The Rigid and the Slack:
Photographic Process in the Pursuit of Familial Intimacy

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ABSTRACT

The Rigid and the Slack: Photographic Process in the Pursuit of Familial Intimacy uses conditions of the photographic process, from the alchemical to Barthes’s ‘violence of capturing’ to pursue intimacy in familial relations - contained, measured and contingent upon ‘the everyday’ - to examine how a body of artwork may bridge the distancing paradox inherent in the photographic process to pull the subject close.

My approach has been to visually and conceptually map the trace of the familial subject in their haptic actions and low-fi everyday setting alongside photographic picture making tools and approaches that aspire to ideal and hi-end production as a method to reflect both as intricately and intimately entwined and woven into the fabric of the artwork. My domestic setting is the studio and site where - as wife and mother - I experiment in the zone between control and disorder.

The Rigid and the Slack: Photographic Process in the Pursuit of Familial Intimacy is informed by Roland Barthes’s Camera Lucida alongside; Sally Mann’s approach to photography and her memoir Hold Still: a Memoir with Photographs and; Carol Mavor’s Blue Mythologies: Reflections on a Colour.

The creative work comprises two projected videos and seven photographic prints, three of which are diptychs. Images of examined works are included in the appendix and two separate video files are available for viewing.
Declaration

This is to certify that

(i) the thesis comprises only my original work towards the Masters except where indicated in the Preface*,

(ii) due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used,

(iii) the thesis is 10,556 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.

Siri Hayes
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What is always coming but never arrives?

Around the age of eight I played a camera-less photography game on my way to school in the car. I decided to look out the window and examine carefully whatever happened to be out there and always remember it. Similar to taking a snap shot but without a camera. When I opened my eyes, like a shutter, to the scene outside the window I saw a steep clay embankment. Small scruffy bush saplings grew out of the almost vertical incline. I think the memory photograph may have altered slightly. I drive along this same route often now and the trees have grown. I now know they are black wood wattles as I have learnt to identify this variety of tree in the past few years. At the time I thought they were eucalyptus saplings. So the shapes of the leaves have warped slightly to look distinctively like a black wattle leaf. Apart from that I can recall the scene anytime. Another mental photograph I took as a child is possibly more intact because, as far as I know, I’ve never travelled along that route again. I was on the way to an iris farm with my grandma who had a phase of collecting the flower that is my name backwards. I feel like the place was out near Berwick in outer eastern Melbourne but more in the country. I looked out the car window and opened my shutter eyes. The scene I can easily recall, although it is softly focused, contained a dry grassy nature strip in the foreground, silhouetted pine tree in the middle ground and lush paddocks beyond. The car window was the frame for my mind photograph complete with blurry and vignette edges.

There were two moments recorded with each of these ‘memory photographs’. There was the visual ‘photograph’ that I can see in my mind anytime I wish to recall it and there is also the memory of telling myself to always remember it. An unintended message from my younger self in which I remind myself of who I was and how I thought as a child. Or perhaps the ‘I will always remember this’ frames the image in much the same way the car window did.

Now, at eight years of age, my daughter Luella plays a similar present-future game with herself. She asks herself today about how her day is tomorrow. When tomorrow comes she answers her question from the day before (now).

Her game differs to mine: my game involved a present but quickly became about the past and memory, like Photography.
Maybe one day I will adopt the wisdom of the ‘former amateur photographer’ from Boris Mikhailov’s *Unfinished Dissertation*: “in the beginning I still took pictures, but I no longer developed the film. Then I photographed with an empty camera, and now, I just look”\(^1\). Maybe this will become my method of making work and art and life will be one.

\(^1\) Boris Michailov, Margarita Tupitsyn, and Marta Kuzma, *Unfinished Dissertation; or, Discussions with Oneself* (Zurich: Scalo, 1998), 204.
INTRODUCTION

*The Rigid and the Slack* uses conditions of the photographic process, from the alchemical to Barthes’s ‘violence of capturing’ to pursue intimacy in familial relations – contained, measured and contingent upon ‘the everyday’ – to examine how a body of artwork may bridge the distancing paradox inherent in the photographic process to pull the subject close.

The Zone/Studio/Studium pricked

In the zone (my studio) and the zone of the thesis, Roland Barthes’s *Camera Lucida* is a useful guide. There is a gesture in the Winter Garden Photograph of Barthes’s mother as a five year old that brings her to him. It goes beyond representation of her – he can see and experience something of his ‘real’ mother in the photograph. Barthes unpacks this highly personal and subjective response through his notions of the *studium* and *punctum* with a nice sprinkling of alchemy. He refers to studium as a culturally coded knowledge of the photographic detail contained within an image. He says it is the ‘very wide field of unconcerned desire, of various interest, of inconsequential taste: I like / I don’t like.’ And that it may ‘provoke a general and, so to speak, polite interest’.

The studium relates to generic information known to many that does not provoke a particularly emotional or personal response. To study a photograph and objectively appreciate it through the photographic detail provided is a way of understanding and locating the studium. The word ‘studio’ originates from the Latin word studium. If my studio in *The Rigid and the Slack* is the everyday familial zone it isn’t much of a stretch to translate Barthes’s notion of studium into this setting.

The punctum shoots out of studium ‘like an arrow’. It is a sharp detail or object that pierces and ignites a highly personal response in a viewer. Photographs can be ‘speckled with these sensitive points: precisely, these marks, these wounds’. The pointy punctum strikes each person viewing photographs randomly and completely subjectively but, paradoxically, the sharp initial wound is subsequently difficult to locate or articulate and perhaps more like an ache. This is because it affects the subjective self in the place where experience and memory exist. For Barthes most photographs do not contain them. The idea of the punctum operates in photographs through the idea of trace or of having ‘been there’. Barthes can almost

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3 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 27.
connect with his mother through the idea of the trace and the alchemical aspect of photography. The photographic referent is always connected to the real thing recorded: ‘Photographs can never be separate from the Encounter, the Occasion, the Real’\(^7\). Photographs are indexical and therefore contain traces of the real thing that existed. I like how the real is complicated by illusion in photography but that is beside the point just now. In my zone in which the studio is related to the studium, the punctum I come across in striking traces of my familial subjects in the aftermath of their haptic actions.

Two anecdotes serve to background - and foreground - the concerns that have led me to this examination of the relationship between the ‘rigid’ and ‘slack’ in developing photographic artworks around the notion of a distancing paradox.

1. Personal space – close distance

Writing this thesis in the school holidays has been an exercise in close distance. Luella and my other child Oli, ten, are at one end of the house and I am at the other. The door is closed. The act of writing enacts the paradox of distance in which I attempt to bring the subject close.

In a counter action I have been giving Oli and Luella a Chinese spinal massage (painful but efficient in the release of tension) followed by a Japanese shiatsu (always relaxing) each night for the past six months. The massages I give the kids are non-spontaneous and self-conscious attempts to engender my love through touch. Whilst the action is forced it is also sincere and now comes more naturally as it has become a habit. As a child I craved more physical contact and now worry that my children may have the same need for it. I’ve been doing shiatsu as part of a yoga class I’ve been attending for about 20 years so I’m well practiced at it and think I’m pretty good. To me, massaging the kids’ backs feels like a good thing to do. We chat about this and that. It seems to relax them and they sleep well.

As an adult I am not naturally touchy feely. I have a friend who is. She is an osteopath and has magic fingers. She just rests them on my shoulder and I feel tension (that I didn’t know was there), melt away. I think I have become less tactile since I’ve had kids. The first few years of their lives I found I had little personal space. They always wanted to be attached to me. If I sat still doing nothing on the

\(^7\) Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 4.
couch my lap was a magnet. This was okay some of the time but it was all the time.
I found that if I started tidying up the house or kept myself busy they were more likely to occupy themselves.

When I told a wise woman about the nightly massage sessions with the kids she suggested that perhaps my kids might not need touch in the same way I did as a child. I give them the massages as love but they may receive them as something else. She told me about a New Age psychology ‘Five Languages of Love’ theory. She sent me a link to a website and I played a game with Oli to work out his ‘Love Language’. She was right; his love language wasn’t ‘Touch’ but specifically ‘Gifts’ and ‘Quality time’. I guessed the first language before we began the game. In hindsight the second is obvious. He knows he has been fobbed off with relatives so I can get writing done – he just wants me to hang out and have some fun with him. He is sitting beside me now tearing up paper from the recycle bin in preparation for us to make homemade paper together. He’s waiting for me to stop writing. Waiting for some close-not-distant Quality Time.

2. Neat rooms
As a child my room was immaculately tidy. At 13 years of age I consciously decided that it should be messy. Someone had told me that teenagers’ rooms look shambolic. To begin with I controlled the chaos and then, after a while, I became slack.

Now as a lapsed tidy person living in a family of four, and with two family members not being naturally neat, an uncluttered and ordered home can feel frustratingly unattainable. The mother and wife wanting to return to her childhood neat ways often boils over as she pines order and control.

Moving round our home there are multiple objects or events that are indexical to my family. Intimate details reveal who has done what: I see their modus operandi in their traces. If everyone is unwell I know which used tissues belong to who depending on what shape, how many are bunched together and where they appear. As a mother and wife with controlling tendencies these details can be trying and, as mentioned, lead to my distress. However there is a space, tidier than
usual but not in the spotless place I often desire, that magically opens up a different zone: studio. Studio occurs somewhere between neat freak tendencies and slacker ways and is contingent upon the everyday. It is marked by my family and me.

In this studio that is the context of *The Rigid and the Slack* I hypothesize how it may be possible to create a body of artwork in which I locate and intimately connect the subject. How I might connect with my family in their physical absence that I paradoxically create through making photographs.
CHAPTER 1: The Golden Mean and Magic Dust

1. Double alchemy Oli
2. Strung-out shaggy shaman rug
3. Black and Gold magic
4. Magic dust: compression and expansion
5. Down to the earth and magical
Figure 2 – *The Rigid and the Slack* installation VCA Student Gallery, 2016
Double alchemy Oli

‘A sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze: light, though impalpable, is here a carnal medium, a skin I share with anyone who has been photographed.’

Oli captured his family. He threw a magical net over them and trapped them with his hand.

Last year Paul’s sister drew diagrams and explained to him how he might use the Golden Mean in three dimensional space to help him place his sculptural works in an installation. Oli keenly listened and proceeded to test parts of the magical formula over found images. I discovered he had worked a web of freehand spidery horizontal, vertical and diagonal black biro lines over an old postcard that had been advertising material for an exhibition that Paul, his parents, siblings and their partners, including myself, had put together long before Oli or Luella were born. The postcard image depicts a vertically composed ochre coloured grassy landscape, with circular gravel track and seven tiny and almost indistinguishable figures. Entitled *The Woods* the postcard image is a portrait of the Wood family in a treeless landscape close to the family home.

![Figure 3 – Oli’s Golden Mean postcard drawing 2015](image)

Through Oli’s biro lines the landscape image is contained within a loose but simultaneously controlling grid. Where scrawly lines intersect they are dotted or circled suggesting these points are significant. A freeform and loosely controlled slice along the top edge of the postcard indicates where the image didn’t fit his newfound system. There he simply and pragmatically cut a section off. There are still parts of a black biro line visible across the top

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8 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 81.
that he used as a cutting guide. His purposeful marks and slice force the image into the Golden Mean in which the cut could be perceived as a violent act. Although he is searching for the aesthetically pleasing composition promised by the equation, his actual sketchy lines are not made for an aesthetic outcome but for extracting information. He tests the image: measures and divvies it up. The figures within the landscape have been ruthlessly cordoned off from each other. One line slices Paul in half. Oli’s measurements emphasize division and distance: the Divine Equation at work. He hunts for images that fit, or he forcibly conforms them to the system: shades of the Spanish Inquisition for sacrilege compositions!

However through his indexical mark making he touches his family and contains it within an all-encompassing net. His lines divide but also connect. In some places Oli’s biro indentations are so heavy they pierce the photographic surface. Is it possible he was able to make an incision in the photographic surface and enter the world within the photographic space (the past)? Is it possible his idiosyncratic lines, containing his trace, connect him to his paternal family contained within the photograph index below his marks? Through his action, and with pen as conduit and piercing tool, ink combines with silver particles and the potential of alchemy feels possible. For as Barthes discusses, the alchemic silver metal used in the photographic process is ‘alive’\(^9\). Is there another dimension behind the surface of the photo?

Oli’s magical equation contains the most infamous and precious alchemic metal; gold. With two precious alchemic metals to fuel his time machine Oli can travel where he likes.

I posit that he travelled back to 2004 using his Golden Mean time machine propelled by silver, gold and biro ink to stand beside me in the old St Albans quarry as I fumbled with my photographic equipment to capture an image of the Wood family below. At the time I was struggling with the composition and I couldn’t get high enough above the scene to see more of the landscape. I remember thinking that there was ‘too much sky’. The composition didn’t feel balanced and I have always felt uncomfortable about it. Without knowing the magical Golden Ratio I am partial to a balanced composition that could benefit from Oli’s tidy measuring device. At the quarry all those years ago, there was Oli urging ‘just cut it off’. Of precious photographic ideals such as full frame and uncropped images Oli had to patiently travel back to now and fix my ‘problematic’ composition.

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\(^9\) Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 81.
Oli loves tricks in all forms from practical jokes through learning the tricks of a magician to wanting wonder in ‘real’ magic. His handmade geometric workings look like voodoo magic symbols from hokey TV shows. It appears that both voodoo objects and photos require the vital indexical element or the trace of something or someone to activate the magical mechanism. There is a connection between indexicality and alchemy. However Oli was interested in the potential of the Golden Mean formula as a magical trick for unlocking the image as good or bad. He is unaware that his drawing looks like the casting of spells. He was also oblivious to any of the anecdotal familial facts surrounding the image or that the act of physically touching his family in a photographic time warp is magic to me. For him there was no nostalgic or sentimental attachment to the image. He experienced no piercing punctum moment in response to any particular part of the photograph. Not even precious regard to the image itself – he just cut it. He was trying something out. At the postcard scale it is difficult to identify any of the tiny figures as familiar. Maybe if he encounters the image at its full large scale (1.2 x 1.5 metres) one day he will have a heightened moment with it? Will he see his father and then something in his father’s stance that will strike him as so familiar that his heart will pound and be pierced? Will he realize that I took the photograph and be moved by the photographer and subject relationship? Or realize his own familial relationship to the subject and photographer as viewer? Regardless I am able to locate and identify Oli in the order he attempts to create and it pricks me. Unconsciously he created an intimate moment in which I feel more connected to him. It looks and feels like magic.

Strung-out shaggy shaman rug

Oli’s postcard drawing, documented to scale, is contained within the same expansive white A0 size page as a photograph depicting a shaggy circular weaving still attached to a round wooden loom. The weaving rests on a tree stump and against a white interior wall. The cracked wooden wheel loom, its shadow and the rounded shape of the wooden stump the weaving rests on, echo the circular track shape in the postcard image. Placed side-by-side the images also emphasize a handmade wonky aesthetic within classical geometry. They reveal how a circular pie graph or square grid usually associated with accurate measurement when imperfectly executed or unevenly embellished by the maker’s hand can move from the abstract to the tangible. The amount of wobble contained within the structure of the grid itself measures the spectrum between rigid tension and slackness.
The tactile objects were indexical to their makers, Oli and myself, before photographic mediation. Traces of mother and son and their journeys into control, contingency and the wonky are mapped. The spidery Oli lines connect to the shamanistic shaggy mother threads. Our aesthetic interests overlap in the pictorial. In this context we connect not via a physical hug but by our fondness for sketchy slack within the notion of strict control. Or, from afar, magical and sinuous threads extend toward one another in a long distance spidery embrace.

**Black and Gold magic**

Like Oli’s magical postcard drawing, Paul’s handmade, homemade and haptic method of creating his three-dimensional geometric and fluro green (Black and Gold home brand) stringed ‘web’ box, align it with voodoo objects and black magic narratives.
However Paul’s ‘Asahi beer’ box is a model gallery space that Paul used to measure out where he might place his ceramic sculptures for an upcoming exhibition. Like Oli he used the three dimensional Golden Mean ratio of triangular grid to extract information. Found lying around our house, its roughness and suggestion of order along with the markings of its author leant itself well for inclusion in The Rigid and the Slack. Photographed and placed within the generous and simultaneously constricting borders of an A1 size document page, the image speaks to the A0 page that contains mother and son web diptych depicting a shaggy circular weaving on the left and to the right the scrawly Golden Mean postcard drawing over family landscape portrait. They radiate long, thin and crooked lines that speak to each other of mapping, measuring and the slippages that occur within constrained parameters: these slippages or indexical turns-of-hands provide a space in which to communicate. Like Barthes’s mother in the Winter Garden Photograph ‘the loved body is immortalized’¹⁰ by the trace contained within the object within the photograph.¹¹

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¹⁰ Barthes, Camera Lucida, 81.
¹¹ Not to be sidelined, Luella made a drawing whilst I was installing work for my Rigid and Slack MFA crit earlier this year. She drew a simple spider web with a spider waiting for its prey. It was relevant so I pinned it up as part of the exhibition.
Magic dust: compression and expansion

Overlooking and down into a muddy creek with ochre coloured clay banks Oli, Luella and their friend move in and out of the scene throwing handfuls of dust up into the air to watch it shower down and merge with the water below. There is no audio in the video and this adds a mute dreamlike quality that removes it from the reality of everyday ambient sounds recorded with the original footage. Their movement in and out of the frame, extending arms and keeping them momentarily still as the dust expands into the air, has the rhythm and feel of breathing. The expanding and freefalling dust cloud is like oxygenated air inflating lungs. The children are like the muscles working the lungs in and out. The dust is free forming: the tiny particles could head in any direction and create any dust-shaped cloud as they shower down together and into the water. It’s what keeps the kids going back for more: the general swelling shape as it expands and the way it showers down and combines with the water below. It reminds me of an image that Anne Ferran took of her father’s ashes being thrown over a creek. It’s a remarkable image in which the cloud of her father’s ashes creates a kind of hovering ghostly effigy. Whereas Ferran’s image is still the video sees the dust change form, disappear into the water below and then create billowing cloudy shapes under the surface. There is freedom and anarchy in the unknown, disordered and temporary event/effect within the controlled frame. They immerse themselves in the contingent aspect of their actions. It could be said that the video breathes air into the project. Or it could be said that the kids’ action with its expanding dust is like a valve opening and letting off steam within the rigid confines of the zone. The potential for contingency creates relief. However, over time, the short duration of the video loops makes it also feel as though the children are trapped in the relentless looping and this becomes oppressive. In this way their action becomes frenetic and frantic feeling.
For the children at play, the camera is not present. The viewer can magically access their private dusty world, to a point. One’s view is interrupted: In keeping with the analysis of measurement, time, process and indicating the presence of the camera as machine and tool within the project, a play/pause/stop bar has been layered over the top of the bush creek imagery in postproduction. It has the frustrating effect of one wanting to look around, through or over the bar like someone has accidently left the mouse hovering over it and it is not gradually fading off over a small amount of time like it should. The play/pause/stop bar
interrupts the romance of the idyllic scene. It reduces the bush creek video to a 2 dimensional surface and extinguishes any possibility that we are a fly-on-the-banks-of-the-creek.

**Down to earth and magical**

I was drawn to the children’s interaction with the dirt because of the way they essentially grab the stuff of the place around them and attempt to make sense of it by throwing it in the air and watching it change shape and transform. Just as Oli and Paul used the Golden Mean to fathom space, the dust throwing has the same impulse although via more chaotic and anarchic means. It may be unconscious for the kids but their actions reveal an existential yearning that I am prone to but paradoxically resist through my analysis of it. Rather than participate in this down-to-earth activity, I extend the distance between my kids, their friend, surroundings and self by mediating it through my iPhone. I stand back and distance my very desire to connect by observing the kids engage the tangible. Herein is the contradictory action that I enjoy to pursue, analyse and take forward into art.

My family makes things: they leave a grotty trail that, in this instance, becomes a temporary cloud sketch when dust expands in the air. It is a temporary extension of their selves. It is embedded in the video. Similar to British artist Trish Morrissey’s photographic self-portraits that show her face painted by her 4 year old daughter they create an action that leaves a trace. Morrissey’s photographs show the indexical action of daughter marking her artist mother.

![Figure 10 – Trish Morrissey Bitzer 2011, Type C print](image)

Observing my children’s experimental and non self-conscious methods of engaging their surrounds another yearning comes to light that, again, sees similarities between Paul and Oli’s reasons for using the Golden Mean and the dust throwing kids. Father and son are intrigued by the possibility that the magical aspect of their equation will reveal visually pleasing
compositions or arrangements of objects whilst the dust throwing kids reveal an intrigue with the possibility of alchemical shape shifting. Along the lines of the apparition of Anne Ferran’s father in his ashes, the kids appear excited by the possibility of magical shapes appearing and disappearing before their very eyes. I observe and am intrigued by the exploration of existential questions surrounding the fathoming of space and magical possibilities. I draw together, map and test these notions in my meta art narrative. My findings suggest that haptic endeavours uncover an interesting tension or correlation between the measuring and comprehension of physical space and alchemy. Alchemy requires an elemental trace of the tangible physical world. I stand there, I bear witness, I AM present and I am intricately enmeshed even from my bird’s eye view (that at times feels distant).

As Barthes says, ‘Every photograph is a certificate of presence’\textsuperscript{12}.

\textsuperscript{12}Barthes, Camera Lucida, 87.
CHAPTER 2: Intimacy through distance: pictorial unpicking

Pinhole Paul – A humming blue cloud
Figure 11 – The Rigid and the Slack installation VCA Student Gallery, 2016
Pinhole Paul – A humming blue cloud

‘To write photography is always, in a sense, to leak into the fluidity of the utopian fairytale. Photographs hold their referent (whether it is a goose, a beast, a starfish, a woman) as never changing. Photography's ‘magic’ casts the short-lived as forever and ever non-altered in an eternal emulsion of the frozen time of the Briar Rose’s hundred-year-long sleep. Photographs make good the daguerreotype glass of Snow White’s coffin.’

The striking blue geometric pattern of Paul’s jumper became the rhythm and intrigue that drives a diptych in which a portrait photograph of Paul created with a pinhole camera sits alongside a drawing that is an enlargement of the pattern. The strong geometric shapes on his jumper are reminiscent of the Moorish tiles we saw at the Alhambra in Granada whilst on an artist residency in Spain and also allude to Paul’s Arabic heritage. Whilst in Barcelona I made a similar formally composed portrait of Paul to the pinhole photograph in the diptych for The Rigid and the Slack. I stitched the background pattern onto Paul as an intimate act in which I literally attempted to connect him with Barcelona and myself. For the diptych I was intending to create a follow-up image as an inverse portrait to the Spanish creation in which I would stitch the pattern of Paul’s jumper onto the background to examine family and self in a familiar place (home) as opposed to a foreign one. In the earlier image the decorative floral interior grows onto Paul like the vines of the Briar Rose fairytale, as I attempted to fathom an unfamiliar place. In the latter I planned the reverse, imagining that the pattern from Paul would grow onto the background.

On the very first page of *Camera Lucida* Barthes speaks of an overwhelming sensation when looking at a photograph of Napoleon’s little brother because he realized that he is looking at the eyes that actually looked at the Emperor: ‘And I realized then, with an amazement I have not been able to lessen since’\(^{14}\). Part of Barthes’s wonder comes from the indexical element of photographs where a trace of the ‘real’ is left in the silver particles of the film. In this way, photography is a bit like the first part of a séance: Barthes can reach out to Napoleon through time. He is in touch with someone who is dead. Kathrin Yacavone suggests, in relation to her analysis of this aspect of *Camera Lucida*, that a séance and a photograph have in common the dynamic situation in which the viewer and sitter are in a ‘direct experiential relation’\(^{15}\). However they can’t interact because the action is only in one direction: Barthes can look at the eyes that looked at Napoleon but the Emperor can’t see Barthes in the future. Napoleon’s brother’s eyes look but are unseeing. There is a bridge between Barthes present and the historical time of the former ruler but it is only one-way. Likewise when I stitched thread and beads onto the photograph of Paul a few years ago I was touching the silver particles that the light reflecting off him imprinted upon. I felt like my action was to physically touch him as an intimate gesture. There is something real of him left in the picture because the image was created with light that reflected off him and onto the silver particles. Or as Barthes says:

‘The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here; the

\(^{14}\) Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 3.
duration of the transmission is insignificant; the photograph of the missing being, as Sontag says, will touch me like the delayed rays of a star.\textsuperscript{16}

However it is a strange intimacy that Paul will never feel because the Paul that was there in the past isn’t there anymore. Only his trace, however many light years removed. It is a paradoxical intimacy or just frustratingly one-way. Derrida proposes that touch involves the action of two forces toward each other\textsuperscript{17}. So my action is futile: I can communicate the idea of intimacy, and Paul may see this symbolic gesture from another time and place when viewing the artwork, but it can’t be felt as real intimacy with the Paul in the artwork because of the time delay. Or maybe Paul does feel it on some level:

‘And if Photography belonged to a world with some residual sensitivity to myth, we should exult over the richness of the symbol: the loved body is immortalized by the mediation of a precious metal, silver (monument and luxury): to which we might add the notion that this metal, like all metals of Alchemy, is alive’\textsuperscript{18}

The singing blue geometric pattern of Paul’s jumper became the piercing point of the work within The Rigid and the Slack. Barthes’s memory of his aunt was activated when he saw the necklace worn in a photograph of an unknown woman. In my photograph the pattern of Paul’s jumper affected me and lead to a bundle of personal/subjective associations: Paul’s heritage, our travels and my affinity with the colour blue. In Margaret Olin’s thoroughly extended examination of 4 or 5 images from Camera Lucida and Barthes’s discussion of them, including the one mentioned above, she convincingly suggests that the punctum experience is activated by numerous memories and experiences rather than one singular association. She notes that his idea of punctum heavily relies on the indexical aspect of photographs. However she concludes that a ‘reading of Camera Lucida suggests that the most significant indexical power of the photograph may consequently lie not in the relation between the photograph and its subject but in relation between the photograph and its beholder, or user, in what I would like to call a “performative index” or an “index of identification”’.\textsuperscript{19} This feels true to me: The seemingly banal detail in the pattern of Paul’s jumper instigated multiple associations for me

\textsuperscript{16} Barthes, Camera Lucida, 80-81.
\textsuperscript{17} Jacques Derrida, On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy (California: Stanford, 2005), 2.
\textsuperscript{18} Barthes, Camera Lucida, 81.
\textsuperscript{19} Margaret Rose Olin, Touching Photographs (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 69.
that make it feel significant and would most likely not trigger such a response in another person. It’s about Paul, about me.

In keeping with the way in which I map the pictorial and place it within a context that compares and relates the photographic process with the messy everyday details of family, parenting and the possibility of intimacy, I did not stitch the pattern: I traced and sketched a template of the geometric pattern from the jumper to use as a guide for stitches but I did not stitch. I placed the sketch beside the portrait. Invisible spidery lines connect the photo and the drawing. I unpicked my process and put it on display.
CHAPTER 3: The Zone

1. Holding Still
2. The Dutch master and I
3. Blue Siri-iriS
4. The Indigo Zone (Ruler)
5. Testing
Figure 14 – The Rigid and the Slack installation VCA Student Gallery, 2016
**Holding Still**

‘“Raise your head. Look out the window. Point your toe. Bend your knee. Put your chin up. Make yourself veerrrrr uncomfortable.” (Laughter all around.) “There we go.”’\(^{20}\)

Luella appears full length and central in a static video frame with straight back, bare feet and hands clasped formally on her lap in front of a wood-paling fence and details of a backyard. Pinned to the fence behind her is a silk cloth. Luella remains remarkably still as she stares into the lens of a pinhole camera on a tripod to the left of the composition. Near the beginning of the video a figure, me, comes slightly into the left-hand side of the frame to the pinhole camera. I pull out a dark slide and count the exposure length for the pinhole photograph using the phrase ‘one cat and dog, two cat and dog, three cat and dog’ and so forth until I get to ‘30 cat and dog’. The dark slide is replaced and the video ends fairly soon afterwards. Apart from my movement near the beginning and end there is motion from the breeze gently rippling the silk cloth and trees and the diminutive yet persistent blinking of Luella’s eyes. There is also a moment when her vision flickers over to the video lens and she looks at us, the viewers.

![Figure 15 – still from Holding Still 2016, looped video projection, dimensions variable](image)

One aim of the exercise was for Luella to remain as still as possible for the pinhole camera so that little movement was recorded in the long exposure photograph. However the fact that Luella’s focus darts from pinhole to video lens and back again for only a split second has a series of interesting and relevant implications that contribute well to the notion of control

\(^{20}\) Francine Prose, "‘Hold Still,’ a Memoir by Sally Mann," *NY Times*, 24 October, 2015.
within this research. She is probably aware that I may not approve of the slight deviation in focus. I would be concerned that her eyes are recorded as blurry. She would be concerned that she has misbehaved. In momentarily breaking her focus from the pinhole to the video lens and viewer she also ruptures the romance of a singular and autonomous narrative, a Classical Hollywood narrative convention. Possibly, without knowing it, she empowers herself through this small devious sleight of vision: she returns the viewer’s gaze. She acknowledges a world beyond her immediate setting in the multiple technologies surrounding her. Perhaps her action is a small rebellion against the oppressive situation she finds herself in. Perhaps her action is a plea to the viewer – ‘save me from this’.

Whilst it falters and the counting is irregular my voice is used as a tool to keep Luella’s pose in check. It measures the exposure length and it measures her behaviour. It is a controlling instrument similar to the play/pause/stop bar in the Magic Dust video. The viewer can see that Luella is compliant. That she stays so still and is being so good. She appears serious about doing a good job. Maybe there is a masochistic enjoyment in seeing if she can fulfil the brief however difficult. Or perhaps she hopes to avoid the sharpness in my voice that can easily arise. Michel Chion investigated the notion of an ‘umbilical web’21 in which a baby hears their mother’s voice in the womb. An audio web surrounds the child and connects her to her mother. This work potentially exemplifies the notion of the umbilical web and how far its pull may extend into childhood.

At my mother’s 60th birthday party, some of her old friends, just before they were leaving the event, said to me ‘and now we must find Eve and say good bye’ and began to scan the room. Through the din of voices I realized I had known where she was, without seeing her, during the whole conversation. I pointed her out before I even knew I was doing so. There is an auditory bond that means I can differentiate her sound, even in loud places, and locate her. It binds me to her.

Luella is caught in the umbilical web I surround her in. Possibly it’s easier to obey the voice than escape the web. The viewer also experiences the controlling web my voice creates. It permeates the exhibition space and one cannot avoid hearing it as they engage with other works in the project.

The Dutch master and I

One night Oli came tentatively into our bedroom and said that he’d had a bad dream. It had clearly terrified him. Sleepily I told him to jump into bed with us. He climbed in and proceeded to ask me if he should tell me his dream. I replied that if he thought it would make him feel better that maybe it would be good. He said: ‘Mummy I was trying to kill you’.

If the Luella pinhole video exemplifies a work in which control teeters as the dominant force over chaos, some work I made in 2010 on our Spanish artist residency, when Luella and Oli were two and four, reflects the heartbreaking turmoil that can occur when things don’t go according to a warm and tender plan. The intention was to create images that revealed my love for my children. The work was inspired by a moment that aligns with the clichéd event of the Aussie artist who has a revelatory experience in front of a European artwork in a famous art museum. I was at the Guggenheim in Bilbao and in an exhibition of Dutch master paintings when I came across a small portrait by Cornelis de Vos. It was a painting of a young child entitled Susanna de Vos that had a sweet and intimate feeling. The chubby little fist holding some food was a sight I was familiar with in my children. I discovered that the painting was the artist’s daughter. My ‘moment’ with this work was identifying with the 17th century painter as an artist and a parent. His painting is so full of tenderness and love. I also realised he used the same technique as I do to keep my kids in one place – food. I reached across four centuries and could relate to this Dutch master for his everyday parenting technique. The chubby fist activated a punctum moment.

![Image](image-url)

Figure 16 – Cornelis de Vos Portrait of Susanna de Vos 1627, oil on panel, 80 x 55cm

On returning to Barcelona I tried to replicate this moment of parental love and parenting camaraderie with a 17th century Dutch master in photographs of Oli and Luella. My first attempts were a failure. I sat Oli in front of the camera with the idea of creating a simple
portrait using a large bowl of food to keep him placated and still for the camera. My parenting moment with de Vos became void as the food actually brought Oli to life. He did not stop moving the food from the bowl to his mouth. He could not resist the enormous bowl of food I placed before him as a symbolic gesture. Instead of working with a pervading sense of love and endearment for Oli I became more and more frustrated as I asked him to stay still and keep his hands resting near the food. I lost my temper and the only two images I have from this session is one of Oli all a blur as he devours his small feast. There is another heartbreaking one with his eyes all wet from tears. Not much love revealed here. More a moment of a mother son love gone wrong. No wonder he doesn’t like the camera. The photograph of Oli with tears in eyes is close to the bone. My intention to create an image that expressed my love for Oli collapsed as the impulse for art grew and I became monstrous.

![Image](image1.jpg) ![Image](image2.jpg)

*Figure 17, 18 – Oli 2012, Type C print, 62 x 52cm. Photo of Oli with his eyes wet from tears, 2012*

Given this unfortunate event in Barcelona amongst other photographic experiences my kids have had, it is fair to say that Oli, the camera and I have a complicated relationship. In short Oli doesn’t like the camera, will often refuse to engage with it and ask me to delete pictures. He is happy to be included in a photograph if he feels pride in what is being depicted. Anything else suggests he feels the camera is an infringement upon his freedom. I created some similar videos of Oli at the same time I recorded the one of Luella posing for the pinhole camera. He enjoyed the process for a short time but became so annoyed by flies that the challenge of sitting still became unbearable (even with the promised reward of icy poles upon completion). Whilst Luella has a determination in her that meant she probably would have enjoyed the challenge of sitting still as an endurance test Oli would not have enjoyed the strictness of the exercise and the fact that it included a camera. The camera represents the aspect he doesn’t
like in me most – control. And in turn he knows that he can exercise the same attribute by refusing to perform for the camera. Oli likes to listen. He has eavesdropped on my adult conversations about the ethics of taking photographs of people. He understands his rights in this area and enacts them.

The deviant and momentary flicker of Luella’s focus away from the pinhole camera could invest a sense of hope in the project. In this extremely controlled environment there are cracks. Gaps where oxygen can flow. And this is the point of tension the project operates from: the place where chaos and control converge and diverge. Luella is complicit in my experiment. She was curious about the technology. She glanced over to the video camera to examine the different modes at play in creating the artwork. Through my being her mother and my constant tinkering in this area I think she is aware of the constructed image. She too is fathoming how control works in imagery. By observation and osmosis (if not collusion) she slowly begins to fathom and pick up the dark arts.

Blue Siri-iriS

I see blue through my blue eyes. It makes my zone azure.

When I look out the kitchen window there are mountains in the distance that create a line of blue along the horizon. I have spent many hours before this window over the years we have lived here but I hadn’t noticed the blue line until someone pointed it out recently. Now I see it. I have opened my blue eyes to the blue horizon.

I am wondering if I have been partially blind to the presence and my dependence on blue. It has been pointed out that blue is a predominant colour in my oeuvre. As a child I was given blue gifts equivalent to my sister’s pink. Perhaps blue is more culturally aligned with my straight brown hair and pink with my sister’s blonde curls? As a young teenager I remember my mother and sister liked subtle colour: pastel or soft. I loved bright colours but being less sure of anything I edited my preference because I thought that my family saw these as too garish. As I couldn’t work comfortably with bright colour blue was an obvious and easy choice because of my blue gifts. Blue was ‘me’. Perhaps it partly explains why I have developed a preoccupation with natural indigo blue dyeing.
The writer and art historian Carol Mavor has a passion for blue that I don’t think I share in the same way. She takes pleasure in immersing herself in its complicated and paradoxical nature. She describes its contradictory nature in poetic terms desiring its beauty both dark and jewel-like. She is a lover of blue and collects all detail regarding its myriad forms. One could describe blue as her lover. For me it has been a life-long companion. Maybe through its omnipresence I have become blind to it. It is always reliably there for me: like putting on a well-worn pair of tracky daks at the end of the day. I feel relaxed and comfortable with it. Having listened to Mavor passionately describe her love of blue, I wonder whether I am coming to more actively appreciate its presence. Perhaps there is a latent fervour for the colour that could come to the surface if required. Her lover is my steady companion.

Mavor quotes a student of hers who had an interesting experience in Japan as a Western traveller on a train. A boy came up and said: “My grandmother wants to know if you see blue through your blue eyes”23. The same friend who pointed out my blue horizon told me about how she once owned a pair of blue tinted sunglasses. It affected her mood and made her feel a bit depressed. She saw blue and was blue. However blue can be ‘joyful-sad’24, as Mavor points out. Blue is the blue sky and represents a sunny day.... I don’t think I always see blue through my blue eyes but I do appreciate our committed companionship.

**The Indigo Zone (Ruler)**

Seven shades of blue cloth from dark to light hang wet on a nylon rope stretched across the middle of the frame and from one side to the other. They hang in an exterior location surrounded by rock wall, foliage, gravel and details of a backyard shed. The suspended blue gradient created from slightly uneven squares of calico dipped in magical indigo blue dye vats was a technical exercise assigned in a natural dye workshop. The challenge was to produce seven tones with distinct separation between each shade and for the steps between each shade to be approximately similar in tonal contrast between them all.

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22 Tracksuit pants
The indigo tonal exercise is almost identical in desired outcomes to a technical task I was assigned in first year art school except that the photographic Zone Ruler was produced using light, film and chemicals not indigo dye and calico cotton. And in photography there are ten ‘zones’ to achieve rather than seven (I have been told that master indigo dyers aim for 12 tones). The photographic exercise was developed by Modernist photographer Ansel Adams whom invented the Zone System as a method for creating excellent exposure techniques in analogue photographs. This indigo dyeing exercise is also a challenge in technical mastery albeit the tonal outcome has a blue hue. Same exercise but using different mediums, processes and one with an azure colour cast.

Within *The Rigid and the Slack* the *Indigo Zone Ruler* can be employed as a tool to measure and control photographic materials and production, as well as instigating notions of measurement and power that exist within the act of parenting and taking photographs. For instance it can be used technically to measure the tonal range of any other images exhibited within the project. How well are they exposed compared to the ruler? If the *Indigo Zone Ruler* is placed next to the projected video work of Luella, for example, the tonal range of the video projection can be assessed. It can also literally introduce a concept of a subject being measured. The viewer can gauge how well Luella behaves for the camera. Is she sitting well and still for the mother counting the exposure length and for the camera that records her (both still and video)? The ruler is there to show the ideal standard of evenly spaced incriminates and measurement. Luella does sit extremely still. If the ruler were a graph she would be up the top of it for stillness. Just the flickering of her eyes away from the pinhole camera to the left of the frame and to the video camera show how she deviates momentarily.

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**Figure 19 – *Indigo Zone Ruler* 2015, Giclee print, 59 x 84cm**
from her good behaviour. There would be a slight dip in the graph. The voice, another tool for measuring behaviour alongside its technical use as shutter speed, counts for how long she can endure the rigid stillness. The ruler sits to the side of the projection as a tool to measure and back-up this parental authority. Or, in the mode of Michel Chion\(^{25}\), the umbilical web can extend its net more securely and powerfully with the Indigo Zone Ruler standing by like the bars of a playpen.

Placed by the video of Luella, *Indigo Zone Ruler* can also be used as a tool for measuring and potentially emphasizing notions of power often associated with photography. Photographers and photographs control the viewer and the subject. To take a photograph is to place a rigid frame round a particular moment. It coerces the viewer to look at what the photographer saw from exactly the same position and instant. It is manipulative and full of its own power. These are well worn photography truisms. Barthes says the ‘photograph is violent: not because it shows violent things, but because on each occasion it fills the sight by force, and because in it nothing can be refused or transformed’\(^{26}\). The viewer is effectively controlled by the photographer/photograph. There is no space to move and look from a different position. Similarly it can be difficult for the subject to have real autonomy over how they are conveyed in portrait photographs. When Sally Mann talks about violence and control in relation to photography, it is towards the subject not viewer: ‘It is a tricky moment: taking a picture is an invasive act, a one-sided exercise of power’\(^{27}\). However she writes this in relation to her portraits of black men and not in relation to the notorious photographs of her children. Working out one’s relationship with their kids is a murkier and trickier ethical question. In relation to these portraits of black men in which she analyses race relations through photography, she discusses how photographic portraits always come at the ‘expense of the subject’\(^{28}\). There are ethical complexities involved with taking photographs, with ‘shooting’ your subject. The subject is stilled and now becomes a specimen for the viewer to inspect. A certain amount of technical mastery and therefore control is required to produce a certain photograph but to wield a camera is also an ultimate act of supremacy before, during and after the moment it is recorded.


\(^{26}\) Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 91.


\(^{28}\) Sally Mann, *Hold Still* : A Memoir with Photographs, 292.
The *Indigo Zone Ruler* next to pinhole video highlights me as the photographer and parent exercising power over my subject and viewer. I am also a Ruler. My voice in the video backs this, as does my torture tool and my right-hand man, the Indigo Zone Ruler. This is probably why the split second that Luella’s vision temporarily flickers over and acknowledges the viewer is the circuit breaker that infuses relief (that Luella is not an automaton).

The contrast between the technically, well-produced tones as ‘ideal’ and the roughly cut calico in its messy, domestic, backyard environment as ‘everyday reality’ is the key to this work. The physical state of the Zone Ruler provides an idea of what could be measured: the domestic and those that inhabit it. So whilst the presence of Rulers and tools of measurement and control can exemplify control over one’s materials and subject and an idealized striving for perfection, it can also, and by their very presence, simultaneously emphasize their opposite: imperfection and chaos. The Zone Ruler may aim for technical prowess, control and order but the everyday context contains grit to mess things up. Wonkiness and disorder resulting from haptic events are on display and hard at work in *The Rigid and the Slack*: Trusting in process and honouring the latent potential of contingencies on all fronts has been central to its development. Julia Margaret Cameron used the ‘wrong’\(^{29}\) lenses to photograph her subjects. Some details of their faces fell out of focus. These technically faulty slippages ‘make’ her work in much the same way that me ‘allowing’ the everyday to impinge upon the ideal and strict order, makes mine. The imperfect detail that occurs between control and disorder gives me pause to recognise and be pierced by the indication of my subject that may otherwise be ostracized. It is this particular point of tension between what is rigid and what is slack that is key to the integrity of the works produced in this studio research. A similar methodology applies to the relationship between my lo-fi ‘loose’ studio creations and my technically exacting hi-end photographic output.

The *Indigo Zone Ruler* points to my ongoing preoccupation with highlighting the construction of images. I paradoxically love being drawn into the illusion of pictures all the while seeing their artifice. To see and know I am being tricked is stimulating for me. How can it appear that a whole alternate world is before me and I am being shown, simultaneously, that it is a construction, an illusion? Weegees’ photograph of a woman on a beach in the midst of an emergency scene smiling at the camera shows how this alternate world can be complicated by the presence of a camera. The woman’s smile is inappropriate to the natural order of the

\(^{29}\) Sylvia Wolf et al., *Julia Margaret Cameron’s Women* (Chicago: Yale University Press, 1998), 33.
scene but draws attention to one’s habitual response to a camera. It makes the invisible presence of the camera felt. Her unseeing gaze meets the viewer’s and connects us to the world that would otherwise appear self-enclosed. The viewer is aware of the mechanism that created the picture – how it has been constructed. Through her 'smile at the camera’ I feel like the viewer can magically access the fabric of the image.

![Image](image-url)

**Figure 20 – Weegee Drowning victim 1940, silver gelatin print**

Watching fabric being drawn out of a natural indigo dye vat and seeing it change from yellow to blue before one’s very eyes is also magical. Magical in a similar way to observing an image appear in the developing tray under the red light in a black and white darkroom. It’s magic. It’s real but it’s not. The Indigo Zone Ruler sits in *The Rigid and the Slack* to measure. It may be possible that it can measure and map the length of the pictorial and conceptual threads that weave and construct the magical zone that is *The Rigid and the Slack*. Perhaps it can also measure the intimate: how close or distant the familial subject is.

**Testing**

Where the *Indigo Zone Ruler* is a visual tool for measuring things (how good the exposure is, how well behaved my children are, how neat the domestic space isn’t) *Darkroom testing* provides the site where the assessment takes place. The location is a viewing board outside an analogue black and white darkroom on which black and white test strips have been arranged in a no admittance ‘x’ cross formation. Similar to the *Indigo Zone Ruler* the image contrasts the hunt for the ideal within a contingent reality. Incidental messy details such as grotty tap and short garden hose to wash the test strips and water droplets running down the board indicate and foreground the everyday. The test strips are roughly cut and the arrangement itself is haphazard and not exact in its placement. The image being tested reveals
hints of scratchy foliage and backyard paling fence: the everyday domestic context of The Rigid and the Slack. Where the Indigo Zone Ruler exists within the domestic, Darkroom testing situates the domestic within a photographic context. Exceptional outcomes are the result of stringent testing. Darkroom testing makes visible the difficult process of aspiring to an ideal in the wayward everyday.

The loose but simultaneously tight composition could also be described as ‘sketchy’ and this draws it into alignment with the haptic line work of the Golden Mean works of Oli and Paul and my own shaggy circular rug. I wield my iPhone to make a quick study that suggests and emphasizes gestural and connecting lines in much the same way someone sketching would use their pencil to mark out the movement and details that strike them as relevant. I am mapping. This testing place is an ideal site to develop imagery and show connecting lines. It is a site of process.

The Indigo Zone Ruler is used as a tool for measurement that suggests the construction of picture making whilst Darkroom testing makes visible the site in which the illusory picture is created. The traditional and old-fashioned image production site (analogue darkroom) is ideal to highlight the process being mapped. It points attention to the technology, medium and the constructed nature of images. The everyday familial setting is brought into the direct visual and conceptual comparison with the photographic process. Darkroom testing sets up the idea of using picture making and photographic process as comparative methods for understanding familial intimacy. Captured mid activity I am testing; finding links, connecting the dots and mapping the art making process. I am in the Zone.
CONCLUSION

Travelling through our familial zone I hone in on particular interconnected details that relate to *The Rigid and the Slack*. I am consciously drawn to the haptic and decidedly idiosyncratic details that mark my familial subject matter. Other times I collect significant particulars unconsciously. For example I now know that I collect blue. Like a bower bird collecting anything of an azure hue my eye is unconsciously attracted to the colour and it glints through various works in the project. I recognise this in retrospect. They are familiar and automatic markers used to locate the known and orienteer me through the zone. I visually and conceptually hone in on and identify the threads but also simultaneously step back to observe where they crossover and how the overall web of our familial zone works from my place on the map.

When I encountered a shelf of Paul’s pots that would soon be used in some of his artwork I saw his art materials but I also saw Morandi. I had a moment in which I recognized the art historical within my everyday context. I connected with Paul by associating his art materials within my zone. Once I was tuned into Morandi I saw him everywhere, including Instagram. In *The Rigid and the Slack* Morandi is real to me in the trace line between art, blue, and Paul.

![Figure 22 – Morandi 2016, Giclee print, 84 x 118cm](image)

It was a similar unconscious trace I experienced, not long after graduating from artschool, in the organic veggie shop where I worked and was serving customers: I was struck by the sight of a woman carrying her baby. For a split second her pose looked identical to that of the mother and child in Raphael’s *Sistine Madonna*. I knew the painting intimately as my mother
had a poster of it hanging in the lounge room throughout my childhood. I was intrigued that I
could see the Sistine Madonna walking around an organic veggie shop in the Southern
Hemisphere in the year 2001 through a simple gesture. I now understand this as a trace line
connecting me and my mother, Eve, to art. A technical photography term, reciprocity factor,
may apply to the delayed time it has taken me to process this ‘moment’ as punctum.

Fig. 23 – Raphael Sistine Madonna 1512   Fig. 24 – Matilda and Ada from Mother and Child series,
2001, Type C print, 75 x 105cm

In the veggie shop with the Sistine Madonna the completely subjective moment of
transcendence when everything in this fairly banal context became meaningful was akin to
Barthes’s piercing punctum. The gesture of the woman with her baby pricked me. The studium
was the everyday contemporary detail of the veggie shop. I originally applied Barthes’s
studium and punctum notions to my familial subject matter because they also suit a discussion
on intimacy. Now I see that piercing moments drive much of my work.

As a mother and wife I may use my family as subjects in my artwork but the compelling prism
through which I view myself in the world is that of an artist. Louise Bourgeois’s comment
resonates: ‘the feminists took me as a role model, as a mother. It bothers me. I am not
interested in being a mother. I am still a girl trying to understand myself.’30 In the same way I
could relate to Cornelis de Vos back in the 17th century with his food-and-parent-as-artist
solution I have included my kids in my art out of convenience like Sally Mann. A New York
Times reviewer spoke about Sally Mann including her children in her photographs saying ‘Her
solution to the demands of motherhood, which have eaten away at the schedules of artistic
women throughout the ages, was ingenious: with her children as subjects, making art became

a kind of child care.\textsuperscript{31} That’s not how it works for me. \textit{The Rigid and the Slack} exposes a raw part of my pathology as a person. It’s easier to order and contain a small part of the world within a frame than everything around me. After all I left the neat freak as a 12 year old in my bedroom. I’d like to have her back but I mustn’t want her that much. I am me. I am an artist, wife and a mother. My family make interesting subject matter, - subjected to me. Me in my everyday studium with my punctum moments.

In \textit{The Rigid and the Slack} transcendent or punctum moments make their way into my artwork via my familial subject. Paul and the kids are in my artwork because I am close to them. We are a unit and rely on our relationships with each other as methods to comprehend the world. For me, Paul and the kids are both mirror and portal. Sally Mann said ‘For all the righteous concern people expressed about the welfare of my children, what most of them failed to understand was that taking those pictures was an act separate from mothering. When I stepped behind the camera and my kids stepped in front of it, I was a photographer and they were actors, and we were making a photograph together.’\textsuperscript{32} I would go a step further and say that when my family step in front of the lens, they stand in for me. I have mapped the threads that connect us and learnt how we are intimately bound. I have learnt through creating and writing \textit{The Rigid and the Slack} that I have spun a web of intimacy. It has become an index to the time I have spent deeply communing with Oli, Paul and Luella.

\textbf{Remember me as tuned-in - not Rigid, not Slack}

In my mind I have created a happy future image containing the smiling faces of my immediate family. My husband reminisces over a humorous wife; my children remember a relaxed mother with ordered principles. Maybe like the punctum that pierced Barthes heart when he saw his mother in the Winter Garden Photograph they will find a photo of me that brings me to them.

\textsuperscript{31} Francine Prose, “‘Hold Still,’ a Memoir by Sally Mann,” \textit{NY Times}, 24 October, 2015

\textsuperscript{32} Sally Mann, "Sally Mann’s Exposure," \textit{NY Times}, 19 April, 2015
Reassuringly Luella, has shown that she could be the neat person I would like to one day be again. She closed her bedroom door the other night and an hour later opened it to reveal an incredibly tidy room. She had even made makeshift curtains to cover the IKEA shelf so that you couldn’t see ‘all the messy stuff’. It was pleasing. Unexpectedly, however, what really drew my attention were the wonky wooden blocks used as anchors to secure the creased and not-quite-perfectly taut cloths over the shelves. The minute details of the untidy in the expanse of orderliness appealed. The trace of Luella imbedded in the slightly imperfect haptic actions affected me. I was touched by her want for order. I was greatly affected by the possibility that I could locate her essence in the small distinctively ‘Luella’ details of her actions. Her presence in the detail ‘pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)’. The expanse of Luella’s tidy possessions surrounding the idiosyncratic detail framed and made it visible. A little bit of untidy is okay.

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Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 27.
Figure 25 – Luella’s tidy room, 2016
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APPENDIX

List of Works presented for the Master of Fine Art examination

*Long distance spidery embrace* 2016, Giclee print, 84 x 118cm

*Black and Gold magic* 2016, Giclee print, 59 x 84cm

*Magic dust* 2016, Loop video projection, variable

*Luella’s web* 2016, Giclee print, 16 x 25cm

*A humming blue cloud* 2016, Giclee print, 84 x 118cm

*Holding still* 2016, Loop video projection, variable

*Indigo Zone Ruler* 2016, Giclee print, 59 x 84cm

*Testing* 2016, Giclee print, 59 x 84cm

*Morandi* 2016, Giclee print, 84 x 118cm
Long distance spidery embrace 2016, Giclee print, 84 x 118cm – installation view

Black and Gold magic 2016, Giclee print, 59 x 84cm
Long distance spidery embrace 2016, Giclee print, 84 x 118cm – installation view
Black and Gold magic 2016, Giclee print, 59 x 84cm
Long distance spidery embrace 2016, Giclee print, 84 x 118cm – installation view

Black and Gold magic 2016, Giclee print, 59 x 84cm – installation view
Black and Gold magic 2016, Giclee print, 59 x 84cm
Long distance spidery embrace 2016, Giclee print, 84 x 118cm
Magic dust 2016, Loopled video projection, variable
Luella’s web 2016, Giclee print, 16 x 25cm – installation view

Magic dust 2016, Loopled video projection, variable – installation view
Luella’s web 2016, Giclee print, 16 x 25cm – installation view

A humming blue cloud 2016, Giclee print, 84 x 118cm – installation view
A humming blue cloud 2016, Giclee print, 84 x 118cm – installation view

Holding still 2016, Looped video projection, variable – installation view
Indigo Zone Ruler 2016, Giclee print, 59 x 84cm

Holding still 2016, looped video projection, variable – installation view

Indigo Zone Ruler 2016, Giclee print, 59 x 84cm  – installation view
Testing 2016, Giclee print, 59 x 84cm – installation view

Morandi 2016, Giclee print, 84 x 118cm – installation view
Morandi 2016, Giclee print, 84 x 118cm – installation view
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