm needs to be understood in terms of the performativity of force of the research, its capacity to effect 'movement' in thought, word and deed in the individual and social sensorium... To bring new perspectives on research not just in the artistic field but also in social sciences, the humanities and in the sciences where the reduction of 'raw life' to 'data' cannot encapsulate the performative effects of much primary research... Looking at where, originary knowledge or the new is revealed through handling, rather through conscious acts of transgression (Bolt 2006, p.129).

Bolt explores the experiential potential of artwork by referring to von Hantelmann's suggestion that, "The performative triggers a methodological shift in how we look at any artwork and in the way in which it produces meaning" (von Hantelmann 2014, p.2).

The project *Assembly* (2018), privileges practice and co-actions with material to consider the scope of impact that creative methodologies in practice-based research can achieve, re-evaluating ideas of materialism from the context of fine art to cross-disciplinary networks.

Funded by the Cohort Development Fund from Northumbria-Sunderland AHRC Centre for Doctoral Training in Art and Design, this project invited a cross-disciplinary network of practitioners and researchers to physically assemble an artwork from my doctoral research. Through this haptic process, responses manifest in each individual's own respective practices which were brought together as a live installation, seen as both a public evening event (April 26th 2018) and a performative symposium, for a

research-student audience at Baltic 39³⁹ (Northumbria University), Newcastle upon Tyne (April 27th, 2018).

In this chapter, the research expands the wilding approach, placing my research materials into the hands of other practitioners as new situations of practice, in which the embodied act of 'doing' results in unexpected thoughts and bodily gestures. The collaborative expansion of the research through this methodology, aims to further attend to the research exploration on the affective qualities as "a body's capacity to affect and be affected" (Anderson 2014, p.13), and the turbulent qualities of the medium as "a mix of order and disorder - tensed between a gathering and a distribution" (Anderson & Wylie 2006, p.321).

The methodology carried out through *Assembly* further challenges an undervaluation of the nuanced affective and multi-dimensional qualities of the material phenomenon of photography within critical photographic theory

This material-led approach to research is also recognised as a neglected area of study in wider approaches to materiality. Art historian Petra Lange Berndt asserts: "Materiality is one of the most contested concepts in contemporary art and is often side-lined in critical academic writing" (ed., Lange Berndt 2015, p.13). Berndt goes on to ask: "What does it mean to

³⁹ Baltic 39: "is a unique collaborative venture between Newcastle City Council, Arts Council England, BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art and Northumbria University, in which the Fine art postgraduate student cohort reside" (Baltic 39 2019).

give agency to the material, to follow the material and to act with the material?” (ed., Lange Bernt 2015, p.13).

The methods undertaken in *Assembly* also draw upon psychological studies of ‘situated cognition’ (as mentioned in Chapter 3) where “situations might be said to co-produce knowledge through activity... bound to social, cultural and physical contexts” (Brown, Collins & Duguid 1989).

I further relate my methodologies to contemporary theory in the field of material feminism, as defined by feminist theorist, Rosi Braidotti, as that which: “Proposes a materialism that combines oppositional consciousness of critique with creativity, in a double-edged vision that does not stop at critical deconstruction but moves on to the active production of alternatives” (Braidotti cited in Dolphijn & van der Tuin 2012).

Assembly drew upon a cross disciplinary network in its methodology, and thereby continued to reveal the effects on material, body and meaning through simultaneously engaging with the haptic, spatial and temporal dimensions of the photograph. In this, and in line with Baker’s proposition in his essay *Photography Expanded Field*, it also aimed to “[mark]out a strategic movement whereby both art and world or art and the larger cultural fields would stand in new formerly unimaginable relations to one another” (Baker 2005, p.130).

First, this chapter describes an overview of my processes and experiences in undertaking this project. Then, the chapter reflects upon the responses of the *Assembly* network, both through the resulting installation and performative symposium, including descriptions of in-situ experiments and subsequent insights. From this initial outline of the 'free-flow' of ideas that arose in the project, the chapter ends by summarising the project, drawing out vectors of thought in relation to the overarching research aims of this doctoral study.

OVERVIEW OF ASSEMBLY

I see myself as an artist and curator of this project, carefully selecting invited participants through my own encounter with the material outputs of their respective professional practices (Hughes 2017).

In keeping with the processes discussed through this thesis, I selected the network of people for *Assembly* from pre-established relationships or physical encounters of their respective practices - encounters that had, in some way informed my thoughts or experiences during the course of this doctoral research. The resulting network consisted of: Dawn Bothwell, Luce Choules, Fiona Crisp, Ditte Goard, Carol Mavor, Tim Rubidge and James Watts. Further details on the selected network members can be seen in the letter of invitation (figure 134 & 135).

Assembly was informed by a prior project, *Load* (2013-2014), that I conducted as an MRes Fine Art student at Northumbria University.⁴⁰ The intention of *Load* was to create a material-led dialogue on photography through the form of an archival box that accumulated content from invited contributors. With *Assembly*, instead of an accumulation of material in one box, each contributor received the same material at the same time to then be manifested as a new collaborative overlay in an installation, live event and performative symposium.

⁴⁰ *Load* (2013 - 2014): <http://alexandrahughes.co.uk/>

The *Assembly* network received dissembled artworks, *Claytypes*, as a set of material components along with a guide to how to reassemble. The materials varied in shape and content but equally could be named the same thing, i.e., a pole, a photograph.⁴¹

⁴¹ Deciding to 'flat-pack' the artwork *Claytype* (as described and seen in Chapter 1 with instructions, had already proved to be successful when utilised for a previous event, *re-creation* at Rochester Square Gardens, London (June 2017) <https://www.rochestersquare.co.uk/news/2017/7/27/re-creation-day>

A S S E M B L Y

26TH APRIL 2018 / MOON STUDIOS, BALTIC 39

This project has been funded by Northumbria-Sunderland AHRC Centre
for Doctoral Training in Art & Design



from: Alexandra Hughes
contact@alexandrahughes.co.uk

subject: An invitation to contribute to
Assembly

Dear:

I am writing to you with an invitation to contribute to an experimental project entitled *Assembly*.

At the root of language is practice and as an artist and current practiced-based PhD (Fine Art) student, I am physically invested in the over flowing, messy, fragile, enduring, meaning-making qualities of material. My processes go between physical experiences of environments to working with photography in conjunction with other matter, creating intuitive (sometimes precarious) work that raises questions on the production of situations and meanings through material encounters. I am asking how ideas of the photographic object in contemporary fine art can be expanded by discovering the effects of simultaneously engaging with the photographic image and it's haptic, spatial and temporal dimensions?

Within my research I have found much theory runs a risk of giving a reductive reflection on the nuanced affective qualities of material, which are often only discovered in the 'doing' that then results in unexpected thoughts and bodily gestures. With this project, I am privileging practice and co-actions with material with the hope to open a space for critical reflection on the material encounter of the photographic object in the wider social and cultural sensorium.

The project, *Assembly* begins with me sending you a set of materials, including a bag of clay, poles and a photograph, along with instructions on how to assemble. After which, I ask you to photograph the piece in-situ and then to make a response in any medium (including text). From this, the material is to be sent back to me and the resulting response will sit alongside a set of invited responses to be presented and discussed in a public event.

Assembly, precedes [Load \(2013 - 2014\)](#), which took the form of an archival box that accumulated content from invited contributors, presented at *The North East Photography Network's Photo-Book Market* at the BALTIC Centre of Contemporary Art (2014) and at the Hatton Gallery, Newcastle Upon Tyne (2015). With *Assembly*, instead of an accumulation of material in one box, each contributor receives the same material at the same time, which in the subsequent exhibition and symposium presents a set of multi-faceted individual responses expressed in material, words and bodily gestures.

I see myself as an artist and curator of this project, carefully selecting invited participants through my own encounter with the material outputs of their respective professional practices. My invitation comes from a genuine appreciation of your work and what, I hope, is an observed shared interest in what I am proposing.

Figure 134: *Assembly*: Invitation sent out to contributors (page 1), 2017

Author's Own

I am inviting you:

Dawn Bothwell, because, I can see your insight and experience of curating contemporary artwork and events that draw out thought-provoking results, through CIRCA Projects, in a wide set of contexts from the gallery to alternate sites would be an important addition to the project. Also, from my understanding of your PhD research at The University of Sunderland, exploring the notion of 'intermedia' would be relevant to this project's exploration. Last but not least, your music practice, played as PENTECOSTAL PARTY, is evocative, immersive and amongst many things, brings about ideas of ritualism and I would love to explore further how our potential actions with material can bring about meaningful behaviour.

Luce Choules, as it was great to see you present your work both visually and through your spoken words, in your position as Follow at the Royal Geographical Society, in the conference EXPLORE (2016), exploring the line between science and art. I see particular relevance in both your initiated *Temporal School of Experimental Geography*, that brings artists together in a network to look at responses to encounters of landscape as well as your own practice, responding through physical processes with the photographic medium in conjunction with other mediums.

Fiona Crisp, because as my PhD supervisor we have a shared interest in exploring through our artistic practice and position in academia, how the photographic medium can create space that embodies a sense of material encounters and your current project *Material Sight* (2018) awarded by The Leverhulme Trust, as well as your essay *Negative Capability: Imaging and Imagining Fundamental Science Through Productive Doubt* (2015), are great examples of this. As well as this, we are both invested in widening the approaches and situations artist researchers can make to articulate a meta-discussion around the effects of their artist research and so I see your response and contribution to this project as incredibly important.

Ditte Goard (as Material Chorus), from remembering when you visited my project as artist in residence at ROAMING ROOM, London (2016), you stepped into the installation and spontaneously started to whistle a beautiful tune which captivated me! As well as this, your *North Sea Project*, at The Sage, Gateshead (2017) is an incredible score of music played with a ten-piece orchestra and choir, informed from the experience of sea swimming as well as research on the history of this coastline. Since then, hearing your latest experimental work as well as remembering your allegorical performance in the finale of your BA Hons Fine Art at Newcastle University (2015), means I would love your response to project!

Carol Mavor, because of your unique and innovative approach as an 'artist historian'. I saw online a recording of your performative lecture delivered at the RCA in 2015 that bridged an intriguing space between theory and subjectivity, responding to photographic images through spoken word that opened up the meaning of visual objects in relation to experience. Also, your publications are of interest including, *Black and Blue: The Bruising Passion of Camera Lucida*, *La Jetée*, *Sans soleil* and *Hiroshima mon amour* (2012).

Tim Rubidge, through your role as choreographer and dancer, I see that your practice is invested in the potential of body language and the bodies capacity to communicate, working across exciting contexts and cross-discipline projects including, as guest artistic director at Dance City, Newcastle upon Tyne, and also because I would love to take this opportunity to continue the dialogue we began in the summer within CIRCA's summer lab (2017), in which an exciting exploration of bodily response to material opened up.

James Watts (and Drone Quartet), because of our trips to ancient stone circles revealed a shared interest in ideas around the material imagination, thinking between the elemental and animism as well as through watching your excellent performances, including in the final MFA graduate show at Northumbria University (2016), that involved you playing your handmade and brittle clay instruments, exploring bodily, visceral, energetic, non-verbal aural coactions with material objects.

Best wishes, **Alexandra**

Figure 135 : *Assembly*: Invitation sent out to contributors (page 2), 2017

Author's Own



The materials enclosed are gathered from my studio, used previously to structurally alter and cohere the photographic object with other composite material. With these given materials, I invite you to do the same; to create a free-standing object by bringing these components together (I have provided guidelines below, to help you with this). Your response to this process and/or the finished piece can be at any scale, format and medium, including text, using whatever material or actions relate or come from your own practice.

The materials include:

- 1 x photographic print smeared in clay
- 1 x block of clay (air dry)
- Assorted materials – metal rods, branches, wood dowelling
- 1 x roll of electrical tape
- 1 x glue gun plus glue sticks
- A couple of bundles of mixed wire

1. From the assorted materials (metal and plastic rods, branches, wood dowelling) make 2 poles that are approximately the same height.
2. To make the 2 poles fasten some of the assorted materials together by using the adhesives included, for example, the glue gun can be used to adhere sticks together, adding the wire and/or tape for an extra bind.
3. Dependent on the size print received you may need to make an additional pole as a top support.
4. Use the clay to create two bases (spaced in relation to the size of print) in which you place the poles into.
5. In positioning the clay and poles consider how the light conditions in the space will affect the photographic print and overall work.
6. Fasten the photograph between the poles, again, with the provided adhesives. Feel free to, add glue, stick tape and poke wire on and through the print.
7. When complete, photograph the work in-situ and email to me at: contact@alexandrahughes.co.uk
8. Please make your response.

Figure 136: *Assembly* - materials and instructions sent to contributors, 2017

Author's Own

The network had two months to complete their response. The early stages of the developing responses came through emails sent to me, including photographs of the assembled material constructions in varying environments. Alongside these photographs, some members provided sketches, sound and video recordings and a performance. I then received back the materials initially sent, as well as new material and propositions from the network members for new works to be completed in-situ.

I created the installation in an enclosed studio space at Baltic 39, where I re-assembled the material back into my artworks *Claytypes*. These works were placed in conjunction with the network members' responses, and lit with spotlights. During the set-up, there were intermittent rehearsals and in this jostling an installation emerged. During the evening event, the audience were able to move through and amongst the

installation, experiencing the objects, video and live performances. The final list of works seen as:

Alexandra Hughes has reassembled works, *Claytactypes* in an installation with a new collaborative overlay including:

Objects:

Burial (video) – **Dawn Bothwell**

Arboreal Journey Essex 2018 (map) – **Luce Choules**

Prone to Flooding (re-configured *Claytactype* with water) - **Fiona Crisp**

A fragment of text from Anne Boyer's 'MA VIE EN BLING: A MEMOIR' – **Carol Mavor**

Recording (Tape, clay) - **James Watts**

Performances:

6:10 - 6:25 pm - **Tim Rubidge**

6:45 - 7pm - **Tim Rubidge**

7 - 7:15pm - **Luce Choules**

7:45 - 8pm - **Tim Rubidge**

8 - 8:35pm - **James Watts and Drone Quartet**

8:35 - 8:55pm - **Ditte Goard as Material Chorus**

Figure 137: *Assembly* - list of artworks and performances for live event, 2018



Figure 138: *Assembly* - installation at Baltic 39, 2018 Photo Credit: Arto Polus

As part of the methodology to research and negotiate the physicality of the work, the performative symposium occurred in the same studio space where the live event had taken place. The installation was still present but reconfigured for the seated PGR and MFA student audience and for the *Assembly* network panel presentations.

The performative symposium consisted of three panels of network members, whom I placed together through observation of common ground in their responses. I began the symposium with an introduction of my research and chaired each panel. The panellists talked about their individual responses, giving descriptions and thoughts during their processes, reflecting upon video documentation from the evening event, and in relation to their own practices. Further thoughts were raised and discussed from audience questions throughout the symposium and culminated in a round table discussion which concluded the events.

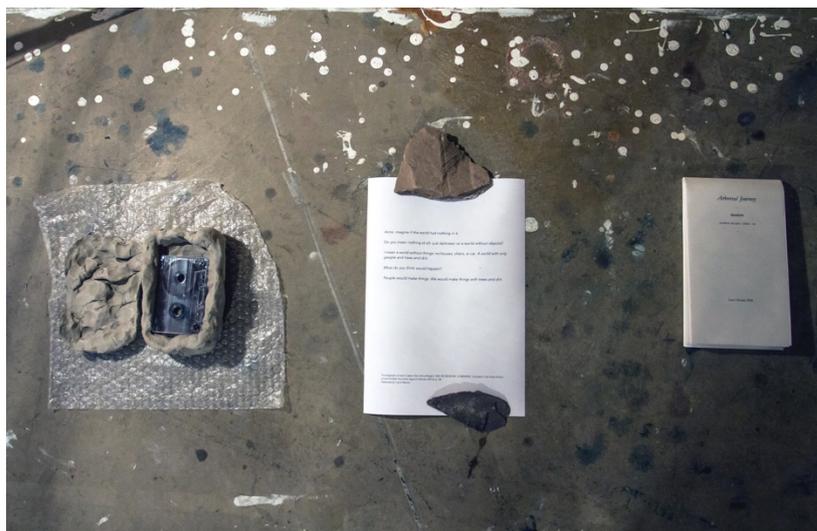


Figure 139: *Assembly* - installed objects, 2018 Photo Credit: Arto Polus

RESPONSES MANIFEST



Figure 140: **VIDEO** - Full recording of *Assembly*, Performative Symposium, 2018

Video Credit: Arto Polus / Link:

https://vimeo.com/318262277?utm_source=email&utm_medium=vimeo-cliptranscode-201504&utm_campaign=29220&utm_term=1195028

This section includes the full video documentation of the four and half hour performative symposium (figure 140). It summarises both events and the responses, by moving through the panel format of the symposium, profiling each member, starting with an excerpt from my letter of invitation to each member of the network. Each profile includes descriptions, photographs, sound and videos clips of both preliminary ideas and the final responses seen in the live event and through reflection on the discussions that arose in the performative symposium.

Panel 1: *Visceral Energy, Material Bodies*

Tim Rubidge and James Watts

I am inviting you:

Tim Rubidge, through your role as choreographer and dancer, I see that your practice is invested in the potential of body language and the bodies capacity to communicate, working across exciting contexts and cross-discipline projects including, as guest artistic director at Dance City, Newcastle upon Tyne. Also, because I would love to take this opportunity to continue the dialogue, we began in the summer within CIRCA's summer lab (2017), in which an exciting exploration of bodily response to material opened up.

James Watts, because of our trips to ancient stone circles revealed a shared interest in ideas around the material imagination, thinking between the elemental and animism. Also, through watching your excellent performances, including in the final MFA graduate show at Northumbria University (2016), that involved you playing your handmade and brittle clay instruments, I can see relevance in your exploration of bodily, visceral, energetic, non-verbal aural coactions with material objects.

(Hughes 2017).

Both Tim and James had a couple of key stages to their processes. The first was an improvised private performance in the environment in which they had initially installed the given materials. The second stage was a whole new improvised public performance within the installation at Baltic 39. What arose between Tim and James was a shared process of improvisation and an interest in dialogue between matter, space and non-verbal bodily co-actions with material objects.

Tim Rubidge ⁴²

Tim Rubidge's final response was three dance performances, lasting approximately 15 minutes each, resulting from impulsive and improvised actions (figure 141-142). The first time Tim danced was in conjunction with the sound of Dawn Bothwell's video. The second without sound, and the third as a brief overlay and transition to James Watts' performance.



Figure 141: Tim Rubidge - during his performances in *Assembly*, 2018 Photo Credit: Arto Polus

In his dance performances, Tim used the whole space, sometimes he directly interacted with the *Claytatypes*, making gestures that appeared to measure or mimic the shapes of the free-standing pieces, or drew attention to the shadows and light reflections they cast. At other times, Tim danced in way that seemed in another world, including sliding across the floor backwards or doing jumps and twists in the air.

⁴² For more information see: <http://www.timrubidge.net/>



Figure 142: **VIDEO** - Tim Rubidge -excerpts of performances in *Assembly*, 2018

Video Credit: Arto Polus / Link: <https://vimeo.com/302571936>

The processes leading up to Tim's response began with the initial assembly of the artwork in the situation of a community hall. After which, Tim disassembled the materials and invited me to witness his first bodily response as a dance work within that space (figure 143-145). In a conversation we had after this dance, I asked Tim, "are you remembering the construction of the material I gave you?" Tim replies:

Yes, without a doubt...it was just me in the empty space, but I feel it's here like a presence because I remember how it looked and felt. I remember lifting the clay and putting up the poles and the sound of the plastic film of the photograph as it wobbled. All these things are important; they provided for what I was doing but I didn't want what I was doing here today to be about those things...but they were there as part of the map (Tim Rubidge, pers.comm., 19th December 2017).



Figure 143: Tim Rubidge - constructed material, 2017 Photo credit: Tim Rubidge



Figure 144: Tim Rubidge - initial dance response to constructed materials, 2017
Author's Own



Figure 145: **VIDEO** - Tim Rubidge - initial dance response to constructed materials, 2017
Author's Own / Link: <https://vimeo.com/303975404>

During the performative symposium, Tim elaborates on his responses in relation to his practice, which looks to put body and memory in dialogue

with space and matter to see what both “emerges and merges” (Tim Rubidge, pers.comm., 27th April 2018). Tim defines the body as a memory stick, a cluster of associations and a connector tissue between inner and outer worlds. Tim talks about his approach to his final performances for *Assembly* coming from a desire to be in: “different states in the body”; as both a clear response to the work and environment whilst at the same time, to be lost or “otherwise”, in a parallel world, where he was, “still in association with the material but elsewhere” (ibid).

An audience member questioned Tim, asking: “What was it like working with another artists material/practice and how did it feel in the body?” (Gayle Meikle, pers.comm., 27th April 2018).

Tim replied that he made no preparations for the event, arriving with just a few minutes to spare before the event began to simply start to see how he would “navigate the space”. He said he felt that there were areas within the installation with different ‘feels’ to them and explained:

I was very certain of the installation, the materials used, the concreteness of the floor...I became aware of the layout... the topography... I was very aware of the material reality of the space and I wanted to be constant with that but in every other way not very constant (Tim Rubidge, pers.comm., 27th April 2018).

Another audience member asked Tim: “How aware were you during your performance of the presence of the sculptures –which also seem to have the presence of people?” (Ditte Goard, pers.comm., 27th April 2018). Tim replied: “I enjoyed being in close proximity to that material world... and all

that lies behind and in that material world” (Tim Rubidge, pers.comm., 27th April 2018).

Tim went on to describe the challenge he finds to put into words “the flavour of a situation” and brought awareness to the trajectory from bodily sensation to words through an activity; asking the audience to focus on their hands coming together (ibid). In this activity, attention was drawn to how each hand shape alters to accommodate the other. He then asked the audience to say a word to describe this experience, collectively piecing together a spoken language around this action and sensation. Tim concluded this activity by saying: “Hands are always there, ahead of us” (ibid).



Figure 146: Tim Rubidge speaking in *Assembly*, performative symposium, 2018

Photo Credit: Arto Polus

As Tim reflected upon the video documentation of his evening performance, during the symposium, he stated:

As I watch this I think...it's not how I remember it from last night... it has a different feel...the video gives a description on how it appears in the best possible way... but it hasn't documented the profound way that I am feeling it and want to grow it further...that can happen post performance, post improvisation, through discussion and so on... pitching it in a certain place...in the here and now (ibid).

As part of a continuing response Tim read out a text piece he wrote, adopting a similar technique to the activity he had just delivered to the audience, describing his performance the night before.

What might a compass say - its needle restless and reluctant to give its own true meaning.
Moving backwards is not retreating - it's another way of opening space.

All that lies behind is where I have been. Hands describe a next possibility.
All *that* offers a welcome - as all that lies ahead grows and grows.

Like a long flag furling and unfurling - drawn across the ground; lifted and billowing out, curving out of the place where it once was;
close to airborne; to lengthen out before settling to quiver in elastic time and beginning its slow path to resettle haphazardly
- bringing down its own shadow.

What lies underneath...?

Can we see; does it rest concealed?
If resting, it may not seek to be uncovered.
If waiting, waiting for what...?
This sweep of arm to brush away the surface;
to trace a revealing outline, until shape takes form, takes recognition.
Here we meet... an unlikely alliance of rest and restlessness.

Figure 147: Tim Rubidge – text piece, written after dance performance in *Assembly*, 2018

James Watts ⁴³

James Watts' response manifested as two corresponding works, the first, titled, *Recording* (2018), was a cassette tape in a clay case, situated on the floor within the installation. The second response was a live band performance, titled, *James Watts and the Drone Quartet*. The band performed for half an hour during the evening event, producing improvised earthly, visceral, heavy, slow sounds through guitars and vocals (figure 148).



Figure 148: **VIDEO** - James Watts and Drone Quartet - excerpt from performance in *Assembly*, 2018 Video Credit: Arto Polus / Link: <https://vimeo.com/301078905>

⁴³ For more information see: <https://thenewbridgeproject.com/portfolio/james-watts/>



Figure 149: James Watts and The Drone Quartet, performance within *Assembly*, live event, 2018 Photo Credit: Arto Polus

In his panel presentation, James described what led to both responses by first explaining his practice as a “kinda music” born from improvisational methods and in relation to the genre of ‘drone’ music that he re-situates and plays in the gallery context (James Watts, pers.comm., 27th April 2018).⁴⁴ James explained how his responses (the tape and live event) emerged from his initial interaction with the given material in a music practice room. He elaborated on his processes and methods, relating the inspiration drawn from his interest of stone circles as a locus point for an event. In this same manner, James approached the given materials by

⁴⁴ Drone music: “is a subgenre of minimal music that emphasises the use of sustained sounds, notes, or tone clusters – called drones...with relatively slight harmonic variations throughout each piece” (Wikipedia 2019).

situating the assembled materials in the music context of a practice room to become a locus point for a sound work to unfold.



Figure 150: James Watts- material construction in practice room, 2017

Photo credit: James Watts

James explained how he assembled the material construction in the corner between the floor and low ceiling of a windowless, dimly-lit rehearsal space. He described how this environment looked and felt, “cave-like and primitive” (ibid). The material construction was in a space that was usually for the drum-kit and James reflected upon how it, “replaced a band member” (ibid). James asked three musicians he had worked with in other capacities to play their instruments without instruction or preconceived ideas but to be responsive to the environment that the material construction created.⁴⁵ As well as this, James placed contact mics in the clay bases of the construction, which he remarked reminded him of “elephant’s feet” (ibid). James recorded this process and mixed it onto a cassette tape afterwards, using the left-over clay to make a case.

⁴⁵ Drone Quartet performers: Tim Croft, Kevin Rajiah, James Watts and Chris Watson

James played the tape recording during his presentation (figure 151) (James Watts, pers.comm., 27th April 2018).

For the live event within the installation at Baltic 39, James stated he wanted a similar improvised process to occur as he was interested to experience how the initial response in the practice rooms transformed and changed in this different environment and set-up.



Figure 151: **SOUND** - James Watts, *Recording*, 2017

Sound and photo credit: James Watts / Link: <https://vimeo.com/302577057>



Figure 152: James Watts, *Recording*, installed in *Assembly*, Baltic 39, 2018

Photo Credit: Arto Polus

An audience member perceived both Tim and James' approach towards the assembled material as a totemic ritualistic object and posed the question: "Was the object talking back... was there an agency there that allowed you to know what to do with it?" (Fiona Crisp, pers.comm., 27th April 2018).

James answered:

It was not necessarily a conscious way that we (the band) would look to the image for ideas for what to do next but the fact it is there and the environment it sets up by just being there in that sense, is totemic...I think consciously or not, it sets up the kind of sounds we were going to make...we were not directly looking at as a score but the area that it sets up (James Watts, pers.comm., 27th April 2018).

Panel 2: *Encountering Environments & Photography*

Fiona Crisp and Luce Choules

I am inviting you:

Fiona Crisp, because as my PhD supervisor we have a shared interest in exploring through our artistic practice and position in academia, how the photographic medium can create space that embodies a sense of material encounters and your current project *Material Sight* (2018) awarded by The Leverhulme Trust, as well as your essay *Negative Capability: Imaging and Imagining Fundamental Science Through Productive Doubt* (2015), are great examples of this. As well as this, we are both invested in widening the approaches and situations artist researchers can make to articulate a meta-discussion around the effects of their artist research and so I see your response and contribution to this project as incredibly important.

Luce Choules, as it was great to see you present your work both visually and through your spoken words, in your position as Follow at the Royal Geographical Society, in the conference *EXPLORE* (2016), raising questions on the relationship between science and art. I see particular relevance in both your initiated *Temporal School of Experimental Geography*, that brings artists together in a network to look at responses to encounters of landscape as well as your own practice that works with photography in conjunction with other mediums, including performance.

(Hughes 2017).

This panel related the responses of Fiona Crisp and Luce Choules, whose respective practices look at the boundaries of environments and the photographic medium, and who shared their experiences of contrasting and shared methods of knowledge production between art and science.

Fiona Crisp⁴⁶

Fiona Crisp's response, titled *Prone to Flooding*, was a reconfigured *Claytactype* within the installation, placed in the 'prone' position (as alternate to the instructions) and with the additional element of water sitting at its centre.

The initial recorded processes I received from Fiona consisted of a photograph of the constructed materials in her studio along with a video clip, showing a cropped close up of the surface of the given clay smeared print, with water being squeezed and dropped on to its surface (figure 153-154).

To outline her response in the symposium, Fiona began by describing her relationship with photography as "deeply unstable", using examples of her own practice that, in part, come out of her "personal frustration of photography's inability to carry the marks of time (or contemporary treatment of it, where there is a tension with the pristine quality of the photograph) in contrast to other cultural ancient objects". Fiona also described her practice as exploring the photographic medium's potential to construct an "impossible space" (Fiona Crisp, pers.comm., 27th April 2018).

⁴⁶ For more information see: <http://www.fionacrisp.com/biography.html>



Figure 153: Fiona Crisp, *Prone to Flooding* - reconfigured *Claytactype* within *Assembly*, 2018 Photo Credit: Arto Polus



Figure 154: **VIDEO** - Fiona Crisp's initial response to constructed materials, 2018
Video Credit: Fiona Crisp / Link: <https://vimeo.com/303975776>

Fiona described the process of constructing the materials as an interaction that forced her into a relationship with the material's nature. She explained how her initial approach of carefully unrolling the prints in her studio lead to a completely different experience to the usual handling of "precious prints", revealing a, "torn and abject image, smeared with clay" (ibid).

In relating her experience, she said:

I found I really had to start responding to this 'Nature' of the work...when I talk about nature, it is not about a mere act of alteration of the image being made 'other' by being covered in clay, but it seems more of a fundamental order, like the DNA of the photograph had been restructured and shifted genesis to a different order of objects where the rhetorical forms of photography radically shifted (ibid).



Figure 155: Fiona Crisp - constructed materials in her studio, 2018

Photo Credit: Fiona Crisp

In elaborating on how the work resulted as a “low table-like structure”, Fiona explained what happened as she encountered the rolled-out print on the floor: “the print itself is of a body of water, but it is also striated, like the body of animal...it tells me it wants to stay prone” (ibid). Fiona defined the word prone, ‘to lie flat’ and also to mean, “liable towards something – i.e., prone to flooding” (ibid). Fiona remarked in contrast, “*this* print is far from flat” and draws a comparison to an encounter of this print in an imaginary, alternate scenario: “if it was a print on the wall it would be unremarkable because we are so habituated to this strange thing that photography does...the way the world is dematerialised through images” (Fiona Crisp, pers.comm., 27th April 2018).

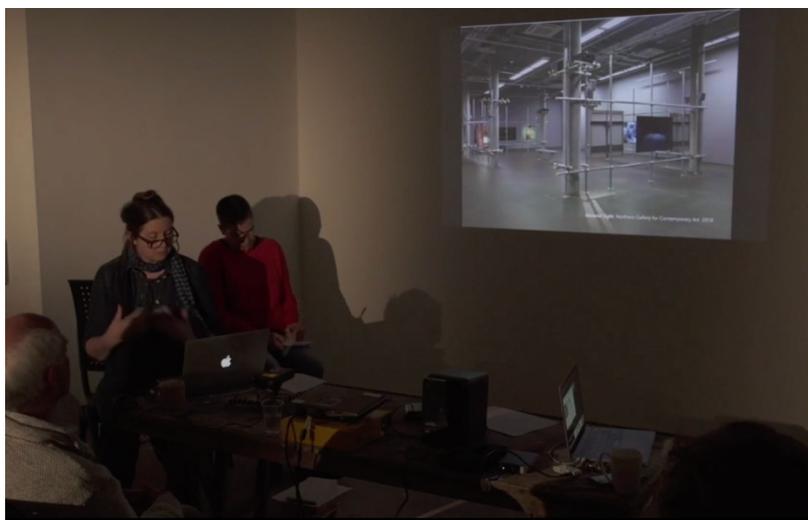


Figure 156: Fiona Crisp during *Assembly*, performative symposium, 2018
Photo Credit: Arto Polus

Through the handling of the material construction, Fiona became aware of dust escaping and of the feeling and sight of clay on her hands and the

floor, experiencing an oscillation between wet and dry, dirt and dust. This awareness raised questions in Fiona on misplacement and called to her mind, a quote by writer Mary Douglas: “that dirt is nothing but a thing in a wrong place” (Douglas, cited by Crisp pers. comm., 27th April 2018).

Fiona went on to describe the phenomenon of her simultaneous encounter of the photographic image of the water, the physical material form of the print, and the clay streaks as the impetus to her intervention of putting physical water onto the surface of the material construction:

It is this image of a body of water, that's become a curling undulating sheet of dried topography, where the scale of the water is rescaled into an entire landscape that we stand above and survey and we can see the upland lakes, the river tributaries that follow gravity, weaving their way down the paper's valleys, until the water simply drops off the edge of this section of a flat world... These are elemental works of Alex's that remind us of the flux of the world, of the move between malleable soft clay that takes our handprint to its hardened structural form that builds houses, contains and carries water or forms cultural objects and it reminds us of the flux landscape that shift between drought and flood that slip and slide and equally ossify. We are also reminded of the mutability and flux of photography itself, as it moves between wet and dry in its alchemical processes (Fiona Crisp, pers.comm., 27th April 2018).

Luce Choules⁴⁷

Luce Choules' response manifested in two ways. The first as a fold out map, *Arboreal Journey 2018*, made up of images of tree trunks from a forest in Essex. The map sat in the installation to be handled by the audience. Luce's second response was a performative lecture that she delivered during the evening event, showing a succession of further images from the forest, with details of mosses, lichen and bark, alongside her spoken word. Both the map and lecture became part of pre-established on-going series within Luce's own practice.

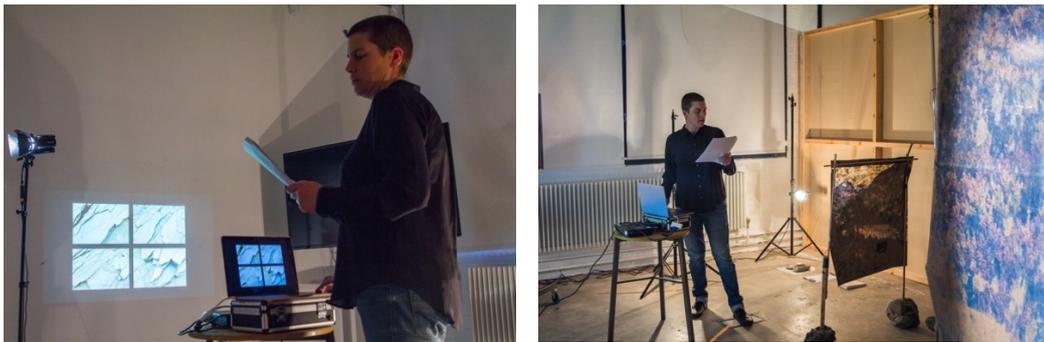


Figure 157: Luce Choules - performance lecture in *Assembly*, live event, 2018

Photo Credit: Arto Polus

In the symposium, Luce explained that her practice comes from experiential fieldwork and in keeping with this approach she decided to construct the given materials outside in a woodland. She assembled the material construction horizontally “to find the flexibility in the meaning of the instruction and to challenge the vertical notion of photography...so the

⁴⁷ For more information see: <https://lucechoules.wordpress.com/>

vertical objects in the space, remained the trees” (Luce Choules, pers.comm., 27th April 2018). At this chosen environment, Luce explained that she took a set of photographs and gathered written notes on her experience, which became the source material to her map and performance lecture (figure 157-159).

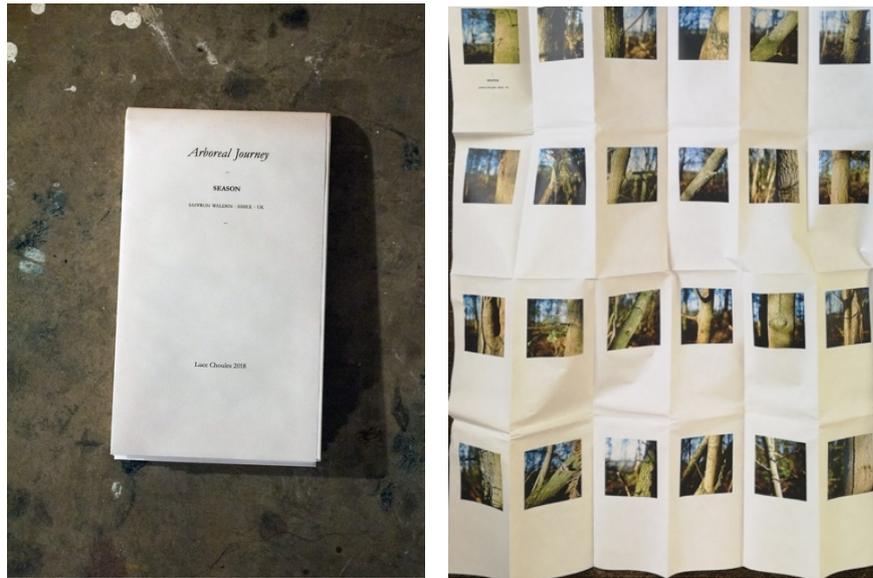


Figure 158: Luce Choules, *Arboreal Journey Essex*, map installed in *Assembly*, 2018

Photo Credit: Arto Polus

In elaborating on her wider practice that explores the human relationship to the natural environment and the ‘wilderness’, Luce delivered a second performative lecture in the symposium, *Rabbit Island* (2016), which was descriptive of her time spent on a remote uninhabited island in Lake Superior, Michigan, USA.



Figure 159: Luce Choules - constructed materials in forest, 2017

Photo Credit: Luce Choules

In the panel discussion, Fiona Crisp observed Luce’s work as an exploration of the wilderness, “as not only as a place of agency but one that resists” (ibid). Luce explained that she approaches the photographic medium as “itinerant”, which she uses to set up situations to “allow you in on one hand and resist you in another”. She related this comment back to the human approach to the ‘natural world’, with a “sense of something we both come from and equally something we can feel a resistance to and within” (Luce Choules, pers.comm., 27th April 2018).



Figure 160: Luce Choules delivering *Rabbit Island*, performance lecture (2016), during *Assembly*, performative symposium, 2018 Photo Credit: Arto Polus

In this reflection, Luce drew relevance to her interpretation of her initial tactile engagement with the material construction, as well as the resulting encounter of my *Claytypes* in the installation: “I’m interested in it because it seems it has this intimate quality, and I think that’s like a body recognition but it resists it as well, as it has this boundary of being something *Other*” (Luce Choules, pers.comm., 27th April 2018).

Thinking about a sense of resistance or uncertainty in embodied encounters opened up a discussion with the audience around ‘speculation’. What was raised in this discussion centred around attention and thoughts on the exchange and dialogue when encountering something *Other*; in which both sides are affective and affecting in shaping meaning.

Panel 3: *Story Telling; Symbolic Language*

Carol Mavor, Dawn Bothwell and Ditte Goard

I am inviting you:

Carol Mavor, because of your unique and innovative approach as an 'artist historian'. I saw online a recording of your performative lecture delivered at the RCA in 2015 that bridged an intriguing space between theory and subjectivity, responding to photographic images through spoken word that opened up the meaning of visual objects in relation to experience. Also, your publications are of interest including, *Black and Blue: The Bruising Passion of Camera Lucida*, *La Jetée*, *Sans soleil* and *Hiroshima mon amour* (2012).

Dawn Bothwell, because I can see your insight and experience of curating contemporary artwork and events that draw out thought-provoking results, through CIRCA Projects, in a wide set of contexts from the gallery to alternate sites would be an important addition to the project. Also, from my understanding of your PhD research at The University of Sunderland, exploring the notion of 'intermedia' would be relevant to this project's exploration. Last but not least, your music practice, played as PENTECOSTAL PARTY, is evocative, immersive and amongst many things, brings about ideas of ritualism and I would love to explore further how our potential actions with material can lead to meaningful behaviour.

Ditte Goard, from remembering when you visited my project as artist in residence at ROAMING ROOM, London (2016), you stepped into the installation and spontaneously started to whistle a beautiful tune which captivated me! As well as this, your North Sea Project, at The Sage, Gateshead (2017) is an incredible score of music played with a ten-piece orchestra and choir, informed from the experience of sea swimming as well as research on the history and folklore connected to this coastline. Since then, hearing your latest experimental work as well as remembering your allegorical performance in the finale of your BA Hons Fine Art at Newcastle University (2015), means I would love your response to project!

(Hughes 2017).

The final panel of three were connected through an exploration of material objects' journey of metamorphosis, becoming symbolic, meaningful and the genesis of story-telling and music-making.

Ditte Goard⁴⁸

Ditte Goard's response resulted in a 20-minute group performance within the installation, named, *Ditte Goard (As Material Chorus)*.⁴⁹ At first, inconspicuous, the performers moved around the installation and audience. The group's collective, ambiguous sound built in volume and action. The performers were seen stopping at points to sing towards the objects in the space. The choreography and sound culminated at a point of congregation in which, seemingly ceremoniously, Ditte picks up a knife and cuts through the large photographic surface of a *Claytatype*. Ditte then walks through it, with the rest of the group following. This cut marked the end of this live performance as well as the whole evening event (figure 163 & 164).

Along with receiving photographs of the materials to be assembled in Ditte's chosen environment, I had a conversation with Ditte in the early stages of her response. In this conversation, Ditte showed me sketches of her proposed choreographed sound performance, to explain her proposed response as an exploration on the psychological experience or effect of a physical object (figure 162).

⁴⁸ For more information see: <https://thenewbridgeproject.com/portfolio/ditte-goard/>

⁴⁹ Material Chorus Performers: Skylar Gil, Ditte Goard, Arto Polus, Heather Bonnie Reid and Emily Wilson



Figure 161: Ditte Goard - constructed materials, 2018 Photo Credit: Ditte Goard

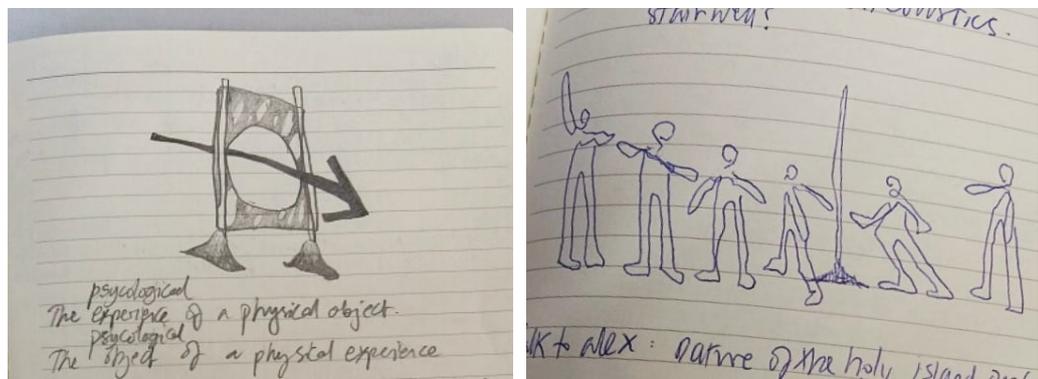


Figure 162: Ditte Goard, Sketches of initial ideas in response to constructed materials, 2017



Figure 163: Ditte Goard as Material Chorus, during *Assembly*, live event, 2018 Photo Credit: Arto Polus

During her panel presentation in the symposium, Ditte described receiving the work:

When I got the materials out to make this sculpture, I had this feeling that often get when looking at Alex's work, that I really just want to put my head inside it, to be able to absorb; I've always felt this feeling that there was something between us...what I really wanted to do with this performance was to feel like I could have a direct experience with the sculpture. From what I have done with the past with using the voice I found that it's a way of getting something directly from me without it passing through a filter (Ditte Goard, pers.comm., 27th April 2018).



Figure 164: **VIDEO** - Ditte Goard as Material Chorus, excerpt from performance in *Assembly*, 2018 Video Credit: Arto Polus / Link: <https://vimeo.com/302570194>

Ditte explained that the resulting performance came from experimental processes and rehearsals with a group of people (found through an open call). The rehearsals began with each performer walking around the installation, passing around the sculptures, each making noises that came from how the individual felt in response to installation and each other.

Ditte remarked: “I want this to create an atmosphere of sorts and I wanted it to give me (and perhaps the other performers) a physical and emotional connection to the work” (Ditte Gourd, pers.comm., 27th April 2018).



Figure 165: Cut *Claytatype* as the remains of Ditte Gourd as Material Chorus performance, *Assembly*, 2018 Photo Credit: Arto Polus

Dawn Bothwell⁵⁰

Dawn Bothwell created a video recording of pieces of clay and other material debris being dropped and placed on her face, seen by a hand occasionally entering the frame. The video shows Dawn's face progressively being covered in earth as she lies, opened eyed. There is an overlay of an electronic sound composition by Dawn, taken from her interaction with the materials given to her. This was played in the installation on a monitor, the sound emanating across the space (figure 166).



Figure 166: VIDEO - Dawn Bothwell, *Burial*, 2018

Video Credit: Dawn Bothwell / Link: <https://vimeo.com/301076677>

⁵⁰ For more information see: <http://dawnbothwell.hotglue.me/?curation>

In the performative symposium Dawn introduced herself through her various professional outputs, and she began by drawing relevance to the methodologies of *Assembly* to her curatorial practice:

I am also interested in an artist-centred approach...looking at the subjective identity of an artist and the influences of peers and the dynamic community around them that can form an understanding, or expanded definitions of their practice (Dawn Bothwell, pers.comm., 27th April 2018).

Alongside her role as curator, Dawn described her practice as a musician as seeking to create evocative music, often coming from free improvisation and her limited, uncertain knowledge of the instruments she uses. She stated this point of uncertainty is “a place of fruition” and wanted this to be the point of response in this project, *Assembly* (ibid).



Figure 167: Dawn Bothwell, *Burial*, video on monitor within *Assembly* installation, 2018

Photo Credit: Arto Polus

Dawn described how, after constructing the material, the encounter of the completed freestanding work, “proved too totemic to deal with, so I started to dismantle it” (ibid).

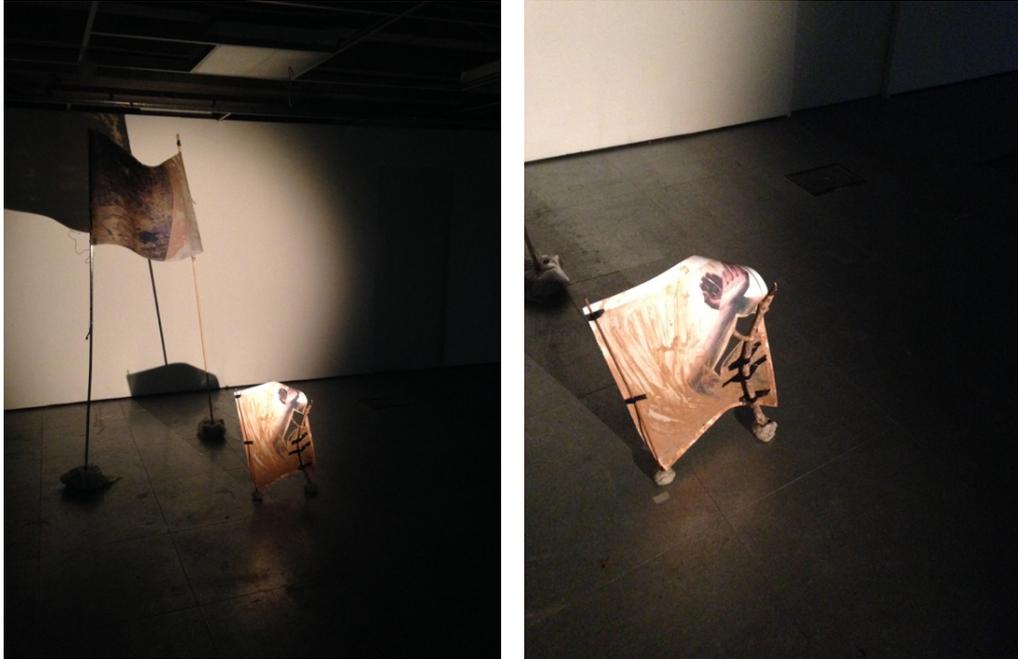


Figure 168: Dawn Bothwell - constructed materials, 2018 Photo Credit: Dawn Bothwell

Dawn then explained that what remained was a desire to have physical bodily contact with some of the material. She described the video piece she created and the overlay of sound, which resulted from electronically mixing sound recordings of her handling the given materials, including dropping and striking parts of the material with one another.

During the panel discussion, leading from my questions on her response in relation to ideas of ritual and sacrifice, Dawn elaborated on her title of the work, *Burial* and the video content:

Your material brought in that element; I had to respond to their materiality in a sense and the way that I chose to do that was in quite a bodily way...it almost seemed to become sacrificial...it seemed to go in that direction... to it almost becoming symbolic, like throwing earth on a coffin (ibid).

She also further reflected upon the image within the given print of upstretched arms and hands:

I think the gesture of the hands is like a defenceless or sacrificial symbol... there are characteristics to the work that resonated even after I decided I couldn't use as it was and took it down...that image stayed with me (ibid).

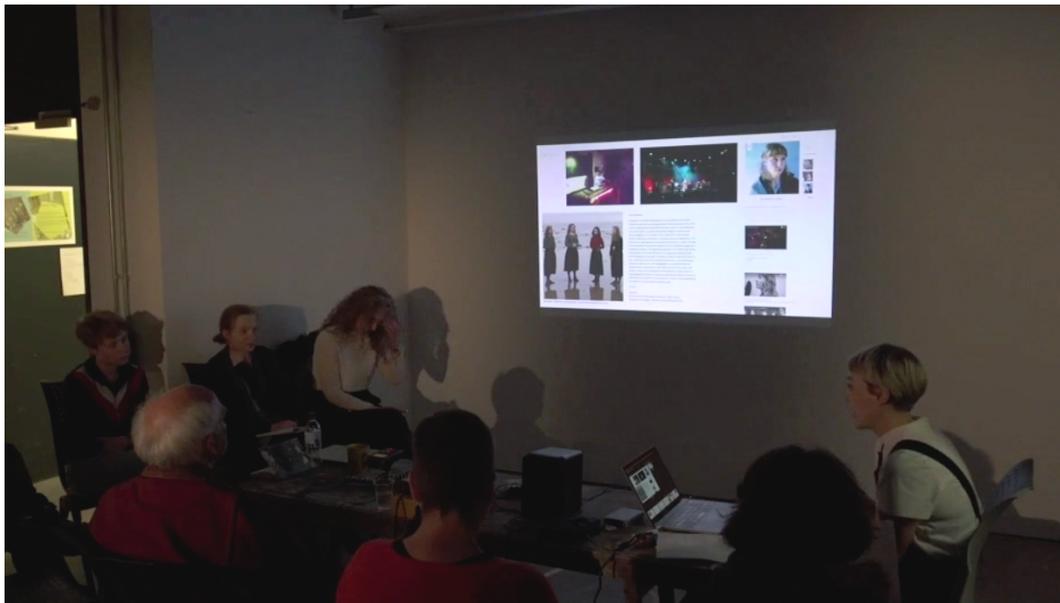
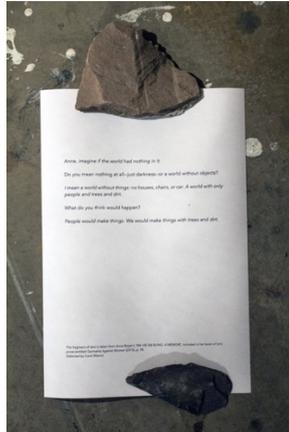


Figure 169: Panel 3 - during *Assembly*, performative symposium, 2018

Photo Credit: Arto Polus

Carol Mavor ⁵¹



Anne, imagine if the world had nothing in it.

Do you mean nothing at all--just darkness--or a world without objects?

I mean a world without things: no houses, chairs, or car. A world with only people and trees and dirt.

What do you think would happen?

People would make things. We would make things with trees and dirt.

Figure 170: Carol Mavor - text piece within *Assembly* installation, 2018

Photo Credit: Arto Polus

Carol Mavor's response was an appropriated piece of text, taken from Anne Boyer's *Ma vie en bling: a memoir*, and included in her book of lyric prose entitled *Garments Against Women* (2015). The printed text sat within the *Assembly* installation.

As part of her response, Carol delivered a performative lecture *Photogen and Nycteris* in the symposium. The lecture unfolded as a narrative around metamorphosis, inspired by a fairy tale novel written by George

⁵¹ For more information see: <http://www.carolmavor.com/>

MacDonald (1882), and the alchemy of darkroom photographic processes. Carol moved through a set of projected, appropriated photographs, alongside video clips, sound and her live, spoken words.

After the lecture, Carol elaborated on her responses, both in the choice of the appropriated text and her performative lecture. She said the act of building the construction with the given materials, was “quite surprising” and led her to ideas on metamorphoses. She added that in the encounter with the completed material construction: “I wanted mine to walk away...there was a childlike animation to it” (Carol Mavor, pers.comm., 27th April 2018).



Figure 171: Carol Mavor - constructed materials, 2018 Photo Credit: Carol Mavor

Photogen and Nycteris
a magic tale

by
Carol Mavor

'Photogen and Nycteris' is a magic tale of metamorphosis: like a photograph in the darkroom's developing tray, like a night blooming cereus flower, like a wet bean sprouting roots in a sunny windowsill, like milk teeth making way for permanent teeth, like a girl becoming woman, like a boy becoming man, like a hawk moth hatching out of a cocoon, like day into night, like night into day. Dark, fuzzy, glassy, surprising, erotic, bright, starry, melancholic, delicious everafterness.

Watho (who is rumoured to have swallowed a wolf) has stolen a girl and a boy and hidden them in separate quarters of her castle: a white day girl named Photogen who only knows the light; a black night boy named Nycteris who only knows the dark. One lives above ground, the other below. Even their foods are black and white. Photogen consumes pale white tea, coconut sorbet, and vanilla pudding spiced with Winter's Bark. Nycteris swallows black pomegranates, black grapes and black meat from birds that dwell in marshy places. Diurnal and nocturnal they are unaware of each other until . . .

©

Carol Mavor will read her story with images, still and moving, dark and light, silent and soundful.

Figure 172: Carol Mavor, description of performance lecture *Photogen & Nycteris*, 2018



Figure 173: Carol Mavor, during her performance lecture in *Assembly*: performative symposium 2018 Photo Credit Arto Polus

Carol related this experience of constructing the material to her interest in 'transitional objects', referencing psychoanalyst, DW Winnicott (1953).⁵² She explained how Winnicott's studies observed how when a baby is first left alone by the mother, they are given something to play with, for example, a piece of string, to make something out of nothing. This action, Winnicott observes, is to help the baby cope with the mother's absence and is also a creative act that is the beginning of becoming an individual.

⁵² To read more on Winnicott's *Transitional Objects* (1953), see link: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/016502548600900308>

Round-Table Discussion

A round-table discussion between the student audience and the *Assembly* network concluded the performative symposium. What are described in this subheading are further emergent thoughts which act as prelude to my summary on the overarching methodology and results of *Assembly*.

An audience member (James Bell, pers.comm., 27th April 2018) began the discussion with a reflection on the overarching methodology of *Assembly* in relation to the notion of mediation I had outlined at the start of the performative symposium, as, “a term used in cultural and media studies to refer to something that stands in-between and reconciles two separate things” (Anderson 2006, p.13).

Fiona and Luce elaborated on their experiences of working alongside scientists and geographers to show a distinct difference between art and scientific methodologies. Fiona observed how science resists acknowledgement of the “first person” in research. Luce recalled fieldwork she conducted alongside geographers counting species in an area, and explained how the geographers used systematic grids to gather data, whilst in contrast, she simply used her situated body and eyes to count what she could see (Luce Choules, Fiona Crisp, pers.comm., 27th April 2018).

An audience member (Laurel Carpenter, pers.comm., 27th April 2018) in the round-table discussion related the *Assembly* methodologies, and

resulting responses, to the notion of 'Becoming', as defined by philosophers Deleuze and Guattari, within their theoretical proposition of 'Assemblage', as:

Presupposes a world of immanence and becoming...Such an approach configures a world that is open, porous, mobile and changing, but from the relations between the parts that the temporary, contingent whole emerges concurrently one that can stabilise temporarily (Steinberg & Peters 2015).

In the discussion, further thoughts and questions arose on how practice-based researchers could employ, and physically evidence processes and methodologies as acts of 'becoming', revealing a temporal transformative unfolding of knowledge. An audience member (James Bell, pers.comm., 27th April 2018), referred further to Deleuze's, *Dialogues* (1977), co-written with journalist Claire Parnet. The book discusses major theoretical ideas formulated by Deleuze whilst moving through a series of conversations. Deleuze states the importance of their practice-in-dialogue as a limited face-to-face, real time interchange as, "a process that would occur when least expected...behind the thinker's back or in the moment when he blinks...Such movement can unfold only through 'becomings'" (Deleuze cited in Stivale 2003, p.26).

In the roundtable discussion, a member of the audience remarked upon her interpretation of the methodologies of *Assembly*: "what is evident in the practices, responses and agenda of the project is a sense of 'interconnections'". She went on to define her use of the word

'interconnections' as an embodied individual's openness to the affective qualities of external events, objects and people (Gayle Meikle, pers.comm., 27th April 2018). She related her observations of interconnections to ideas of 'fluidity' as explored by feminist theorist, Astrida Neimanis, through her notion of 'Hydro Logics' (referenced in Chapter 2), which proposes: "that we can be open to alterity - to other bodies, other ways of being and acting in the world" (Neimanis 2012, p.96).

As well this, the audience member noted the interconnections seen in *Assembly* to be about a productive co-exchange and a co-affecting relationship with the encounter of Otherness, and related this to the field of the feminine sublime by Freeman: "to sustain a condition of radical uncertainty as the very condition of possibility" (Freeman 1995, p.11).

In this roundtable discussion, Carol Mavor then referred to feminist theorist, Donna Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto* (2016) as: "a rejection of rigid boundaries, notably those separating 'human' from 'animal' and 'human' from 'machine'" (Carol Mavor, pers.comm., 27th April 2018).

In turn, another audience member looked around the studio at the installed *Claytactypes* and remarked that she perceives that: "the image crosses a boundary, becoming alive and tactile towards other external things" (Eret Talviste, pers.comm., 27th April 2018). In thinking about this encounter as an active engagement with objects of sensuous experience and transformation, this audience member related this to the field of New

Materialism, referring to the notion of 'enchantment' defined by philosopher Jane Bennett, within which she explores her idea of 'crossings':

Some crossings invoke the exciting sense of travelling to new lands, to different planes, to postures not ordinarily associated with human bodies. Crossings bring new things into being...new elements are themselves sporadically drawn into molecular proximity (Bennett 2001, p.31).

The discussion continued as Carol Mavor recalled the impetus behind Barthes' book *Camera Lucida* (1980): to seek a photograph of his late mother that would give Barthes a sensuous experience. Carol added, "that has the insertion of gentleness that his mother had" (Carol Mavor, pers.comm., 27th April 2018).

From Carol's reference to Barthes, she drew a parallel observation to my approach to the photograph, saying to me "the physical part seems important to you" (ibid). I reiterated my research approach to move past metaphors of touch, by bringing the photograph together with sculptural material and performative gesture, to explore an embodied encounter with photographic objects.

This conversation led to a succession of further interpretations by members of the *Assembly* network. Dawn observed my approach to be: "a purposeful obliterating of the image". Luce stated: "it feels like the making a new image". While Fiona said: "on a basic level it is transgressive act –

you don't do these things to photography" (Dawn Bothwell, Luce Choules, Fiona Crisp, pers.comm., 27th April 2018).

SUMMARY OF NETWORK RESPONSE

In reflecting upon the act of 'doing' and on the subsequent responses, the materiality of the photograph is shown to hold an agency as a physical, living body. Luce Choules stated this bodily recognition opened up both a sense of intimacy in the embodied encounter whilst at the same time a resistance was felt. This in turn created space for 'speculation.' This resistance and boundary were also the point of response for Ditte Goard, which prompted her to break and physically cut the material surface. This cut then turned into a threshold and a point of transformation, inserting her body which led to her own ambiguous, psychological and performative allegory.

Dawn Bothwell also responded through her direct bodily contact with the materials, starting at a deliberate state of uncertainty. However, Dawn's response was in reaction to an overwhelming totemic quality felt in the encounter of the material construction, which despite her de-constructed approach, continued to resonate in her memory and body. From this, Dawn's subsequent response led to associated ideas of symbolic and ritualistic action.

In comparable contrast, James Watts chose to be in direct communion with the totemic quality of material construction, by approaching it as a locus point to generate and influence an event of sound, space and meaning.

Through the summarised responses discussed thus far, the research relates to ideas in Chapter 3 that explore material culture and ritual practice, specifically stemming from bodily engagement with matter. This can be further defined as:

A creative act that does not just express or represent but actually does something; it can alter understandings, bodies, or the world itself, as understood by human beings (Bolvin 2009, pp.272-274).

Fiona Crisp's response also stemmed directly from "the material's 'nature'", which "spoke" to her (Fiona Crisp, pers.comm., 27th April 2018). By following the material's tactile instructions, Fiona reconfigured the work in the prone position and proceeded to add a pool of water to its surface, throwing into question dimensions, place and matter. Fiona described her encounter of material construction as leading to a different experience to the conventional one expected, "where the rhetorical forms of photography radically shifted" (ibid). Fiona's response raises further attention to photography's ontological relationship to other seemingly disparate matter. It draws back to the explorations in Chapter 1 on the notions of 'hybridity' and the relationship between photography and elemental matter as well as the concept, 'gesamtkunstwerk' as structures:

“found in different media to rethink the habitualised forms of perception” (Schroter 2011, p.6).

Tim Rubidge’s response, which oscillated between “states of the body”, both in association to the materials and “elsewhere”, showed representation in coexistence to gesture, material and space. Tim emphasised the potential ‘on-going’ effects and response that will reveal themselves in future situated and temporal contexts (Tim Rubidge pers.comm., 27th April 2018). In relation to this, Carol Mavor’s response to the material raised ideas of metamorphoses and animation, disrupting the notion of fixed immaterial photographic images.

These responses show the capacity of the performative force of the research to effect thought, word and action, challenging the contemporary identity of photographic images made manifest through digital technologies. We can look to wider cultural fields of study surrounding the enquiry of materiality, finding significance to the observations made by historian Hans-Jorg Rheinberger:

Materiality points to the complexity and entanglement of diverse factors in the digital age in which ‘material’ which like sound or language can also be something that is not physical, is an effect of an ongoing performance (Rheinberger cited in ed., Lange-Berndt 2015, p.14).

TO END CHAPTER 4

Wilding Response, attends to the 'space beyond', considering the affective, potential collaborative and ongoing performativity of this research. This method expands the dialogue concerning the embodied, physical approach towards the photographic object in the wider social and cultural sensorium.

Through the haptic response from a cross-disciplinary network of practitioners, and the situated perspectives and discursive input of a public and student audience, this research looked "at where, originary knowledge or the new is revealed through handling, rather through conscious acts of transgression" (Bolt 2006, p.129). Again, this methodology counters the tendency of photographic theorists to evolve critical discourse away from the transformative, nuanced affective and turbulent qualities of the material phenomenon of photography.

Through the methodology of *Assembly*, the performativity of this research is manifested through 'interconnections' of situated action and dialogue. The resultant meanings in this approach, could be described as emerging through a 'resonance' - as a phenomenon that is a fundamental human capacity to "expand meanings through creating certain correspondences among specific elements" (Conle cite in Meier and Wegener 2016, p 2).

Through further reflection on the methodologies of *Assembly*, it can be seen to relate to ideas of 'fluidity' explored by feminist theorist, Astrida Neimanis (2012) and further returns the research to the notion of the feminine sublime as: "two subjects not only exposed to each other but also needing each other for the assertion of their own (temporary) subjectivity" (Zylinska 1998, p.102).

In the methodologies undertaken through *Assembly*, exploring the production of meaning brings perspective on the impact and effect that the photographic object has situationally, from the context of fine art to cross-disciplinary networks. The responses revealed in *Assembly*, relate to the proposition (as referred to in the thesis introduction) by Estelle Barrett, Professor of Art and Education at the Institute of Koorie Education, Deakin University, Australia:

There must be a recognition of the generative potential of the ambiguity and the indeterminacy of the aesthetic object and the necessity for ongoing decoding, analysis and translation (Barrett cited in Bolt 2014, p.132).

THESIS CONCLUSION

In the studio, knife in hand, I hold the blade above a photographic print. I hesitate momentarily before my body exerts pressure downwards and the blade pushes through the thin layers of emulsion and out the other side. I have cut through the photograph...I have broken through the apparently seamless image, no longer stable, with a cracked surface.

Within installation and live event, *Assembly*; the choreography and sound culminated at a point of congregation in which, seemingly ceremoniously, Ditte picks up a knife and cuts through one of the large photographs.

(Hughes 2018)

The act of cutting in my research found an unexpected symmetry at the beginning and end of this doctoral study. The thesis began with descriptions of my embodied studio processes, including the action of cutting through the surface of the photograph, revealing a collision of photography's haptic, spatial and temporal dimensions. The final part of my methodologies, undertaken through *Assembly*, reflected upon invited practitioners' tactile responses to the research. These were brought together as a live event in which the last performance culminated in a ceremonious cut through a photograph, creating a threshold for a new, ambiguous narrative to unfold.



Figure 174: Studio Processes, 2017 Author's Own

I describe a 'cut' as an action to form and break an opening. I 'cut' the photograph, alongside piercing, contorting, smearing and touching, as a deliberate act to complicate the 2-dimensional image. This serves to move towards an understanding of a 3-dimensional photographic object as something that can create a space for differently structured experiences of the photographic medium.

My research term, 'wilding', is defined as both a methodology of action and a conceptual strategy situated in physical, material-led processes that are embodied and bodily-led, tactile and disruptive to the conventions of the photographic medium. I described the term as derived from the meaning of 'wild', marked by turbulent agitation, "going beyond the structures we inhabit and that inhabit us" (Halberstam 2013, p.7).

In marking out the context of my research in the field of contemporary fine art and placing it in relation to other artists and theorists who seek to discover and reflect upon the potential dimensions of the photographic object, I set out a challenge to Barthes' *Camera Lucida* (1980), that embeds narrow cultural conventions and critique towards the photographic medium as faithful, indexical images of representations and memories. The 'cut' also appears metaphorically in Barthes' notion of the 'Punctum', denoting the wounding detail felt in the encounter of a photographic image which "shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me" (Barthes 1980, p.27).

This cultural convention, influenced by Barthes, has also assimilated Peirce's sign theory, including his triadic division of signs (icon, symbol and index). Peirce reveals a special slippage between iconicity and indexicality particular to photography. However, this slippage seems to be largely neglected, misread and confused. This is particularly evident when applied in the critical analysis of photographs by art historians, assigning photography with the prominent quality of the index.

This research has situated itself within a wider cultural speculation regarding the medium of photography. This speculation has been largely in response to the domination of digital technology, which has increased the ubiquity of images and subtly fed assumptions of the image as giving what is already known and what has been seen before. This, in turn, has

fed the notion that symbolic representations precede and form our sense of the world.

As demonstrated in my example of encountering Woodman's photographs, the image is not to be discredited in its potential potency to engender emotive reactions when encountered. However, the physical ambient conditions between the photograph and myself also played an integral role in the 'reading' of it as exceeding beyond image, to reveal multiplicities and slippages in the index, icon and symbolic qualities of the photograph.

Through wilding photographs, this practice-based research employed interrogative processes that brought together the photographic image with sculptural material and performative gesture. I placed and shifted the photographic object with other material matter, which consequently took a leap from the point of capture to expand outwards, exploring a situation of encounter which opened up a space for differently structured possibilities of the medium, surpassing the notion of photographs as singular representations. By doing so, the research expanded beyond the common approach to photography informed by oppositional thinking, reliant upon binaries such as art and technology, index and icon, image and material, and instead bringing these together to examine the photographic object. Through this approach, the research explored the construction of installations as situations for embodied encounters, which destabilised

and re-created worlds, examining the boundaries of representation, material and imagination. In doing so, the research project asked: what are the potential effects on material, body and meaning when simultaneously engaging with photography's haptic, spatial and temporal dimensions?

The methodologies described throughout the thesis explored and evidenced the turbulent qualities of the material phenomenon of photography as a medium in a position of confusion and instability, sitting between states as “a mix of order and disorder – tensed between a gathering and a distribution” (Anderson & Wylie 2006, p.321). Furthermore, it also revealed the affective qualities that “emerge and develop in concert” (Anderson 2014, p.13).

Through my observations, I found Plummer's reflections on the materiality of photography particularly resonant, including her proposal to embrace the notion of the photograph as “either-and” (Plummer, Riches & Wooldridge 2011). This related to another key reference throughout my research: Baker's essay *Photography's Expanded Field* (2005), which suggests looking at the medium as in a simultaneous “‘non-stasis / non-narrative’ condition...to open up the imagination to how the photographic object can be ‘reconstructed’ in contemporary art practice” (Baker 2005, pp.123 -130).

However, I perceived there to be a deficit and potential area for expansion in the detailed dialogue and reflection on the material phenomenon of photography, concerning the embodied, physical approach towards the photographic object, encapsulating all its dimensions at once. The research addressed this deficit through evolving methodologies that privileged co-actions with material, starting with the artist-researcher's sensory encounters of environments and the photographic object, and then moving on to account for the audience response.

In looking at the 'affective' qualities of the photograph, the research established a dialogue with the field of installation art, and the related critical sphere of phenomenology, thus addressing a further neglected area of study in each field's relationship to photography.

The research outlined its alignment with the motivations of installation art as neither requiring optical contemplation from an audience, nor showing an explicit exchange between two sites with a direct reference to somewhere else. Instead, the research investigated the multiplicity and production of altogether new situations that re-centre, de-centre and activate the body and senses. In direct reference to the philosophical ideas of Merleau-Ponty, a connection was drawn between the fields of phenomenology, installation art and photography. This highlighted the formerly narrow line of enquiry into this relationship, by observing a general disregard for materiality (Barthes 1980; Fisher 2008; Damisch 1978). The research sought to develop this area of study through

methodologies of wilding – embodied and tactile – which revealed the overlooked nuances of the material phenomenon of the medium in both the affective and discursive domains.

What is made apparent throughout the thesis, is the timely relevance of my work to wider contemporary enquiries seen in the Western cultural sphere surrounding the enquiry of materiality and an “epistemological crisis” (Batchen 1994, p.48). Throughout the thesis, reference is made to theory within ‘New Materialism’, seen in studies in cultural geography, anthropology and contemporary feminism (Bachelard 1942; Anderson & Wylie 2006; Edwards 2010; Neimanis 2012; Ishii 2012). By centralising the embodied encounter, the research relates both to the critical sphere of phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty 1945; Dufrenne 1973) and to psychological studies of ‘situated cognition’ (Brown, Collins & Duguid 1989; Goldin-Meadow & Beilock 2010). This serves to widen critical reflection on the material encounter of photography in the social, academic and cultural sensorium.

WILDING SURFACES

Walking through,
Undulate.
A haphazard manner,
Shimmers,
Passing images that disappear
Drip,
Thread,
Hold,
Hang,
Frame,
Penetrate,
Glow,
Change.
Petrified finger marks,
Dried,
Marking an encounter,
For a cracked moment.

(Hughes 2017)

My descriptions of the installation *Letting Things Be Uncertain* – both of my solitary processes during its construction and of my encounter of the final work – constituted an interrogation of ‘the surface’, presenting a collapse of division between image and material.

This chapter revealed not only a consideration of the physical locus points of dimensions but brought the photographic object in relation, both ontologically and aesthetically, to other seemingly disparate material forms as well as perceptually, through my situated embodied encounter. By doing so, my practice-based research extends the challenges to Barthes made by Elkins (2012), who drew attention to the often overlooked, ‘invisible’ photographic surface by likening it, metaphorically, to black ice from his perspective of spectator. Through this research, I

made the photographic surface apparent through bodily and material engagement that was both reflective and self-reflexive.

By describing my haptic and perceptual decision-making in the creation of installation *Letting Things Be Uncertain*, I showed how the combination of materials seen in the works came together as an animated correspondence between me, the photo and disparate material matter. This opened up notions of activation and intimacy that organise “our experience of space and especially surfaces” (Meraud 2015).

In describing the reconfiguration of work *Claytotypes* (2017), attention was brought to the photograph as matter and image produced and bound through the physical world; in particular elemental, primitive matter seen in the works combination of clay and photograph. This combination sought to produce and share a certain correspondence and commonality of appearance, which, when seen in the encounter, serve to meld image and matter into one textural sensory object. This work thus presented the approach to wilding photographs as revealing a turbulent state of the medium. This turbulence created a confusion in the distinctions between surface and flux, as well as representation and material, seen as an experiential, hybridity of matter and meaning.

Through the interrogations of surfaces undertaken in the processes and encounter of *Letting Things Be Uncertain*, the research shows the inherent materiality of photography as ‘earthbound’ and lively, bringing attention to the photograph as matter and the image as produced and

bound through the physical world. This raised questions on a potential shared ontology of material matter and on the continual mutability of the photographic medium.

Resonating with my wider research's wilding approach to disrupt the conventions of the medium, highlighting the link between the sensuous world underlying the image, the photograph is seen in a condition of "either/and" (Plummer, Riches & Wooldridge 2011) and "non-narrative/non-stasis" (Baker 2005, p.6). This work thus contributes distinct research to the explored notion of hybridity (Plummer, Riches & Wooldridge 2011, p.30) and ontological studies that look at the slippage of medium distinction, matter and image (Schroter 2011; Bachelard 1942).



Figure 175: *Claytacyes with detail*, 2017 Author's Own

In describing *Letting Things Be Uncertain*, I gave a detailed account of how image and material appear and disappear in accordance to the moving, encountering body walking through the installation and the subsequent perceptual throw between the senses. These encounters created an ambiguity between the perceived boundaries of reality and representation, which drew particular relevance to the studies of Merleau-Ponty, who re-orders perception before representation (Merleau-Ponty 1945). This in turn related to contemporary theorist Fisher (2008), who challenges Barthes' mistaken analysis of the relationship between photography and phenomenology. Fisher moved to correct Barthes, but he himself neglects to describe the materiality of the medium and thus this research provides a practice-based engagement that develops a deeper relationship to photography and phenomenology through embodied, animated encounters of conflated surfaces and images.

The material phenomenon revealed in *Letting Things Be Uncertain*, as physical negotiations between reality and appearance, perception and senses, further extended to the 'experiential turn' as: "in favour of a felt and lived experience of corporeality, a haptic or tactile phenomenology of the body as it encounters the physical world" (von Hantelmann 2014, p.6).

The resulting installation, *Letting Things Be Uncertain*, reveals an important potential in the ambiguous condition of the medium that further related to the contemporary sublime as an exploration into a wider realm of experience and subjectivity that disrupts, "the understanding of

representations as producing our life-world” (Morley 2010, p.2), and to Lyotard’s sublime ‘event’ between object and beholder as: “an absolute singularity; something without equivalence” (Lyotard cited in Thompson 1999, p.26-27).

This installation also presented temporal and physical negotiations between reality and appearance, perception and the senses opening up the transformative, nuanced affective qualities of the material phenomenon of photography.



Figure 176: *Letting Things Be Uncertain*, 2017 Author’s Own

WILDING THE FRAME

figuring it (2016):

The installation brings attention to the frame boundaries and alignment of objects, creating perceptual shifts of scale and distance...This conflates, my situated body at the moment of capturing the landscape through the camera, with the situated, perceiving, audience body.

Phole (2015-2018):

The rolled photographic object loses a definitive edge; instead, the frame is marked between each free-standing print on the floor, to be walked through and around; the movement of the audience, creating a sense of animation and flux between fixity and movement.

Filmy (2016):

Suspended above the ground, fragments of photographic imagery and material are seen in a dense arrangement of matter.... varying transparency and opaqueness determining the amount of light and image that filters through. Throughout the course of the exhibition it evolved and changed, to spill onto the floor.

(Hughes 2016-2018)

The three works described in Chapter 2 investigated the limits of the photographic frame. This approach challenged the conventional approach to the frame as seemingly fixed and questioned where the edges of the frame truly reside, looking at the potential significance of what happens 'in-between' these edges.

The research recounted in this chapter considered how the frame related to western notions of landscape in which there is a problematic, singularity seen through the frame as a fixed representation (Kesley 2007; Krauss 1981).

More specifically, the research acknowledged the etymology of the term 'wilding' and its associations with the words 'wild' and 'wilderness', including a historical overview showing the exploration and construction of

both the photograph and the wilderness as intrinsically linked to the human encounter. This exploration showed the association of wilderness to Kantian notions of the sublime (1790). The research demonstrated how the terms have loosened and evolved to define ambient situations in contemporary cultural conditions. This trajectory and debate of the terms wilderness, landscape, environment and situation was shown to have amplified from the steep rise in the use of digital technology within Western culture. This also included reference to explorations of the technological sublime, yet the observation was made that a ubiquity of photographic representations of landscape and the wilderness as an immaterial, visual trope within mass culture still persists.

This chapter also explored how the edges of the frame can be open to a live physical world that reverses a sense of visual distancing. This exploration was described through artworks that showed not an explicit exchange between two sites but rather the multiplicity and production of altogether new situations. Through this, the research brought human scale and the photographic object together with notions of fluidity, which served to highlight the slippery and provocative notions of nature, material, technology and human, in our current digital age. In doing so, new experiential situations and meanings were opened up, finding relevance in the sub-genre of the feminine sublime with “radical uncertainty as the very condition of possibility” (Freeman 1995, p.11).

figuring it (2016), resulted from physical material processes with photographs and video stemming from my direct experience of the desert wilderness of Arizona, USA.

In describing the construction of the installation, I sought to deliberately confuse the environmental 'source' of the artwork and bring attention to the potential of frame boundaries and the alignment of objects to create perceptual shifts of scale and distance.

The head and hand were seen throughout the installation as objects and in prints; including photographs on the wall, where paper hands are seen in the landscape, printed to the scale of the absolute specificity of size of my own human hand. This was shown to partly contradict the condition of digital images as a form open to being re-scaled, "sitting across networks" (Fisher 2013).

Further descriptions included floor-based figurative objects, consisting of circular wire frames that measured the circumference of my head with filmstrips placed across the middle. These objects disturbed the viewing experience with the viewer's body appearing to occupy the head-like, wire frame, almost 'filling in the space', conflating my situated body at the moment of capturing the landscape through the camera, with the situated, perceiving, viewer's body. This revealed a turbulence in the perception of defined boundaries of frames, materials, images and scale.

Audience response to the work reflected metaphorical and symbolic references and interpretations, with ideas of the 'soul' and religious allegories projected onto the work. It was also noted how the work challenged ubiquitous modes of representing landscape and wilderness by "stopping the eye from falling into the image of a vast landscape" (Anna Douglas pers.comm., 5 November 2016). Thus, a disruption and expansion is seen on how photographs function as culturally coded signs and representations of landscape and the wilderness.

Through work, *Phole* (2015-2018), the research explored the flux and overlay of tactility, scale and subsequent symbolism and activation in relation to the frame.

Phole, described as an installation of pillar-like shapes made of enlarged contact sheets and photographs, stood as freestanding objects to be walked through and around. The rolled photographic pillars showed a loss of a definitive print edge, instead a frame was marked between each pillar. This brought attention to the space between the moving audience body seen within and to the other artworks in the exhibition, collectively forming another sense of environment. The spatial framework revealed through *Phole*, related to the phenomenological aspect of Heidegger's architectural temple (Hyland & Manoussakis 2006) and partly drew back to my encounter of indigenous monuments, that brought attention to bodily relationships that inspire the creation of metaphor and symbol. There was further reference to art historian Chare, who challenged

cultural monuments assigned symbolic status by revealing the lack of fixity in the structures themselves (Chare 2011). Looking further between anthropology and photography, reference was made to visual anthropologist Edwards, who also drew attention to the lack of fixity in photographs as documents of the past, stating that “they are both representational and material... They are multi-sensory objects which in turn must elicit multi-sensory responses” (Edwards 2010, p.21).

The installation *Phole*, showed how the symbolic and indexical qualities attached to the image can be disrupted and brought into relation with the ephemeral and ambient realm of physicality, opening up to sensory, embodied new subjectivities. This phenomenon evoked Baker’s approach to an ‘expanded field of photography’, in which the medium is “between the conditions of being neither truly narrative nor static in its meaning effect” (Baker 2005, p.127).

The final artwork discussed in Chapter 2 was *Filmy* (2016). This piece is a dense fragmented arrangement of imagery and material from encounters in different environments. In describing my processes and my approach to the photograph as a material that is both fixed and fluid, I highlighted a particular sensory experience of the multi-layered, reactive landscape of bog-land. Here, my research approach considered the theoretical propositions of anthropologist Ingold, of an alternative to the fixed viewpoint and representational qualities imbued in landscape, proposing a landscape defined by the present, physical body.



Figure 177: *Filmy* - detail, 2016 Author's Own

Filmy became the centre point for two key discussions as part of the research methodologies to broaden and evidence the effects of the research in the affective and discursive domains. The first discussion was with Ben Anderson, Professor of Geography at Durham University. In this discussion Ben defined material as “anything that has the capacity to make a difference”, (Ben Anderson 2016, pers.comm., December 8th 2016). In considering the potential fluid quality of the frame boundary and the turbulent ‘in-between’ state, Ben suggested ‘experience’ is the middle part, noting that the word ‘experience’ is derived from the word experiment which means to have an ‘openness’ to the world (ibid).



Figure 178: *Filmy* - detail, 2016 Author's own

The discussion went on to relate to the other approaches laid out in the essay, including, the 'Excessive', which incorporates multiple modes of possibility and the 'Interrogative' approach, as in search of a renewed account of bodily perception, described as a 'productive indeterminacy' (Anderson & Wylie 2006, p.325).

These notions related to my exploration of simultaneously engaging with the spatial, haptic, symbolic and temporal dimensions of the photograph. Which in turn, revealed my research as showing the middle part of the frame to not only hold a representation but be an 'open' affective point for the production of meaning, which is ultimately mutable and shifting through situated, unique bodily presences.

In the subsequent PGR doctoral group critique (Northumbria University), colleagues remarked that there was "a sense of a purposeful 'wilding', creating rifts and schisms between material, that disrupted expectation and threw into question the encounter" (Gayle Meikle pers.comm., 27th

April 2018). There was a further discussion that the wilding process drew a correlation to the material processes and interchanges that occur within a landscape, as opposed to a pristine vista looked upon from a removed standpoint. This solidified my research approach of 'wilding' photographs and led to the discovery of an important ambiguity and indeterminacy that enabled the creation of a situated sense of environment.

Relevance was marked out to other cultural propositions of environment through notions of 'wildness' and 'fluidity'. This included Halberstam's approach to 'wild', as an important condition for finding new ways to understand cultural constructions of time and place (Halberstam 2013).

Further to this, feminist theorist Neimanis' concept of 'hydro logics', described as "seeping through every aspect of our material existence", particularly resonated (Neimanis 2012, p.4). This approach moves beyond a fixed idea of knowledge and preconceived ideas of environment. This further aligned to Freeman's approach in the feminine sublime which "makes meaning infinitely open and ungovernable" (Freeman 1995, p.11).

These propositions related back to this research impetus of wilding, returning the photograph to a physical condition and mutable image in turbulent and shifting relationships with matter preceding and open to meanings as situations for embodied encounters, destabilising and re-creating worlds, and re-examining the boundaries of representation, material and imagination.

The encounters with the three artworks described in Chapter 2, evidenced how the disruption of a fixed frame can collapse a sense of distance, in which ideas of boundaries and meanings of environments blur. In this way, the research complicated the perceived landscape and environment as something 'looked upon', instead showing how the frame can be open and in a fluid flux to the live physical world, determined through experiential boundaries as situations that are continually open.

Through interrogating the 'frame', across these three works in Chapter 2, I showed the image and material as not one state, neither static nor inert. Exploring the turbulent and affective qualities of the photographic object in this chapter, enabled the qualities and properties of matter to be thought of as emergent, multiple phenomena, drawing out and defining situations of wilderness as a process understood through the expression of immersive experiences, multiple perspectives and as a self-reflective journey that is visceral and ambiguous.

WILDING BODIES

Wild Affections (2017):

In unison, their bodies bend, folding weight onto the large photographs they hold. The photograph of a pool of iridescent oil becomes dented with the contours of the body's clasp, the uplift and crush creating an image in relief... A performer, lying on her side, is covered by a photograph, threading her arm through a cut hole, becoming disembodied or re-embodied into the image of the sea, the hand and waves undulating... An eerie sound coming from seals envelops a moment where a performer stands on the beach at dusk, projecting and framing her silhouette through the photograph of a glacier (Hughes 2017).

Following the trajectory from the 'surface' to the 'frame', the research in Chapter 3 further expanded the process and concept of wilding, through performative gesture and movement, to encompass 'bodies'. This was conducted through the artwork, *Wild Affections* (2017), involving the active participation of an audience, in two live public performances and mixed-media installations.



Figure 179: *Wild Affections*, video stills of performance - Crossman Hall, 2017 Photo

Credit: VileGame Productions

I introduced the experiential and theoretical touchstones in this chapter by including a reflection of my observations on the gestures of a desert guide which raised questions of how we move, feel and create meaning. This led the research to reference studies in 'situated cognition', in which physical gestures and hand motions work to shape ideas (Goldin-Meadow and Beilock 2010). Importantly, this showed how some qualities of experience remain in the realm of physical expression.

In thinking about gesture in relation to the nuanced qualities of the material phenomenon of photography, I drew upon art historian Olin's theoretical propositions, which looks to go beyond Barthes' notion of the punctum, suggesting that: "metaphors of touch do not encompass everything that makes photography a gestural practice" (Olin 2012, p.11). The research also reflected on observations by visual anthropologist Edwards who explored notions of feelings to bring attention to the performative engagements with the photographic object, that go "beyond the visual" (Edwards 2010, p.3).

My research extended Olin and Edwards theoretical approaches, by embracing gestural practice as a physical engagement with the materiality of the photographic object that encapsulates all its dimensions at once. My approach showed a translation of sensation to motion and meaning and considered the idea of 'performance' as the action, process and presentation of bodily gestural expression. The research thus contributes

to an undeveloped area in artistic practices and gallery exhibitions on the relationship between performance and the photographic object.

The methodologies carried out in *Wild Affections*, extended and emphasised the process of wilding photographs as material-led, improvised and intuitive bodily actions, through myself, performers and public audiences.

In creating the installation, I described my avoidance in using premediated ideas (symbols), instead choosing to employ a creative approach derived from a pre-consciousness, arising through a visceral energy and bodily expression, that was subsequently subjected to critical analysis. This process and the creation of situations was both self-reflexive and reality forming and related to the studies of anthropologist Ishii, who explored how divine worlds and ritual practices are created, through focusing on how the body acts with things (Ishii 2012).

The installation and performances of *Wild Affections*, evolved through the live encounter and experimental, improvisational activities undertaken between myself and the selected. Through this approach, the wilding process expanded the co-participation with the performers, as individuals producing unexpected responses which, in turn, folded back into the work itself. These processes led to the synchronised performances of *Wild Affections*. In showing this trajectory of material action to narrative, the idea of the image as a fixed representation was disrupted. This approach extended the exploration of the turbulent and affective qualities of the

photographic medium and was reminiscent of further definitions of the feminine sublime, which: “delineates the boundaries of the meeting parties” (Zylinska 1998, p.102) and: “spreads itself into multiplicity” (Yaeger 1989, p.191).



Figure 180: *Wild Affections* - beach performance, 2017

Photo Credit: VileGame Productions

On witnessing the resulting performances, the audience saw an enactment of wilding of the distinctions between body, material, technology, image and space. Here, perception of depth, movement and image were called into question, “holding at odds such effects of movement and petrification as well as the temporal and spatial dimensions themselves in one contradictory field” (Baker 2005, p.126).

In watching the performers move into positions collectively, the audience experienced a confusion in process, performance, reality and imaginative narratives. In that situated perspective, the audience moved from the position of peripheral 'learning' to an embodied unique position of 'sensing' and 'interpreting', which revealed a collapse, expansion and overlay of further meanings.



Figure 181: *Wild Affections* – beach performance, 2017

Photo Credit: VileGame Productions

In accounting for the encompassed audience experience, the research related to Lyotard's notion of 'event' as "the 'sublime' metaphorical connection between world and body as the model relationship between

artist and world, between the viewer and the work of art...not shaped by referentiality” (Thompson 1999, p.27).

In describing the research undertaken within *Wild Affections*, the photographic object is shown as a material in a situation of exchange with visceral bodily actions creating qualities to be experienced that can be described in phenomenological terms as an ‘atmosphere’, “exceeding representational content” (Dufrenne, cited in Anderson 2016, p.141).

Through creative processes, the collaborative exchange of performers and the audience engagement, the research undertaken in *Wild Affections* offers an ‘unfixed’ photograph, shown as a representation in coexistence with gesture, material, space and imagination. Through the simultaneous, bodily engagement with the haptic, temporal and spatial dimensions of the photographic medium, *Wild Affections* showed the photograph as a material that holds an agency capable of moving beyond the metaphors of touch. The work resulted from harnessing the potential of the medium to produce artefacts that testify both through their physical presence and their pictorial representation, and that cause us to rethink not only our acts of seeing but our bodily acts of engagement with the photography.

WILDING RESPONSE

Assembly (2018):

I am inviting you:

(Hughes 2017)

Extending the idea of embodied performative action, *Wilding Response* attended to the 'space beyond', considering the affective, potential collaborative and ongoing performativity of the research into the wider social and cultural sensorium.

As 'performative research', *Assembly* encompassed embodied acts of 'doing', producing "material outcomes of practice- as all-important representations of research findings in their own right" (Haseman 2006, p.103).

Assembly revealed the haptic response from a cross-disciplinary network of practitioners, who were invited to physically assemble an artwork. The responses manifest as objects, video, live performance and text, which alongside my artworks *Claytatypes*, came together as a live installation and performative symposium, in which, "originary knowledge or the new is revealed through handling, rather through conscious acts of transgression" (Bolt 2006, p.129). Through both the event and performative symposium what was evidenced was diverse and

overlapping situated perspectives on the research in the affective and discursive domains, in which some key findings emerged.

The network response in *Assembly*, explored and showed the hybridity between representation and material qualities, evidencing the nuances and agency of the material nature of the photograph as a physical, living body, imbued with totemic qualities. These qualities engendered a sense of 'otherness' and resistance, holding the potential for transformation, mutability and longevity.

In confronting the received material, network member Fiona Crisp described the encounter as leading to a different experience to the conventional one expected: "where the rhetorical forms of photography radically shifted" (Fiona Crisp, pers.comm., 27th April 2018).

By following the material's tactile instructions, Fiona constructed the work in the prone position, adding water to its surface. In doing so, the clay returned back to mud that melded with the striated image of water in the print, throwing into question dimensions, place and matter. Fiona concluded how certain qualities of the given material raised ideas on: "the mutability and flux of photography itself" (ibid). Fiona's response confused the physical materiality and representational qualities of the photograph, in which attention was brought to the relationship between the photograph and the physical world. This response related to the research on the notions of 'hybridity' discussed in Chapter 1, in which

transgressive acts raise questions on perceived ontologies largely associated with the image.



Figure 182: Fiona Crisp, *Prone to Flooding*, within *Assembly* installation, 2018
Photo Credit: Arto Polus

Luce Choules' response challenged the "vertical notion of photography" and utilised the "itinerant" nature of the photograph by constructing the material given, in a forest (Luce Choules pers.comm., 27th April 2018). Luce described her encounter of the material as a contradictory sense of intimacy and otherness: "like a body recognition but it resists it as well" (ibid). Through both Fiona's and Luce's responses, perceived notions of representation are destabilised, presenting an ambiguity of meaning that raises questions on speculation. This calls upon the mind and body to reconsider preconceived notions of the photograph and of environment, drawing an affiliation to the research outlined in Chapter 2.

James Watts simultaneously took the material object and representational object as a physical focal point for his experimentations, showing an active communion with the material construction's totemic quality by creating an event of visceral sounds, without preconceived ideas. Though differing to James' response, Dawn Bothwell also responded to the totemic qualities in the work that even in its absence, continued to resonate in her body and memory. Dawn created a video and sound piece that formed associations to ideas of ritual and symbolism, deriving from a desire in Dawn to put her body in direct contact with the material components she had broken back down.

A further harnessing of both the material and representational qualities of the work was seen in Tim Rubidge's dance response. Tim's response showed an oscillation between a physical and imaginative realm, as "parallel states", which he stated as: "still in association with the material but elsewhere" (Tim Rubidge pers.comm., 27th April 2018). Tim's approach formed a new spatial and temporal dimension between himself and the material construction. Like Dawn, Tim's response revealed how the sensory encounter of the material continued to resonate in his body as a haptic memory. Tim emphasised the 'on-going' effects and response of the encounter to continue to reveal itself in further, future situated and temporal contexts (ibid). In relation to this, Carol Mavor's response to the material raised ideas of metamorphoses and animation. Carol drew on notions of a primal human need to shape meaningful behaviour through

material, further disrupting the notion of fixed immaterial photographic images.

Taking the research full circle, the final performance of *Assembly*, saw Ditte Goard compelled to take performative action to cut the photograph. Ditte's act was driven by a desire in her to confront and break the resistance and ambiguity she felt in the material construction: "to put my head inside it, to be able to absorb it...to create an atmosphere of sorts" (Ditte Goard pers.comm., 27th April 2018).

By re-focusing on material preceding symbolic language and narrative, Ditte's response further related to James' and Dawn's approaches to the 'totemic quality' of the material construction and related ritual practice mentioned in Chapter 3. Ditte's act of cutting became a threshold and point of insertion for a transformation to occur. Related to the explorations seen in Chapter 2 and 3, Ditte's action revealed the turbulent conditions of the photographic object that 'sits between states', crossing boundaries and distinctions between material, image and bodily experience, which are shown to come together, shaping narrative and meaningful actions.

The roundtable discussion included how *Assembly* utilised physical processes and methodologies that revealed an act of 'becoming' as a temporal transformative, unfolding of knowledge (Deleuze cited in Steinberg 2015). In the situated action and dialogue between the material and network response, the meanings reveal themselves through a

'resonance', which "expand meanings through creating certain correspondences" (Conle cite in Meier and Wegener 2016, p.2).



Figure 183: Cut *Claytatype* as the remains of Ditte Goard as Material Chorus performance, *Assembly*, 2018 Photo Credit: Arto Polus

During the symposium's roundtable discussion, a member of the audience concluded: "what is evident in the practices, responses and agenda of the project is a sense of 'interconnections'" (Gayle Meikle pers.comm., 27th April 2018). This notion was brought back to relate to the ideas of 'fluidity', with reference to feminist theorist, Astrida Neimanis (Neimanis, 2012) outlined in Chapter 2 and the feminine sublime as a framework to open up new subjectivities (Zylinska 1998).

In this way, *Assembly* revealed multiplicities of meaning through situated embodied encounters, opening a space in which photography as a term

can be seen “on the periphery of a field in which there are other, differently structured possibilities” (Baker 2005, p.136).

Through *Assembly*, the agency and materiality of the photograph and the performative effects of the research are revealed as continually merging and emerging, with the potential to take-up and shape various and multiple material forms, thoughts and situations. The result of this research methodology relates back to the ‘performative paradigm’ as a “recognition of the generative potential of the ambiguity and the indeterminacy of the aesthetic object and the necessity for ongoing decoding, analysis and translation” (Barrett cited in Bolt 2014, p.132).

TO END (LESS)

This practice-based research has challenged the narrow conception of photographic images as ubiquitous, immaterial representations. It has also sought to counter the dominant paradigm in photographic theory that overlooks the transformative, nuanced, affective qualities of the material phenomenon of photography, through an exploration of innovative practices, texts and a body of research practice that privileged co-actions with material that moved incrementally from solo to participatory, meaning-making.

This exhibition-based research operated through a distinct approach demonstrated through simultaneous engagement in the haptic, spatial and temporal dimension of the medium. This brought the photographic image together with sculptural material and performative gesture to reveal the photograph in relation – both ontologically and aesthetically – to other seemingly disparate material forms as well as perceptually, through embodied, human encounter.

By wilding photographs, returning them to a physical condition and mutable image, sitting between matter and mediums, the photograph is seen in a turbulent state of confusion and instability, both fixed and not. This turbulence reveals an important ambiguity. It reorders perception before representation, returning the photograph to the experiential realm. This rupture collapses the dividing line of image to the sensuous world,

encompassing the body, showing the potential to form multiplicities of new and unique situations. With this, the photograph is shown to simultaneously affect and be affected. These affective and turbulent qualities manifest in the photograph as a threshold, a threshold to the Other, to dialogue, to performance, to unforeseen imaginative narratives, gesture and material matter. It reveals its state as crucially undone, continually merging and emerging.

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