Double Dark: A Constructed Composition from a Darkroom Haptic

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Abstract

The thesis, including the paper and artworks, cogitates upon the research undertaken that explores contemporary photographic practice through questioning the conventions of the photograph in a contemporary culture of ‘image saturation’.

The first chapter defines limitations harboured in the known photographic apparatus – the camera. Explicated is the camera’s function of placing the viewer in the monocular position of single point perspective of a frozen moment. That then leads to a discussion of the reception of images in a contemporary culture of ‘image saturation’. This problem petitions a testing and ultimate discarding of the camera-apparatus from the project. The darkroom and associated ‘production methods’ of analogue processes are considered as an ‘extended apparatus’ to conceive a solution.

Drawing focus on the non-figurative photograph, chapter two positions the materially driven processes of a cameraless practice derived from cameralless action produced in the darkroom. This chapter asks, can a photograph be abstract? By examining the characteristics of ‘Concrete Photography’ and ‘Abstract Photography’, the research exposes ideas that support a conflation of both concrete and abstract on the one surface.

Adapted from László Moholy-Nagy’s photogram the final chapter defines the ‘extended apparatus’ used in the project as three components. These are the ‘constructed composition’; the ‘traces between light and dark’; and the ‘darkroom haptic’. When merged these components become the ‘extended apparatus’ that produce a photographic object.
In a series of materially driven haptic actions, conducted in the blind space of the darkroom, the research resolves as non-figurative ‘photographic constructions’ that aim to evade traditional representational conventions, associated with the saturation of the lens-based photograph in contemporary culture. The layered complex adapted process combines a painterly aesthetic, sculptural actions and photographic processes, ‘re-representing’ light, materials and action as a unique photographic object in contrast to the saturation of lens-based images.
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 13786 words in length, exclusive of List of illustrations, Acknowledgements, Foreword, Bibliographies and Appendices.

Ms Danica Chappell
Foreword

“Nichts ist so, wie es scheint.” ¹

- René Mächler

The word ‘photographer’ has always sat uneasy with me, as it implies a heavy inference to the utility of an apparatus – the camera. The word ‘photograph’ comes from Greek origins, meaning light – write; light is thus fundamental to the photograph, making the photographer a light – writer.² Withdrawing from conventional camera-based photographic practice, my interest turns toward the often invisible, devalued processes of the ‘handmade’ derived from the darkroom. For the photograph is not only a window of illusion, but also a materialist object of recorded light and colour. In the past, whilst making images with a camera, I considered the crop (achieved with the frame of the view finder through the lens, but most often at the time of enlarging the negative in the darkroom), to be the most important ‘apparatus’ in the photographic process. The crop allowed me to emphasise, mediate, cut and construct compositions to present awkward spatial planes. The power of the crop over the camera is an example of what keeps me intrigued in the medium of photography: that of the handmade darkroom image, where the latency of recording light and its materiality, allows the construction of photographs to question perception.


² Cheung Chan-Fu, “Photography,” in Handbook of Phenomenological Aesthetics [electronic resource], ed. Hans Rainer Sepp and Lester E. Embree (Dordrecht; London: Springer, 2010). 262. Chan-Fu states: “At its early inception, photography was considered as what Fox Talbot called a ‘pencil of nature’, and the term ‘photography’ signified, as mentioned, writing or drawing with light. Light is then the essential element of photography.”
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Introduction

The project *Double Dark: A Constructed Composition from a Darkroom Haptic,*\(^3\) commenced with the proposition to challenge the conventional depiction of illusionistic space afforded by linear perspective on a two-dimensional plane – that which is often relied upon in photography. However, the control that the camera affords to photographic vision – rendering a perspectival view and thus a naturalistic photographic realism – initiated the desire to reject the camera entirely from the project. The pursuit in this project is exposed as the raw materiality of photographic production. As such, this project is an investigation into the potential of harnessing light and colour from darkroom processes to create non-figurative\(^4\) photographs, thus reconsidering contemporary photographic practice.

The research, conducted over two years, follows the model of practice-led research as described by Graeme Sullivan in *Making Space: The Purpose and Place of Practice-led Research.*\(^5\) This model involves research that traverses the ‘unknown’, offering insight to the known. Throughout the project, five exhibitions publicly tested the experiments developed through this research. They were *Sightline* (March, 2011), *Understanding Spaces* and *Private Sphere* (August, 2011), *Viewfinder* (December, 2011) and *Double Dark* (April & December, 2012). Together with this dissertation, the artworks shown in these exhibitions form this project’s thesis.

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3 The research project will be referred to as *Double Dark* in short, throughout this paper.

4 Non-figurative refers to being without the representation of a figure or a recognisable likeness. In this research it refers to the “abstract” appearance, without narrative and/or naturalistic photographic realism.

5 Graeme Sullivan, “Making Space: The Purpose and Place of Practice-led Research,” in *Practice-led Research, Research-led Practice in the Creative Arts,* ed. Hazel Smith and Roger T. Dean (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009). 48. Sullivan states: “A relatively simple way to consider this distinction is to acknowledge that some approaches to research involve moving from the ‘known to the unknown’ as new knowledge is constructed within the spaces and places opened up by the gaps in existing information systems. These procedures draw on established methods that confirm the probability or plausibility of outcomes and make use of accepted conventions and practices. What is of interest to practice-led researchers, however, is the possibility of new knowledge that may be generated by moving from a stance more accurately seen to move from the ‘unknown to the known’, whereby imaginative leaps are made into what we don’t know as this can lead to critical insights that can change what we know.”
In the initial stages of the project, the camera was used to develop work for *Viewfinder* and *Understanding Spaces*, (fig. 1 & 2). Despite attempts otherwise, the camera maintained its conventional function: to record a monocular image that was then disseminated through the conventional analogue print. These works were an investigation of framing and constructing compositions of objects to emphasise spatial ambiguity and material qualities. While the studio ‘set-ups’ led to spatially intriguing photographs, these artworks determined that the camera could not abstract what was placed in front of it, but only represent it as per the object’s figuration. This realisation led to the camera being discarded at the midpoint of the project. The experimentations moved away from the layered vertical plane of the camera image to the horizontal plane of the adapted photogram; produced in the darkroom (fig. 3). Ultimately the term ‘apparatus’, initially only considered in relation to the camera, evolved to classify other actions, such as the materially-driven haptic processes that are developed in the blind space of the colour darkroom; these are processes that I have termed for the project, the ‘darkroom haptic’. Within this dissertation, therefore, the darkroom and its associated production methods are considered as the ‘extended apparatus’. By rejecting the camera as the core apparatus – thus rejecting the control of the lens – the application of the darkroom as an ‘extended apparatus’ has emerged as a method to exploit a larger field than that allowed by the camera. This is achieved through a process of blending light, colour and depth. These investigations resolve in ‘constructions’ that aim to evade representational conventions. The development of the ‘extended apparatus’ within the project has also highlighted connections with the historical dialogue between photography and painting, the sculptural actions of construction and the photographic process itself. By investigating these connections, and the application of the ‘extended apparatus’ in developing the artworks of this project, this dissertation will propose alternative dialogues around contemporary photographic practice, that go beyond conventional considerations of how the image can function.
(R) fig. 1 Viewfinder #3 (2011)  
C-Type Photograph, 80 x 80 cm

(L) fig. 2 Understanding Spaces (2011) Installation still:  
Epson Pigment Print 6m x 60 cm

(R) fig. 3 Untitled (2011)  
C-Type Photograph, 90 x 90 cm
The first chapter defines the constraints harboured in conventional lens-based photography. A comparison is drawn between the camera and the Renaissance development of the camera-obscura: David Hockney’s *Secret Knowledge: Rediscovering the Lost Techniques of the Old Masters* theorises that ‘conditioning’ commenced in the Renaissance with the use of the lens and a camera-obscura to render perspectival realism in the painted image. Explicated is the camera’s function to place the viewer in the observational position of a monocular-viewpoint of a frozen moment which is followed by a discussing the reception of images in an ‘image saturated’ environment. Vilém Flusser’s text *Towards a Philosophy on Photography*, and lectures from Professor Andrew Benjamin consider the specificity of ‘image saturation’ caused by the camera and its relationship with that which is termed the ‘photographic index’. ‘Image saturation’ poses to petition the testing and ultimate discarding of the camera-apparatus from the project. Thus, opening the research to conceive a solution for an alternative ‘apparatus’ that ‘extends’ the potential of presenting unique photographs of non-figuration; this becomes the ‘extended apparatus’ that which is explicated in the final chapter.

The second chapter begins with a historical exploration of the non-figurative photograph. It commences with the Vorticist’s in the early 20th Century, particularly in relation to Alvin Langdon-Coburn’s essay *The Future of Pictorial Photography*. It then looks at László Moholy-Nagy’s re-interpretation of the ‘photogram’, and finally leads to Gottfried Jäger’s inception of the term ‘Concrete Photography’. ‘Concrete Photography’ refers to images that do not depict illusory photographic vision associated with the conventional camera-apparatus instead they appear abstract in form. However, these images are not necessarily abstract in nature.

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as they embody a concrete reality associated with photography through its ability to record immediate light against the surface of a light-sensitive substrate. This exploration of Concrete Photography fosters the question ‘what is abstracted in the cameraless photograph?’ The focus moves to differentiate between an abstract and a concrete photograph through an investigation of current contemporary artists works, such as Walead Beshty, Wolfgang Tillmans, René Mächler and Mariah Robertson. In contextualising this question in contemporary practice, it becomes apparent that the project, Double Dark, actually conflates the binary conditions of ‘concrete’ and ‘abstract’ through the treatment of materials and processes. This notion leads to the examination of the ‘extended apparatus’ in the final chapter.

The final chapter will explore the full complexities of the ‘extended apparatus’ used to develop the artwork in the project. By exposing the apparatus, a frame can be drawn in which the boundaries of sculpture (form and construction), photography (light and light-sensitivity) and painting (density and blending of colour) are amalgamated onto the flat photographic plane. The ‘extended apparatus’ is considered as a complex combination of three conditions: the ‘constructed composition’; the trace between light and dark; and that which has been termed in this project, the ‘darkroom haptic’. Merged as one action, these conditions become the ‘extended apparatus’. The first section, the ‘constructed composition’, positions the choice of materials in light of their importance to the work. This is reflected upon using Jan Verwoert’s description of Tomma Abts’ layered paintings, and with Gyorgy Kepes concept of visual articulation on the flat plane. The second section, will define the trace between light and dark that manipulates colour and density: the binary “interplay with negation and representation”,7 as explored by Andrew Benjamin in On Abstraction: Notes on Mondrian and Hegel. The third

section explores the ‘darkroom haptic’ as a blind condition, discussed in relation to Deleuzian concepts of the haptic in the production of art.\textsuperscript{8} Barbara Bolt’s text \textit{Unimaginable Happenings: Material Movements in the Plane of Composition} is also crucial to this chapter as it positions the complex processes undertaken in \textit{Double Dark} and their roles in the research. The ‘darkroom haptic’ – a term used to qualify the actions undertaken in the darkroom – refers to the physical action and touch performed under blind conditions of the darkroom in order to manipulate light, colour and to construct the composition. Throughout this chapter and within the project itself, the ‘extended apparatus’ becomes the combining factor that bonds painterly aesthetics and the sculptural actions of construction onto the flat photographic plane.

This dissertation will conclude that the complexity of the ‘extended apparatus’ is imbued by three conditions: the ‘constructed composition’; the trace between light and dark; and the ‘darkroom haptic’. With these conditions functioning together, the resultant artworks from the ‘extended apparatus’ are not representational in the traditional sense of the term, but instead are ‘re-representational’ of the layered process through which they come into being: The complex process permits both a co-existence and a slippage between what is positive and what is negative. These ‘materialist photographs’,\textsuperscript{9} honest to the fundamentals of photography as ‘light-writing’, allow for actions and considerations often associated individually with sculpture, painting and photography to converge and interact on the flat image plane, forming unique abstruse ‘\textit{light-shadows}’, that contests the contemporary culture of ‘image saturation’.

\textsuperscript{8} Gilles Deleuze, Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation (London: Continuum Impacts, 2005). 108 – 113. Deleuze dissects painting where the hand takes direction from the eye; through Francis Bacon’s embodiment and “mannered postures [...] from the hand to the haptic eye, from the manual diagram to haptic vision”, qualifies the act of working under blind conditions to produce “pure visual forms” that are not diagrammatic from a sighted vision.

\textsuperscript{9} G. Blank et al., “Discussion Forum to Walead Beshty’s \textit{Abstracting Photography} “ in \textit{Words Without Pictures} (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2009). 327-28. Haendel, suggests “materialist photography”, is a term to describe Walead Beshty’s artwork (this is discussed in chapter 2).
Anthony Person: “...I keep trying to reconcile the fact that I'm looking at a representational image that doesn't have a true representational reveal, even though all the components are representational.”

Barbara Kasten: “...The challenge is how do you use light and shadow to photograph an object in such a way that it questions the veracity of what you are looking at?”  

- Frieze, # 143


Contextualised by naturalistic photographic realism, this chapter historically positions the ‘apparatus’ – the camera – in conventional photography. Since its beginning, photography has intercepted and diverged with painting’s path. The chapter begins with David Hockney’s *Secret Knowledge: Rediscovering the Lost Techniques of the Old Masters*, in which he theorises that an apparatus first appeared in the Renaissance through “lens-based painting”. The camera’s controlling characteristics as made apparent through the project’s studio research, is supported by Vilém Flusser’s *Towards a Philosophy on Photography*. By exploring the conditioned role of the camera in conventional photography, avenues of consideration will then open in which to discuss the emerging concept of the ‘extended apparatus’ and other forms of non-camera photography.

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10 Barbara Kasten and Anthony Pearson, “Set Pieces,” *Frieze* Nov-Dec, no. 143 (2011). 119. The interview with Kasten discussed how she was not drawn to documentary photography but rather to materials and geometry.

1.1 Hockney and Lens-Based Painting of the Renaissance

In Secret Knowledge: Rediscovering the Lost Techniques of the Old Masters, Hockney theorises that painters of the early Renaissance used an apparatus, as early as 1435 to render light, line and texture in perspectival realism. Hockney believes that the optical apparatus used in 15th Century painting began with a mirror, which was later replaced with a lens and a darkened room: which became known as the camera obscura. In Jan Van Eyck’s painting Arnolfini Marriage (fig. 4), it is easy to envisage Hockney’s idea of the artist working in a darkened space, with an inverted and reversed hyper-detailed image projected onto the canvas, making figurai pictures of an ‘illusionary reality’:

I know from experience that the methods artists use (materials, tools, techniques, insights) have a profound, direct and instant influence on the nature of the work they produce. […] We know of one such innovation in the early Fifteenth Century – the invention of analytical linear perspective. This provides artists with a technique for depicting recession in space, with objects and figures scaled just as they would appear to the eye from a single point. But linear perspective does not allow you to paint patterns following folds nor shine on armour. […] Dark backgrounds suggest involvement of optics.

However, the camera obscura that Hockney refers to – inherently involved the use of a lens – was not flawless like the pure geometry of linear perspective. Hockney extrapolates through an analysis of Lorenzo Lotto’s painting Husband and Wife (fig. 5), that the lines in the table-carpet between the couple are rendered with inconsistencies to linear perspective; suggesting that the position of the central vanishing point, which renders the lines irregular was caused by the repositioning of the lens. The lens, Hockney further considered, had been moved at the time of the paintings construction to combat the effects of a shallow focus area and to

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12 The mirror reflected light (and therefore an image) onto the canvas, rendering single point perspective correctly, albeit dimensionally smaller. Hockney illustrates in the 2003 BBC documentary, Secret Knowledge, how the apparatus was employed; first to project and render light in paint, and then to copy the painting to scale it up in size.
13 David Hockney, “David Hockney Secret Knowledge” (London: BBC Production, 2003) DVD. Quoted from Hockney from the DVD BBC documentary.
14 Hockney, Secret Knowledge: Rediscovering the Lost Techniques of the Old Masters. 51 & 52.
fig. 4 Jan van Eyck. *The Arnolfini Portrait* (1434) Oil on Oak, 82.2 x 60 cm.

fig. 5 Lorenzo Lotto. *Husband and Wife* (1523 – 24) Oil on Canvas, 96 x 116 cm.
regain focus through the staged scene. With the camera obscura becoming an accepted and popular device, it is also noted by Hockney that painters recorded small amounts of ‘circles of confusion’ in their paintings. This is known as ‘depth of field’ in lens based photography. Hockney’s final point considers that the characteristics of the optical apparatus in Renaissance painting control and curb the painter’s personal interpretation of a subject; hiding the hand and the brush so that the viewer receives the two-dimensional depiction as if it were “real, natural and true to life”.

Hockney theorises that the monocular view of the camera obscura was directly transposed into the photographic condition of the camera since its inception in 1839. He states:

In the end, the single viewpoint, the frozen moment, triumphed. We live in a perspective nightmare where the single point of view will always ruin our perceptions.

The ability of the camera-apparatus to produce a frozen moment, as it appeared before the lens – that which Hockney feels was in conflict with artistic expression – is fundamental to another major element of conventional photography the concept of the indexical. The ‘indexical’ is a term applied to the photograph to

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15 Ibid. 59.
16 It is suggested that these lenses may have been borrowed from telescopes of the time, and the convex shape would have been large in order to gather as much light as possible under the night sky. The implication of the lens is that it gathers both straight and oblique light and as it passes through the lens it is focused. It is known through photography that oblique light appears on the film plane as a blur – focused un-sharp light – which is known as ‘circles of confusion’. In photography, ‘depth of field’ is the term that defines the amount of focused un-sharp (oblique light) and sharp (straight light) is recorded in an image. The aperture size is what controls the amount of straight and oblique light that passes through the lens. Think of a curtain and a window. When the curtain is wide open, light floods in. When the curtain is fully closed with a mere crack on the side, you may see a reversed, upside down image from outside appearing on the wall perpendicular to the window. This is the effect upon which the camera obscura was based.
17 Hockney, Secret Knowledge: Rediscovering the Lost Techniques of the Old Masters. What we would refer to today as a photographic realism, depicting glinting highlights on glass and gleam of polish on metal objects such as armour. Renaissance painting emphasised the ability to depict light and hide the artist’s hand. Detailed examples can be seen throughout Hockney’s book.
describe the way in which the image functions as a ‘pointer’. In the seminal text *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, Roland Barthes refers to the photographic indexical as “that [which] has been”. Challenging Barthes index, Susan Sontag refers to the index as a depiction of something that points to the real or is decipherable as real: “Photographs do not simply render reality – realistically. It is reality which is scrutinised, and evaluated, for its fidelity to photographs.”

The theorist, Philip Rosen expands on this concept of the ‘index’ stating:

An indexical sign indicates or arrests the existence of something [not necessarily defined as realism]. In the case of a genuine index, what Peirce [Charles Sanders Peirce] calls the sign’s object - that is, its referent - is an existent whose presence is required in the formation of the sign.

### 1.2 Re-Positioning the Photograph

The photographic print is the residue of a process that records light – the print is the object that we are left to admire from a method of production. We often look past the material of the medium, permitting the fixed imagery on the photographic paper to inform us of the world at the moment in which the shutter was released.

Vilém Flusser considers this the ‘technical image’:

The technical image is an image produced by apparatuses. [...] This apparently non-symbolic, objective character of technical images leads whoever looks at them to see them not as images but as windows. Observers thus do not believe them as they do their own eyes. Consequently, they do not criticize them as images but as ways of looking at the world (to the extent that they criticize them at all). Their criticism is not an analysis of their production but an analysis of the world.

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19 The common example used, as described by Charles Sanders Peirce is the way in which smoke indexes – that is, points to – the existence of fire or the way in which a footprint in the sand is indexical of a persons passage in “Peirce’s Theory of Signs.” In *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, [http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/pierce-semiotics/](http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/pierce-semiotics/) (Accessed, 7 Feb 2012).
With cameras easily accessible today, anybody has the ability to record their engagement with the world in images. The saturation of images produced by the camera, and disseminated in the digital world, leaves us to accept a desensitised version of the world in which we exist. With the progression of digital camera-apparatus, the ‘medium’ of photography that which mediates between the image and the observer is potentially rendered obsolete: there is no materiality. The camera, a complex apparatus laden with technology, enables the viewer to interface with an image initially via a screen. Whilst the ‘medium’ of photography still offers potential to question that which we see, the ‘image saturation’ in our contemporary culture, makes us forget that the camera is not a seeing machine.

Philosopher Vilém Flusser raised this concern at a lecture in Budapest in 1990. Contesting the position of the ‘technical image’, Flusser stated that the image hides the world, marking a profound alienation for those who read the image as a *concrete reality*, with the world only as its pretext.24 In this respect, through unawareness, the individual’s imagination projects meaning onto the image, thus criticising the world and not the photograph.

My own exposure to ‘image saturation’, brought about by the ‘snap and post’ culture of digital social interfacings, caused me to become a “disinterested photographer”;25 which included the use of large format analogue camera-based processes. The figurative, frozen moment of *found* locations where framed forms could offer a unique perspective, as previously focussed on within my practice, seemed all too commonly rendered with familiarity and over saturated contexts enhanced by post-production techniques and camera software.

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Flusser states:

“We no longer take any notice of most photographs, concealed as they are by habit; in the same way, we ignore everything familiar in our environment and only notice what has changed. Change is informative, the familiar redundant.”

The indifference I felt, was attributed to a resistance of integration with digital production; as screen-based process harnesses light that is then digitised from a digital sensor. In this respect, the digital workspace operates with a different sense of time and embodiment. This sedentary process, removes the tactile engagement to materials and the decision making process, involved in the darkroom practice of appearing and disappearing in and out of the dark space. Flusser speaks of this shift in technology identifying the camera as a controlling device, and pleads for the technical image to debate the subject of photography; as he believed in the late 1980’s, that the structure of photography’s culture was under a fundamental shift. The implication is that the technical apparatus shifts the fundamentals of the medium and, from Flusser’s position, the way in which we engage with the world. Flusser believes that the “problem [of] photography is that there are multiple points of view, how many should [he] collect?” It is my belief that Flusser argues that the camera provides too many aspects of the one thing, and thus that the value of the moment or the object in the image is de-saturated.

1.3 Andrew Benjamin: Rupturing Lens-Based Photographic Conventions

Writer and Philosopher, Professor Andrew Benjamin proposes a shift in thinking around the photograph that could also reconcile a solution to Flusser’s de-valued experience of the world through ‘image saturation’. Pitched alongside of the language of painting, Benjamin classifies where photography can be split into two. He states that there are two histories in photography: firstly a history of nature and context, (where the artist is creator) and secondly a history of technology.

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26 Flusser, Towards A Philosophy of Photography. 65.
27 Ibid. 7.
Benjamin’s consideration of technology is of particular interest to the project as it directly addresses the apparatus, opening up possibilities for a fresh dialogue around the production processes of photography and also the reception of the image. Specifically, Benjamin’s discourse on the ‘history of technology’, can be yoked with materials, their function and their manipulation in relation to light-sensitivity. For what is a camera, but a dark box that funnels focused light through an aperture over a period of time, thus holding a latent image? Benjamin states that photography’s “relationship to light and the registration of light becomes one of the essential ways in which photography and painting acquire images, [but] can be held apart”. This comparison can also be seen in Hilde van Gelder and Helen Westgeest *Photography Theory in Historical Perspective*, where van Gelder and Westgeest consider the construction of painting and photography cross each other’s boundaries. Comparing artists Jeff Wall and Gerhard Richter, the authors state that painting can emphasise light and depth of field, while photography can look like a blurred brush stroke, but that neither share the same materials. An example of this is when a shadow is cast: in paint, layers of pigment construct the shadow, whilst in lens-based photography the shadow is an area where light has not ‘charged’ the light-sensitive negative.

Benjamin suggests that the moment the image is positioned within a genre it refers to the ‘history of nature and context’. He asks, ‘what is the photograph an image of?’, but by changing the linguistics to – ‘what does the photograph present?’ he directs the position away from the referent and towards an analysis of the

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30 Ibid. Benjamin. April, 2012  
32 Ibid. 191.
physical production. He says, “Imagine, here is a painting of a lemon and I [then] hold up a lemon and say, here is the lemon of which it is painted”, he continues, “Now consider, here is a lemon in paint; the indexical shifts to production and the image is a site of presentation, rather than representation.” By changing the description linguistically we can remove the focus from the artwork’s indexicality to a reading of process and production. Therefore, in order to interrogate the potential complexities (in the abstracted photograph) derived from the method of process and production, this project must consider the production as the primary point of investigation.

Quoting from artist Kasmir Malevich Benjamin suggests, “Artists today should no longer be peddlers of antiques”; saying that artists should reconsider the apparatus in relation to the handmade mark. Encouraging artists to present the ‘new’, Benjamin places this quote alongside an image of El Lissitzky’s The Constructor (fig. 6). The self-portrait montage shows a hand with a translucent palm over the eye, with a compass held lightly in its finger-tips. Malevich’s statement supports an inventive exploration with the principles of manifesting a photograph that is developed through this project’s studio research. The exploration of – what it is to be photographic – invigorates the deviation away from photographic conventions. As artist Walead Beshty concurs:

In other words, the Barthesian theorization of the ‘this has been’ contained in the photographic image, has become the ‘this has been’ of ‘Photography’ itself. [...] a clash between the apparently concreteness of photographic referent and its slippery contextual play.

33 Benjamin, April, 2012.
34 Benjamin, Andrew. Lecture: Part 2: How the instability of photography both as document and as art reveals the truth about the photographic image. May, 2012
fig. 6 El Lissitzky. *The Constructor* (1925) Photomontage, silver gelatin matt paper, dimensions

fig. 7 Danica Chappell. *Sightline* (2011). Granite, wood, light, C-Type photograph. Installation view, dimension variable
Benjamin also states that the technical investigation of photography positions the image as “an after-effect”.\textsuperscript{37} This is of relevance to this project, as it refers directly to the semiotics of process, implying that the image reveals not an illusory picture but rather an idea that the image was constructed. As this project unfolds, it has become clear that a non-figurative photograph can have more than one apparatus playing a part in its production. The term ‘after-effect’ defines a process and discloses an action of creating the ‘image’; giving rise to the possibilities of developing an ‘extended apparatus’ that may produce non-figuration. This act of production within the ‘extended apparatus’ is discussed at length in the final chapter.

The exhibition \textit{Sightline} (fig. 7) was the first opportunity for the project to explore the mechanics of photography. This exhibition helped to clarify the important elements of the image making process within the project. These were: choice of materials; light and its position, navigation and engagement to site; and the potentialities of obscuring views through composition and placement. Motivated by Alvin Langdon-Coburn’s suggestion, “Wake up! … Do something outrageously bad if you like, but let it be freshly seen”.\textsuperscript{38} The installation expressed an intention to be read as a photograph. The materials would reflect light and cast shadows to create an image (in a similar way to the negative inside a camera), except that it was not a fixed image, but constantly in flux; it was an opportunity for the viewer to both move amongst and stand back from. The rejection of the camera led to the rejection of the centrally positioned observer with the monocular view. The apparatus in this context became the viewer’s body and eyes as they explored and recorded the unchanging ‘moments’ revealed by navigating the exhibition’s constructed elements. Second to this but equally important, the work raised the

\textsuperscript{37} Benjamin. May, 2012
question ‘what is the photographic’ and ‘how else can the photography be depicted without using conventional means?’ Shadows and reflective surfaces, formed by a single light source, activated latency in the site-specific still-life that hung under tension from the gallery’s walls and paved brick floor. *Sightline* revealed the details of the ‘constructed composition’ that would not have been seen through the monocular pictorial photograph alone, referring to Wolfgang Tillman’s interest of the artist’s activity unseen between the frames on a roll of film.39 The experiments that discarded the camera proved invaluable to the project’s development.

1.4 Vilém Flusser and The Apparatus

In the chapter *The Apparatus*,40 Vilém Flusser problematises the camera as a technical apparatus that influences control over those who engage with it. Flusser suggests that the technical apparatus, like the technical image, removes a level of involvement, distancing human interaction: Flusser states, “With the Industrial Revolution, […] tools were no longer limited to empirical simulations; they grasped hold of scientific theories: They become technical.”41 Today, this can especially be seen with the digital camera, as its only demands are to turn it on and press ‘the’ button: the image is recorded. Knowledge of the mechanical, technical and algorithmic aspects of the operations is relinquished as the apparatus determines your decisions through its internal, complex programs. In its most elementary form, the traditional photographer – the photographer who stands behind the camera – can be considered as a mere middleman between the technology of the camera and the technology of the print. The glory of construction is reduced to a single button push that commences the process of digital code transmitted into synthetic images.42 Flusser goes onto acknowledge those who remain involved

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41 Ibid. 23
42 Ibid. 21-33
in the photographic process are, “[unlike] manual workers standing at their machines, [some] photographers are inside their apparatus and bound up with it”.43 By removing the technical apparatus – the camera – the project can realise a complex system of processes that develop the ‘extended apparatus’ through embracing the darkroom and camera-less actions performed through photogram techniques. This project has enabled me to crawl inside the camera becoming the aperture and the shutter, whilst also influencing the light source, materials and constructions. These actions reclaims the ‘device’ from that which reproduces conventional representations, and thus the viewer’s desensitised reception of the photograph, by allowing a space in which the photograph shifts to being a handcrafted and unique object.

The photogram also provides an opportunity to be adapted and manipulated, thus extending this apparatus through the inherent construction that occurs within its making. An extensive discussion of the photogram will occur in chapter two, however, it is worth mentioning at this point Lyle Rexer’s claims when thinking of the photograms by Constructivist artist László Moholy-Nagy:

[...] the messy reality of photography as a made (not found) thing, springing more from imagination and intention than from chance, technology and instantaneous perception.44

Another artist considering such concerns regarding an equally inventive approach to medium and apparatus is Katja Maters (NL) in her Present Absence video work from 2005. The audio plays the sounds of an unnerving breath, a passage of slow and unmetered footsteps, and an intermittent flash being fired. The visual, an abandoned factory, is flashed briefly out of blackness, and in the moment’s

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43 Ibid. 27
blackness that follows, your memory tries to re-picture what the eyes saw. She describes this work as, “photography on video”.46 The video runs for just over two minutes and ending visually with a black screen and audibly with a gulping intake of breath. Without the audio, it would be difficult to distinguish if the work was video or animated from still photography. Present Absence repositions the apparatus by melding the photographic and video processes together. Harnessed, are split second views designed to appear fleetingly, suggesting that the after-image burnt onto the retina is an intentional response drawn from Maters’ ‘extended apparatus’.

In conclusion, Hockney’s position on the controlling nature of the lens, in which the observer is placed in a position of single point perspective, validates this project’s removal of the conventional photographic apparatus – the camera – in favour of the ‘extended apparatus’.

The aim of this project has been to investigate the potential of non-figurative and abstract outcomes through the undertaking of various processes within the photographic medium. The exploration of the ‘apparatus’ and photographic processes rejects the conventional lens based photograph, rendering my actions as a challenge; not only of the conventional apparatus, but also of the concept that a photograph is solely an indexical action which represents a memory, fantasy or naturalistic photographic realism. In fact, Rosen’s theory of the index suggests that the photographic index is, in the end, simply a result of light and time recorded onto a light-sensitive substrate.47 In the Double Dark project, this

46 Ibid. Mater
47 Rosen, Change Mummified: Cinema, Historicity, Theory. 18.
concept shifts further: these images are not intended to be read as indexes – as representations – but rather are considered as abstruse ‘re-representations’. This ‘re-representation’ caused by processual48 shifts, is further discussed in chapters two and three.

Defining the parameters of the project utilising the medium’s processes of latency, offers a refreshing approach in the exploration of directing light. As such, recalibrates the photographic condition away from the over saturated use of conventional lens-based practices. By drawing on the fundamentals of analogue photographic processes, and the techniques used in painting (such as colour blending and overlaying of transparency), the ‘extended apparatus’ devised in the Double Dark project enables an opportunity to challenge the construction of pictures whilst also confronting the viewer’s perception of the photographic plane. The project shifts from standing outside of the camera, to working directly with darkroom processes of construction that define the methods as the ‘extended apparatus’. For Flusser, the camera is merely a black box, whilst the “images are significant surfaces”.49 Focusing on the construction of Double Dark’s ‘significant surfaces’, allows the photograph to repose in the phenomena of recording light and forms, rendered unfamiliar to its index whilst skewing depth recession. Given that the project has devised a system of ‘extended apparatus’ as a mode of production, the next chapters will address the project’s relationship to Concrete Photography and to abstraction.

48 Oxford Dictionaries s.v. “processual”, Oxford University Press. April 2010, http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/processual. (Accessed 21 March 2013). ‘Processual’ is used by Jan Verwoert and appears later in this dissertation when referring to Tomma Abts process that reveal material construction in her paintings. ‘Processual’ is defined by Oxford Dictionary as “relating to or involving the study of processes rather than discrete events”; for this research, it refers to the study of photographic processes that are ‘mixed’ to manifest work derived from the ‘darkroom haptic’, therefore resulting in a shift from straight camera-based (discrete event from a shutter release) representational photography to re-representational photographs that appear abstract in form but concrete to both materials and manipulation through process.

49 Flusser, Towards A Philosophy of Photography. 8.
“A photograph need not depict or represent in order to be a photograph. It can just be traces of light [...] It dispenses with the camera and is devoid of all irony and symbolism [...] defined only by internal factors [...] by its own inherent laws. [...] That is the field of concrete photography. It is concerned only with its own existence; it is esoteric, self-enamoured and self-immersed. It alternates between freedom and self-control.”

- Gottfried Jäger

Chapter 2: Concrete Photographs and Abstract Photographs

A concrete photograph is an object within itself – self referential of its making process – it does not depict naturalistic photographic realism associated with reproduction, derived from lens-based photographs. The investigation in this chapter begins with the historical position between the eras of the Vorticists (1914 – 1919) through to László Moholy-Nagy’s re-invention of the photogram (early 1920’s) before linking to Theo van Doesburg’s conception of Concrete Art (1930 – 40’s). This lineage points to Gottfried Jäger’s pivotal essay Concrete Photography, which has been key to considering the project’s final manifestations. The chapter then examines current practitioners whose non-figurative photographs investigate the ideas first raised through ‘Concrete Photography’. This includes artists who have moved away from figurative photography, such as Walead Beshty and Wolfgang

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51 Man Ray coined the term Rayograph and was working similarly to László Moholy-Nagy’s process of the photogram. For the purpose of this paper, Man Ray’s experimentation in this area falls away to László Moholy-Nagy’s research of the photogram. This is due to Moholy-Nagy’s connection with the Constructivists and my interest to geometric spatial forms.
Tillmans, as well as artists including Mariah Robertson and René Mächler whose careers are grounded in the non-figurative.

2.1 Historical position

The history of non-figurative photography relevant to this project will be traced through three phases; the Vorticists, the photogram and Concrete Art. In the context of this project, these act as a precursor to Concrete Photography.

Vortography

Alvin Langdon-Coburn (1882 – 1966) practiced Vortography and was part of the Vorticists movement (fig. 8). Jäger classifies the Vorticists’ artworks as examples of the first non-figurative photographs using a camera. In his essay The Future of Pictorial Photography, Langdon-Coburn dismissed the figurative photograph; in a world that he saw as moving faster his practice staked a claim for photography to keep up with the innovative progress he saw in other mediums at the time:

Why should not the camera also throw off the shackles or conventional representation and attempt something fresh and untried? […] You may think what you like about the modern movement in the arts, but the world will never be the same place again.

Although the Vorticist movement was short lived, the avant-garde of the Dadaists, Surrealists and Constructivists continued experimentation with the photographic medium, presenting the collaged and the montaged image to speak of alternative visions and question political views. These movements pushed the medium

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53 Although it is correct to say that the lineage of “photogenic drawing” devised by Henry Fox Talbot’s Calotype processes eg Lacock Abbey (1835), was followed by John Herschel’s invention of the Cyanotype. This was taken up by botanist Anna Atkin’s expansive collection of botanical photogram cyanotype collection. However, these early experiments are figurative depictions where this project’s concern comes after the Impressionistic period in painting where painters returned to en plein aire, rejecting the studio practice of the camera obscura apparatus.

54 Philip Rylands, “Introduction,” in The Vorticists, ed. Mark Antliff and Vivien Greene (London: Tate, 2010). 15. Vorticist was a short art movement that ignited in the U.K. at the end of King Edward’s reign and was over by the end of World War 1, (1914 – 1919).


57 This links to earlier footnote [47] of perception and control but is not the primary focus undertaken.
fig. 8 Alvin Langdon-Coburn. *Vortograph* (1917)
Silver Gelatin Print, 27.6 x 20.7 cm

fig. 9 László Moholy-Nagy. *Fotogramm* (1926)
Silver Gelatin Print, dimensions unstated
of photography to express more than a mere image of reproduction, or as an extension of realist painting.\(^{58}\)

**The photogram**

László Moholy-Nagy anecdotally records in the book *Malerei, Fotografie, Film* his experiments and experiences of “pure light designs” made from “optical creations” with the use of light “as the creative agent”.\(^{59}\) Moholy-Nagy aligned his shadowy constructions to *chiaroscuro*; the Renaissance technique of layered underpainting in monochrome to create shadows and emphasise highlights. Through the experiments with photographic processes, Moholy-Nagy rediscovered\(^{60}\) and coined the term photogram (fig. 9), which he describes as:

> The light if allowed to fall on to a screen (photographic plate, light-sensitive paper) through objects with different coefficients of refraction or to be deflected from its original path by various contrivances; certain parts of the screen are shaded, etc. [...] This course leads to possibilities of *light-compositions*, in which light must be sovereignly handled as a *new creative means*, like colour in painting and sound in music. [...] it offers scope for composing in a *newly mastered material*.\(^{61}\)

Moholy-Nagy’s photograms demand a close inspection of the details contained within the frame. In a traditional black and white photogram, the object placed on the photosensitive material is the negating factor for blocking or filtering the light from reaching the light-sensitive substrate. As such, the unexposed paper remains white when developed. Exposed in the print are hints of the form, revealed in light and dark fragments; as if lit, the form emerges from the blackness of exposed paper. It is for this reason that I think of the traditional photograms as

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58 Examples of stylised photography appeared from French photographer Eugene Atget (working late 1890’s) who made photographs of Paris streetscapes that appeared empty. The work has now become known for its ambience rather than documenting the landscape or community directly.


60 Though Moholy-Nagy coined this method, it had also been in use for some time; Anna Atkins was producing botanical cyanotype photograms from 1840’s onward; Christian Schad in 1918 coined the process as the ‘Schadograph’; and in 1920’s Man Ray began his ‘Rayograph’. It does appear that there was a 70 year gap in this process’ use between Atkins and Schad.

'light-shadows’. Following on from this, by using colour photosensitive material, the manifestations in Double Dark maybe considered as an object of ‘painted light-shadows’, derived from a complex combination of a negative-gram (objects on C-41 negative film), a transparency-gram (objects on E-6 slide film) and a paper photogram. This process will be discussed further in the following chapter.

Although there are parallels between Langdon-Coburn’s Vortograph and Moholy-Nagy’s process of the photogram, Moholy-Nagy does not make mention of Langdon-Coburn’s work. I speculate that this could be due to Langdon-Coburn’s work involving the camera whereas Moholy-Nagy emphasised the constructed mode of camera-less production. More importantly, however, Moholy-Nagy felt that the monocular view of the photograph is unnatural to vision, and as such, that camera work should not be read as a depiction of seeing; the attraction of photography is that it arrests in the pictorial form what natural vision cannot. Moholy-Nagy stripped away the subjective reading of his work, positioning it along side a science of optical composition and a pure discipline of process. The project has made evident that, through the process of inversion, the photogram offers the potential to shift the object from being considered solely in respect to a direct representation, and instead being itself in a ‘re-represented’ form. Moholy-Nagy’s ideas and works have been central to this project due to an affinity with light, light-sensitivity materials, the depiction of space and his rejection of the camera as sole photographic apparatus.

Concrete Art/Concrete Photography

Evolving out of the De Stijl (Netherlands, 1917-1930), Concrete Art was a term originally coined in a manifesto from a group associated with Theo van Doesburg (Paris, 1930): Its aim was to define abstract art from non-figurative art, “pointing

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62 Ibid. 22 & 28.
63 Ibid. 22.
to the future, exploring in depth the idea of creating something entirely new, with no representative or symbolic function whatsoever. Max Bill further developed the concept by combining art and design, which emphasised ‘concreteness’. He exhibited these works in Zurich in 1936, saying in the essay:

> We call ‘Concrete Art’ works of art which are created according to a technique and laws which are entirely appropriate to them, without taking external support from experiential nature or from its transformation, that is to say, without the intervention of a process of abstraction.

Therefore, Concrete Art is artwork made under the notion of purity to materiality; it is unmediated, not abstracted, from the concrete reality of its material. In relation to the photograph, this raises the question *can a photograph ever be abstract?* If a photograph is produced with its laws of raw materiality – light on light-sensitivity substrate – then we can follow Max Bill’s suggestion that it becomes concrete – thus making, for example, Maholy-Nagy’s conventional black and white photogram a concrete photograph.

Concrete Photography is a term coined by Gottfried Jäger derived from both Concrete Art and an examination of the rich visual history of non-figurative photography (fig. 10). In his essay *Concrete Art – Concrete Photography*, published in 2005, Jäger responded to a notion of ‘pure’ or ‘absolute’ photography that was made by photography’s fundamental elements, light and light-sensitive materials. Jäger defines it as:

Concrete Photography represents: the concretisation of photography, [...] works are pure photography: not abstractions of the real world, but rather concretions of the pictorial possibilities contained within [the medium] photography. 67

Concrete Photography: Photography, which produces ‘reality’ and turns her own fundamental principles and laws into its very subject: it is photography of photography. Its works are characterised by their self-referentiality and autopoiesis [...] Concrete photography are objects of themselves, as signs they are indices, symptoms. 68

Concrete photographs are not a semantic medium, but esthetic objects; they are not represented, but presented, not reproduced, but produced. [...] They are nothing but themselves: objects referring to themselves; they are independent, authentic, autonomous, autogenic: photographs of photography. 69

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68 Ibid. 252.
69 Martin Gasser, *René Mächler: Am Nullpunkt der Fotografie* (René Mächler: At the Zero Point of Photography), 117.
Jäger’s interest and theories regarding the concrete photograph and the abstract photograph have been a central component to the studio research. This seems to align with Andrew Benjamin’s idea that processes of photography can fall under an investigation of technology. For, in this project, the artworks do not adhere to traditional rules of perspectival design or representation, and are objects derived from process-laden individual production. This is accentuated by the light-sensitive substrate failing to cover the full area of darkroom action, as the papers edge reveals the misalignment. (See Appendix 4) Jäger continues:

Concrete photographs, however, are not only non-abstract they are also non-figurative. They produce an object of their own. They are in themselves creative, and have no model. To this extent they are also non-symbolic.70

Although abstract in appearance, ‘Concrete Photography’ is not abstract in its nature, as it embodies a concrete reality associated with the fundamentals of the photographic medium – recording immediate light against the surface of a light-sensitive substrate. The project Double Dark speculates a conflation of binary conditions, ‘concrete’ and ‘abstract’, through the interplay of materials and processes in the blind space of the darkroom. At the core is the slippage between what is an abstract and what is a concrete photograph. Jäger’s definition for abstract photography is:

Abstract Photography: Photography in which the medium and its objects, undergo a conscious process of abstraction; both are reduced to their intrinsic and essential properties; any contingent factors are neglected. Three separate modes or practices can be divided: (1) abstracting the invisible (by intensifying information through image-given methods); (2) visualising the invisible (by intensifying information through image-given methods); (3) concretizing pure visibility (by creating new visual information). While the first two modes still contain extra-pictorial references, the latter renounces all such obligations. It neither depicts ‘reality’, nor represents ‘reality’, it produces ‘reality’. The last mode marks the transition from abstract to concrete photography.71

71 Jäger, Krauss, and Reese, Concrete Photography. 252.
The project presents unique objects of light traces and colour shifts, hand constructed under a blind action that occurs in the darkroom and as such, negates a prescribed narrative or concept. However, the construction is ambiguous to read, as the indexical is an abstruse production process. The ideal of Jäger’s concrete photograph – “the self-referential and autopoiesis” – rings true to this project but in part these works have also “[undergone] a conscious process of abstraction” as a result of the complex darkroom methods used.\textsuperscript{72} If the processes were blended (i.e. positive transparency printed to positive paper or cross processing negative film) then perhaps it could be considered as ‘abstracting’ the processes, and as such conflating this with the ‘concrete’. Therefore, the studio research devises complex systems of adapting the photogram, (to work directly with light and constructed materials, exposure time and light-sensitive substrates). This includes: exposing onto C-41 (negative film); exposing onto E-6 (positive/transparency film); cross processing C-41 and E-6 processes; enlarging negative/positive/cross-processed film onto positive RA-4 paper and then repeating the layered process by constructing materials directly onto the paper’s surface. (See Appendix 4)

### 2.2 On Abstraction and Photography

A symposium, titled \textit{Abstract Photography: The Visibility of the Image}, was held in 2000 at the Fachhochschule Bielefeld (University of Applied Sciences), in Germany. It was accompanied by a comprehensive exhibition survey titled \textit{Abstract Photography}: The symposium sort to explicate ‘what is an abstract photograph’.\textsuperscript{73} As the research in this project has shown, defining ‘abstract’ and ‘concrete’ in relation to a photograph (a medium that records light across time) is

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid. 252.
\textsuperscript{73} Gottfried Jäger, \textit{Die Kunst der Abstrakten Fotografie (The Art of Abstract Photography)} (Stuttgart: Arnoldsche Art Publisher, 2002). 7.
fig. 11 Barbara Kasten *Construct PC/4B* (1981) Polaroid, 61 x 50.8cm
fig. 12 Walead Beshty
Travel Picture Rose
[Tschaikowstrasse 17 in multiple exposures* LAXFRATHF/ TXLCPHSEALAX March 27 – April 3 (2006)
*Contax G-2, L-3 Communications eXaminer 3DX 6000, and InVisionTechnologies CTX 5000, 2006/2008
Chromogenic Print, 221 x 124.5 cm

fig. 13 Wolfgang Tillmans
Ice Storm (2001)
Unique chromogenic colour print, 40 x 30 cm
difficult. Photographer Wolfgang Tillmans says the “eye does not want to accept that [the image] is just colour”, as there is an association with a machine and a physical process which the viewer cannot easily locate nor fully comprehend.74 Here, it becomes clear, within the context of the project the work cannot be defined as solely concrete or abstract. Instead, the work is better considered as non-figurative ‘re-representations’ of material, derived from an affected, camera-less action in the darkroom.

To further clarify, in the early phase of the research, the project employed a camera in a studio to ‘photograph’ compositionally constructed materials, suggestive of Cubist still life (refer to fig. 1, pg 3). The aim was to evoke, within a frame, an abstracted geometric composition from opaque, translucent and reflective materials. This is reminiscent of the work of Barbara Kasten (fig. 11);75 she states: “Everything comes back to my physical interaction and interventions with the materials.”76 Though Kasten has achieved geometric compositions, the camera mediates the materials to reproduce a monocular view of the studio setup that was before the lens; deducing that although the images are not abstractions the compositional studio setups are unique and that to exactly recompose them would be near impossible; thus the ideal (of producing uniqueness) resonates with the concepts of this project.

Walead Beshty and Wolfgang Tillmans are two artists who moved away from the figurative photographs to the non-figurative in the early 2000’s. Walead Beshty whose current oeuvre includes large coloured photograms, derived from working directly onto photographic paper in the darkroom with gels and magnets. It appears, from Beshty’s catalogue Natural Histories, that a pivotal point in his

career occurred when he mistakenly left exposed, unprocessed film in his luggage
that passed through airport x-ray screening. These images, although processed
by hand, resulted in a series titled *Travel Picture Meadow* (fig. 12). Each image
looks like it had been indiscriminately applied with a ‘screen overlay’ effect of
varying colour casts. Beshty’s series is indicative of Wolfgang Tillmans’ *Ice Storm*
(fig. 13), though Tillmans’ colour shifts appear more distinctive of a light leak from a
darkroom incident, than of Beshty’s result of a happening with the x-ray machine.
To both artists, it seems that the fundamentals of the medium’s materiality remain
the constant motivator.77 These serendipitous darkroom happenings of non-
reproducibility remind us what the medium of photography can do without the
conventional camera-apparatus mediating a perspectival presentation.

Beshty writes and presents at conferences about his position on the concrete
photograph. His texts are closely aligned with this project’s interest in discarding
the camera. He accepts Jäger’s idea of the photograph situated in a concrete
reality and thus rejects that his outcomes are abstracted. Beshty states:

> These are not abstractions, because they are not an idea or concept and are defined
by their concrete existence. [...] Pictorial photographs are abstractions. They are
abstracted from the real world and turned into 2D form. They obey a set of conventions
for the translation of 4D to 2D (since we do not really see in Renaissance perspective).78

Beshty believes that process-driven photographs are pure states of photography
rather than abstracted presentations. Further more, Beshty describes his process
as “aleatory”, where the “game of photography” is played with a set of rules though
the outcomes don’t necessarily follow the parameters laid out.79 A systematic
process is necessary within photographic production; the term *haphazard* is not
a correct description for the method of construction pertaining to the processes

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77 Beshty, *Three Colour Curl* (2010) and Tillmans *Blushes* (2004) justifies the application of
‘concreteness’ to their practices at this point.
79 Ibid. 156.
undertaken in this project. There are perceived outcomes driven by an assumed plan. However, the colour darkroom is a hard place to navigate intentions when the loss of the sense of sight overrides control and therefore the outcomes. Beshty further suggests that the figurative pictorial photograph can be considered as an abstraction of the real object in time and space. Here Beshty aligns with Flusser to describe the use of imagination to reconnect the flattened abstracted object back into a window view of the figurative representation:

Unlike the ‘picture’ that adheres to Renaissance perspectival rules (based on the construct of homogeneous and infinite Cartesian space) these pictures are Anisotropic because the material that receives the image is bent and is both what is imaged and imaged upon (Anisotropic images are hermetic and irregular in every direction, thus they cannot be translated or applied to circumstances outside of their own production, i.e. they cannot propose to ‘map’ or ‘order’ the world outside their boundaries).80

These are the strong similarities that connect the driving ambition of Beshty’s manifestations and the ideas behind the project Double Dark. This connection is emphasised here, with Karl Haendel quoting Beshty:

This type of deconstructive art often leaves us with a feeling of vacancy […] Oddly, though, out of a different kind of “nothing” these abstractionists seem to be on a path to “something”. This new abstract work is attempting, in its subtle way, what amounts to an assault on the practically monolithic associations between the image and its material form, what Beshty calls, “a triumph of images over the material”, so that maybe photography can finally get somewhere without images. What we are talking about is a ‘materialist photography’ that uses as its tools the very thing that makes an image/object relationship possible – light-sensitive surfaces, paper, chemical, dyes etc. and it is to this often repressed aspects of photography (it is often taken care in the ‘darkroom’) that these photographers give much of their attention.81

In considering Beshty, Jäger and Flusser’s positions, the question of whether a photograph can be abstract may be answered by tracing the connections between processes of construction and the resolution of the artwork. Though,

80 Ibid. 156.
Jäger’s definitions of both ‘abstract’ and ‘concrete’ are seemingly held apart by his reasoning, it is through this project and the layers of manipulation undertaken in the darkroom that these seemingly disparate concepts may conflate on the photograph’s surface.

2.3 Other Current Practices

Inspiration for the studio research can be linked to the seminal Constructivist artists Kasmir Malevich, El Lissitzky, László Moholy-Nagy and current artists who use non-figurative photography such as Walead Beshty and Wolfgang Tillmans. However, two artists that have the closest link to this project’s studio-research are René Mächler (fig. 10, refer to pg. 28) and Mariah Robertson (fig. 14). They both straddle the borders of Constructivist and Concrete Photography movements; use adapted photogram techniques; and complex darkroom processes in their work (including external materials of construction that engage scale and time).

Mächler, described by Jäger as a “photo-engineer”, is known for using an adapted cliché-verre method in his practice. This method involves etching designs onto blackened glass plates and then enlarging the painted/etched image onto the light-sensitive paper. His works are by definition camera-less but not without a ‘negative’, which introduces both scale and inversion of image. By comparison, Robertson uses colour photogram techniques combined with colour hand processing to construct architectonic geometric images and installations.

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82 Other artists of importance are Robert Erwin, Olafur Eliasson and Tomma Abts who investigate sight, body engagement to a spatial plane, perception and recession of the spatial plane. Although Erwin and Eliasson featured heavily in the beginning of the project’s research, they soon fell away to accommodate the perspectival, control and lens-based photograph in order to lead into perception. It is important for this project to concentrate on ‘what is photographic’ to better position future research into perception of image in the future.

83 Jäger, Krauss, and Reese, Concrete Photography. 253. Cliché Verre is “A glass plate, which is manufactured manually and treated or completed photographically…”

Robertson’s darkroom set-up affords power to the artist’s hand, which contributes to the unevenness of the processing with an emphasis on drips and runs of the chemistry. This technique reveals many things, amongst them the quality of differing opacities adding a layer of depth, as if the image were painted onto the paper’s surface. Although there are aspects in Mâchler’s, Robertson’s and Beshty’s practices that are very close to my processes, the results manifested from my time in the darkroom highlight my own interpretation of process specifically the enlarging (from a negative-gram/transparency-gram), materials and colour.

The concepts discussed show that process and production modes delineate whether a non-figurative photograph is considered as concrete or abstract. Beshty’s work aligns to concrete expression through immediacy of light, coloured filters and light-sensitive paper. In contrast Robertson’s expressions engage with abstracted processes embedded in the variance offered by the involvement of blind darkroom action; expanding upon the idea of being solely embedded in a

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85 Colour hand processing is uncommon due to the chemistry being incredibly toxic. As described by Robertson in her Vimeo Vodcast, only a rubber suit, gloves and a full facial breathing aid protects her from the photographic chemistry during the hand processing of the print. Although the project is not permitted to hand process due to toxicity of the chemistry, the multi-haptic driven processes are more in common to Robertson’s practice than say Mâchler and Beshty.
concrete reality: Whereas, Mächler could be situated in-between these. Further, speculation could then suggest that the concrete photograph is made without a camera-apparatus; whereas fluid processual\textsuperscript{86} methods become an apparatus for the non-figurative photograph, making the concrete reality obscure. Qualifying Andrew Benjamin’s linguistic shift, of the photograph being read as the ‘after-effect’ of darkroom labour, harbours an oppositional mêlée on sight and perception, (which have both been negated and skewed in the mode of production). The complexity of the ‘extended apparatus’ through this investigation of the expanded photographic processes embodies an adaptation of the photogram. The following chapter will dissect these principles of the ‘extended apparatus’ used in the \textit{Double Dark} project.

\textsuperscript{86} Derived through the practical study of processes, processual refers to testing the blind conditions of construction in the colour darkroom against conventional colour darkroom methods of colour correction from traditionally known photographic apparatus.
Christy Lange: “What does it mean for the status of the pictures […] if the artist deliberately arranges the object?”

Wolfgang Tillmans: “What would it mean to think less about the photographs credibility as document and more about the movement, or artistic activity that took place between the frames?” 87

- Frieze #143

Chapter 3 Exposure: The ‘Extended Apparatus’

The physical materiality of the photograph remains present in the making of the artworks in Double Dark. A supposition regarding the processes used became clear in discarding the camera, the apparatus in this project extended to combine a complex order of processes and materials applied in layers, guided by the body.

This chapter describes the components of the ‘extended apparatus’, being the ‘constructed composition’, the trace between light and dark, and the ‘darkroom haptic’. The first section will position the ‘constructed composition’ and the choice of materials used in the project. This is contextualised through discussion of Jan Verwoert’s description of Tomma Abts layered paintings, and Gyorgy Kepes idea of visual articulation on the flat plane.

The second section will define the trace between light and dark and how this affects the binary “interplay with negation and representation”. 88 Andrew Benjamin’s in On Abstraction: Notes on Mondrian and Hegel will be contrasted with Jäger’s idea of the concrete photograph to explore how the ‘abstract’ and the ‘concrete’ are conflated through process.

The third section explores the ‘darkroom haptic’ as a blind condition, and discusses the project in relation to Deleuzian ideas of the haptic and production, referring to painter Francis Bacon. Peppered throughout the chapter are insights from Barbara Bolt’s text *Unimaginable Happenings: Material Movements in the Plane of Composition*, which allow for a positioning of the actions and outcomes of the ‘extended apparatus’. Concluding, that the ‘extended apparatus’ is the combining factor that bonds painterly aesthetics, the sculptural action of construction, and photographic processes together on the flat two-dimensional plane.

3.1 ‘*Constructed Composition*’

The materials and objects employed in each stage of the project were selected for the their instrumentality of casting, reflecting, transferring and deflecting light; with the aim to construct and accentuate aberrations between the forms, the light and the recorded ‘light-shadows’. This became known in the project as the
‘constructed composition’. During the project’s middle stages the ‘constructed composition’ moved from the vertical plane to the horizontal plane to further refute the perspectival and figuration; trading the camera for an adapted photogram technique. As such, the materials employed have not strayed far from what was initially used at the outset: discarded manufacturing offcuts of semi-translucent, translucent, highly reflective, colourful variants of plastic, metal and paper. The nature of construction continues outside of the darkroom after processing forming multi-panel-pieces, to form a whole. It is here that the hand made construction exposes the photograph not as an illusory window but as an object in its own right.

In *Unimaginable Happenings: Material Movements in the Plane of Composition* Barbara Bolt reflects on her own practice, revealing that layers of preparation are core to components in construction. Bolt states:

> I lay the canvas on the floor. I mix the liquid paint into jars and line them up, one by one. In this way I construct a stage for myself like a readymade. I start out with some sort of intention but the canvas is already full before I begin. It is painting before painting.89

Bolt’s musings describe the phase undertaken which she supposes to be integral to construction; that the order in which the jars are lined up indicates their readiness come their time of use. And, that this ‘construction’ of thought fills her canvas before paint touches its surface. This preparatory stage is similarly undertaken in collecting and picturing potential ‘constructed compositions’. The visualisation of the material’s significance in the construction, as discussed by Bolt and as undertaken in this project, parallels the petite canvasses of Tomma Abts (fig. 15). The geometric abstractions of her paintings are a combination of

soft-blended colours masked by opaque hard edges that show indications of an “underlying processual structure”. Traces of indentations, from the layers of paint and masking tape, reveal the painting’s physical construction on its surface. Abts’ selection of masking seem guided by what each layer reveals, derived from points or markers that lay external to the canvas; I believe these are not preconceived but revealed to Abts’ over time, through each layer and Jan Verwoert states:

Abts’ paintings, visibly, do not rely on a grid or other predetermined structural parameters to organise the form of shapes or choice of colours: Abts’ creates a geometry outside axiomatic co-ordinates.

At this juncture, the ‘constructed composition’ of this project intersects with the processes of both Bolt and Abts. In the Double Dark project, resources are collected, based on the parameters stated at the start of the section; individually assessed and imagined upon for how they will translate in the process of creating the ‘constructed composition’. Gyorgy Kepes suggests that:

Each representation of an object or a thing acts on the picture surface and discharges its own unique direction of associations as a point, a line, a shape, acts on the picture-plane, and forces the eye into virtual spatial directions.

The three-dimensional form of the ‘constructed composition’ is built and dismantled in the dark, derived by touch; resolved not by the artist’s eye, but by absolute contact between the light and the constructed materials onto a light-sensitive substrate. The duration of the construction is recorded in exposure time on both the negative and the print. During this time, the construction is revealed

90 Jan Verwoert, “Beauty and Politics of Latency on the Work of Tomma Abts” in Tomma Abts (New York: Phaidon Press, 2008). 95. Verwoert claims, “Abstraction […] proceeds at its own particular pace and sets its own temporal parameters […] of its perception, from instantaneity of quick recognition to the duration time of an immanent memory of the work’s making - in other words, from the actuality of identifying a given form as visual information to an immersion in the latency of memory inscribed in the materiality of paint on canvas.” In the works of Abts (and the Double Dark project) question the process undertaken in making the form; and as such, in this project studies process with the intention to abstract and challenge its conventional conditions.


to me either in seconds or minutes of the exposure time; bringing a sense of achievement or speculation. Sometimes this spills over onto two panels of paper, whilst at others multiple exposures may be undertaken. The result is a complex hand-crafted object reaffirming its materiality.

3.2 Trace: Between Light and Dark

The second quality contributing to the ‘extended apparatus’ is light and the ability to manipulate it through colour and density. Light is the integral ingredient of a photograph; being acutely aware of light – how it falls, how it bounces and the way it can radiate – is acquired knowledge from the experience of working with analogue processes. In this project however, through filtration and density, and the artist’s position inside the ‘extended apparatus’, the colours are manipulated and crafted, as if applied like paint. The light from varying sources (flash, enlarger and torchlight) is pushed and pulled between what is arrested on the ‘negative-gram’ (C-41), the ‘transparency-gram’ (E-6), and the photogram; in other words, what is a positive-to-negative, a positive-to-positive or a negative-to-positive ‘re-representation’ of material and light. Through the interplay of this action and application, the ‘concrete reality’ becomes an abstracted process caused from the fluid manipulation; Light is used like a paintbrush, where filtration combined with time and the ‘constructed composition’ becomes the paint.

Verwoert suggests the process starts with something blank – in this project, known quantities – white and black, dark and light – become highlight and shadow on the light-sensitive substrate. Each is inversely affected by time; the shadow of an object is rendered as white, thus reading as light in the final print, whilst light over time creates density that turns the paper black. The project is a commitment to the photographic processes of the darkroom, however it is

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93 See Chan-Fu, “Photography.”
94 See page 24.
95 Verwoert, “Choosing To Choose: On the Painting of Tomma Abts.” 232 – 257
not committed to sticking to the rules of the light-sensitive substrates like that of traditional lens-based photography; where the idea is to finish with a colour corrected image.\(^{96}\) This component of the ‘extended apparatus’ does not work from a proofed idea, nor does it express anything other than my choice of colour and density manipulation.

Replacing the camera-apparatus with a complex photogram process, working with light-sensitive materials, was a pivotal step in achieving multifactorial traces of light – what has become known as ‘light-shadows’ in this project. The manipulation of light with colour gels, duration of exposure and transparent and semi-transparent materials that filter the light’s opacity, highlight factors where a disconnection occurs in the process of the ‘extended apparatus’ of the adapted photogram. It is in this transition that introduces abstraction to the concrete photograph, as it “concretis[es] pure visibility by creating new visual information”,\(^{97}\) in accordance with Jäger’s definition of Abstract Photography; no longer is it one pure form derived from light recorded on a light-sensitive substrate but through processual manipulation, new visual material is created.\(^{98}\) Andrew Benjamin considers:

> Abstraction is always more than one. [...] If what is maintained as central is a conception of the abstract as a process then what becomes of interest if the identification of the differing conditions in relation to which the process is realised. As such, abstraction will always be more than either its named presence or its conflation with a specific generic type. \(^{99}\)

The process of this project records light and colour on one element, which is then filtered and abstracted through various other elements; traces result in light paintings of ‘light-shadows’ between the light and the dark. The exploration of

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\(^{96}\) Working with a lens-based negative implies that darkroom activity is mastering the ‘colour correct’ image; through this research project and the camera-less practice the darkroom activity is mastering how to ‘colour print’.

\(^{97}\) Jäger, Krauss, and Reese, *Concrete Photography*, 252.

\(^{98}\) In this project, the new material is blended from processes of the ‘extended apparatus’, the trace between light and dark and the ‘darkroom haptic’ to manifest re-representation of both positive and negative on the one surface, obscuring the photographic condition of conventional indexicality.

process is crucial to the project’s artworks; the process is the work of art. “Art’s own practice” is raised by Benjamin; he urges that clarification of abstraction is not only achieved through “content or negation of figure” or “the dependency on art of thought and reflection”100 but that abstraction is applied to the process and methods of construction. Bolt seems equally intrigued by action, manifestation and manipulation of processes. She states:

Whilst the artist may be responsible for casting a net over chaos and be vigilant to the responsibilities that then emerge, art needs more than the skills of a draughtsman or the eyes of the painter. It is by means of the material that art is able to wrest the percept from the perception and the affect from affection.101

Highlighted in the final artworks is the contradiction between both abstracted (colour and density) and authenticity of materials implemented (form and line). As Kepes says, “contradiction is then the basis of dynamic organisation of the associative qualities of the image”,102 which, as mentioned in previous chapters, adds complexity that problematises the indexical representation in the image. The complexity of the traces between light and dark, however, does not clearly define the final artwork as either representational or anti-representational, but instead presents a ‘re-representation’ of the light, (and thus colour), materials and form through the opportunities provided by the multifactorial actions in the darkroom. In this respect, leading the discussion into the action that brings the painterly and the crafted construction together on the one plane through the ‘darkroom haptic’.

3.3 Darkroom Haptic

The darkroom offers a sighted person the unnatural insight into blindness; it challenges my perceptions of space and my ability to perform tasks. As mentioned

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100 Ibid. 87.
earlier, the ‘darkroom haptic’ was coined for this project to articulate the actions conducted through touch and movement in the darkroom under blind conditions. It encompasses the actions of constructing the ‘constructed compositions’ and manipulating the trace between light and dark. The haptic forms a relationship between the darkroom, the materials and the light, and is broken into stages: Firstly in producing the ‘negative-gram’ and ‘transparency-gram’ and secondly in building the adapted photogram.

The ‘darkroom haptic’ is the component of the ‘extended apparatus’ that refers to the physical action and touch, performed under blind conditions, that pulls four-dimensions into two-dimensions; resulting in an unreproducible moment and outcome (see Appendix 4). Working blind without a blueprint – guides the process. The final works in *Double Dark* are not pre-proofed; the mind’s-eye constantly speculates over the probable outcomes, testing possible combinations derived from the layered ‘constructed composition’ and light manipulations. There are a myriad of possible solutions, which may present themselves upon the reveal. Working with the sensation of touch, Gilles Deleuze reflects on Francis Bacon’s visceral paintings, stating:

> The words to describe Bacon – hand, touch, seizure, capture – evoke this direct manual activity that traces the possibility of fact. [...] But the fact itself, this pictorial fact that has come from the hand, is the formation of a third eye, a haptic vision of the eye, this new clarity. It is as if the duality of the tactile and the optical were surpassed visually in this haptic function born of the diagram.

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103 Appendix 4 contains examples of works derived from the ‘extended apparatus’ process. Illustrated are the ‘constructed compositions’, the trace between light and dark and the ‘darkroom haptic’.  
104 Proofing with small contact sheets, in terms of the conventional analogue processes, is a way to check exposures on a roll of film prior to enlarging.  
105 Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*. 112 - 13
Colour, density and the materials that leave their ‘light-shadows’ behind are guided by blind touch; the line from the material's form is the only attribution that remains representational to the ‘constructed composition’. As Deleuze continues:

> To describe the relationship of the eye and the hand, and the values through which this relation passes, it is obviously not enough to say that the eye judges and the hands execute. The relationship between the hand and the eye is infinitely richer, passing through dynamic tensions, logical reversals, and organic exchanges and substitutions.106

Bolt traverses Deleuze’s account of Bacon into her own account of preparation and haptic action, by stating;

> I position myself above the stage [...] and prepare to perform. [...] The performance commences. It is a complex assemblage made from the body’s gestures, rhythms and speeds.107

The body is laboured with the lifting, bumping, constructing, destructing and reconstructing. The haptic is structured with preparatory order enabling the touch to be direct and less confused in the entrapping darkness, though the nature of the darkroom is unforgiving to order – no matter the extent of preparedness. Fingers lightly dance over all the surfaces in the darkroom to produce the latent image; however, the toil that guided the haptic action is hidden in the fixed record on the photographic surface. Philosopher Henri Bergson suggests:

> There is a succession of states, each of which announces that which follows and contains that which precedes it. [...] Whilst I was experiencing them they were so solidly organised, so profoundly animated with a common life, that I could not have said where anyone of them finished or where another commenced. In reality no one of them begins or ends, but all extend into each other.108

Working by touch offers a unique image in contrast to the multiple reproductions available in lens-based photographic process. Recorded in the photograph and

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106 Ibid. 108.
produced in the ‘extended apparatus’ is time that has passed, where the body’s involvement is neither repetitious routine nor a singular performance. Henri Bergson looks at duration as an assortment of continuing factors that trace time and states:

Let us try for an instant to consider our duration […] by an effort of imagination, solidify duration once it has elapsed, divide it into juxtaposed portions and count all these portions, yet this operation is accomplished on the frozen memory of the duration, on the stationary trace which the mobility of duration leaves behind it, and not on the duration itself.\textsuperscript{109}

The durational activity of the ‘darkroom haptic’ takes place across 1 - 2 hour blocks with a final product taking up to 5 days to produce. The extraneous labour and thought processes are a commitment to analogue process, navigating the space, the materials, objects and the desire to produce. The breakdown of time can be measured in test strips that are pulled from the processor but it is not possible to locate duration other than as a component of production: And the production of the ‘darkroom haptic’ decides its own duration.

To discard photography’s “modernist canon [that followed] the seemingly inevitable arc of the medium’s technological development\textsuperscript{110} generates a freedom with both process and outcomes. The “internal (and causal) factors” as described by Jäger opening the chapter, are not easily visible in the final artworks. The research throughout this project grips latency; that is, the binary modes of cause and effect between the action and the forms are arrested by light and colour. The traces of light reveal the activity that was conducted in the darkness by adapting processes and modes of production. Vilém Flusser states that the apparatus becomes an extension of our hand and body and that we thus take the camera for granted without question, accepting what the camera-apparatus offers the resultant photograph.\textsuperscript{111} The adapted photogram is an intriguing technique that

\textsuperscript{109} Ibid. 14.
\textsuperscript{110} Rexer, The Edge of Vision: The Rise of Abstraction in Photography. 9.
\textsuperscript{111} Vilém Flusser, Towards A Philosophy of Photography. 21- 32.
raises an interesting dialogue with that of conventional lens-based processes. The three elements which developed through the studio research – the ‘constructed composition’, the trace between light and dark and the ‘darkroom haptic’ – have revealed that whilst singularly each is of little consequence, when combined they function as one apparatus – the ‘extended apparatus’ – that produces the final artistic manifestations in the project. When Flusser debates the photograph, he feels that freedom means playing against the apparatus as a means to caution against the inelasticity that the camera-apparatus asserts. The agencies employed by the ‘extended apparatus’ are concrete, perceptual and abstract. The project *Double Dark: A Constructed Composition from a Darkroom Haptic*, reconfigures and expands the borders of the photographic, confronting what constitutes the contemporary photographic practices relevant today.

Through examination of the conventional applications and considerations towards the photograph, this project has found that evolving a photographic practice, has actually involved looking back into the past. By abandoning technology and getting messy with the materiality of the medium ‘the photograph’ constructed in this project is once again permitted to become a unique hand-crafted object. The contemporary culture of images in over-abundance sits in contrast to the artworks developed throughout the *Double Dark* project; each work is a singular record of the blind ‘darkroom haptic’ activity, implementing a ‘constructed composition’. Concluding, that the print itself can shift from the reproducible nature of the conventional photograph, to the singular hand-crafted object as a means to float above the contemporary culture of ‘image saturation’.

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112 Ibid. 55.
“It is very strange to explain what [it] is. It becomes easier to make a picture of the pieces or describe what the elements are but it becomes more difficult to explain what happens when you experience them. [Like] going up stairs in the dark, when you think there is one more step and you take the step, but you are already at the top […] or going down the stairs and expecting there to be another step, but you are already at the bottom.”

- Bruce Nauman.

Conclusion

The medium of photography’s fundamental condition of ‘light-writing’ has seemingly receded into obsolescence, making way for a saturated arena of images (memories, fantasies and pictorial realisms) in contemporary culture. Aiming to challenge photography beyond its conventional illusory representation, this project, whilst addressing contemporary photographic practice, gives recognition for the medium of photography to elevate its potential as a unique hand-crafted object. Firstly by pinpointing the camera’s relationship with painting and the perspectival system, (followed on by the discussions of Andrew Benjamin, Vilém Flusser and Gottfried Jäger), this paper demonstrates that conventional lens-based photograph – derived from the camera-apparatus – could be abandoned. Engaging a shift in focus toward photographic production processes enabled the manifestation of the ‘extended apparatus’ to handcraft the work in this project and question the illusory nature of the lens-based photograph.

The complexity of the ‘extended apparatus’ in this project is imbued by three conditions: the ‘constructed composition’, the trace between light and dark and the ‘darkroom haptic’. Together, the resulting artworks are not representational but rather reflect the layered process allowing perceptive slippages between the

conventions of positive and negative, permitting both to co-exist on one surface. And, in doing so, challenges the indexical. These are ‘materialist photographs’, which re-represent only those conditions occurring from the ‘extended apparatus’. The viewer may desire to describe the artworks ‘abstract’ however, the objects themselves belong to a concrete reality.

Lastly we come to the [...] disinterested photographers. They have their lineage with the non-objective and photogram works of the 1920s. Literal, dumb, non-pictorial and often non-referential; in short it is straightforward and maybe honest.114

The long and intensive ‘darkroom haptic’ conflates the painterly and the sculptural action onto a flat plane, through combining light-sensitive materials with remnants of semi-translucent, opaque and highly reflective forms. Ultimately, the ‘extended apparatus’ exposes the push-pull construction – of the ‘light shadows’ – devised through varying combinations of negative-gram, transparency-gram and the photogram.

This emphasises a unique trace of constructed actions and manipulated light recorded on a flat plane. It is through the ‘extended apparatus’, that the project Double Dark: A Constructed Composition from the Darkroom Haptic provides a challenge and an alternative to the conventional naturalistic photographic realism.

fig. 16 Danica Chappell.
5days: 2hour (2012)
Unique photograph, 8.7m x 1.1m

114 Blank et al., “Discussion Forum to Walead Beshty’s Abstracting Photography “. 327.
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MEDIA:
APPENDIX 1

Blindness

Blindness in the darkroom is selective; bound by a space where all light is eliminated at will. Whilst in the dark, my eyes - overcome at first - soon relax; the frown from my brow – strained; slackens. And the concentration propels me forward into action of seeking, constructing, layering and finally exposing. In the moments after the exposure is performed, and the action complete, the haptic becomes familiar and autopilot kicks in, attention turns the physicality of my body, muscle strain, my knees, the surface of the hard floor, staggered balance and the thudding pain from crashing into the walls. Recently I have noticed that my eyelids tend to fall shut; for after some period they must relax and close due to inactivity.

Night vision goggles are a vision apparatus, enabling sight in the dark by visualising infra red light particles just outside of the visible spectrum. If I were to use night vision apparatus in the darkroom, it would seem like I was cheating myself out of the experience of chance, of the haptic, of the choice to adhere to the condition of being blind. The results may appear more tailored to preconception, more ordered and less derived from an entanglement of action.

Returning to a lit room requires gradual introduction after being accustom to a dark space. The aperture of my pupil rapidly dilates but not before the mark of light has imprinted a light-shadow on my retina.

fig. 17 Untitled (work in progress) 2012, Copper, paint, light and paper
Acidic Light

by Benjamin Woods
Prepared for the project, Viewfinder by Danica Chappell
Dianne Tanzer Gallery, Dec 2011

This room is a landscape.
Here, space scatters into a multiplicity. Spaces proliferate as self-exposing.
The body emerges as a kind of image taker. Continuously selecting, moving.
Always surfaces surface as textures, colours and densities: shiny, reflective, refractive, infected - lit.
Light differentiates as it whacks, smothers, impregnates, misses and bends perturbedly around.
Light as a condition bends around other kinds of light - self-conditioning and agential.
Space intra-acts - enmeshed with other space. Two spaces, once architectural and once photographic,
become bodily and full. Overflowing.
This room has a floor as a stage for movement and is walled and roofed for the control of light.
Here, light is a chemical density. Acidic.
The body - entering the room, moving at different speeds and rhythms - acts as a catalyst for the slight
though chaotic and fast redistribution of light.
However, the precision and durability of the surfaces configuring of the walls, dampen lights’ chaos by
positioning the body.
The warmth and wetness of the body emerges reflected or enactive with materials external to the body’s
habitual boundaries. Problematic.
Flesh, clothing, perspex, timber, paint, paper, steel, air, dust, finger-grease, concrete; together, moving
and materialising an acidic light.
This room performs a practice sensitive to light, and lights’ reverberations and elaborations between
bodies. Other, new, bodies.
Here, what occurs is a continual construction of boundaries, compositions, and propositions, that blurs
the whereabouts of human and non-human forces.
The process of moving as this room encourages different bodies of matter to dissolve in each other as
an acidic light - redistributing stuff as the fracturing, diffusing play of this light.
Author/s:
CHAPPELL, DANICA

Title:
Double dark: a constructed composition from a darkroom haptic

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2012

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